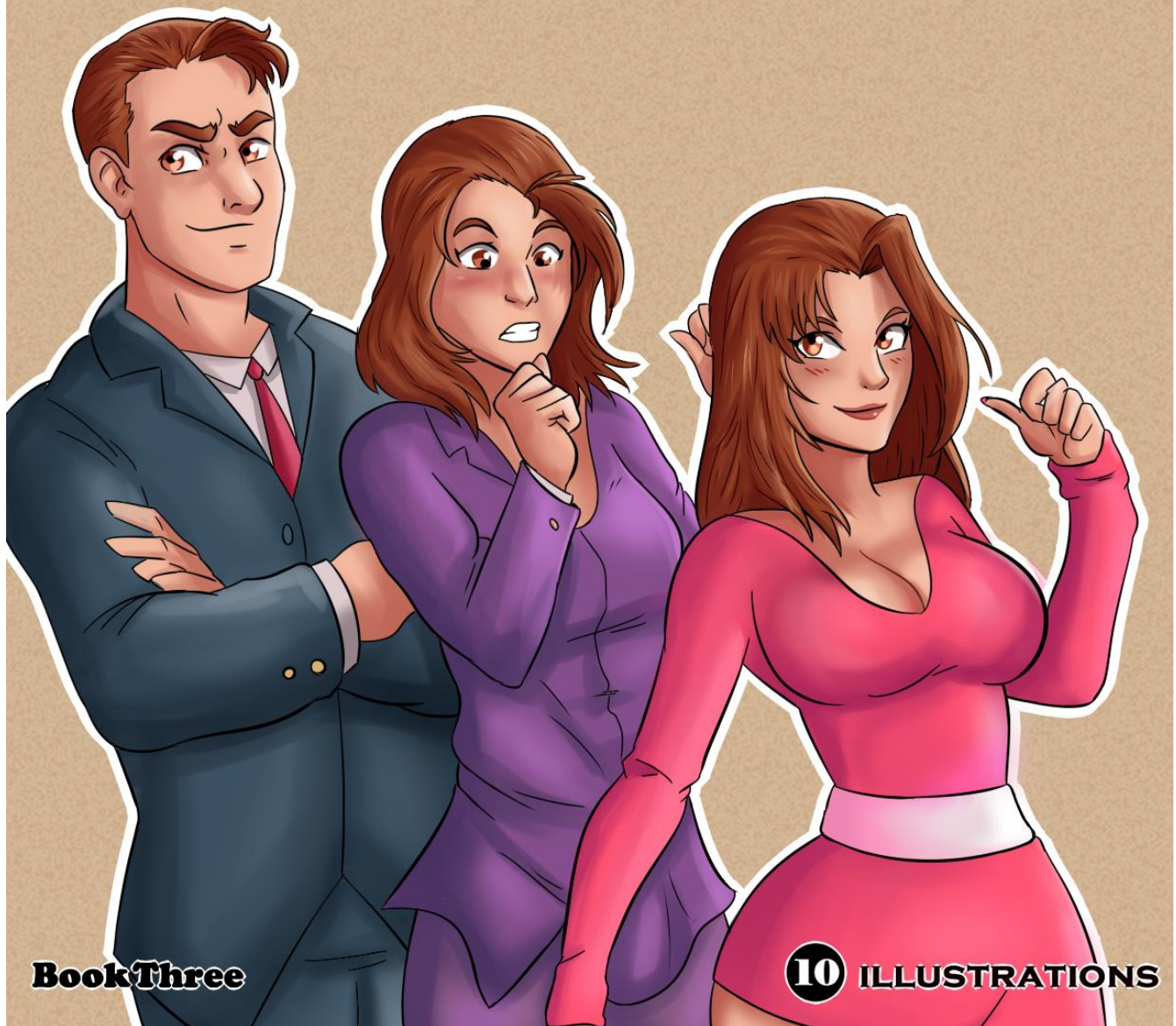


Daeva: Corporate Culture

TG Stories

Story by The Professor Illustrated by
The Might Fenek



Book Three

10 ILLUSTRATIONS



Daeva – Corporate Culture Book Three

Written by The Professor

Illustrated by The Might Fenek



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BOOK THREE

Women started filtering into the room, all in skirts, and all uniformly attractive. Some were merely cute, while others made Victoria Secret models look plain. Some were timid to the point of appearing embarrassed to be there, while others cheerfully greeted each other with hugs and air kisses. Most looked comfortable in their bodies, and I had to admit, what Becky had put together seemed to be working. I didn't have much contact with the new women, since Jane was on one side of me at the table and Toni was on the other.

Finally, Becky took her place at the head of the table and brought the meeting to order. "We have a couple of new guests this evening," she announced, nodding toward Toni and me. "Would either of you like to say anything?"

This had to be the 'Hi, I'm Dannie and I'm a woman' moment, to be followed by 'Hi, Dannie.' No way was I going to fall into that trap. I just shook my head, and looked to my left to see Toni do the same.

"All right then," Becky smiled, not forcing us to speak. "In that case, I'd like to introduce our special guest for the evening." A new woman, dressed in a short sweater dress, made up to the nines, swayed in on four inch heels.

She was Andrea Nelson – my former employee.

Andrea gave Toni and me a wistful smile. Jane looked puzzled as she watched our surprised expressions. Of course, I realized. Jane had never met Andrea. She had been hired to replace Andrea.

It was all Toni and I could do to remain silent as Andrea began to speak.

"Hi, I'm Andrea. I've been a woman now for nearly five years. I'm not going to bore you with the details of how this happened to me. I'll only say that I haven't met anyone else who has been transformed longer than me..."

