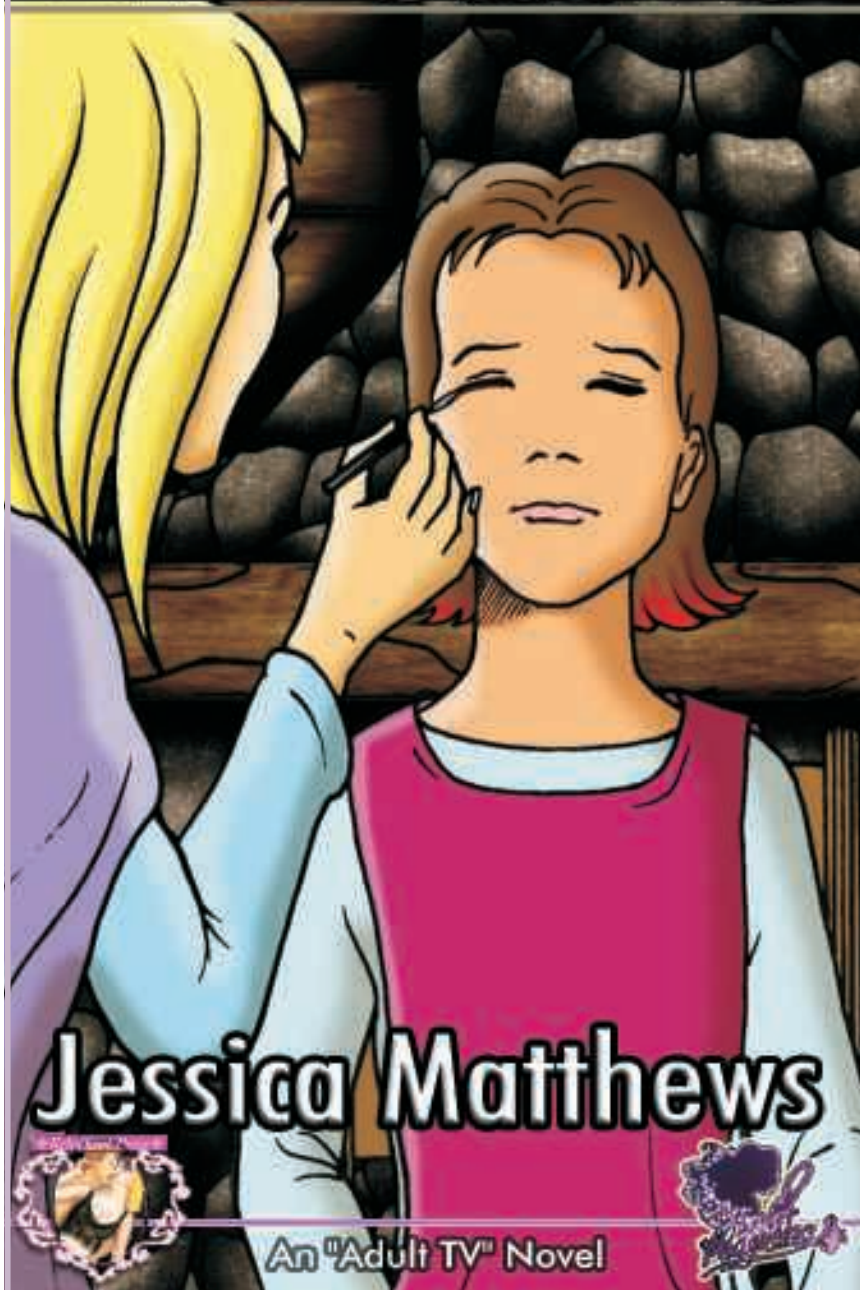


The Castle



Jessica Matthews



An "Adult TV" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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The Castle

By Jessica Matthews

Jaycee Steel did not have the easiest of starts in life. His mother and father met and married in haste and parted just as quickly. Jaycee went to live with his father; when he remarried, the family moved to London.

Father's second marriage didn't last either and he made it obvious that he didn't want Jaycee holding him back when he moved to California. The boy stayed with his stepmother in England and went with her when she returned to Edinburgh, in Scotland where she was born.

Jaycee was a nickname. He was born Jean-Claude but if that was quite normal in France where his real mother came from, it wasn't normal in Scotland, hence the decision to use his initials.

A legacy changed Courtney's life and Jaycee's as well. With it, she was able to give up work and return to study at the University's school of ancient Scots language and history. There she discovered an aptitude for languages and Gaelic came easily to her. They didn't have a lot of spare money but it was ade-

quate, and Jaycee's high school years were entirely conventional.

"I need you to sit down," Courtney said to Jaycee one evening after he had completed his last year of high school. "I've taken a job in the far north of the Highlands, and we get free accommodation there."

"Does that mean I have to come with you?" Jaycee asked. "What about my friends here? I've applied to college for next year too."

"Yes, you have to come with me," Courtney replied. "There's nowhere else for you to go and while we were able to live these last few years when I've been studying, I'm afraid that the money's run out. I need an income, and if I'm going to make a career in the archives, this is a golden opportunity."

"Why do we have to move? Surely you can work in the archives here."

"I've got a job to catalogue the library and archives of the McFelpart clan. They have a huge archive which no one's ever seriously researched. It's really an exciting opportunity."

"But there's nothing there for me to do." Jaycee looked disappointed at the prospect. "I was thinking I might apply to get into an art school here."

"You're going to be paid as my assistant," Courtney replied. "It's going to be valuable experience; you can apply to college when this project is finished. You'll be able to save towards college too. Think of it as a gap year."

"I don't know if college is the right thing for me," he said with a deep sigh. "I think a job with training might be better."

"Don't be silly," Courtney replied. "You hate getting dirty. And besides, there's the legend of Calgacus treasure. It's supposed to be somewhere round the Castle towards Loch Merkland."

“Surely that’s a silly legend from the mists of time.”

“It’s one that’s been taken seriously.” Courtney said. “And there have been some finds of Pictish silver up there.”

“It’s pretty wild country. I saw it on the map.”

“The Loch is near the McFelpart’s ancestral lands,” Courtney explained. “Legend has it that when Ketil Flatnose...”

“Ketil who?”

“He was a Viking and a lot of them had strange nicknames.”

“Was that to distinguish him from Ketil With The Ordinary Nose?”

“Don’t be silly.” Courtney smiled. “It’s nothing to do with Calgacus either. He probably didn’t exist but it’s the first Scottish name we have from Tacitus writings when the Romans came to these lands about two thousand years ago.”

“Is there really a treasure waiting to be found?” Jaycee was imagining himself finding a horde bigger than any pirate’s buried treasure.

“The rumour is persistent through history,” Courtney said. “The Pictish king had it all buried to keep it from the Viking invaders. He was probably killed and the location was lost.”

“How long ago was this?”

“Probably late in the ninth century.”

“Didn’t he leave a map?”

“No, he didn’t,” Courtney laughed. “I don’t think we’re going to find one with an X marking the spot. The Picts didn’t leave any documents anywhere, just some stone carvings... and they weren’t maps either.”

“Just think; somewhere in this cold, soggy land where the sun never shines, there’s a king’s treasure to be found.

“A Victorian landowner became obsessed with finding it,” Courtney continued. “He was found dead on a remote hill one day, with a high status Pictish chain in his bag. They’re very rare and only about a dozen are known.”

“Did he find the hiding place?”

“Who knows; maybe there’s a clue in the castle archives.”

“It all seems pretty remote.” Jaycee wasn’t convinced. “I don’t really want to spend months cut off up there in the Highlands chasing a legend.”

“I can’t see any alternatives, unless your father wants you to go to California.”

“And that’s not going to happen,” Jaycee scoffed. “His latest child bride isn’t going to want me hanging around.”

“Hey, you might like her.” Courtney smiled. “She’s probably nearer your age than his.”

“But she probably doesn’t speak English very well.” Jaycee remembered his last visit to Father. “His girlfriends aren’t chosen for their conversation. I think the last one came from Slovenia, and this one’s from Moldova.”

“You could teach her English?”

“Don’t even joke about it. I haven’t seen my father for more than a couple of days in years,” Jaycee replied. “I think I’m with you whatever happens, at least until I can get into art school.”

It was a grim day as they drove across the Highland moors. Scotland in late Autumn was devoid of colour; a grey sky and an almost grey landscape. The green grass of summer had given way to washed-out moorland, and the dark grey of the road surface provided little contrast.

They were on my way to meet Stepmother's new employer, the McFelpart of McFelpart; a chieftain of a minor clan in the highlands, with what they were told was an interesting, rather than a distinguished, history.

Their clan seat was little more than a crumbling mansion house, built inside the walls of their ancient castle but it contained a library with the collection of ancient documents which Courtney was being paid to catalogue.

As they drove, they wondered what they might find there and Jaycee's curiosity overrode his doubts about the place. To tell the truth, Courtney was glad of the employment. Her new qualifications in library science and in ancient Scots language and history gave her few options. She had ignored that fact when she chose the courses, because all she really wanted was to get closer to the history of her ancestors.

A few soggy sheep grazed at the side of the road, hardly lifting their heads as the car rumbled past. Majestic deer appeared out of the mist, reminding them that there was in something akin to wilderness in these lands of the far north.

The elderly Ford Fiesta grumbled and rattled through the miles of single track road, protesting at the hills and threatening to go way out of control on the downward slopes. Although it was only four o'clock, the light was fading fast; the headlights hardly penetrated the rain which was falling in sheets and threatening to overwhelm the windscreen wipers.

If Jaycee hadn't been so sharp-eyed, they would have missed the turning off the main road. As it was, Courtney had to reverse a few yards before she could turn into the steeply descending road which was signed to McFelpart Castle. It wasn't a good road and the little Ford, which had sounded rough for the last few miles, finally cut out when they tried to cross through some deep water in a dip in the road.

The car rolled on down a steep slope. It clearly wasn't going to get up the next gradient so Courtney pulled over into a patch of gravel beside a swollen stream. There was silence in the car, apart from the incessant rain drumming on the roof.

"Another fine mess..." Jaycee said, trying to make light of the matter as the car stubbornly refused to start.

"But what do we do now?" Courtney looked at him with a tear in her eye. "I've no idea how far it is to the castle." She stabbed her finger against the screen of her mobile phone. "And there's no signal at all."

"There's a book of maps behind your seat," Jaycee reminded her. "Maybe that could give us some idea of where we are."

He thumbed through the pages and traced the red line of a road with his finger. "I think we turned off here." He showed her the map. "The castle should be in sight when we get over the next hill."

Courtney turned the key and they listened as the starter motor whined. After several more attempts, it struggled to turn over, then stopped altogether.

"I'll walk and get help," Jaycee volunteered. "You can stay dry in here."

"You'll get soaked."

"But it's probably better than both of us staying here," he insisted. "There may not be another car along for ages."

“We’ll both go,” Courtney resolved. “We should stay together. If you get to the castle and they can’t rescue me, how could you tell me? There’s no mobile phone signal here.”

They packed as much as they could into rucksacks, pulled on walking boots, and clad in what they hoped were waterproof jackets, they set off.

Half an hour and lots of rain later, two bedraggled figures arrived at a short bridge at the side of a loch. It took the road to the castle entrance.

“I can’t see any lights or a way in.” Courtney sniffled and shivered as the rain soaked through her supposedly waterproof jacket.

“There’s a rope dangling here, near the door.” Jaycee pulled it and heard the distant ringing of a bell.

They stood in silence watching the door and hoping someone would come soon. Eventually they heard the sound of a lock being turned and the door opened a fraction. A tiny grey-haired lady peered at them through thick glasses.

“I’m the new archivist,” Courtney said. “I think you’re expecting me today.” She had to repeat it and shout.

“So we are,” the woman replied, opening the door. “Come away inside out of this rain. I’m Morag, the General’s housekeeper. My, but you’re both soaked.”

“My car broke down at the other side of that last hill,” Courtney said. “We had to walk from there. All our luggage is in the car.”

Morag put her hand over her ear, cupping it to hear. “I’m a bit deaf,” she said, taking a small pad and a pencil from her overall. “You’ll have to write it down until I get my hearing aid. I think I left it somewhere, but I don’t remember where.”

Courtney wrote it down briefly.

“Your car will be quite safe there. I’ll get someone to fetch it in the morning,” Morag smiled. “Now I’d better find some dry things for you and your daughter before you catch your death of cold.” She indicated that they should go through a door and then scuttled away.

“Did she say *daughter*?” Jaycee hissed but before Courtney could answer, Morag returned.

“I’ll put your clothes to dry.” Morag picked up their outer clothes and bundled them into a wicker basket. “I’ll show you to your rooms and you can get dry. There are robes in the shower rooms with warm towels.”

“That’s great; we’ve nothing dry to wear, and all our luggage is in the car.”

“There should be something to fit you both in the old mistress’ wardrobe. I’ll telephone the General and ask if it’s alright later.”

Courtney wrote a question on the pad.

“The old mistress died twenty years ago but all her things are still here,” Morag explained. “The General doesn’t mind them. Elspeth uses them all the time she’s here. I’m sure she’d not mind if you did the same.”

They went into an old-fashioned kitchen with a huge table and chairs, and best of all, a big fire roaring heat into the room.

“Did she say *daughter*?” Jaycee asked again when he and Courtney stood in front of the fire, grateful for its warmth as they removed their sodden jackets.

“I didn’t hear,” Courtney replied. “Maybe she assumed someone as small and slim with such long hair as yours must be a girl.”

“Don’t rub it in.” Jaycee turned his back to the fire. “It’s not my fault if Dad didn’t give me the genes to

grow into a football star. I can't even grow a moustache."

"That might be great in the present circumstances."

"Why couldn't I have had a normal father, or at least one that I meet occasionally?"

"He didn't give you much," Courtney said a little bitterly. "But you're beautiful all the same, and you've got me." She gave him a damp hug.

Morag returned with towels and a couple of robes. "I'm so pleased you've arrived safely," she said. "The General has been looking forward to meeting you and your daughter. He misses Elspeth since she went away to school. Another wee girl about the place will be so good for him."

Jaycee reached for her pad but Courtney got there first. Morag looked at what she'd written and looked up at them.

"Yes, he was so pleased that you were bringing your daughter," Morag said. "He wouldn't have another boy living here, not since the last one did all that damage in the armoury."

Courtney looked at her and gestured for her to continue.

"He sacked your predecessor on the spot; paid her off and got rid of her and her son. He was so pleased to receive your application and I know he'll be delighted with your daughter. I think that's the reason he decided you were the best applicant for the job."

"Don't say a word," Courtney hissed to Jaycee. "Not a single thing."

Jaycee looked at her and saw that this wasn't the time or place to argue. They removed their clothes and wrapped the robes around themselves, grateful to be warmed in front of the fire. Courtney rubbed

Jaycee's hair with a towel, then secured it like a turban over his head.

"She looks a little like Elspeth too, slim as a pencil and beautiful long hair." Morag smiled at them both. "She'll be eighteen when she comes back in the vacation. She so loves it here in the Highlands."

After a warm shower in a surprisingly modern castle bathroom, Courtney and Jaycee returned to the kitchen where a huge fire crackled in the open grate.

"Do I look like an Elspeth?" Jaycee spoke softly to his stepmother as they sat at the table where Morag served bowls of thick broth with chunks of rough bread.

"Not now," Courtney cautioned as Morag returned.

"It's all made here," she said. "The General said I should have something ready. He's away at a diner with his old regiment. He should be back tomorrow or the next day."

Courtney tried to reply but Morag waved her hands, smiled and pointed to her ears, reminding them that she couldn't hear.

"From now on, until I say otherwise, you'll do everything you can to look like an Elspeth." Courtney smiled and nodded at Jaycee, giving no indication that she was giving him an instruction.

"That's silly," he replied. "I'm not a girl."

"No, you're not." Courtney smiled at him. "But I need this job and you heard what Morag said. I got it because my daughter was coming to stay in the castle with me."

"It's too much." Jaycee stared back at her. "I can't do it."

“No, you can and it’s what you’re going to do.” Courtney sounded very determined. “I can’t afford to lose this job. We need the money, and I need something behind me to get the next job.”

“That’s not fair.”

“I didn’t say it was fair,” Courtney replied. “But until I tell you otherwise, you’re my daughter from now on.”

“But I don’t know anything about being a girl.”

“It’s like being a boy, but with added civilisation and less sports,” Courtney replied. “Since you don’t do sports, it should come easy.”

“That’s stupid. Even if I go along with pretending to be a girl, I’ll never get away with it.”

“I’ll just have to make sure that you do then.” Courtney’s look told him that the discussion was over.

“I’ll show you to your rooms,” Morag said when they had finished eating. “You’re in one of the holiday apartments in the round tower.”

They walked through the house and up some magnificent stairs. The house was obviously built for an earlier age of elegance and show.

“Here’s the mistress’ wardrobe,” Morag said, unlocking an oak door off a landing. “Your room is next door, so help yourself to anything you need.”

Courtney mimed something about their car.

“I’ll ask James to bring your car up in the morning if you give me the keys.” Morag smiled and, with a half curtsy, she left them to explore their new accommodation.

“You can’t be serious.” Jaycee started as soon as they were alone. “I’m not going to pretend to be some

dumb girl just because an old man doesn't want a boy living here."

"Listen." Courtney silenced him with a sharp stare. "I may not be your mother..."

"No, you're only my stepmother and..."

"And I'm the one who's looked after you since your own good-for-nothing father dumped you on me," Courtney said. "I've been good to you, now it's your turn to return the favour and do as you're told."

"Or else..."

"Or else you can go. I'm staying here," Courtney said, then softened her voice. "Think of it as a game," she said. "You liked acting at school; this is acting with a bit more method in it."

"It's a bit more than acting a part in a play." Jaycee looked pensive. "How long are we to be here anyway?"

"As long as it takes," Courtney replied. "I've no idea what I'm going to find in the clan archives."

"What do you expect to find?" Jaycee's attention was shifting a little.

"There'll be a lot of problems finding some of the old documents," Courtney admitted. "None of the land nearby is registered, neither is much of it in the Register of Sassines. That means it's probably been in the family for centuries." "Sassines" being the word for old land registers.

"That doesn't sound very interesting."

"There may be all kinds of family squabbles, clan rivalries and the like to be discovered," Courtney replied. "Not many of the McFelpart clan went to the royal court, either before or after the Act of Union in 1707."

"Was Bonnie Prince Charlie here?"

"It's a legend, but who knows what the documents hold." Courtney looked at him. "So will you co-operate, please."

"I guess so," Jaycee agreed. "You'll have to help me though. I don't know the first thing about being a girl."

"I'll make it fun." Courtney hugged him. "If you'll play along with it all, I think we'll be a great mother and daughter team."

It started the next morning. Courtney knew she had to do something radical to make Jaycee adapt. She had to get him into character as his female self and stay there. She thought about all the complications as he came out of the shower room, towelling his hair.

"I'm going to pierce your ears," she told him. "Sit here."

"Isn't that taking it too far?" Jaycee complained. "Not every girl has pierced ears."

"I agree not every girl has pierced ears," Courtney repeated. "But *my* daughter has pierced ears. Sit down. This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you."

Jaycee stared at the needle from the repair kit that was always in her purse. It looked sharp and gleaming as she put a wad of tissues behind his ear and looked at him from side to side.

He sat still, petrified with fear and anticipation as he felt the needle being placed, moved, then placed again as she checked again from side to side.

"Take a deep breath and keep still," she demanded and, pursing her lips, thrust the needle through his earlobe.

“That hurts,” he complained but with the needle still stuck through, he daren’t move.

“This may hurt more, so another deep breath.” Courtney pulled out the needle and pushed the post of a rather large hoop earring through the hole and fastened it securely.

Jaycee winced and when he felt her fingers were no longer exerting pressure, he gulped and moved.

“That’s huge,” he said, looking in the mirror and touching the bottom of the earring. “How do I hide that?”

“You don’t hide it,” Courtney replied. “It’s not meant to be hidden. It’s there to remind you to behave properly at all times. Now let me do the other one.”

“Can’t I just wear one?” Jaycee protested.

“That would look very silly on a young lady.” Courtney pushed him into position on the chair and put the wad behind his other ear. “I have to make sure this is in exactly the same place.”

“This is awful.” Jaycee held still. “I can feel the scratching as you’re trying to find the spot. The anticipation is killing me.”

“Don’t exaggerate. How do you think girls go on with several piercings?”

“That’s okay for girls.”

“But lots of boys have pierced ears too.” She held still. “Take a deep breath, here it comes.”

She pushed the needle through and then as his face contorted in pain, she pushed the post of the second earring into place and fastened it in place.

“You’ll have to leave them in for about ten days for the holes to heal properly,” Courtney said, wiping his



ears with some antiseptic mouthwash that she carried. "All you have to do is keep them clean."

"I'm glad that's over." Jaycee touched both earrings gently. "Now that they're there, they don't feel so sore." He turned his head left and right in the mirror. "I wouldn't mind but they're far too big for a boy to wear."

"That's the idea. They'll get hidden in your hair when you leave it loose and people will see them when you move your head." Courtney paused. "And when you play with them, like you're doing now."

"They feel different," he said thoughtfully, his hand dropping from the earring. "I think I like the feeling. I can feel them moving."

"So keep liking the feeling," Courtney said. "You've a lot of girl things to learn in a very short time."

"I don't want to do this," Jaycee said. "But now its reality and I've no choice, I rather like the idea."

"Okay, next lesson," Courtney took her cosmetic bag out of her purse. "This is your new best friend."

"It's a pencil." Jaycee looked at her with disbelief.

"It's not just a pencil; it's a kohl pencil," Courtney said. "Watch me; I'll show you how I use it and then you can do the same."

Courtney stroked the pencil around her eyes, under the bottom lashes and into the wet lines, then over her top eyelid, touching under the lid as well. She smudged it gently with her finger.

"That's eyeliner," Jaycee said with disgust in his voice. "You can't expect me to do that."

"I do, I can, and I will expect you to do it. Once it's on, you'll not know it's there but everyone else will see it."

“You’re joking.” Jaycee looked at the pencil in his hand. “A bit of eyeliner won’t turn me into a girl.”

“So you’ve no problem in wearing it then,” Courtney replied. “Please just do it. It’s not for you; it’s for other people to see.”

With a sigh, Jaycee took the pencil and, looking in the mirror, did as he was told.

“Satisfied?” he asked, turning to Courtney.

“I rather like it,” she replied. “Please remember to keep on using it.”

“I guess...’ He looked in the mirror again and started to say something but Courtney interrupted.

“This is mascara. You know want it is; don’t pretend you haven’t seen girls using it.” She held out a yellow tube. “Watch me and then you’re going to do the same.”

Courtney brushed the mascara through her top and bottom lashes, repeating and applying three coats.

“Do I have to have my mouth open as I do it?” Jaycee teased as he accepted the tube.

“I bet you have your mouth open anyway.” Courtney laughed and watched as he stroked the wand through his lashes, secretly noting that his objections didn’t come and his mouth was open too.

Jaycee pulled a face but didn’t reply. He looked at the effect in the mirror and decided that he could live with it. Staying in a castle was going to be weird anyway, so why not go along with it all?

Courtney knew she’s won a major battle there. She smiled to herself. She’d never thought of Jaycee as a girl before but an idea was forming in her mind and it may keep him occupied while she got on with her work.

And every morning he appeared with both eyeliner and mascara, without being prompted to wear it.

Courtney smiled to herself when she saw. He was going to resist, she was sure, but for now, she was winning.

“Good morning.” Morag bustled about the kitchen when they came down in their robes. “Your car’s being brought up soon. I fear it’s gotten very wet inside and damaged when the stream rose in the night. All your luggage will need drying out but James doesn’t think the car can be mended without spending a fortune.”

“Thank goodness I carried my laptop with me last night. It’s in a really good travel case,” Courtney said.

“Mom lives with that laptop.” Jaycee added. “It’s her best friend.”

“Just like all the young people,” Morag nodded. “I don’t understand it myself.”

“That means I’ve only the clothes I arrived in when they’re dry,” Courtney said, noticing that Morag was wearing her hearing aid.

“The General would be happy for you to use the mistress’ wardrobe.” Morag handed out plates of warm scones. “He telephoned this morning to ask if you’d arrived safely.”

“Would anything fit Jaycee?” Courtney asked.

“Miss Elspeth called too and I told her of your unfortunate arrival,” Morag replied. “She says that your daughter can help herself to anything she’s left in her room... and that’s probably a lot.”

“That’s so good.” Courtney felt refreshed at the news. “You’ll have a really lovely selection to choose from,” she said to Jaycee who shrugged as if it was no matter. “You can’t wear one pair of jeans all the time in this amazing castle.”

“How could you?” Jaycee hissed at Courtney when Morag was out of earshot. “I don’t want her stuff. It’s probably dresses and high heels.”

“You *need* her stuff,” Courtney replied. “You don’t have a lot of girl stuff, do you?”

“I guess I never had a lot of girl stuff...” Jaycee turned his attention to the scones.

Courtney smiled to herself. If Jaycee was going to be successful in convincing everyone that he was really a girl, then clothes and all the things that go with them were essential items. She wondered if she could get him into more makeup as soon as possible.

She watched his hands check his earrings. He looked to be doing it naturally, even though he’d only had his ears pierced the night before. She noted his reaction to the touch. Wisely she filed it away in her mind and said nothing.

“I think we could play a dressing up game,” she said. “It’s so lucky that we’ve things to wear after all.”

“You could call it lucky,” Jaycee agreed. “But not on my planet.”

Courtney’s look told him that he should be more gracious in public and not make difficulties.

“Okay, I get it,” he said sullenly. “I’m resigned to my fate, as long as you don’t take pictures to embarrass me afterwards.”

They lingered in front of the fire after their breakfast, enjoying the warmth; watching the flames rise in the ancient range.

“The General’s been on the telephone again.” Morag bustled back into the room. “He’s very sorry but he has to go to Edinburgh before he can come home. You’re to help yourselves from the old mistress’ wardrobe and dressing room and your daughter’s to treat Miss Elspeth’s things as her own,” she repeated.

“That’s very kind,” Courtney said. “I’m sure Jaycee and I will find something there.”

Jaycee’s face tried to smile at the thought but his eyes told another story as he resigned himself to whatever horrors Courtney was going to inflict upon him.

“After lunch, I can show you where your workroom has been set up and where most of the documents are stored,” Morag announced. “The General doesn’t expect you to have started before he has a chance to speak to you himself.”

“Do you know when he’ll be back?” Courtney asked.

“He didn’t say but I don’t expect him for a few days.” Morag turned, hearing a telephone ring somewhere in the distance. She smiled and left them.

“That was James,” she said when she returned. “He’s sorry but he’s forgotten and left your cases in the car. They’ll all be at Dougal’s garage while he looks to see if he can dry it out and get it going. He’s trying again to repair it.”

“Can we go and get our cases?” Jaycee asked.

“Not really; Dougal’s is twenty-five miles away.” Morag’s look suggested that they should know this. “James will bring them when he next passes but he said they were all wet and damaged.”

“Do you know about Calgacus treasure?” Jaycee asked.

“We don’t talk about that nonsense here,” Morag said severely. “I had enough of that when Miss Elspeth was younger, going exploring and digging up the Allt nan Allbanach as far as Beinn Direach.”

“Where?” Jaycee and Courtney said almost together.

Morag looked at them as if they should know. “The Allt nan Allbanach is the river that flows down from the side of Beinn Direach.”

“That sounds really romantic,” Jaycee said.

“It’s bleak and boggy; not country for the faint-hearted.” Morag turned away. “Not the place I’d choose to hide my worldly wealth.”

They left the warmth of the kitchen reluctantly. It wasn’t that the rest of the house was chilly but that the roaring fire was so comforting against the rain falling incessantly outside.

“I think this place is going to be really spooky when the nights draw in.” Courtney said as they walked to their rooms.

“From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggedy beasties and things that go bump in the night, good Lord preserve us,” Jaycee recited.

“I never would have guessed that you knew that one.” Courtney laughed. “They say it’s an old Scottish prayer but its origin seems to be attributed to other places as well.”

“Don’t spoil it.” Jaycee brightened. “It seems to fit this place too well.”

“Talking of fitting, we’d better go and look at our clothes choices,” Courtney said. “It’s lucky that the General isn’t going to be here for a few days.”

“We’re *really* lucky,” Jaycee mocked. “Our car’s been sunk with all our clothes; we’re stuck in the middle of nowhere, and you want to turn me into your daughter.”

“Don’t ever even whisper about that,” Courtney hissed. “You’re going to be my daughter as long as we’re here and you’re going to smile and be polite.”

“Do you want me to flirt with the General too?”

“That might not be a bad idea.” Courtney smiled at his seriousness. “He’s older than your grandfather – if you had one – and he’s looking forward to having a young girl about the place, like Elspeth.”

“Okay, okay, you win.” Jaycee couldn’t help but see the ridiculousness of his position. “I guess I’ve no choices.”

“And when you’ve no choices, then the choice is obvious,” Courtney replied. “Think of yourself as an actor in a role. It’s going to be fun if you let it be fun. Think of it as putting yourself into someone else’s shoes.”

“Marilyn Monroe said give a girl the right pair of shoes and she can conquer the world,” Jaycee said. “I think I got that from watching old movies.”

“I remember another one from Marilyn.” Courtney recognised that his mood was lightening. “I don’t know who invented high heels but women owe him a lot.”

“Is that ever true?” Jaycee laughed.

“Think about it,” Courtney replied. “A naked man wearing shoes would look stupid. A naked girl in high heels would look sexy.”

“That can’t be true for every girl.”

“You know what I mean.” Courtney hugged him. “High heels have a power all of their own.”

“I guess I’ve that to learn,” Jaycee sighed. “I know we’re in a fix and I really don’t want to do this, but I’ll try, but please don’t push me too far.”

“Oh wow,” Courtney gasped as she looked inside the dressing room. “This was a lady who loved her clothes.”

“How can you tell?” Jaycee followed her. “They’re just clothes.”

“But look at them.” Courtney held out a dress which was hanging there for him to feel. “These are fabulous quality; they’re timeless classics and I can’t believe I’m being invited to wear anything I want from here. I can’t wait to start trying things on. Some of these might even fit you with a little padding.”

“What about the sizes?” Jaycee pulled a face and then wandered along the racks.

“From the labels, I’d guess they shouldn’t look too bad.”