Andrea went on to give at least a few details of her life – details I had never heard before. She had been transformed in college, finding herself swept away from a major in business studies to a major in art history. She talked about her struggle to overcome an impending degree in a subject she didn't particularly like by applying for business positions. After a couple of false starts, she went to work for me – although she didn't single me out, to my immense relief.

Never in my life as Daniel would I have ever dreamed that the attractive, professional

businesswoman that I had hired had ever been a man. I had always had the highest respect for her professional abilities, and I realized suddenly that she was speaking to all of us about how we, too, could overcome the terrible trick that this Daeva had pulled on us and enjoy a rich professional and personal life. I was as proud of her as I would have been if she were my younger sister, speaking confidently before this crowd. Of course, thanks to Mike, I was actually younger than her now, I suspected.

After the meeting, Becky asked Jane, Toni and me to stay. When I realized we were going to have the opportunity to speak with Andrea, we all agreed.

"Let me go get the good stuff," Becky offered, leaving for a minute to return with a fine bottle of chardonnay and five glasses. "There's more in my refrigerator," she promised.

"Hi, Dan," Andrea said little sheepishly.

"Hi yourself," I returned. "Although I guess it's Danielle now."

Andrea sat across the table from me, playing with her glass of wine. "I wanted to tell you," she said at last. "I wanted to warn you. But I guess you know now that that wasn't possible."

I nodded, taking a sip of wine. "So you recognized Mike."

"Immediately," she agreed. "I panicked. After what had happened to me and my friends in college, I knew what could happen to people who faced the Daeva more than once."

I thought about how Toni and I had gone off in search of Mike, and the stern warning we had received for our efforts.

"So why didn't you want to tell your whole story?" I asked her.

She was silent for a moment, before replying, "Because all of this trouble with the Daeva – it's my fault."

I didn't know what to say to that. Andrea smiled faintly. "It began when I was still in college..."

I attended Northwestern (Andrea began), but you knew that when you hired me, Dan...ielle. I was taking as many business classes as I could, figuring after graduation I'd get accepted at Kellogg and finish an MBA downtown. I was in a fraternity... the name doesn't matter since it's gone now, thanks to our Daeva.

My junior year, I was goofing around one Saturday afternoon when one of my fraternity brothers – a religious history major – started talking about the Zoroastrian religion. It sounded kind of cool to me. It had all the stuff Judeo-Christian sects had, plus a few extras that made it almost like swords and sorcery as well. There were four of us there that day, just sitting

around the fraternity chapter room drinking beer. Maybe it was the influence of the beer, but the more our fraternity brother told us about it, the cooler it sounded.

"So why isn't it still around?" one of the other guys asked.

"Oh, it is," Jake, our religious major assured us. "At one time, it was the main religion in Persia, but the Islamists conquered the region and drove the Zoroastrians out. Most settled in the Hindu parts of India. There are still a couple of hundred thousand followers around – some in the United States. It was a religion ahead of its time; it influenced nearly all the modern religions to some extent."

"How so?" I remember asking.

"Well, Andy (for that was my name then), look at the afterlife. They had a keeper of the gate like St Peter, a heaven and a hell, where you got assigned until Judgment Day. Sound familiar?"

"I guess," I nodded, taking another swig of beer.

"So what about the differences?" Tom, our big scholarship linebacker asked.

"Well," Jake began thoughtfully, "one of the biggest differences is that the religion allowed for... I guess you'd call them assistant gods. They had powers, could grant wishes, that sort of thing."

"Like genies?" Marty, the last member of our group asked.

"A little bit," Jake allowed. "More like angels, though, I suppose. They were pretty powerful. They had to be. Just like most of our modern religions, they saw our realm as a battleground between good and evil. There were evil gods, and they had their own helpers."

Frankly, it sounded like a cool religion to me. I was raised Catholic, but it never really stuck much with me. Except for when I was visiting my family, I never bothered with mass. I found religion sort of boring. I guess I believed in a god, but never really thought much about what he was. This Zoroaster guy seemed to have come up with a religion that had some fun in it – magical beings, wishes granted, you name it.

I wasn't the only one who was starting to get into Jake's descriptions, but I think it would have just all ended there on the couches in the chapter room if Tom hadn't asked the fatal question:

"So," Tom slurred as he polished off his fifth beer of the afternoon, "you mean if we knew how, we could call up one of these assistant gods and have him conjure up a nice little cock sucking blonde bimbo to take care of us?"

Marty and I laughed with Tom, but Jake wasn't laughing. "Yeah," he said seriously. "One of the assistant gods could probably do that for us – if we had the right summoning spells."

"So how do we get one of those spells?" Marty asked. I don't think he really believed there was

a summoning spell, but the four of us had nothing better to do. There was no party at the fraternity house that evening, and none of us had a date – hence the beer-drinking festival.

Jake shrugged. “The internet.”

“You’re shitting us,” I laughed.

“Wait here,” Jake told us, and rushed out of the room – presumably to get his laptop.

He was back in a few minutes, and suddenly the four of us were actually getting into the idea. He fired up his laptop at the altar, with the rest of us grouping around him. The altar – funny, I later wondered if there was some mystic quality to the hokey fraternity altar. Maybe it combined with the website to make the spell more powerful, feeding on the irony of a male fraternity ritual ground to power the spell. I hadn’t thought of it at the time.

It’s strange – none of us really believed it, but we didn’t exactly disbelieve it either. That’s the way things happen in college, I guess. Especially when there’s plenty of beer to go around. A few other guys poked their heads in the room, but no one else joined us. I guess you had to be there from the beginning to get wrapped up in the process.