He picked up a shoe box from a stack in one of the wardrobes. Courtney took the box from him and looked at the label on the end.

“And these shoes should be my size too.”

“Can’t you tell?”

“I should be able to but sizes vary so much from one manufacturer to another and over time as well.” Courtney opened the box and took out a shoe. “Remember the quote earlier; imagine Marilyn naked except for these.”

“Surely no one could walk in those heels?” Jaycee took the shoe from her and inspected it. “And there’s nothing to them apart from a few straps.”

“Think about it,” Courtney said, rubbing her finger down the heel and looking at him with a knowing look. “Maybe some shoes aren’t designed for much walking.”

“Oh.” Jaycee blushed. “I guess there’s a lot to learn.”

“Let’s go and explore what Elspeth has in her room.”

Elspeth’s room was tidy; so tidy that it must have been thoroughly cleaned and ordered since she left for college.

“No eighteen-year-old girl could ever be so tidy,” Courtney said, opening the walk-in wardrobe. “I think you’re going to love wearing her stuff. There are jeans and tops, blouses and dresses, and I think your feet might even fit into her shoes.”

“It’s all for girls.” Jaycee’s face showed distaste.

He couldn’t help himself being negative now that the reality of it all was in front of him. Part of him was horrified but there was a little voice inside telling him that it was all really exciting.

“It’s all for you,” Courtney snapped.

“I can’t do this.” Jaycee’s voice had dropped to a whisper as he held his head down.

“Come on, sweetheart.” Courtney pulled him to her and hugged him. “You know why I need you to do this.”

“Sure and I know I’ve nowhere else to go.” Jaycee lifted his face to look at her, tears running down his cheeks. “I don’t want to do this. I’m scared. I don’t know how to be a girl.”

“You start with the shoes,” Courtney said softly. “It’s all going to come easily and naturally.”

Jaycee flopped onto the bed and wiped his eyes on the sleeve of his robe.

“You’ve made your mascara run.” Courtney looked at him and started to giggle.

Jaycee stood and went to sit at the mirror in front of the dressing table. “I’ve sure got a lot to learn.” He turned and giggled with her.

“Waterproof mascara is a good investment sometimes.” Courtney opened one drawer after another. “You won’t go short of lingerie and makeup anyway.”

“Lingerie?” Jaycee looked up. “Surely I don’t have to go that far?”

“Think of it as underwear.” Courtney looked at the labels on the garments in her hand. “And yes; you do have to go that far. Girls have a different shape.”

“I know, start with the shoes and build up the character from there,” Jaycee replied.

They exchanged a weak smile. Courtney chalked it up as another little victory.

“Hey, did you know there’s an internet connection here?” Jaycee jumped up as if he’s discovered the Holy Grail.

“That’s great,” Courtney replied. “I couldn’t get a cell phone signal anywhere.”

“But you haven’t tried since we arrived here.”

“That’s true,” she replied. “Maybe the General isn’t stuck in the last century.”

“I bet it’s Elspeth.” Jaycee shrugged. “I’ve been looking through her wardrobes. She seems really cool. Her clothes are all over the place in fashion and her makeup drawers are overflowing with all kinds of girl stuff.”

“Does that mean you could do the girl stuff?” Courtney asked.

“I guess,” Jaycee replied. “But please don’t take pictures.”

“I promise.” Courtney crossed her fingers. “If you can draw and paint as well as you can, I’m sure that mastering makeup will be easy. It’s only colouring after all.”

“You’ve got to be kidding,” Jaycee replied with a smile. “I bet I can do it better than any girl anyway.”

“So convince me,” Courtney laughed. “If you can, it’s really going to piss your father off. You could look better than his latest girlfriend.”

“Easy. I’ll look younger, maybe blonder and sexier.” Jaycee laughed. “That might be fun, in which case you can send him a picture.”

“Do you really mean that?”

“Maybe not but then maybe I do. You can decide.”

“I’m going to hold you to that.” Courtney thought that he was really going to do whatever it took and sighed with relief. “I can’t wait to see what you can do.”

“I think you’ll have to teach me the basics,” Jaycee said. “It’s something that little girls learn from their mothers.”

“That’s how I learned,” Courtney replied. “I started playing with makeup when I was about four or five.”

“So I’m a late starter.”

“But you found the Wi-Fi, so you have lots of tutorials on YouTube to work through. You’ll be doing *my* makeup before we’re much older.”

“I didn’t know that the internet did that,” Jaycee said. “I should have guessed that everything would be there.”

“That’s your afternoon settled,” Courtney said. “I’ll expect my daughter to appear this afternoon.”

“Aren’t you going to help?”

“I think you should design your own girl.” Courtney smiled rather wickedly and waved her fingers as she closed the door behind her.

“Where do I start?” Jaycee turned to look again through Elspeth’s room. “Start with the shoes.”

He stood for a while, thinking. He knew he didn’t want to turn himself into some kind of girl. He knew that Courtney was depending upon him. It wasn’t her fault that his father had dumped him upon her at the

first opportunity, and she'd done her best for him. He owed her really.

He closed his eyes and tried to envision himself as a girl. It came surprisingly easily. His hair was long and shiny. He'd always liked it long, and the colour was good; just slightly red shades of light brown.

He was slim, but he knew he didn't have the curvy shape that girls had. Not all girls had that shape though; some were as skinny as he was. He turned in the mirror. He didn't have breasts either but what Nature had forgotten could be stuffed with cotton.

He smiled at the thought and turned to look through the cupboards and drawers in Elspeth's dressing room.

"If I have to be a girl, I'm going to be my kind of girl," he resolved after a long consideration of everything.

A couple of hours later, Jaycee was no nearer deciding upon anything.

"I don't think I want to look like I'm in drag," he said to no one in particular. "I don't think I want to look like I'm wearing heavy makeup. It's too much to do and far too much to maintain through the day."

He sighed and went back to the internet.

"There must be some simple instructions here," he said, then suddenly a brainwave struck. "Maybe if I search for girl's videos instead of looking at the boy to girl transformation stuff..."

"This looks better." He scanned through a selection of screens. "Maybe less is more," he mused. "I don't have to be super precise and glamorous; all I need to do is look authentic. If the makeup is smudged or wearing, then that's what happens to real girls."

"How do I look?" Courtney burst into his room with a huge smile on her face.

“You look amazing.” Jaycee stood and looked at her.

“I can’t believe all that there is in that woman’s closets,” Courtney said. “She must have had great style and taste. There are a few things that look awful and dated but most are classic and vintage.”

“You’re preening,” Jaycee said.

“And why not?” Courtney twirled, watching herself in the mirror. “When did I ever get the opportunity to co-ordinate like this?”

She wore a dark blue dress with a slashed neckline and matching belt. The skirt flared out when she turned and hung beautifully when she stood still. Her shoes were a matching blue, with an ankle strap and thin heels about three inches tall.

“I thought all her makeup would have dried out but most of it is good. I even found that it was organised carefully. It looks as if no one has touched it since she died.”

“I bet the General won’t believe how good you look when he arrives,” Jaycee said. “You’ll turn his head and become the new mistress of the castle.”

“I’m not sure I want to go that far.” Courtney’s face turned serious. “Have I gone too far?”

“Of course not,” he replied. “You were invited to use the clothes here, so why not use them to look your best?”

“And what about you?” Courtney asked.

“I’m thinking.” Jaycee turned to the mirror. “I’ve watched some movies on YouTube. You know I don’t want to do this.”

“Right, but you’re going to do it for me.” Courtney’s tone told him that this was an instruction not a question.



“I said I would but don’t expect me to get enthusiastic about dressing up and pretending to be a girl.” Jaycee shrugged. “I don’t think I’m going to be good at it.”

Courtney sighed. “I know you’ll do your best. Would you like me to help you with makeup?”

“If I’m forced to do this, I’m going to do it my way,” Jaycee replied. “I’m going to be my own sort of girl.”

Courtney smiled weakly and left the room.

Jaycee looked at his reflection from left to right for a few moments. He brushed through his hair, fastened it in a high pony tail, and watched a couple more videos. Now his hopes were rising. Maybe he could pull it off.

Very hesitantly, he started to arrange cosmetics from the drawers on the dressing table in front of him.

“Keep it light,” he told himself as he used a tinted moisturiser on his face and neck.

“You look very nice, young lady.” Megan saw him first as he came back to the kitchen which seemed to be the nerve centre of the house.

“Yes you do.” Courtney stood and watched him walk across the room. “I love the double denim look.”

“Thanks,” Jaycee replied. “These were the nearest to my own clothes that are probably all ruined now.”

He walked across the room to stand near the huge open fireplace. Courtney watched him carefully. The long pale denim shirt hung almost down to the bottom hem of his short skirt in darker denim. It fitted very tightly to his figure. He wore thick tights, and pink and white trainer boots, which seemed to make his legs look longer.

Under his denim shirt, he wore a pale blue top which stretched across his chest, suggesting that

there was something there that Courtney knew was impossible, but which he had managed to pad out. He seemed to be wearing no makeup other than thick heavy mascara and kohl around his eyes.

They looked at each other, Courtney appraising and Jaycee watching to see if she approved or if she was going to be angry later. The unspoken signals were good.

“It’s been another filthy day,” Morag said, breaking the silence.

“I’ve been looking in the library,” Courtney said. “Don’t worry, I’ve not disturbed anything, but I wanted to get a sense for this place.”

“And I’ve been catching up with my friends on the internet and planning where I can go to get some sun when we’ve finished Mom’s work here.” Jaycee said. “I didn’t realise so much time was passing.”

“The mistress’ old clothes seem to suit you very well,” Morag said to Jaycee. “She’d have been happy to see them being worn. It was Elspeth who stopped the General clearing them out a couple of years ago. She said she’d grow into them.”

“Maybe she has already,” Jaycee interrupted. “I’ve tried some of her stuff and I think some of the things would fit me. They’re too beautiful and far too sophisticated though.”

“I didn’t know you’d been looking.” Courtney shot a warning look across the room.

“I haven’t but I heard you saying what the sizes were and Elspeth has the same sizes,” Jaycee said. “I know you said sizes on labels varied but that’s what the labels say.”

“Elspeth was always a bonnie girl,” Morag said. “I hope you’ve the chance to meet her if she has the time to come and visit her old grandfather.”

"I'm sure you'd be happy to see her," Courtney said. "It can't be much fun being the only girl here."

"There may be advantages," Morag laughed. "I often wished the other girls would disappear when I went to the dances as a young girl."

"I bet you were the belle of the ball." Jaycee smiled at her.

"I wished I was but with Father and six brothers to look after, I didn't have the time for myself." Morag's look said that she was remembering times long ago and far away. "If only it had been different."

Courtney thought that the next few days passed easily. With no prompting, Jaycee stayed in character; female character, playing the part of the younger girl that she hoped he'd sustain. The eye makeup grew heavier and messier through the day but was always precise and fresh when they met for dinner. He dressed each day in a short skirt, with different tops and, almost inevitably, the pink and white trainers.

"I really thank you for doing this," Courtney said as they sat in the library later in the week.

"It's not so bad," Jaycee shrugged. "There's only you and Morag to see me."

"I'm so pleased. You're getting more and more used to the clothes and the makeup every day."

"The makeup doesn't seem so daunting when I'm doing it every day. At first, it all felt so strange; you know, running the kohl pencil around my eyes and the heavy mascara on my lashes. Now it seems natural to wear it," Jaycee said.

"You look so good," Courtney said. "It's just as well that there aren't any young men here, or you'd be a target."

“Don’t frighten me.” Jaycee replied.

“But you look so good.”

“It’s not all down to me. The internet shows so many different ways to use makeup. It’s getting to be quite fun to see how differently I can do it every day.”

“You painted your nails.” Courtney suddenly noticed his hands. “That’s really beautiful.”

“I thought you’d expect me to do it,” Jaycee said, not maliciously, as he looked at his fingers again. I’m not sure that I’ve got it even enough or tidy enough. It took several attempts to get it looking this good.”

“No one will notice the imperfections.” Courtney squeezed his hand gently. “The important thing is that you did it.”

“I don’t know how it makes me feel though.” Jaycee looked down and dropped his voice. “I think I’m slipping into being suddenly female.”

“Is that bad?” Courtney asked.

“I don’t know. I thought I knew who I was but this is making me feel different..., uncertain... I’m not explaining this at all well, am I?”

“It doesn’t matter.” Courtney hugged him, and whereas the boy would have pulled away, the new girl hugged her back.

“I guess not.” Jaycee pushed his long hair back with his fingers. “Once I’ve done my eyes, I think I forget that I’m wearing makeup. The clothes too; they seem more natural, and less awkward that they did.”

“I’m so pleased,” Courtney replied. “It’s important that you stay female and act naturally.”

“I’m frightened by my feelings though.” Jaycee replied. “I’m afraid that I might get to like being a girl.”

“The General will be home this evening,” Morag announced next morning. “He said that he’d be available to show you the library and all the documents after dinner.”

“That’s great,” Courtney replied. “I’m really looking forward to getting back to some real work. It’s why I’m here after all.”

“I’ve already shown you where everything is kept,” Morag said. “But don’t disturb anything before the General arrives. He’d not like that.”

“Would you mind if I went for a walk?” Jaycee interrupted. “I feel that I’ve been so inactive these last few days.”

“You’d best wrap up really well.” Morag looked out of the window. “It may be dry now, but the rain can come in so quickly with this wind.”

“I’ve seen some good waterproofs in Elspeth’s room,” Jaycee said. “I think I should be safe in those.”

“Aye, well, there’s always plenty of rain about,” Morag cautioned. “Lassie can go with you and she’ll bring you home if you get lost in the mist if it falls before the rain.”

Jaycee had made friends with the black and white sheepdog who lived across the yard on a long chain. The dog was gentle and comforting; grateful for a new friend and the titbits of food she brought.

“Don’t get lost,” Courtney said gently, thinking that time outdoors would do her new stepdaughter good.

Jaycee set out after lunch, intending to walk along the track from the castle, up the valley along the stream which the rain had turned into a torrent. Lassie remained at her side, occasionally stopping to sniff, and occasionally getting ahead of her, but always waiting until she caught up.

“It’s good to be outside.” She watched Lassie listening to her as if she understood every word.

Jaycee laughed watching Lassie’s ears twitch as she spoke and before too long, she was chatting to the dog. He poured out his feelings at being turned suddenly into a girl. As he talked and thought, Jaycee was forced to admit that he was enjoying this charade.

“I’m learning more about the way girls do things than I ever could have if we’d stayed in the city. I never had much luck at dating anyway.”

He clambered upwards as the stream petered out towards the top of a valley, then on an impulse, began to follow the path as it went more steeply up a ridge which disappeared into low cloud. He stopped and looked back towards the castle. The view was breathtaking, across the valley as the clouds scudded past.

“I think we’ve earned this,” Jaycee said to Lassie as they shared the homemade biscuits he’d stuffed into his pockets before they set out.

He sat a little longer, thinking, and stroking Lassie’s ears. Then the cloud was suddenly all around them and the rain began to fall, gently at first; just a few drops, then it turned into a torrential downpour.

Lassie shuddered at the impact of the rain and turned to look at Jaycee. She didn’t leave but nudged him towards the path. Two hundred yards, then three and more they trudged through the downpour, through the thickening mists.