Jake found the spell in less time than I would have imagined. It was a spell based upon the square – Zoroaster apparently believed the circle, square and pyramid were the symbols of man, with spells associated with each. This one, though, was the square, requiring four of us to invoke a demigod. If just one of us had said, “bullshit,” and walked off, none of this would have happened.

So we did it. We collected a brass bowl for fire and laid out the sign of a square right there in the chapter room. Beer flowed liberally as we moved the furniture out of the way and put the table that served as the fraternity altar in the center.

The actual spell was a “so what?” experience, with Jake droning on in a tongue none of us had ever heard. I found myself wondering if he was making all of this up – demigods, rituals with fire, near-dead religious practices. It sounded like something a Religious Studies major might come up with just to jerk our chains. Maybe in a minute, Jake would pretend to be possessed, drawing out our deepest fantasies and pretending to be able to grant them. If only it were so.

I think we all felt the presence at once. It was as if something – not someone – had entered the room when we weren’t looking. The air in the center of the square we had formed began to flutter, causing ripples in our vision. At each of the corners of the square, it was as if we were being pulled into the center of the expanding vortex. Then, in less than a heartbeat, he was there.

You know him as Mike. Becky knows him as Dr. Grimm. We had no name for him then, but he appeared the same as he did to all of you. He was tall, well built, well-trimmed hair, naked, and a look of pure sexual power. His penis... Well, we’ve all experienced it, but if you’d seen it there in the middle of the square, you would have been ashamed of your own equipment. He looked around the room, concentrating less on the walls and furniture and more on each of us.

Determining that Jake was our leader, he focused on him.

"You invited me," he said simply, his voice booming and echoing in the chapter room. "What are your terms?"

It was that direct. No, "what is thy bidding, my master?" or any of that hokey crap. It was more like a business deal. I suppose when you think about it, it was a business deal to him. We just didn't know then what kind of a business he was in. We all looked at Jake, not knowing what to say. Unfortunately, he didn't know what to say either.

The creature frowned. "So you have no terms. So be it. I can see you invited me without thought or purpose. Yet I see from your minds that the place you have invited me to holds many just like you. Fine. Yet you called me to produce for you... 'a little cock-sucking blonde bimbo?' That can be provided. All will be changed. I will start with each of you."

Remember all the movies where supernatural beings are held helpless in a pentagram? It isn't like that – or at least it wasn't for us. Each of us was frozen in place at the four points of the square. The creature stepped over to Jake, waiving his hand and watching as Jake's clothing disintegrated. Then, without warning, he lifted my fraternity brother up, forcing his legs to either side of his massive member. Jake fought at first, but to no avail. We watched in horror as Jake's body began to twist and reform, into feminine curves and smooth, long legs. Jake's hair grew long and blonde in feminine curls half way down his back. The creature pushed him back and forth against his groin, until we could see that there was no resistance. The creature's massive penis suddenly entered Jake in an opening that hadn't been there before. Jake gave a feminine gasp and began to ride the massive organ.

Jake changed before our eyes, and as horrifying as it was to watch, I don't think I was the only guy in that room with a monster of a hard-on. We could do nothing but watch in silence until the act was finished. The room smelled of sex as the woman who had been Jake was unceremoniously dropped to the floor. She lay there, whimpering, her head between her legs, her long hair draping her body. The creature ignored her and began to work on each of us in turn.



There was no trace of the Tom I knew left.

Tom was the next to be transformed – and the most striking in terms of difference. His six-foot three imposing body shrank as if the air were being let out of a balloon toy. His broad shoulders and barrel chest reformed into oversized breasts on a slender frame. He – by then probably she – was most un-athletic, since even in a bra, those breasts would be swinging in all directions. I marveled at how the creature manhandled Tom's much larger body, slamming it against the wall and forcefully penetrating her new anatomy.

There was no trace of the Tom I knew left. She was huddling with the girl who was now Jake, leaning against each other on the floor, sobbing. Her long, light blonde hair mingled with Jake's brunette mane as they tried to console each other.

The Daeva had moved on to Marty. His reality was rewritten as well, but with a few embellishments. Marty's thin body plumped out into a slightly chubby feminine form. The Daeva grabbed the newly-forming woman and treated her to the same experience as the others. I watched in horror as her hair turned dark red and a dusting of freckles covered her changing face and growing breasts. Soon she, too, lay on the floor, sobbing with the other girls.

My turn was last. By the time he was ready for me, I had witnessed three of my fraternity brothers being transformed into women – each one sopped between their legs, moaning and sobbing, whether from pleasure or pain I couldn't be sure. I had been forced into standing there, hard as a rock as I watched the perverted sex show go on. Now, I was about to be the show.

He grinned at me, his eyes sparkling with energy. "Ready to join your sisters?" he taunted me. "What shall I do to you?"

After what I had just witnessed, I tried to blank my mind. I was certain he could see directly in it. He undoubtedly knew I preferred blondes, busty and ready. As the image of one formed in my mind, I could sense it growing in his as well. He grinned. It wasn't a pleasant grin. "Very nice..." he breathed, and before I could try to erase the image from my mind, my clothes were gone and his strong arms had wrapped around me, pulling me closer...

There were tears in Andrea's eyes. She bit her lip, unable to continue. I put my hand on hers. "It wasn't your fault," I said softly. "You couldn't have known."

"That's right," Toni added. "All of us pulled dumb fraternity stunts in college. You couldn't have known it would actually work."

"There's more," Andrea whispered.

She went on to tell us about having to silently watch as her fraternity brothers were transformed one by one until the entire house was female. Her fraternity was now a sorority. To make it worse, she found herself with a boyfriend who didn't sound any better than Stephanie's Lionel. She didn't tell us much, other than the fact that he was on the football team and very demanding. For Stephanie's sake, I'd have to find out how Andrea managed to dump him.

"Jasmine – that was Jake's name now – came up with a plan to get rid of him," Andrea continued. "We had no trouble locating him; he was always hanging around the campus, making friends with some of the guys who visited our house and transforming them without warning. He called himself Carson then. He was a little rough around the edges since he didn't know our culture, but he learned fast. He didn't pay much attention to those he had transformed – except to revel in our discomfort."

"It was also Jasmine who finally determined that this creature was a Daeva."

I took another sip up wine, thoughtful. Then I asked, "You use this term 'Daeva.' Do you really think it's a god?"

She shook her head. "No, it's more like what we'd call a demon. According to legend, they're limited in power – although that still leaves them pretty powerful by our standards."

"But what are their limits?" I pressed. "Can he change us back?"

Her answer was not comforting. "Their limits are that they typically have only one power. Maybe his power includes changing women into men as well as men into women, but I doubt it. I've only heard of him changing men into women."

This was not good news.

"But why does he do it?" Toni asked.

"Jasmine did the research, and she wasn't sure. She thought it was to cause the maximum amount of chaos. He disrupts lives – even the lives of those who call him, although he usually doesn't transform them – only those around them."

"But he can cause their businesses to fail, or their lives to take a turn for the worse," I guessed, thinking of Chelsea's bartender or Jack.

"Andrea nodded. "That's right. And as for the ones he transforms, their lives are shattered – nasty boyfriends, status downgrades, ruined lives..."

"So Jasmine tried to find a way to get rid of it," I surmised, trying to get us back on track. "Obviously, she failed. What went wrong?"

There were tears in Andrea's eyes. "She found the way to send it back to wherever it came from," she said. "The ritual was almost identical to the one which brought it here – the bowl of fire, four people at the points of a square. We trapped it and went through the ritual perfectly. There was just one thing wrong."

"It took men to do the ceremony," Toni guessed. "A lot of old religions are that way – not to mention some current ones."

Andrea shook her head. "No, that wasn't it. The Zoroasterian religion treats women nearly equal. There's just one problem. Menstruation is a big no-no when it comes to performing rituals. Like a lot of ancient faiths, women were a something of pariahs when it was that time of the month. You know – unclean. It spoils everything. I was having my period when we did the ceremony. It was my fault."

The tears really began to flow after that admission. Toni put her arms around Andrea and held her as she quaked in misery. I wondered if that misery somehow transmitted to our Daeva, making it stronger. I wouldn't have been surprised.

I still wanted my manhood returned. I was growing more comfortable in my woman's body, and I was beginning to feel real affection for Bobby, but if someone had offered me my male body at that moment, I would have taken it without a moment's deliberation. The problem was, it was beginning to seem more and more likely that I was going to remain female even if we caught up with the Daeva. Still, watching Andrea's confession and thinking about all the men around me who had been forced into womanhood, I felt more certain something had to be done to keep the creature we had known as Mike from feeding on more innocent men. It was in my nature, I suppose. I was a problem solver. I had to get rid of the Daeva just as I had

rid countless companies of their own demons.

“What happened after you failed?” Jane asked suddenly.

Andrea looked out into space as if she was seeing the entire event all over again. “The Daeva was pissed – and I mean pissed. I think we came too close to succeeding. He screamed at us that we would regret what we had done until our dying day. He lashed out at everyone but Jasmine, and each of us felt ourselves change. Not physically, but mentally. Before, we had normal female sex drives, but suddenly, those drives went crazy. We all wanted sex in the worst way. We began playing with ourselves and with each other. Eventually, the urges lessened, but by the time they had, weeks had gone by, and each of us had... reputations around campus. I can’t even talk about what I did during that time.”

“You said Jasmine wasn’t changed,” Toni prompted.

Andrea choked out a horrified laugh. “No, she was changed – just not like us. The Daeva correctly realized she was our ringleader. He had something special in mind for her. Not only were her sexual drives increased even beyond ours, but she found herself a whore – a real whore. We tried to help her, but it didn’t do any good. Within a month, she was part of a pimp’s stable, on drugs, and working the sleaziest parts of town. Within six months, she was dead – an overdose.”



She found herself a whore

The rest of us were silent. In my wildest dreams, I never thought the creature – Mike, or

whatever its real name was – could go that far. I understood now why Andrea had left us. She was frightened – and for good reason. There was no telling what he would have done if he had seen her again.

“That’s why I come to this group every now and then,” Andrea explained. “Sure, I tell most of my story to give the newer women hope that they can overcome what was done to them. But I also want to meet with groups like yours. Becky told me Jane was still having some problems being a woman. I didn’t know you two would be here with her tonight, but I’m glad you were. Jane had said something about getting a group together to get the Daeva to change you back. I should have known it would be you guys.

“You can’t change back. Or at least I’m pretty sure you can’t. No one has. The best thing you can do is attend Becky’s group, learn how to enjoy being female, and get on with your lives. Anything else is suicide.”

“Maybe we are stuck,” I admitted. And I was becoming increasingly certain that we were. “Don’t we owe it to others to get rid of Mike? Think of the lives he’s ruined. How many children don’t exist because their fathers were changed into women?”

“Some,” Becky admitted. “Probably about a hundred and fifty as nearly as we can count.”

I looked at her. “And how many suicides?”

“About a dozen,” Becky replied. “Maybe more. We don’t have any good way of registering all the Daeva’s victims. That only happens when we can tell where he’s gone next. For example, we think he’s been invited into a major sports organization. That’s probably why he left Jack’s company so quickly. He couldn’t turn down an opportunity like that.”