“I’m glad you know where we’re going,” Jaycee said to Lassie as the rain seeped through the borrowed waterproofs and cold water began to trickle down his back.

He shivered as more water penetrated his clothes and mentally cringed as water squelched through his borrowed boots. Sounds were lost in the mist and

against the incessant pouring of the rain but suddenly above all these sounds came the unmistakable chugging of an engine; a diesel engine.

Closer and closer it came until the distant glow of headlights appeared through the fog. A rather battered Land Rover came into view, rocking on its suspension over the rocky ground. It stopped beside the track and waited.

Jaycee shielded his eyes against the glare as he approached cautiously. Lassie didn't hesitate but ran round to the rear and jumped over the tailgate into the shelter of the truck top.

"You must be Jaycee," a girl's voice came from the half open window. "I recognise my jacket. Jump in before you drown."

Jaycee did as he was told, conscious of the soggy figure he'd become in such a short time. He pushed his hood back and felt his wet hair flopping over his shoulders.

His rescuer was a girl whom he guessed was a little older than he was. He didn't want to stare; she was really special and it showed. She was dressed for the weather and gave an air of being completely charge of herself and all about her.

"I'm Elspeth," she said and held out her arms to hug him and kiss formally on each cheek in the French manner. "Ugh, you're so wet." She laughed. "They should pay us to live in this climate. I'll get you back and you can have a hot bath, then we can get to know each other better."

Jaycee shrugged out of his wet coat. The water had soaked through, making his top and jeans cling to him. He saw Elspeth's eyes glance to his hips as she helped him shed the coat.

He knew the jeans were tight. He knew he had a bulge where girls didn't have a bulge. He hoped she hadn't seen the bulge and turned in his seat, dropping his hands to his lap to hide it.



"I'm so cold," Jaycee said, shivering as the Land Rover's heater tried to make some difference to the temperature.

"That's why the Scots invented whiskey." Elspeth smiled. "You'll soon be warm again."

Two hours later, Jaycee padded down into the kitchen and took his place in front of the blazing fire. He hadn't dressed and wore a huge robe which flapped around his slippered feet. His eye makeup was as smudged as ever.

"I'm still so cold." He looked up as Elspeth came to sit beside him. "Getting dressed can wait."

"But your eye makeup couldn't." Elspeth smiled at him.

"I feel naked without it," Jaycee lied.

He'd sat in front of the mirror for ages, wondering if he dared to go down and face Elspeth again. She seemed to be everything he was not; assured and confident in her femininity. He'd steeled himself before he dared to go down and used the black kohl and mascara as something to hide behind.

Elspeth turned and walked to the dresser. She returned with two glasses of an amber liquid. Handing one to Jaycee, she raised hers in a toast.

"Whiskey was invented to cope with living here," she said. "Sip it carefully and you'll feel the warmth returning to your aching bones."

Jaycee sipped very carefully and allowed the sip to roll around his tongue before swallowing. It tasted fiery and warming at the same time as it slipped down his throat.

Elspeth watched him. "I guess this is your first taste of the life blood of the Highlands," she said.

“Our ancestors had a still hidden in the hills that the English revenue men never found. Maybe this came from up there; the General’s little secret but if you tell anyone I’ll have to say you made it up.”

“Was the still near Calgacus treasure?” Jaycee asked innocently.

“Probably, but no one knows quite where.”

“So you believe in the legends?”

“Who knows the truth until it’s found?” Elspeth replied. “One day perhaps we’ll confound the doubters.”

Jaycee saw the twinkle in her eye as she spoke and grinned broadly, raising his glass again before taking another sip.

“It really works,” he said. “I’m feeling warmer already.”

“We’ll make a Scot of you yet,” Morag chipped in. “There’s no cold like Scotland when it’s wet and cold.”

“That seems to be most of the time.” Jaycee sipped again, feeling a little lightheaded as the whiskey burned gently down his throat.

“There’s winter to come,” Elspeth added. “This place can be really cold when the north wind blows.”

“Great.” Jaycee snuggled down into his robe.

“Don’t worry; we’ll think of something to keep you warm.” Elspeth’s grin was mischievous and made Jaycee wonder how many meanings there were to her words.

Life slipped into a routine over the next few days. Elspeth left early the next morning; back to Edinburgh and her real life, whatever that may be. The General returned and Courtney spent time with him, going through the library and waiting whilst old

chests were cleared of documents and the piles were dumped unceremoniously around the table. They sorted them into sections by age and the tedious job of cataloging began.

"I can't read any of this stuff," Jaycee complained as he looked through documents on the table.

"All I need you to do is enter them on the computer spreadsheet." Courtney wiped her spectacles. "I'll give you which heading as we go along. Some things will need to be recorded and cross referenced under two or more headings."

"Don't ask me." The General looked over his shoulder. "That's why I asked for an expert."

"It's old Scots mostly, but there's some Gaelic too," Courtney explained as she looked over the one in Jaycee's hand. "And whoever wrote this had appalling handwriting."

"Can you read it?" Jaycee asked.

"I think so." Courtney took it to the light. "It seems to record rents from the estate, although the dates aren't clear. I'm going to file it in a separate document box after entering it on the computer. When I've separated all the documents into their relevant sections, I can try and date them, and then get some sort of picture of the situation in the past."

"It's not directions to Calgacus treasure?" Jaycee asked flippantly.

"There's been enough nonsense about that over the years," the General said. "I think the legend was invented to attract the American tourists."

"It predates the tourists," Courtney laughed. "I read that there was an allusion in the annals of King Alexander The Third in the Thirteenth Century."

"Stuff and nonsense," the General huffed, looked around with some amusement, and left the room.

And thus the days passed. Slowly and methodically, Courtney worked her way through the dusty collection. Jaycee quickly got into the routine of recording and backed up their work every day.

Without prompting, he found himself slipping into acting the part of a girl until nothing seemed forced any more. Eye makeup was second nature now and he began a routine of taking care of his hands and painting his nails too. Courtney noticed.

"I thought it would look nice," was all he said when she complemented him.

"The General would like you to dress for dinner on Saturday," Morag announced on morning as she cleared the table after breakfast. "Elspeth will be here and I think her cousin Angus and another young man are coming too."

Jaycee's heart raced in panic. It was all right pretending to be a girl in this limited company; even Elspeth hadn't seemed curious about his efforts at femininity which must have seemed strange to her. Young men were a different matter.

"You'll be okay," Courtney said simply when he tried to discuss his fears with her. "Don't let yourself be caught alone with one of them and make sure that they keep their hands to themselves."

"I don't think that's how it works." Jaycee remembered his time at school and the stories he'd heard about older brothers and sisters of his friends.

"I'm sure you'll be okay," she replied. "Elspeth seems to like you so stay close to her and act naturally."

"If I was acting naturally, I wouldn't be here wearing a skirt and makeup," he snapped back.

"I'd guess that secretly you like wearing makeup." Courtney looked him directly in the eye. "I've seen how your look is changing, getting more precise by

the day. I've seen you reapplying your mascara and checking your hair in the mirror as we work."

"I'm trying to stay in character for you," he replied lamely and saw her look which said so much. "Okay, I have gotten a little obsessed," he admitted. "There's not much else to do here when we're not working."

"I'm looking forward to it," Courtney confessed. "The opportunity to dress up in these surroundings is really exciting and there are some real treasures in the wardrobe. You'll have to come and help me choose."

"But I don't know the first thing about dresses," Jaycee said.

"Then it's time you learned." Courtney stopped what she was doing and looked at him. "You'd scrub up really well."

"Have you forgotten? I've never really dressed as a girl. Sure I wear a bit of padding under a top from Elspeth's wardrobe but I wear jeans as well as her skirts."

"I hadn't really thought of that," Courtney replied. "You'll need to walk in heels, as well as in a dress. We've not got much time to get you ready."

"Can't I simply take some supper to my room?"

"No you can't," Courtney said emphatically. "The General would be quite insulted if you ignored his invitation."

"But there are to be these boys there," he protested.

"And I expect you to behave as properly. Don't give them any reason to suspect you're anything else but a well-brought-up young lady."

"Well-brought-up young ladies have sex with well-brought-up young men," Jaycee said softly. "I'm sure you remember being that age."

"I do," Courtney said with a sigh and she came and hugged him. "I remember only too well. Boys' hands have a way of straying and you don't realise until the hand is where it shouldn't be."

"That would be my downfall."

"And probably the end of my job too."

"Jaycee, I'm back and we're going to have such fun." Elspeth almost exploded into the room; such was her enthusiasm and excitement. "I can't wait for you to meet my cousin Angus. You'll love him, even though he's such a studious guy at times."

"I can't wait either," Jaycee answered, trying to put an enthusiasm that he didn't feel into his voice. "I seem to have been the only young person here forever."

"Not so much of that." Courtney's voice came from behind the bookcase. "I'm not really over the hill yet."

"I'm sorry," Elspeth said. "I'd have asked another cousin to come and entertain you if I had one. We're such a small clan but Angus is my favourite."

"You're excused," Courtney laughed. "After marrying Jaycee's father, I'm not ready for another mistake just yet."

"Are all marriages to be mistakes?" Elspeth asked.

"Not all, you seem a happy family. What's the relationship between you?" Courtney asked.

"Angus is my cousin; he's the General's son and only heir. His land is on the other side of the county. My mother was the General's youngest sister and I'm the heir to anything I can marry into. We McFelparts know our duty."

"It sounds quite medieval when you say it like that," Courtney said

Elsbeth laughed and turned away, indicating that the subject was closed.

“I know exactly which dress is going to make you look fabulous,” Elspeth continued. “You must come and try it on at once or I’ll never forgive you.”

“Do I have to dress up?” Jaycee tried to deflect her.

“Of course you must.” Elspeth took her hand and started to lead her towards the stairs. “You’ve spent ages in jeans and probably in outdoor boots, with your hair tied back. You must be longing for something soft and flowing, with heels and an elaborate hairdo; a chance to show that there’s a real girl under all that practical stuff.”

“I’m not one for dressing up,” Jaycee tried again.

“Then let me dress you up,” Elspeth pleaded. “It’s going to be great fun, I promise.”

Reluctantly, Jaycee allowed himself to be pulled up the stairs, not without a final glance at Courtney who seemed to be both smiling encouragement and looking cautious at the same time.

“I can see you in something green,” Courtney pronounced. “With that sandy hair, you have the colouring to look stunning. I know exactly which dress and I do hope it fits you.”

“Could we look at it?” Jaycee asked.

His mind was racing ahead. He didn’t want Elspeth dressing him. He had things to conceal and goodness knew what would happen if those secrets were revealed.

“I’d like to take it and try it on with Courtney first,” he said, hoping that she’d agree.

“Okay,” Elspeth agreed quite easily. “But you’ve got to let me do your hair and makeup.”*

“Another fine mess you’ve got me into.” Jaycee stood in Courtney’s room with a long green dress over his arm and matching heels in his hand. “Look what Elspeth expects me to wear.”

“I think you’ll look wonderful in that.” Courtney didn’t get the point. “It’s sophisticated and has a timeless styling. I love the long drape of the skirt and the neckline won’t reveal too much.”

“If it reveals anything, I’m sunk.” Jaycee slumped back into a chair.

“If you reveal anything, then I’m sunk with you,” Courtney replied.

The look on her face told Jaycee that she’d understood the problems. If the dress didn’t look right, then all kinds of problems were tumbling towards them.

“Elspeth wanted to come with me and play dressing up,” Jaycee said. “I think I got away with that but she’s going to want to see me in the dress and she expects that I’m going to be all girlishly enthusiastic about it.”

“So *be* girlishly enthusiastic,” Courtney said. “Play the game.”

“And she wants to do my makeup and hair.”

“That’s easy. You sit there and let her.”

“But I don’t know how to talk about it like a girl should. I don’t know what to say... what a girl would say.”

“We’re all different, even if we’re all girls together,” Courtney replied. “Switch off all the worries and let her talk. You can listen and chip in when you have to.”

“You don’t understand.” Jaycee shook her head. “She wants me to meet Cousin Angus. How do I deal with him?”

“You be polite, don’t let his hands wander where they shouldn’t, and keep your legs closed,” Courtney said. “When there’s no alternative, what you have to do is obvious. You get on with it.”

Jaycee sighed and picked up the green dress. She held it out and then held it against her.

“Help me try it on then.” She held it out to Courtney.

The dress fit almost perfectly. The material was soft and beautifully cut and the hiss of the back zipper going to the neckline sent a shiver through Jaycee’s body. It fitted closely under the bust line and widened from the hips, falling in generous folds of material to the ankles.

“I love the way it hangs and moves. It makes you look so elegant.” Courtney stood back, admiring him from the other side of the room. “Try the shoes.”

“They’re too high. I’ll never be able to walk in those.”

“They’re only about three-inch heels,” Courtney said. “That shouldn’t be a challenge once you’re used to them.”

“And how long is that going to take?” Jaycee looked at the delicate pattern on the toe straps.

Courtney knelt to slip his feet into the shoes and fastened the ankle straps. “Just walk,” she said. “You have to take small steps with one foot directly in front of the other. Let your hips sway and you’ll soon get used to them.”

“It’s a whole new posture.” Jaycee looked back at Courtney, a puzzled expression on his face. “I know this shouldn’t be happening but I quite like this feeling.”

“Perhaps you’ve been a girl long enough to appreciate the quality of a dress.” Courtney adjusted the narrow shoulder straps.

“I never dreamed that a dress could make me feel like this,” Jaycee said.

“Like what?” Courtney asked.

“Well, girlish I suppose.” Jaycee’s face took a look of concentration. “But I think it was made for someone with more up front than I have.”

“I can pin it to look better,” Courtney said. “You’ll look just right.”

“I think I’ve been half-pretending to be a girl since we’ve been here. This makes me really scared. I don’t know if I want to look like a perfect girl in this dress.”

“And do you?”

“I don’t know. I’m feeling sort of repelled by the idea. I shouldn’t be doing it. But then I have these feelings telling me that I *want* to do it.”

“I want you to do it and I’m not letting you turn back even if you want to,” Courtney said. “I couldn’t think of the consequences. I’d never get another decent job.”

“That’s okay for you.” Jaycee suddenly thought of his future. “What happens to me? If I’m not careful, I’ll have forgotten how to be a boy.”

Before they could say more, there was a tapping at the door. Courtney opened it and Elspeth came in.

“Wow.” She took one look and stood back. “I knew you’d look good in that dress. Can we do the full rehearsal?”

“What now?” Courtney and Jaycee almost said it together.

“I know how I’m going to dress your hair.” Elspeth ran her fingers through Jaycee’s hair, putting it on top of his head. “And we’ll do an understated makeup with all the emphasis on your eyes.”

“It’s a lovely dress.” Courtney adjusted the shoulder straps again.

“And it’s a pity that you don’t have the breasts to show it off.” Elspeth put her hands on the empty bodice. “Most boys don’t.”

The silence was deadly. Courtney and Jaycee were struck dumb and looked at each other in shock.

“You know.” Jaycee was the first to speak.

“It was when I saw you in the Land Rover that day in the rain. Your jeans were soaking and clung to you. You had a bulge where there shouldn’t have been one,” Elspeth said. “I thought it was exciting to have a secret like that.”

“But you didn’t say anything.” Courtney found her voice too.