“Then it’s got to stop,” I said firmly. As I said, I’m a problem solver. I disliked Mike before I knew what he was. Now, I despised him. Such a creature shouldn’t be allowed to live in our world. Besides, I didn’t want to be like Andrea – fearful that whatever I did, Mike was out there somewhere, ready to push me back down if I managed to crawl my way back up the ladder of success.

Toni seemed to realize where I was coming from. She nodded. “I’m with you. Let’s stop him.”

Jane was next. “Me, too.”

Andrea looked at each of us in alarm. “You’re all crazy. Look, I’ve got a great boyfriend, and a good life. It’s not bad being a girl. In fact, it can be fun.”

I ignored her. “Do you have the ritual to send him back?”

“Yes, but – ”

“When can you get it to us?”

Andrea's shoulders sagged. She looked to Becky for help, but none came.

"I actually agree with them," Becky told her. "I'm tired of watching new people come into my group, broken and helpless. It's time someone tried again. Maybe they'll succeed where we failed."

That made an impression on Andrea. I don't think she had expected our reaction at all. She expected to find three new, confused women, talk them down, and make them see the futility of attempting to change back into men. She never expected us to be determined to end Mike's fun and games. I couldn't blame her, really. She had watched her entire fraternity changed into women, and watched a good friend forced into drugs and prostitution. To her, this was a deadly serious situation – one she had tried to flee from since college. Had I been in her shoes, I might have felt the same way. But I hadn't. I was too angry to be frightened.

Andrea sighed. "Dannie, are you sure about this?"

Was I? Of course I was. I nodded my head.

She was silent for a moment. I could sympathize with her. If she gave us what we needed, Mike was almost certain to suspect she was the source. Then, I could see in her eyes that she had made up her mind – reluctantly. "I can have everything her by Wednesday morning," she finally told us.

"We need a fourth," Toni reminded us from the back seat of Jane's car.

"I know," I replied. Andrea and Becky had both declined, although Becky had agreed to let us use her facilities to conduct the ritual. I didn't blame either of them for not participating. They had seen enough to know what we were facing. If we failed but survived, I was certain none of us would ever be normal women again. Mike would be unforgiving, and we would probably each face short lives of unspeakable horror.

"Stephanie?" Jane suggested.

"I can't think of anyone else," Toni remarked.

Neither could I. I had searched the faces at Becky's meeting. All of the women attending had been meek and confused. Some, I gathered, had been women far longer than we had been, but they had given in to the demands of their new bodies. I hadn't seen a one who I considered ready to fight what had been done to them. They were all resigned to a life as females. I suspected that the only women still driven enough to fight Mike (I had a hard time thinking of him by any other name) would be those recently changed. Mike's magic was designed to make each of us fall into our new roles, especially if that meant ruining their lives. He created chaos and confusion. It was his nature.

"We'll talk to her in the morning," I decided, and the others agreed.

Then I was back in my apartment, surrounded once more by all the physical possessions that made me Danielle. I turned my phone on to see if I had any messages. There was a text from Bobby wishing me a good night. And there was one other call. I recognized it was from Cindy.

The greatest confusion in my life was how the roles of Cindy and Bobby had changed. Cindy had been the only girl I had ever been terribly serious about. As Dan, I had loved her both physically and mentally. She was both my best lover and my best friend. Now, it was difficult for me to remember the intensity of our lovemaking sessions. I remembered them as incidents in my personal history, but not as events of physical love. It was just the reverse with Bobby. He had been a good friend, mainly because of Cindy, and we had enjoyed sailing, drinking beer, and playing golf together. Those were secondary memories of Bobby now. Instead, I remembered most intensely our moments together as lovers – strolls along Michigan Avenue in the winter, my body snuggled against his, times together at parties where I admired his manly body, and of course our moments together in bed. Just the thought of those made my body tingle.

Cindy is my friend, I told myself as I returned her call. I felt no sexual attraction to her now that I was a woman, but the memories still persisted. I could remember how much fun we had together in bed, her long. Smooth legs wrapped around –

“Hi Dannie!”

My thoughts switched in a heartbeat to remember the Cindy I had had lunch with and shopped with on Saturday. “Hi, Cindy. What’s up?”

“Well...” she began, “have you talked to Bobby lately?”

“A couple of hours ago,” I told her. Cindy had something to tell me, but she was being damned coy about it. I could almost imagine the grin on her face.

“Did he say anything... interesting?”

What was she fishing for? “Well, we’re having dinner together tomorrow night.”

“Ah!”

I couldn’t stand it anymore. “Cindy, what are you getting at?”

“I don’t want to spoil the surprise,” she said mysteriously. “Just call me after your date, okay?”

“Sure. No problem.”

“I’ll talk to you later then,” she laughed, hanging up.

It didn’t take Sherlock Holmes to figure out what was going on, and the realization of what was happening brought both a warm glow and a cold chill to me at the same time.

Bobby was going to propose.

Jeez, I had known Bobby for the better part of the past year. If he kept a girlfriend for a month, it was cause to celebrate an anniversary. Bobby went through girls faster than he went through craft beers. What made me so damned special?

Maybe I was overreacting, I told myself. Maybe he was just going to invite me to move in then him. Or maybe he was going to invite me to the family cabin in Wisconsin for a long weekend of depraved sex.

But what if he was going to propose? What was I going to say? The truth was, the longer I was a girl, the more I thought about Bobby as a boyfriend instead of just a friend. I had had sex with him, and in spite of the fact that I had only been a girl for a day, I had to admit that I enjoyed it. Sex as a woman had its rewards, and Bobby was a skilled lover.