“Of course not,” Elspeth replied. “Why would I?”

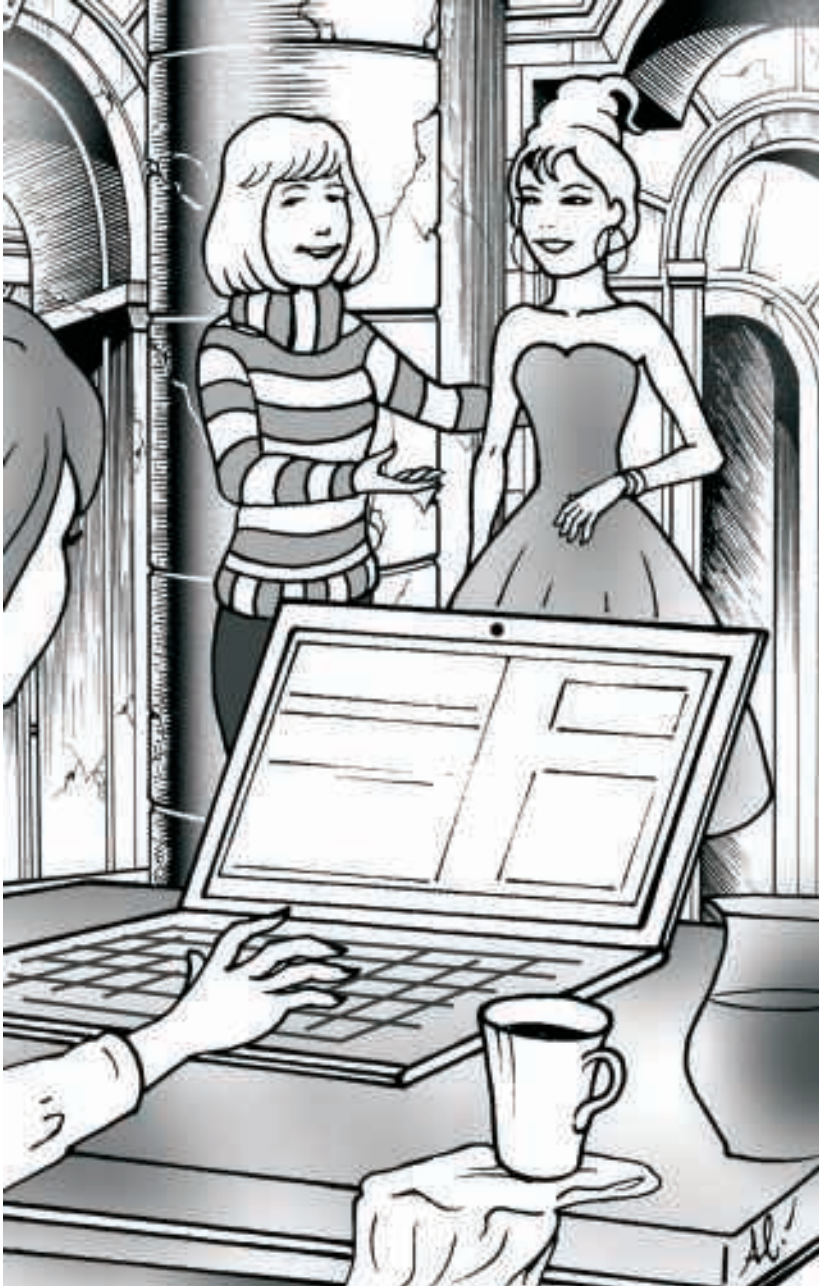
“I feel awful.” Jaycee slumped into a chair. “What are you going to do now?”

“I’m going to dress you up like the belle of the ball of course,” Elspeth replied. “Just because you’re not really a girl doesn’t mean we can’t have fun.”

“Okay,” Jaycee said cautiously, looking across the room to Courtney.

“Please don’t give us away,” she pleaded. “I really need this job.”

“I know you do and I’m not going to say a word against you,” Elspeth replied. “I know the General is getting really excited about all your work too.”



She turned to look at Jaycee who was silently panicking about where all this was going.

“You’d better come with me,” she said, beckoning him to follow.

“Like this?” He gestured to his dress.

“Especially like that. Cousin Angus is going to love meeting you.”

Two hours later, Courtney was sitting at the kitchen table, trying to work on her laptop even though her mind was with the thoughts of all that had happened that evening.

“Are you ready to meet your newly made over step-daughter?” Elspeth asked as she came into the room.

Jaycee followed, but not the Jaycee as before. This one was truly transformed. He walked as if heels were second nature and stood beside Elspeth.

“I can’t believe that it’s you,” Elspeth gasped in surprise.

“It’s amazing what a good makeover can do for a girl,” Elspeth said.

“I’m looking but I can’t believe it’s real.”

Courtney took in Jaycee’s hair, piled up artfully but casually on top of his head. She let her eyes take it all in. His earrings were exposed rather than hidden in his hair, the dark eyes with false lashes exaggerating their smoky depth.

“You’ve got breasts,” she exclaimed when she realised that his figure suddenly had more shape.

“Elspeth glued them on,” Jaycee spoke for the first time.

“I thought of this when I realised he was a boy,” Elspeth confessed. “There were these breast forms

from when I was determined to appear bustier than I really was. Don't worry, they'll peel off later."

"But his voice is different too." Courtney still stared at him. "I can't believe this is really Jaycee."

"It's all me." His voice was softer.

"But you don't even sound the same."

"I sprayed something down his throat to make him speak more softly," Elspeth explained.

"You look wonderful," Courtney admitted. "But tell me honestly, how do you feel?"

"I don't know," Jaycee said. "It's as if the pretending has stopped and I've become this person."

"I think you'll like her," Elspeth said. "I'm not letting her go back before Cousin Angus meets her."

"Why is that important?" Courtney asked.

"He's got a thing for girls like Jaycee," Elspeth said bluntly. "He's next in line to the General, but the General won't acknowledge him until he's shown himself to be worthy."

"Let me guess; being worthy includes being a suitable bride." Courtney looked at Jaycee who in turn looked shocked.

"But I don't want to stay like this." Jaycee's voice didn't go any more masculine.

"Think about it," Elspeth said, her voice harder than before. "You've both got a lot to lose here if you don't play along. I'm not going to be malicious, but I do expect some co-operation."

"I've no chance, have I?" Jaycee slumped down. "You're both determined that I'm to be a girl."

“I’m glad you realise that,” Elspeth said, looking at Courtney for agreement. “It’s going to make your life so much easier if you go along with it.”

Jaycee cried himself to sleep that night. His mind was churning thoughts ranging from running away and disappearing into the Highland mists, to letting Elspeth and Courtney lead him along the path of increasing femininity.

When he woke rather late the next morning, he understood that his choices were so limited as to be meaningless. He was stuck in a castle in the middle of nowhere, with no resources of his own, with people who wanted to control him.

He’d never thought of being a girl. It wasn’t something that would be on his career plan even if he had one, yet here was his stepmother who’d looked after him when no one else wanted him. He knew he owed her something, but was this too much?

There was Elspeth too. She was gentle and kind, yet all the same she was pushing him towards being feminine. He thought about her. After a while, he understood that he didn’t want to go against her either.

And what about girls? He’d never really dated anyone. A few failed encounters in high school and in college hadn’t increased his confidence and given his size and lack of funds, it was clear to him that his attractiveness was way down the scale.

What a mess of conflicting thoughts and emotions.

He showered and then looked at himself in the mirror for the first time that day. The traces of last night’s mascara were still around his eyes.

“I should have cleaned it all properly,” he thought, reaching for a ball of cotton wool.

He soaked it in cleanser and wiped his eyes, then looked at himself closely. He had no trace of beard growth and his skin glowed with youthful health; not a spot or a blemish anywhere. He brushed his hair, feeling the damp locks falling between his shoulder blades.

He sat a few moments longer. His mind stopped churning through all kinds of fears and possibilities, and he allowed himself to relax. If this was his present situation, it was up to him to make the best of it. He may not want to be a girl, but he didn't want to be cast off; lonely and friendless.

A new feeling came over him as he automatically used the pencil to renew the black lines around his eyes. Mouth open, he stroked a couple of coats of mascara over his lashes. It seemed to be so normal now. On an impulse he added lip gloss, then licked his lips just for the sensations of feel and taste.

He looked at himself in the mirror and resolved to let things happen around him rather than trying to buck against whatever fate and Elspeth and Courtney had mapped out for him.

"If I can't change it, I'll have to go along with it, and do my best to enjoy it," he told himself as he started to dress.

Jaycee started to dress. On an impulse, he chose the prettiest bra that he could find and put Elspeth's breast forms into the cups. He chose matching panties in a boy brief style, then turned to the mirror to look at himself.

"Maybe she could do with losing a pound or two round her waist," he told his reflection. "But I'm not too bad overall."

He turned left and right to look how the lingerie fitted and watched his hair, now almost dry, swing be-

tween his shoulder blades. He decided to leave it loose.

He thought about the rest of his clothes and what they might signify to Elspeth and Courtney. Jeans and a sweater would say one thing, a skirt and top may signify something else. He pursed his lips in thought, imagining their reaction, until a decision hit him.

“This dress would say it all,” he said to himself, taking down a really feminine dress with short sleeves and a full skirt.

It hung very well once he had managed to pull up the back zipper to the top. The neckline was modest.

“I think baby blue really suits me.” He looked again. “It’s a bit long but that doesn’t matter.”

He looked at himself in the mirror and realised that it wasn’t altogether right. There was something missing, apart from the shoes which he hadn’t chosen yet.

Suddenly he knew the answer. He rummaged through the lingerie drawer. He thought he’d seen it but couldn’t quite remember where.

There it was; a garter belt which almost matched his lingerie. He fastened it round his waist and looked in the mirror, holding the skirt high.

“That’s not right either.”

He remembered the pictures he’d seen in glossy magazines. The tabs for the stockings went under the panties, not over. He knew where to go next and pulled a pair of stockings from the same drawer.

With trembling hands, he opened the packet and, feeling how delicate they were, sat to put them on. He gathered the material and slipped his toe into the end and carefully pulled the hose up. He stood and the sensation of the stocking falling down made him realise that he needed to fix the garter tabs.

With both tabs secure, he slipped nude-coloured shoes onto his feet and twirled on their stiletto heels. The shoes weren't the best match but the heels were a statement of their own being too high for daytime and impossible to wear outside the castle.

He listened to the click of his feet on the stone floor as he headed to the kitchen where everyone seemed to congregate in the daytime.

Everything went silent as he walked in there. One by one they turned to look at him, as if stunned for something to say. Jaycee started to think what a mistake he'd made.

"Wow, I see you've finally made the right decision," Elspeth broke the silence and came across to hug him. "I'm so pleased. Now that you've taken this step, everything will seem so much more fun; I promise, girlfriend."

"You look lovely." Courtney hugged him too. "I'm so proud and pleased that you've decided not to show me up."

"I wouldn't have ever wanted to do that," Jaycee whispered into her ear as the two held each other.

"You look very nice," Morag added from the other side of the room. "So much better than all that tom-boy stuff that she usually dresses in." She indicated Elspeth with an affectionate look rather than a critical one, smiling as she did so.

"I can't wait to introduce you to Cousin Angus when he arrives." Elspeth pulled her to the side and they sat on a couch. "It gets easier. The more you get into being a girl, the more naturally you'll be as a girl. Stop worrying and enjoy it."

"I think you should both come and see what I've found in the archives." Courtney held out both hands to pull them to their feet. "I think the General's going to be so excited when he reads these documents."

“He’s not so good at old Scots,” Elspeth said as they followed her to the document room. “Neither am I.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Courtney replied. “I can translate and I’m sure that when these are authenticated, they may answer some of the questions about the old pastures across the Loch.”

“The General’s always claimed that they were ours by ancient right, but the other clans have been challenging the claim.” Elspeth looked at the musty documents laid across the table. “I can’t get a word of this.”

“It doesn’t matter.” Courtney pointed to a diagram attached to the side. “This description should reinforce what I think the General understands.”

“Is there an ‘X’ marking the spot where Calgacus buried his treasure?” Jaycee asked flippantly.

“Don’t be silly.” Elspeth jabbed him in the ribs. “If there was any treasure, it would have been found by now. Enough of my ancestors have tried over years and years.”

“Don’t be too hasty to dismiss legends.” Courtney pointed to the diagram. “Here’s where they found an old Pictish grave. It seems to have been high status but whoever it was, was buried quickly without much of the elaborate stuff that’s been found elsewhere.”

“I think that’s where I may have walked.” Jaycee placed an elegantly painted fingernail on the diagram. “This rock looks like a shrouded monk or whatever they had then.”

“I know where you mean.” Elspeth looked again. “But I don’t see what use that could be.”

“Let’s not get too excited,” Courtney said. “The General’s arriving this afternoon and I want to show him first.”

There was another noise as a Jeep drew into the courtyard, the sound of its stereo bouncing off the ancient walls. Cousin Angus had arrived. He was waiting in the kitchen when they returned from viewing the documents. Elspeth flung herself into his arms and then he was introduced to Courtney who got a shake of the hand.

“And this is the special friend I’ve been telling you about,” Elspeth said as she introduced Jaycee.

Angus not only took his hand but pulled him close. Jaycee could smell the cedar and citrus of his aftershave and felt lips kissing his earlobe.

“I’ve heard so much about you,” he said as Angus held on to both his hands and looked him up and down. “I must say, Elspeth didn’t do you justice in her description.”

Jaycee looked across at Elspeth who held her finger to her lips and winked conspiratorially.

Angus put his arm round Jaycee’s shoulder. “You must show me these exciting documents.”

“I think my stepmother needs to show you.” Jaycee unwound himself from Angus’ grasp and came to stand beside Elspeth. “What have you been saying?” he hissed.

“Not much,” Elspeth whispered as Courtney took Angus by the arm and led him through the door. “I told him that you were really beautiful and you were the nearest to his type this side of New Caledonia.”

“You didn’t know how I was going to dress today,” he said. “I could have decided that girlhood wasn’t for me and that I was going to be a boy.”

“I knew you wouldn’t,” Elspeth said. “I admit that I told him a few things in the hope that I could change you.”

“When was this?”

“Weeks ago when we first met.”

“I don’t understand.” Jaycee looked at her.

“I guessed that I could make a pretty girl out of you.” Elspeth put her arm round him. “I could see it even if you couldn’t, then last night when you let me glue those breast forms and you wore that stunning greed dress, I knew you were hooked.”

“You knew I was hooked?” Jaycee repeated.

“I knew you wouldn’t be leaving that image behind in a hurry. I could see it in your eyes that you loved everything about pretending to be a girl.”

“It was only pretend,” Jaycee said. “It was for Courtney. I never wanted... I never intended...”

“Hush. Some things simply happen because they were meant to.” Elspeth put her finger over his lips. “Accept it; you’re really attractive. Angus likes girls like you so there’s a whole new world for you to explore.”

“I need to get away from this. I need to go to college. I have no job, no prospects, and I can’t afford to be a girl simply for your amusement.”

“Did I mention that Cousin Angus is a huge land-owner in his own right?” Elspeth said. “He’s used to getting what he wants and usually pays for it without blinking an eye.”

“I’m not that sort of a girl...” Jaycee paused, realising what he’d just said.

“Maybe you’re the sort of girl Angus needs.” Elspeth kissed his cheek softly. “And you’re exactly the girl I want for my favourite cousin.”

“But what will Courtney think? What about my father?”

“I’d guess that Courtney will be relieved if she can keep on working here. As for your father, who

knows? From what Courtney says, you're younger and prettier than his latest wife anyway."

"And I understand English too, if not ancient Scottish." Jaycee couldn't help laughing at the absurdity of it all.

"This is jolly exciting stuff." Angus burst back into the room with Courtney following. "I've studied these legends since I was old enough to understand them, and this new information might be the key to a discovery."

"Don't shout about it," Courtney interrupted. "You don't know how reliable any of it could be and anyway, walls have ears."

"This old castle's walls have been home to true McFelpart ears for hundreds of years." Angus beamed with excitement. "I can't wait to see more but I guess I'll have to be patient."

"The General needs to see it first," Courtney said. "So not a word until I've told him."

"Okay, I promise," Angus gushed. "But what you've found is almost too good to be true."

"The General's going to be late," Morag announced. "He says you're to have dinner without him. He'll be here about when you're finished."

The General's arrival caused a great stir in the household. His Range Rover, which sounded like its best days were long ago, chugged and smoked into the courtyard. Morag bustled to bring all his cases in, refusing all offers of help.

He was dressed in a tweed jacket over a full kilt, with boots and stockings; real Highland dress, not something from a fancy dress shop. His age was hard to guess, maybe fifty or so. He had the look of one

who lived well and exuded an authority which probably came from being "The General."

He was shortly followed by Elspeth's boyfriend, a sturdy lad called Cameron, who arrived in a more modern Ford Ranger pickup. Angus and he obviously knew each other and were regularly together, as they showed a comfortable familiarity with mutual friends and places.

Cameron had a ready smile and clung to Elspeth's side as if he was afraid she'd disappear. Elspeth seemed to like it exceedingly well and before too long, they excused themselves and left the room. From the look in her eye, Jaycee could guess where Elspeth was taking him.

All the while, Courtney was talking to the General. Jaycee heard the odd words of Gaelic and Old Scottish, as first he listened and then asked question after question.

"This is no good." Courtney stood and pulled him up. "You'll have to come and see for yourself."

Angus stood at the same time. "Can we come and see too?" he asked, not waiting for an answer but pulling Jaycee along with him.

Once again at the table in the documents room, the three poured over the dusty papers. They were handled gently and reverently as they crinkled with age. Some were folded, others rolled.

Courtney ran through her notes, pointing and changing documents, then explaining further. Strange sounding words bounced between them and a modern map at the side was used to outline areas in a marker pen.

The General's face turned from one of interested curiosity to excited discovery as document followed document.

"These should be copied and lodged at once," he said. "I'll call my advocate to see them at once."

“Now that you’ve put them in context, I could email scan copies and photographs of the main documents. Some of these are too old and I think too valuable to let out of your hands.”

“I agree, Father.” Angus said. It was the first time Jaycee could see a real family resemblance.

They reconvened in the kitchen where the fire roared as usual against the dire weather outside. The Scots called it “dreich” which Jaycee guessed meant awful but normal for here. The General called Elspeth and Cameron to join them and included Morag who objected to being included, but was persuaded to sit around the big table with them all.

He placed a tray and glasses on the table, with a jug of water. “I think this calls for something special.”

He opened a wall cupboard with a key from his watch chain. Angus looked round at Elspeth and got a meaningful glance in reply.

“This is from the last of case of the ninety-five,” he said, holding the bottle with great respect. “My grandfather told me to keep it until something really worth celebrating happened. I didn’t open it when I married your mother, Angus. I didn’t open it when I won my medals.”

He paused and looked round, his eyes resting on Courtney.

“Yet now, with your discoveries, I feel we have something exceptional. Of course, I may be premature, but the discoveries you have revealed from these long neglected archives could double our fortune.”

He poured into each glass. The amber liquor’s aroma rose in the warm air. He raised his glass and spoke again, this time in Gaelic, raising a toast to the McFelpart clan.

Jaycee sipped the whiskey, feeling the strange warmth flowing through him. With Elspeth,

Cameron and Angus, they talked about everything and nothing, laughing and feeling a new optimism as the discoveries fuelled speculation about the legendary Calgacus Hoard.

Courtney was blushing as the General took her hand and sat her beside him. Jaycee guessed that they were on their way to being a little over-served by bedtime.

“What a wet, cold, and horrible day,” Elspeth said as Angus and Cameron set off towards the loch with fishing gear and waterproofs. “Jaycee and I are going to spend the day becoming more beautiful to dazzle you at dinner this evening.”

“In that case, we’d better catch something good.” Angus winked at Jaycee, who blushed.

“I think Morag has already started to prepare the venison,” Elspeth replied dismissively. “It’s from our own estate after all.”

“A fish course is always welcome.” Cameron pulled his hat down and turned to the door.

“And I meant what I said.” Elspeth turned to Jaycee. “Prepare to be absolutely dazzling this evening. Angus won’t know what’s going to hit him.”

“I think you’re making assumptions,” Jaycee started.

“I know. You’re going to tell me that you’re not attracted to him at all,” she replied. “You can deal with that yourself.”

“But I don’t think...’

“So don’t think,” Elspeth interrupted. “He’s mainly harmless, rich, and I can see that he’s already thinking how he can get you into his bed. What’s not to like?”

“But I couldn’t...”

“Of course you could.” Elspeth’s look was determined. “It’s only a bit of sex play after all. He’s not going to change at his age.”

“But I’m not his age,” Jaycee protested.

“You’ve always got me as a friend.” Elspeth took his hand and looked into his eyes. “I really think this could work.”

“I get it.” Jaycee suddenly saw what could happen. “He inherits and doesn’t have any children, then in turn you or your eldest will become the McFelpart of McFelpart.”

“You make it all sound so sordid.” Elspeth’s voice gave nothing away. “It’s not like that. I think you could make him happy and my dear, if you get frustrated, I could make you happy too. I really want to and I think you and I could make it all work.”

Jaycee’s eyes widened at her words. He looked at her and didn’t move as she kissed him gently on the lips.

“I really think we could all be so happy.” Elspeth kissed him again, harder this time. “I really like having a sister with a secret like yours.”

“What about Cameron?”

“He’ll propose to me eventually. I’ll accept and we’ll probably have two children. He’ll manage his father’s estates, and I’ll spend time in the family house in Edinburgh. You’ll be a frequent visitor of course.”

“What about Angus?”

“You’ll keep him happy when you’re here. He’ll be busy running this estate. He doesn’t like to socialise much, so when you’re in Edinburgh, you’re going to stay with me and be all mine.”

“You’ve got it all worked out.” Jaycee said this in wonder rather than with rancour. “It does seem at-

tractive when you say it fast but I'm not sure I could ever be what Angus wants me to be."

"Never say never; you can be anything you want." Elspeth was interrupted as the General and Courtney returned from the document room.

Jaycee saw that they were holding hands until they realised that they were not alone. Courtney's blush said a lot too.

"Could it be?" he wondered as he looked at them.

The General was probably about fifteen years older than her but he had a lot to offer.

"What on earth is going on? Are we playing a cut-down version of 'Seven Brides for Seven Brothers'?" he asked himself.

Elspeth's enthusiasm was infectious, as she set about transforming Jaycee that afternoon.

"I'm really looking forward to this dinner party," Elspeth gushed with excitement. "Its ages since I had the opportunity to dress up, really dress up in a formal dress. You'll love the feeling."

"I'm not so sure," Jaycee said. "It's not something that's ever been on my list of things to do."

"Don't worry, you'll love it. I promise."

"I feel silly sitting here in this lingerie watching and waiting as you work so hard." Jaycee pulled the silk robe back up to his shoulder.

"It's not hard work at all," Elspeth said. "I'm enjoying myself. I haven't done a makeover anything like this for years."

"You didn't tell me that you'd done a boy's makeover before."

"I haven't, but you're an honorary girl anyway." Elspeth inspected his foundation and started to work on his eyes.

"I don't know if I can go through with this. Someone's bound to call me out."

"No they won't." Elspeth worked steadily, comparing left to right. "Courtney knows everything and she'll have her hands full with the General."

"You mean...?"

"Weren't you watching? He can be very persuasive and he's quite a catch for any girl."

"What about Cameron?" Jaycee looked up in panic.

"Keep still and let me do your eyeliner." Elspeth pursed her lips in concentration. "Cameron will be so busy trying to impress me."

"And will you be impressed?"

"Not at all." Elspeth smiled. "He's going to have to work hard before I'll give in."

"But you told me that you were going to marry him and have two children."

"Yes, I did, and I will." Elspeth worked on his other eye. "You and I know that, but there's no need for Cameron to know that until he's been a bit more attentive."

"And then there's Angus." Jaycee turned suddenly, smudging her handiwork.

"Angus will be trying to get into your panties," Elspeth replied. "He'll be working harder than Cameron."

"Does he really know what's in my panties?"

“Oh yes. I whispered it to him. He’s entranced already. He won’t dare say a word out of place in case the General’s suspicions are raised.”

“And are the General’s suspicions raised?” Jaycee asked.

“Not at all; he’s got other things on his mind. Firstly, he’s thinking about all the discoveries in the old documents and secondly, he’s thinking about your stepmother.”

“And is he thinking about Calgacus Hoard too?”

“I’m not sure he ever believed in that.” Elspeth laughed at the thought. “But I think you’d be able to get Angus to take you out to the hills to look for it.”

And if we find it...”

“You’ll have to report it of course, but it’s our land. So it will be ours by right if we find it.”

Evening came and they gathered in the document room where Courtney showed them all the discoveries. She translated passages and referred to the large scale maps which the General had brought from the estate office.

Elspeth and Jaycee stood at the side. Elspeth was cool and elegant in a long silk dress which had come from the duchess’s wardrobe. It was grey and emphasised her pale makeup and dark eyes.

Jaycee was trying not to draw any attention. He knew what Elspeth had done so deliberately. He knew he was strikingly attractive.

His sleeveless dress was pale green silk with a scoop neck, fortunately high enough to avoid showing too much. His hair was piled high in a messy tumble of curls and long emerald coloured drops swayed from his ears. His eyes were dark, with subtle



false lashes making them look larger, with high arched brows which Elspeth had plucked so assiduously into perfection. His heels were higher than before so that he stood taller, almost up to the height of Angus' nose.

Angus edged immediately to his side, his mouth open in surprise as he took in everything, and delighted in standing where the scent of perfume was filling his nostrils.

"The real problem with it all is that no one thought to get a proper survey, or even to take primitive measurements in the past," Courtney said, and at that moment, Jaycee saw a small sheet of paper flutter to the floor.

"This looks like that rock I sat on before you found me that day in the rain." Jaycee held it out to Elspeth.

"There's one just like it on the hillside where the Allt nan Allbarnach starts to flow into that narrow gully," Angus said, reaching out to take the paper. "I saw it when I was chasing some reluctant sheep down the side of Beinn Direach last autumn."

"I don't know where this sketch fits in with all the other documents," Courtney said. "I know that an ancestor took the legend seriously and dug all over the hills."

"Did he find anything?"

"What do you think?" The General interrupted

"I think that if whoever drew this sketch took it seriously, that there's no harm in going up there to take a look." Angus looked at the General.

"There's probably a dozen or more rocks that you could convince yourself look like that," The General scoffed.

“We don’t have to dig everywhere,” Jaycee interrupted. “There are all kinds of electronics that could help a quick search.”

“Capital idea,” The General said. “That should put an end to all this nonsense. Go and search. Tell me what you find.”

“You don’t think there’s anything to be found,” Courtney challenged him.

“I don’t believe in legends,” he replied. “But there’s a lot of history out there. We know very little about Pictish times but we do know that they lived here all those years ago.”

He looked round the room, taking in their faces. “We’ll send Angus up there when the weather clears. Now let’s go and see what Morag has prepared for us.”

He passed aperitifs all round and led them into the dining room.

At the dinner table, course followed course, and wine flowed with the conversation. It got serious; Picts and history. It got frivolous; legends and myths. It got silly; which celebrity caused the most shocking reaction.

As the wine flowed, Jaycee became aware of Angus’ hand creeping across his thigh. He pushed it away, not wanting to cause a scene, even when it came again and again. He took a deep breath and resolved to ignore it.

Angus’ hand nestled against his groin and started rubbing and gently massaging him. Jaycee wriggled in his chair and tried to push the hand away again, but an erection was growing and growing. If he stood, everyone would see it tenting outwards from the line of his green silk dress.

He lifted his foot and tried to bring his stiletto heel down where it would hurt. He missed and made a pretence of picking up his serviette so that he could move the hand and edge his chair a little further away.

Angus was pretending to listen to some arcane point about landholding and tenancies as the General poured whiskies and passed them around the table, ladies included. Jaycee looked at him and caught a conspiratorial smile as his hand strayed back again.

Jaycee wriggled in his chair and made another attempt to get out of the way. He concealed a small desert fork in his hand and stabbed down onto the one teasing his penis to an even bigger erection than before.

Angus winced, scowled, then coughed to disguise his scowl as he sipped from his glass. He looked at Jaycee and nodded imperceptibly, with a self-satisfied glint in his eye. Courtney sat next to the General, oblivious as to what was happening.

Elsbeth either saw or sensed something and stood. "I forgot to show you the wrap which goes with that dress," she said and, beckoning Jaycee to follow, they left the room.

"He's hitting on me," Jaycee hissed as soon as they had closed the dining room door behind them. "His hands are everywhere."

"I didn't see them."

"That's because they were under the tablecloth," Jaycee replied. "I think there's a wet spot on my skirt. I was afraid he'd make me do more than that."

"You're having the same effect on him that your stepmother seems to be having on the General." Elspeth's face showed that she was amused by it all.

"And what are you doing about Cameron?" Jaycee asked.

“He follows me like a puppy dog,” she replied. “I’ve told him to come to my room later, so he’s on his best behaviour.”

“You seem to have him under control,” Jaycee said. “I don’t know how you can take him for granted like that.”

“I’m not taking him for granted.” Elspeth looked her in the eye. “I’m a woman. He wants me more than anything and I use that to my advantage. You could do the same with Angus.”

“I don’t know how.”

“Leave it to me.” Elspeth put her finger to her nose to show cunning. “I’ll tell him to be good and that he can come to your room later.”

“But what would I do with him?”

“Follow your instincts and remember it could be your path to a secure future.”

“But I’m not a girl.”

“And he doesn’t want a girl. That doesn’t mean that you can’t... you know.”

“I don’t. I haven’t done it with a girl.”

“All you have to do is lie there and think nice thoughts. He’ll do the rest,” Elspeth replied. “And remember what I said. I was really serious. You can come to Edinburgh with me and we’ll have real fun together.”

“I don’t know if I can.”

“I don’t see how you can’t.” Elspeth was determined. “You help me and I’ll help you. Together we can make a great life, without having to do much more than lie there and let our men take their pleasure. It’s what women have done for centuries.”

“You’re going to tell me that even the Pictish princesses did it that way.”

“Now there’s a thought.” Elspeth’s grim was infectious. “Now remember. Lie there and let him get on with it. A few moans and words of encouragement would help but you’ll work it out.”