In addition, I was likely to remain a girl – and not just a girl, but one with limited prospects: no education, a crappy resume, and the bank balance of a church mouse. My male practical nature told me that marrying Bobby would make me financially secure, no matter what I thought about marrying a man. But would that be fair to Bobby?

Not that it really mattered. I had agreed to help get rid of the Daeva primarily because I couldn't think of spending my life as Dannie the sexy receptionist. I knew there was a good chance that we would fail to either get the Daeva to change us back or return it to wherever it came from. Most likely, I'd be dead – or worse yet, a crack whore on Chicago's South Side. Sure, I could back out, but I wasn't going to, even for the presumably soft life as Bobby's wife.

What would that life really be like? I wondered. Not the crack whore life – I meant life as Mrs. Robert Moorhead. I couldn't see myself waltzing around Chicago as one of those pampered wives of well-to-do men. I was a doer – a fixer – someone who had spent his adult life solving problems for businesses. I had been happy with my previous life. Shopping didn't excite me, as I'd already found out with Cindy. I supposed I could find some worthy cause as many women did, but most of them seemed to enjoy the fund raising luncheons and the speeches, but not the process of getting one's hands dirty to solve problems.

I supposed I could start a business, but what kind of business? Again, most wives of successful men started little boutiques or other small enterprises. I couldn't see myself smiling at overweight women trying on dresses a size too small and cooing, "Oh, that looks so good on you." But the business I would want to start would be a consulting business, and yet I now lacked the credentials for it. Who was going to listen to a consultant whose highest educational achievement had been attending cosmetology school?

But on a more fundamental note, could I be Bobby's wife? I had known him when I was a man, and we had been friends, expecting to be brothers-in-law someday. Bobby had forgotten the person I had been, but I hadn't. Could I look forward to sex with Bobby every day? Could I enjoy looking sexy for him? Could I bear his children and grow old with him? I wasn't sure, although at the very thought of these questions, I could feel myself getting damp.

Mike had made me all girl – I needed sex. Counting last night's dream, I had had sex every night since my transformation. But tonight, I was alone. What did women do to relieve themselves sexually when they were alone? What a stupid question. They did the same thing men did – they masturbated. My Dannie memories informed me that all I had to do was open the night stand drawer and pull out the vibrator nestled there between a few older panties wadded up on top and around it.

Without another thought, I opened the drawer and grabbed the vibrator. I was surprised at what I found. I had been expecting something smooth and sleek, but instead, I found my small hand wrapped around something that looked very much like a man's cock – a very large cock. How could I stick something like that inside me? For that matter, how big had Bobby been? I had no idea really. When we were having sex, I had been too busy feeling his cock and not looking at it.

Experimentally, I turned it on, feeling it vibrate as I tentatively spread my legs and put it at the edge of my lips. It tingled – it felt good. Even better than I could imagine. I started to shudder, trying to forget what I was about to do to myself. I closed my eyes, pretending it was Bobby seeking entrance. I was wetter now and gently pushed it into me, a bit more confident now.

It's funny how masturbation works – it's just never quite as good as the real thing. To make matters worse, it often makes you long for the real thing even more. As a young boy, I could remember jacking off while gazing at the Playmate of the Month. When I was finished, there was just a sheet of glossy paper in front of me and the feeling that something was missing. I found out it was a little better for women, but still not the same as the real thing. Bobby's image in my mind wasn't enough to get me off the same way. Oh, it was pleasant enough, but I sensed it would never be as satisfying for me as the real thing. If I was stuck as a woman – and I was becoming more certain with each passing minute that I was – it appeared that I was going to be looking for a man to do the job right.

I rinsed the vibrator off after experiencing a small but unsatisfying orgasm and washed myself off, climbing into a pair of comfortable if feminine pajamas. I missed Bobby. I mean I really, really missed Bobby. So if that was the way it was going to be, I supposed I'd say yes if he asked me.

As I climbed in bed, I felt as if I was being too clinical about it. Maybe I shouldn't settle on Bobby. After all, there were plenty of single, handsome men in the Chicagoland area. Why settle on one that I had only known (as a girlfriend, that is) for a few days? The answer to that was simple: Bobby was a great guy. I had known him when I was Dan and liked him then. He was well off and damned good in bed.

So my mind was made up, as I dozed off for the night. If he asked, I'd say yes.

The alarm went off bringing me up disoriented from a deep sleep. At least there were no dreams of wanton sex. If I had dreamed, the dreams must have been benign. All this getting up early to look beautiful was already getting old, though. I had half a mind to call in and quit. There must have been thousands of receptionist jobs in the city. Maybe I could find one where either getting up early or looking gorgeous weren't part of the job requirements. But if I did, I'd

lose Toni and the rest of the “girls.” They were my support group. Maybe after we succeeded in getting rid of Mike, I could consider moving on.