Back in the dining room, the company had retired to easy chairs as Morag cleared away the remains of their dinner. Elspeth whispered something to Angus who looked quizzically at her until she repeated it. He looked over at Jaycee with some admiration and perhaps understanding.

Elspeth sat beside Cameron and Angus lounged over a couch at the other side of the room. Courtney sat in an easy chair facing the fire and when Jaycee made to sit in the one next to it, her glance told him not to.

The General was on his feet, again passing round the whiskey bottle. Jaycee put his hand over his glass but the General wouldn’t be stayed and a little more was served. There was no other choice but to sit next to Angus; either that or to seem unreasonably rude.

The conversation ebbed and flowed around Jaycee. His mind was churning.

“What did Elspeth say to Angus?” he wondered.

He could guess the general content and shivered internally as he wondered if he could do as she had suggested. He wanted to refuse, then his mind turned to the other things she’d said.

He could come to her in Edinburgh; she wanted him to and he guessed what that could mean.

Could she be so calculating, he wondered. Then in his head and heart, he knew that she was entirely focussed on her aims. She knew what she wanted and she was going to get it all.

Angus contrived to slip his arm around Jaycee as they sat. He did nothing more than cup his shoulder and then gently draw him closer. Jaycee was conscious of it but tried to ignore it at the same time. He found himself in the conversation easily, behaving as if this possessive arm was entirely natural.

If Courtney noticed, she didn't show any surprise or disapproval but then the General was working his charm there too. Eventually, Elspeth stood and held out her arm to Jaycee.

"I think it's time to retire and leave them to their thoughts of buried treasure," she said, pulling Jaycee to his feet.

Together they left the room, and scampered up the stairs into Jaycee's bedroom. Elspeth slipped a hand under the pillow and pulled out a grey silk nightgown. It had lace trim around the hem, and looked to be calf-length. A matching robe with long sleeves and a tie belt completed the outfit.

"Quickly," Elspeth hissed, "get undressed, I'll do your hair and repair your makeup."

"Shouldn't I be cleaning it off?" Jaycee asked.

"Not tonight."

Elspeth pulled the pins from his hair and let it tumble across his shoulders. It fell in silky soft waves and shone in the light.

"Sit at the dressing table."

"What? Why?" Jaycee stuttered.

"He'll be here soon. When you hear him, turn to the mirror and be brushing your hair. I'll dim the lights as I go out. Remember, he'll know what to do. You lie back and..."

"I know, moan and simper."

"Not exactly but something like that will do nicely."

Jaycee sat feeling fidgety and unsure. He stood and locked his bedroom door, and sat again. Then he stood and unlocked it again. The floorboards creaked in the silence of the old building. He put his ear to the door but nothing was to be heard.

He sat again and ran his fingers through his hair. He looked in the mirror. Was he really this attractive girl he saw in the reflection?

He retouched his lipstick and then wondered why. He was a boy after all and here he was, waiting for a man to come to his room. He didn't know what he was expected to do or feel, yet here he was, patiently repairing his makeup as if it were the most natural thing in his world.

He could feel his heart thumping. Was this his destiny? If it was, how had it come about all so fast and from unimaginably random beginnings?

A noise outside made him start, then there was a noise at his door; a scratching sound rather than a knock. It creaked softly as it opened and Angus appeared. He'd changed into soft casual slacks and a polo shirt and stood barefoot.

He came up to Jaycee and took his hand, then bent to kiss him gently on the lips. He pulled him up to his feet and kissed him harder this time.

Jaycee felt the roughness of his chin against his skin, then the probing of his tongue against his lips. He let them open and Angus' tongue entered his mouth. It wasn't something he expected but it wasn't unpleasant.

Angus took him towards the bed. Jaycee could feel the end against his calves and then he was falling back, with Angus half falling on top of him, and half laying him down. Angus rolled to Jaycee's side and continued to kiss him, whilst his hand reached downwards and started to pull up his robe.



The belt came loose and the robe fell open. Angus's hand slid gently to the top of his thigh and began to stroke his penis into life. To Jaycee's horror and wonderment, it responded at once, growing thick and strong as if it had a will of its own.

Angus broke the kiss and looked down. They both watched as his hand stroked it. Jaycee looked and watched fascinated as Angus continued to stroke it. He leaned down and took the tip in his mouth.

Jaycee gasped at the touch and the feel. It was something he never before even dreamed of; a man's tongue against his penis. It slipped further inside his mouth, and then further again. Jaycee could feel lips far down his shaft and suddenly he was tensioning and jerking.

He knew what was happening and tried to will it to stop but it was his first time and he was half disgusted and half excited. He came more strongly and gave way to the feelings, as his hips bucked and thrust higher. He was willing himself to thrust deeper inside. This was such a heavenly feeling, never mind who had caused it.

Then it was over and he felt the strength ebb away. He slackened and slipped out of Angus's mouth. He laid back, full of tumbling thoughts, but breathless and spent. He barely registered Angus wiping his mouth on a cloth which seemed to have materialised from nowhere.

They lay together side by side. Angus started to kiss him again. Jaycee could taste whatever had come out of his penis with a hint of whiskey from his breath. The kissing became more insistent. Angus took Jaycee's hand and pulled it downwards until it touched his own erect penis.

"What do I do with this?" Jaycee wondered, knowing that whatever answer he came up with, Angus would have a good idea of what he intended to do anyway

Taking a deep breath and summoning up all his courage, Jaycee twisted and bent his body to kiss the tip. He stayed and swirled his tongue around it, deciding that it didn't taste too ghastly. There was a hint of cedar wood scents there which made it nicer.

Angus pushed him and Jaycee allowed him to direct where his body went. He was face down, lying prone on the bed, when Angus pulled him to his knees with his head still face down on the mattress. Angus pulled a pillow down and set it under him, so that Jaycee's bum was raised.

"What do I do now?" thought Jaycee, who'd a vague idea of what was to come. "I can't do much other than let him get on with it."

He could feel Angus' finger working its way inside him. He clenched against it; instinct taking over rather than a deliberate action. Something cool dribbled over his rear and Angus' finger slid more easily and went further inside.

More cool liquid and another finger slipped inside, working round and round, left and right, still pushing further. A third finger entered, then maybe a fourth; the reflex clenching was no more and a different reaction set in. As the fingers were thrusting forwards, Jaycee was rocking back onto them.

A rhythm set in. Jaycee realised that the loud sighs and moans were coming from him, just as Elspeth had predicted. Quickly the fingers were withdrawn and a new sensation was there at the entrance, thrusting just as hard and insistently.

Jaycee knew what it was. He knew he should be resisting. He wanted to resist. His body said otherwise and he rocked back again, feeling something different entering. It was past the point where he could clench and deny it entry.

He still clenched but all that did was make it still until the spasm passed, then it moved further in and then further still. Angus was moaning softly now too each time he pushed further inwards.

Angus pushed again and Jaycee knew that he could feel his ball sac against his bum. There was nothing more to put inside. It was inevitable. Jaycee knew that just as Angus did. He took a deep breath when he felt the first spasm.

Spasm followed spasm as Angus pulsed within him. He could feel every movement and understood that they were panting in unison at the exertion and the feelings of joy as the moment came... and then passed. Angus rolled onto his side and they kissed again, breathlessly, recklessly, and shortly with all passion spent, they fell asleep in each other's arms.

Jaycee knew he was awake. He knew it was morning as the watery Scottish light filtered through his curtains. He lay back. He was alone.

“Did all that really happen last night?” he asked himself, rubbing his eyes as if to recapture a memory.

He rolled onto his back and felt an uncomfortable wetness at his rear. His face wrinkled in distaste when he understood what it was and where it was coming from. He ran to the bathroom and threw off his nightdress. He stood under the shower, bending to allow the water to cascade down his rear.

“What a mess.”

He wanted to feel disgust and repulsion. He tried for these emotions, but another feeling intruded.

“I wonder if it's going to feel like that every time,” he thought, then remembered he shouldn't want a next time, let alone to think about every time.

“I wonder if Elspeth gets that feeling from Cameron,” he thought as he reached for a towel, hoping that the leakage had stopped. “And did the General do that to my stepmother?”

At that point, he decided to stop thinking.

“You look like the cat that got the cream.” Elspeth was waiting in the kitchen when Jaycee came down.

“Does it show?” Jaycee replied, and then remembered who he was talking to. “Yes, Angus came to my room last night.”

“And did he come?”

“You want too much information.” Jaycee couldn’t suppress a grin, although he didn’t know why he was grinning.

“It’s okay. I can guess,” Elspeth replied. “Now do you want to know my secret?”

“Of course I do.” Jaycee was happy to change the subject.

“Cameron asked me to marry him last night.”

“And did you say yes?”

“Not yet but of course I’ll accept his proposal,” Elspeth replied. “It’s never good to appear to be really eager. He’ll have to wait a few weeks or months.”

“Did he give you a ring?”

“He offered but I refused. It was a bit too small. I want something to make a bigger statement than that.”

“You are mercenary.”

“Not at all.” Elspeth slowly hugged Jaycee. “It’s just that I know my life plan and that includes you.”

“How am I included?” Jaycee asked. “You’ve hardly known me for more than a few weeks.”

“I know what I want,” Elspeth said. “I told you already. I want you to marry Angus and when you get me pregnant; I’ll set a date with Cameron.”

“How’s that going to work?”

“He’ll think it’s his and be so excited. You’ll know it’s yours and be so excited too. You’ll be the most attentive godmother a child has ever had and come to stay with me whenever you can.”

“But what if Cameron gets you pregnant first?”

“Don’t be silly. I take all necessary precautions.”

“You have it all worked out.”

Of course; ever since I was old enough to realise what it was, I’ve wanted to be the McFelpart of McFelpart and this way I’ve a chance.”

Surely that means you’ll have to outlive Angus.”

“I know, and I don’t wish him any harm, but a girl can inherit the title.

It may be your child who inherits.’

“In that case, I do hope it’s a girl for all our sakes,” Elspeth sighed. “Stick with me and I’ll make sure you have a happy life.”

“But it’s nothing like I ever thought it could be.”

“What a difference a few weeks can make,” Elspeth said lightly. “Call it fate.”

The next week, the gathering broke up.

“Our old Fiesta isn’t going to be repaired easily,” Courtney told Jaycee. “I know you’re getting a bit bored being so cut off here.”

“It’s not a problem,” Jaycee replied. “Angus has been good company and I’ve enjoyed working with you.”

"I've noticed that Angus has been hanging around." Courtney gave him an old-fashioned look. "I hope he hasn't been bothering you."

"Not at all." Jaycee coloured up and turned away. "We've been discussing your discoveries and Calgacus."

"Stuff and nonsense as the General says." Courtney pretended not to notice Jaycee's evasiveness. "There's nothing there."

"But we're going to look anyway," Jaycee insisted. "He's going to get a metal detector and we're going to explore higher up the Allt nan Allbanach."

"That's going to get you very wet and muddy."

"It's going to be fun, and, who knows, we may find a fortune." Jaycee's enthusiasm shone through. "He's promised me a copy of the Whitecleuch chain if we don't find one up there."

"Has he indeed?" Courtney registered that thought. "There are only a few in existence."

"I know; they're dated to between 400 and 800 CE. I've been reading about the history of the Picts, but there's not a lot known."

"I studied them too," Courtney replied. "It's fascinating to think that this area was probably part of the Cait kingdom of the Picts. Their silver work has been found all over Scotland but they seem to have been taken over in the Ninth Century by Vikings from the north and Kenneth MacAlpin's Scots kingdom from the south."

"It's all so romantic; lost in the mists of time."

"They were probably very brutal times. Have you thought of that?"

"Yes, I know, but I prefer the romantic."

“Elsbeth asked me if you’d like to stay in Edinburgh with her for a few weeks,” Courtney changed the subject.

“I’m not sure about that,” Jaycee replied. “She thinks I’m a girl and I don’t know if I could keep up the pretence indefinitely.”

“You’re doing pretty well so far.” If Courtney suspected that wasn’t true, she didn’t voice them. “I think you’d enjoy the change.”

“But I don’t have any money.”

“You do now; the General’s paid me, and with a bonus for err... certain extras which I’ve been able to find.”

Jaycee smiled and concealed his thoughts about what those extras may have been.

“In that case, I’ll be brave. I’ll go to Edinburgh if you’re sure you can spare me.”

Elsbeth rattled out of the castle in the old Land Rover as far as the local garage, twenty miles or so away. There she and Jaycee transferred their bags to a much more comfortable Volkswagen and they were in Edinburgh before dark.

“There’s only one bedroom, I’m afraid,” she said, holding the door for Jaycee to enter.

“It’s a relief to be here,” Jaycee said. “You know who I am so I don’t have to pretend to be a girl all the time.”

“Whatever gave you that idea?” Elsbeth replied. “I can’t have my neighbours thinking I’ve moved another boyfriend in here. They all know Cameron. His family own the building.”

“You didn’t warn me about that.”

“You didn’t ask and anyway, you’ve discovered how much more fun it is to be a girl.”

“I’m not sure about that.” Jaycee blushed, a little afraid to admit that she was probably right. “What have you planned anyway?”

“Some shopping, some dancing and socialising, and of course, you’ve got to get me pregnant as fast as you can so that I can marry Cameron.”

“Aren’t you afraid to let me do that?” Jaycee asked. “I might get used to it and decide that Angus isn’t for me.”

“Don’t forget Calgacus. His curse would be with you forever if you didn’t find his hoard.”

“Don’t be silly,” Jaycee laughed. “You know he wasn’t real.”

“Just like Santa Claus.” Elspeth kissed him, and wrapped her arms round him. “Whenever you get tired of Angus, I’ll be here for you.”

“You really have it all worked out.”

“I really have. I couldn’t believe my luck when you and Courtney appeared.”

“It’s so tempting to agree with everything you want.” Jaycee kissed her back. “How do you know that this isn’t a passing infatuation?”

“Trust me, it isn’t.” Elspeth pulled him towards the bedroom. “Let’s not waste time. Everything will work out.”

It was like a whirlwind had struck. Elspeth’s clothes were flung left and right. She helped Jaycee undress; he was far too slow. They kissed as she played with his penis, bringing it to full strength, then she straddled him.

Jaycee hadn’t expected this. He thought he’d be on top; in charge, but that wasn’t to be with a girl like Elspeth. She eased him into her and rode him gently at first, building to a more demanding climax. Her breathing became faster as they connected.

Then he was coming hard. She was receiving just as he'd received Angus, but to different purpose. He pushed as hard as he could, trying to match her contractions with his spasms. It couldn't last, much as he wanted it to go on forever. She waited as he slipped out, sliding to his side with a contented sigh.

The next days were filled with new sights, sounds and experiences. Elspeth was determined to educate her protégée.

"I can't remember all the names of these people you're introducing me to," Jaycee complained.

"It doesn't matter. All you have to do is exchange girlie kisses and say how marvellous they're looking. They'll love you, especially if you say they've lost weight."

"What if it's because they're ill?"

"Now who's being silly? You know what I mean."

"There's such a lot. I feel like I'm attending an advanced course every time we go out," Jaycee complained. "There are all the galleries and concerts, plays and receptions, not to mention those parties."

"Some of them were awful."

"I thought it was just me thinking that it was time for Scotty to beam me up."