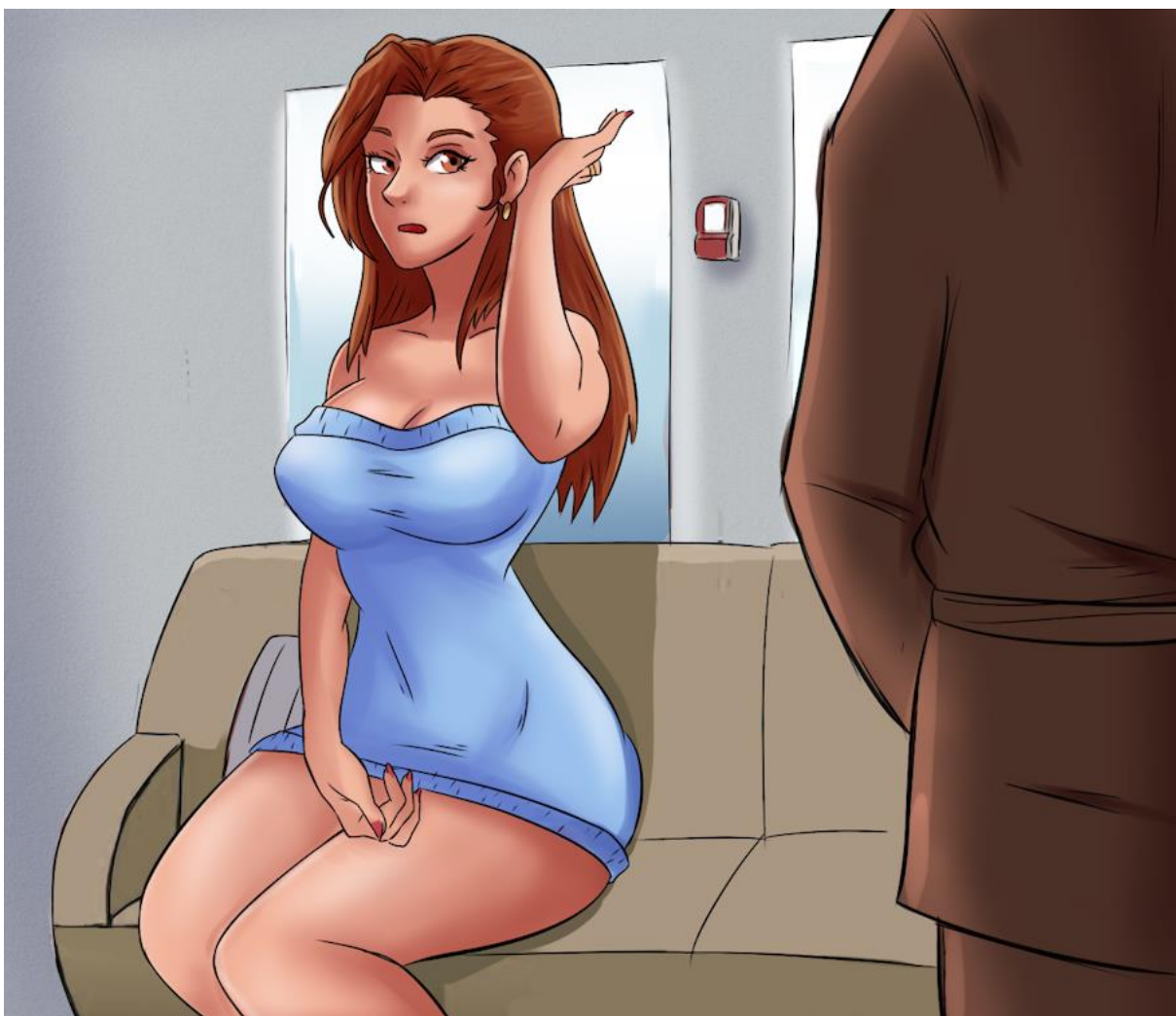
If Bobby proposed, that would certainly be one way of moving on. Certainly it would be the most comfortable for me. But there was no assurance that Bobby was about to propose. Cindy could have been wrong. Maybe Bobby just wanted me to move in with him, or maybe Cindy didn’t know her brother as well as she thought she did.

If Bobby did propose, maybe I should just forget trying to use Andrea’s ritual and move on with my female life. Why the hell was I willing to do the ritual anyway? I had serious doubts that I would benefit from it in any way. According to what I had learned, Mike probably wouldn’t or couldn’t change any of us back into men.

And what if we tried the ritual and failed? Andrea’s story certainly should have given all of us pause to consider what it might mean for the rest of our lives. Right now, being a woman wasn’t the first choice for any of us, but it certainly was a better fate than being a strung-out whore on the South Side.

But the real reason I was doing this, I reminded myself, was that it was a job that needed to be done. I didn’t want to be looking over my shoulder like Andrea did, frightened that the day might come when Mike re-entered my life. With Mike gone, there would be no more lives ruined by the malevolent demigod. And from a personal standpoint, I just couldn’t wait to see the bastard’s face as he got sent back to whatever spiritual world he came from. I hoped it was an unpleasant place – one where he’d have an eternity to regret what he had done to me and my friends.. Nobody ever got the best of Dan Wheeler, and nobody would ever get the best of Danielle Wheeler either.

At least I was able to get ready for work quicker than the day before. Makeup and hair were a little easier, and the short light blue sweater dress I picked went great with the first pair of black heels I selected. In the future, if I knocked a few more minutes off my morning routine, I might be able to get fifteen more minutes of sleep and still catch my bus.



Short light blue sweater dress I picked went great with the first pair of black heels I selected.

When I got to the office, everything was pretty quiet, but the tension was high. Jack wasn't in yet, and checking messages, there was one from him saying he would be out until later in the day. It was possible that it would take at least another day before I could catch him and ask why he had done this to us.

Pat came in a few minutes after I had gotten situated at my desk. He looked rough, and from past experience with him, I could tell he had spent a late night out drinking. As Dan, I had gotten on him about carousing during the week, and he had kept pretty well in line. Of course, in this new reality, there was no Dan to keep him on the straight and narrow. He mumbled a quick greeting, wandered back to his office and closed the door.

Stephanie came in next. "I saw Toni in the ladies' room," she told me. "She said you all needed to talk to me. What's going on?"

A couple of staff admin types came in just then, so I had to ask Stephanie, "Can you hang around until break time?"

“Sure,” she replied, turning her head to her cubicle, but I could tell she was dying to ask me more.