"If you're going to marry Angus, you need to know such a lot." Elspeth took for granted that this was what would happen. "This place is like a big village, with events and exhibitions all the time. Everyone's expected to have an opinion."

"But I'm not educated like that."

"Stick with me; I'm your teacher," Elspeth said. "We'll probably be at the same functions at the same time."

"How can you be sure?"

"I'm sure." Elspeth looked so certain. "Cameron will be managing the family estates and so will Angus, especially if Courtney gets her hooks into him the General and starts making him do more than brood in his castle."

"Is that going to happen?"

"It wasn't in my plan, but I don't mind at all. It can only make things easier for us."

If the days were busy, so were the nights. Jaycee didn't get many nights off. Most mornings, Elspeth wanted him to go again. Sometimes he was too tired and too sore to oblige, much as he wanted to.

"Sometimes the mind expects more than the flesh can provide," Elspeth said in sympathy.

"What about you?" Jaycee teased. "You're here with me and then you're round at Cameron's flat when he's in town. I don't know how you manage to stay awake."

"It's not that bad, and anyway, Cameron has to be convinced that he's the father of my child."

Have you thought about DNA tests?"

"He's not even going to think of it," Elspeth said. "His mother wouldn't let him anyway. He's an only child and the family needs to have an heir."

"But you wanted a girl." Jaycee half-remembered something.

"Don't worry; girls can inherit in Scotland. Boys don't have it *all* their own way if they're not the first born."

It all had to end after a few weeks. Courtney was asking for his help as more documents were being brought from chests long forgotten. It was painstaking-

ing work and the General was far too impatient and clumsy to be allowed near the delicate papers.

Angus was quite insistent too. He called and sent texts, threatening to come and collect Jaycee. Cameron made it plain that he expected to see Elspeth without her houseguest being forever there.

In the end, Elspeth took Jaycee to the railway station and put him on the train north to Inverness. A change of train and it rattled along with much less speed for hours and miles, with the scenery getting more rugged. Angus was waiting in his Jeep at the station in the far Highlands.

Angus pulled Jaycee into his arms and kissed him passionately. "I've really missed you," he said.

Jaycee was unprepared to feel so pleased to see him. There was a feeling of comfort in Angus's arms. The very scent of him was warming, and he found himself thinking of Angus's penis and what they were going to do when they were alone.

The days were so busy and dusty with document after document; some set aside, some for more urgent perusal. Elspeth expected daily updates by email and text. Her days in Edinburgh seemed to busy.

Jaycee's nights were more exciting, with Angus seemingly more ardent and inventive by the day. Jaycee didn't know that there were so many ways to be penetrated.

He loved it when Angus took him on his back; missionary style, with his legs on Angus's shoulders as he thrust and thrust deep inside him. He liked to look at his lover's face as they had sex together. Being over the arm of a chair with his back to Angus was good, but not as satisfying. As ever, variety was really fun.

And then there was a telephone call. "I think I'm pregnant," Elspeth said as soon as Jaycee answered. "I'm having tests next week."

"I'm so pleased." Jaycee almost dropped the mobile as he shook with happiness at the news. "Can I tell Angus?"

"After I've had it confirmed and I've told Cameron."

The confirmation came the next week and the news travelled fast.

"How's Cameron taken the news?" Jaycee asked. "What did you tell him?"

"He thinks it was a miraculous failure of my contraception routine. He's telling everyone. It's quite embarrassing but I don't care."

"Have you thought about the wedding you mentioned?"

"Of course," Elspeth replied. "His mother had a huge guest list but I've persuaded her that it's to be a quieter and smaller affair. I've convinced her to use the family church down the glen. You may have seen it, near the garage."

"It's a lovely austere-looking place," Jaycee remembered. "I've never been inside."

"This is your chance to see inside." Elspeth's excitement came down the mobile. "You're going to be my bridesmaid. I've already chosen our dresses."

"But I can't..."

"But me no buts," Elspeth said theatrically. "You can and will. I command it by the three witches of Mordor."

"Where?"

"It doesn't matter, you'll be there."

"Okay," Jaycee agreed uncertainly.

"I'll speak to Angus and get him to put you on a train. You'll need to come down here for fittings."

“But they’ll see that I’m... I don’t have the right equipment to be a bridesmaid.”

“Don’t worry, I’ve thought of that too.”

Elsbeth ended the call and Jaycee sat to take in the news. Was this another fine mess he was getting into? Who could have imagined that a rain storm, an ancient Ford Fiesta that wouldn’t start, and the General’s dislike of a young boy in the castle could ever have brought him to this pretty pass?

“I’m too far in to turn back,” he told himself and went in search of Courtney to tell her the news.

Angus was so excited at the news that Jaycee found it hard to believe. He knew that Cameron was his oldest friend but surely Angus knew that with his desires, a child was unlikely. Still it was reasonable for him to be excited for his cousin.

Jaycee could tell that there was some secret and some urgency to his departure for Edinburgh. It was all arranged so hastily, with every thought to his comfort, including a first class compartment on the train from Inverness to Edinburgh.

“I’ve arranged everything.” Elspeth met him at the station. “You’ve a private consultation this evening and if all goes well, your breast implants will be done tomorrow morning. Isn’t that wonderful?”

“Wonderful?” Jaycee repeated. “I know nothing about this. Who said I wanted breast implants?”

“I did of course.” Elspeth’s enthusiasm almost boiled over. “You couldn’t wear the dress I have in mind for you without something to give it shape... besides you’ll love them.”

“I’m not sure. This is all so sudden.” Jaycee shook his head. “I don’t really know if I want to go so far. What if I decide not to be a girl in future?”

“Then they can be removed,” Elspeth replied in a matter-of-fact tone. “Don’t tell me you never thought about it.”

“I did, but I never thought it might be real.” Jaycee was struggling to take it all in. “I can’t afford it.”

“Angus is paying,” Elspeth said. “He wants the best for you and when you’re living up there with him, he doesn’t want ugly rumours to spread about his choices.”

“Surely it’s no stigma these days?”

“Maybe but up there in the Highlands, society doesn’t move the way it does in the big cities. It’s a smaller world up there, and quite conservative.”

“I really need more time to think about this,” Jaycee tried to insist.

“Then you can think later. Right now we need to get into a taxi and see your consultant.” Elspeth grabbed Jaycee’s small valise and pulled him by the hand to a waiting cab.

The consulting room was in a fashionable area of the city; an older mansion in a block of Victorian homes for the gentry.

They were clearly expected. A nurse took charge of Jaycee as soon as they were admitted, and dressed him in a gown with no fuss and no surprise at his true gender.

She measured him carefully and weighed him, then before he had time to gather his thoughts, he had his blood pressure tested, blood and urine samples taken, skin swabs, and finally a quick injection which the nurse said was to prevent any infection.

By the time he was sitting across the desk from the consultant surgeon, he was feeling a little less that

fully alert. He sat as the surgeon examined the skin on his chest and paid great attention to his nipples. It was all gentle and soothing.

He was asked to look at a computer screen, showing past procedures and the final result. He agreed that they showed nice breasts but registered little more than that. He sat back as the surgeon explained more and drew black lines across his chest and under his armpits.

"I hope you're taking all this in," Jaycee said to Elspeth as he signed a couple of forms. "I'm finding it really hard to concentrate."

"I'll see you in the morning," the surgeon said as they were leaving. "I'll be the one in the scrubs and mask." He laughed at his own joke.

Jaycee didn't get the implication and in the morning, he still hadn't gotten it as they entered the clinic. The same nurse greeted him and before he could object or ask why, another injection... and then all went blank.

And then suddenly he was awake. Where was he? Why was he here? The room was unfamiliar.

He screwed up his eyes to make them focus. He turned his head and tried to raise his arm to wipe his eyes but they appeared to be fastened down. A man in nurse's scrubs and a mask came into his vision.

"Breathe deeply and I'll get you some water," the nurse said and returned with a bottle and a straw. Jaycee took some water and sighed as it went down his parched throat.

"I'm going to release your hands," the nurse said. "They were fastened down in case you thrashed about."

Jaycee looked down. His thought processes were returning and he knew what the dressings across his chest concealed.

“It’s too late to worry.” This was the thought that came to his mind as he closed his eyes and drifted away.

Elsbeth was sitting beside his bed when he next opened his eyes.

“Welcome back,” she said, squeezing his hand.

“What did you do to me?” he asked.

“Nothing much; let’s say I eased your passage and saved you agonising over some petty little decisions.”

“How little?” He looked down to his chest.

“Not little, but not too large; proportionate is the word I’d use,” Elsbeth said. “They’re going to look awful for a few days while the bruising fades and then they’ll feel like they’re the wrong place.’

“Are they in the right place?” Jaycee felt a bit of panic.

“The surgeon says people complain that they’re too high but after all the swelling’s gone, they’ll fall and look as pure and natural as Nature intended.’

“Nature never intended *this*.” Jaycee shuffled as if to sit up, feeling the weight on his chest for the first time, and winced.

“Take it easy. They’ll give you something for the pain and to help you sleep. I’ll be back with your new underwear tomorrow.”

It was a slow two weeks but the pain eased and then disappeared. The bruising went from dark and angry to a rainbow of lesser colours and then faded altogether. Hugely constricting support bras were discarded and something prettier and more feminine replaced them.

“Stop looking at them like that.” Elspeth caught him watching himself in the mirror. “They’re not going to slip off or suddenly expand.”

“I know. I think I’m getting used to them but there’s always something that makes me want to look again,” Jaycee said. “Do you think my nipples look right?”

“You’re dressed, I can’t see them,” Elspeth replied. “Seriously, the surgeon did say they may be a little high, but he didn’t want to cut them and risk losing sensitivity.”

“I don’t want to be a freak,” Jaycee replied. “Even if I am one.”

“You’re not a freak,” Elspeth said firmly. “They don’t look at all wrong if that’s what you’re really asking.”

“Thanks; I don’t know what I’d do without you.” Jaycee held Elspeth and then rubbed her tummy. “How’s Junior developing?”

“She’s fine so far.” Elspeth smiled. “They do say it’s a girl from the scans they’ve shown me. Cameron’s really excited.”

“And how’s his mother?”

“She’s a little miffed. She said the baby should come after the wedding.”

“It will be so, won’t it?”

“Yes but the gap between wedding and birth will be a calculation all her friends will be doing.”

“Does it matter?”

“It will blow over once she gets into grandmother role,” Elspeth said. “No one else will care.”

The dress fittings were so different to anything Jaycee had experienced. Elspeth had chosen the de-

signs with that empire line style so that whilst it fitted tightly to the bust, the skirt fell away from there.

It would hide any bulge, not that she would be showing too much by the wedding day. Elspeth and Jaycee were in almost identical dresses, but the bride had more lace and of course, the veil.

The date was fixed and all the arrangements swung into place. Their reception was to be at the castle, with Morag and some of her friends in charge of the catering. The hair and makeup was in the hands of one of Elspeth's friends who ran a beauty and hair business in Edinburgh.

The date was fixed. All they had to do was be patient, waiting for the day to arrive.

Jaycee travelled back on the train. As he changed at Inverness, his anxiety started to nag. How would Angus react to his new breasts and of course, what would Courtney say?

Jaycee fastened a coat across his chest before Angus caught him in his arms and kissed him as if he'd been away on a long Polar expedition. He carried the valise to the Jeep and slung it in the back. They settled in their seats and Jaycee was reminded of how different he was when he pulled the seat belt across and fastened it.

His coat remained fastened as they turned off the main road and onto the lanes leading through the highlands. Angus pulled onto the side.

"You're going to have to show me sometime," he said gently.

Very nervously, Jaycee unfastened his coat and slipped his arms out so that he sat in jeans and a scoop-necked top across the vehicle. He turned to-

wards him, cleavage showing in the gaps between his breasts.

“They’re really there,” Jaycee said, still feeling embarrassed and shy.

“Goodness knows why I’m this nervous,” he thought. “Angus has paid for me to have them. He must have some idea of what he’s going to see... and what he’s going to touch.”

Angus looked for quite a long time without speaking. “May I touch?” he asked.

“I thought you didn’t like me, you were so silent for so long,” Jaycee blurted out. “I thought you were looking at me thinking what a freak I’d made of myself.”

Angus’s hand was surprisingly gentle as he felt over and around each breast. He lifted them gently, then leaned over to kiss them in turn.

“Thank you,” he said. “I’ll make you so happy.”

He grinned as he put the Jeep into drive and they set off once more. The castle appeared out of the mists and they bounced over the final bridge and into the courtyard.

“Welcome home.” Courtney was first out of the door to greet them. “I never knew I’d have such a pretty stepdaughter.”

Jaycee looked at the mischief in her eye and giggled at the thought. “I think Angus would be terrified if that was true,” he said.

“I know it and think how angry your father would be if he ever heard of it.”

“He’d probably be all over me,” Jaycee joked. “I think I’m younger than his latest and I speak English.”

“But it’s getting more Scottish by the day.”

They walked hand-in-hand through the door and suddenly, Jaycee noticed something. He raised his stepmother's hand and saw a ring. He looked at her, an unspoken question almost on his lips.

"I know what you're thinking," Courtney said. "The General gave it to me. It doesn't mean that we're a couple... but we are a little more than friends."

I can live with that," Jaycee replied. "One wedding is all I can take. I can't understand all the fuss you women make about it all."

"So said the boy with the breasts, who's going to be a bridesmaid soon."

Courtney held out her hand to the General who'd appeared from the kitchen. He put Jaycee's hand into the General's. The older man shook it gently and then to everyone's surprise, gave him a gentle hug.

"I suppose I'm going to have to get used to treating you like one of the family," he said gruffly, but with a kind light in his eyes. "Goodness knows what I did to deserve all this."

The wedding was all that Elspeth wanted it to be. Even her mother smiled and of course Cameron was feted for catching such a lovely bride. The secret of her pregnancy was no secret at all.

Elspeth gave birth to a daughter seven and a half months later. Some said it was premature, but most didn't care. Jaycee loved the infant at first sight. Elspeth was so pleased and made no secret of the special place Jaycee held in her life.

They never did find Calgacus' hoard. Jaycee and Angus made several trips up the Allt nan Allbanach, with metal detectors, shovels, and all kinds of maps and charts, even drone pictures with infrared overlays to try and detect some abnormality in the soil.

They got wet and muddy. They got bitten by some fearsome insects which must have had enormous

teeth, even if they never saw the one that bit them. My, oh my, did they itch!

Jaycee got a modern copy of the Whitecleuch chain, and wore it almost constantly on her left wrist. Angus gave her a ring but it was the chain which she held her most precious possession. Her goddaughter was going to get one similar when she came of age.

And a final note...

I have taken untold liberties with geography and persons. Most are real, but maybe not exactly in the way I've used them.

The McFelpart castle is pure invention, based on lonely Highland ruins.

The Allt nan Allbanach is the river that flows down from the side of Beinn Direach – that's true, but I've no real idea of the geography there, other than to say it's rugged and often wet.

And Calgacus was a name invented probably by Tacitus. He wrote long after a skirmish between the Romans and the natives of Scotland. He needed to invent a name for a fearsome warrior and this is the one he chose.

It was long before the Picts, about whom we know little. Their time was probably between the Fifth and Ninth Centuries in the north of Scotland. They were skilled in silver and stone but left no writing that helps us understand their history.

All the better for a writer to use these things in a story.

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