The morning crawled by. Toni had just muttered an noncommittal “good morning” and I got a text from Jane saying she was at a client’s location, but would be back for break time. Phone calls were light – mostly for Brad from clients who didn’t sound very happy. After what seemed to be hours, break time rolled around. Rather than use the company break room, we opted for a nearby coffee shop – something quiet where we could all squeeze into a booth and talk privately. I was the only hourly employee in the group, but I had resolved we would take as much time as we needed. If they wanted to fire me for getting back ten minutes late, I really didn’t care.

Jane was waiting for us when we arrived. While Toni, Stephanie and I had walked to the coffee shop together, we had kept the conversation light until we were all together. Stephanie slid in next to Jane while Tony and I took the other side. Then Stephanie sighed and said, “Okay, guys, what’s this all about?”

The other three of us looked at each other back and forth until both Toni and Jane settled on me. I guessed I had been nominated to try to get Stephanie to join us. I decided the best way would be to get right to it. “We need your help to take down Mike.”

Stephanie’s eyes widened. “Take him down? You mean get our old lives back?”

“Possibly,” I allowed, “but it’s not likely.” I quickly explained everything Andrea had told us.

“So what’s in it for us?” Stephanie wanted to know.

“Call it revenge, I guess,” I admitted. “Odds are good we’re stuck. The problem is Mike seems to feed off our trials and tribulations, so as long as he’s around, he might choose to interfere in our lives again.”

Stephanie nodded, rolling up the short sleeve of her yellow dress. Although her skin was fairly dark, we could see the part of her arm normally covered by the sleeve had nasty tinges of blue and red. It didn’t take a detective to figure out what had happened, but she spelled it out for us. “Lionel hit me last night,” she told us. It wasn’t for the first time, but he’s getting more violent.”

“Why did he hit you?” Jane asked.

Stephanie shook her head. “It doesn’t really matter, does it? It’s starting to take less and less to set him off. He’s an asshole.”

“Why not just leave him?” I asked

She sighed, “Nobody leaves Lionel; he leaves them. He’s told me so himself. Imagine how it was for me that first day as a woman when I woke up to find myself in bed with a guy several

times stronger than I was demanding a morning blow job. I gave it to him, as repugnant as it was at the time. He threatened to beat the shit out of me if I said no. It didn't take long for the threats to be carried out. He's getting worse and worse. If we can send this Daeva back to where he came from, I'm all for it."

"So you're in?" Toni asked.

Stephanie nodded. "I'm in. But how do we trap him?"

"No need," I explained. "When Andrea gets us what we need tomorrow, we can summon him. Then we just follow instructions."

"I doubt if it's going to be that simple," Stephanie pointed out. "From what you told me, Andrea and her friends tried before with disastrous results."

"But none of us are having our period," I returned.

"That doesn't mean something else couldn't go wrong."

I nodded. I had been thinking the same thing. From the expression on Jane and Toni's faces, it appeared they had had the same thoughts. "True, we won't know until we try. But look at the alternatives. You're probably always going to have to put up with a Lionel, or someone like him. Mike will see to that. I'm never going to be able to advance much above a receptionist. I don't have the credentials anymore."

"And Jane and I are blamed for most of the problems in the office," Toni added. "Jack is a sexist. So's Pat, for that matter. Without Dan around to stop him, he's been harassing us nonstop, and Jack won't lift a finger to stop him. It's pretty obvious our careers are going nowhere."

None of us were going anywhere. Stopping Mike from interfering with our lives was the only thing any of us could think of to do.

Back in the office, there wasn't much to do. Jack was out on calls trying to undo what his nephew had done. Unfortunately, he didn't seem to have the balls to fire the little prick. His sister must have had all the balls in the family. I hadn't realized until my transformation that I had really been holding everything together since Art had retired. Jack and his sales force could bring the business I, but it had been up to Art and later me to keep it from leaving. Pat just couldn't handle it.

Speaking of Pat, he was holed up in his office again. I could see from my desk console that he was on his phone, probably trying to clean up the messes Jack couldn't handle.

After I had been back for a little over an hour, Jack burst out of his office. He looked even more haggard than he had when he came in this morning. "Dannie, I need to see you right away."

Oh-oh, I thought. Given what Jane and Toni had said about his behavior, I wasn't looking forward to this. I followed him into his office, leaving the door open. Although Toni and Jane had left for calls, I hoped someone would see Pat if he got out of line.

"Close the door," Pat ordered. I looked at him. He looked as if he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. There was none of the old lecherous Pat in his face or his body language. This was a man with a problem. Relaxing a little with the knowledge that I had nothing to fear from him, I closed the door.

"Sit down," he offered. I did. This was the first time I had been in my old office since the transformation. It felt odd to be sitting there, across from where I used to run the operations of the company.

"Dan, I need your help," he pleaded.

Dan? Not Dannie, but Dan.

"What did you call me?"

"I called you Dan," he confirmed. "I know who you were. I know what Mike did to you. I wanted to say something to you yesterday, but then the shit hit the fan. I-"

Things were becoming clear to me now. "But how did you know I was Dan?"

"I- I don't know," he stammered. "I just- I mean I..."

"The only people who know about the transformations are the ones transformed or the ones who invited the Daeva in."

Pat pushed back in his chair, almost as if he was afraid I'd leap across the desk and kill him. The thought crossed my mind.

D-Daeva? What's that? I don't know what you're talking about."

"Of course you do," I returned with venom. "We all thought this was Jack's fault, but it wasn't, was it? Tell me everything now."

"I-I'll tell you later. Right now, you have to help me."

"Help you what?"

"Help me get all this straightened out. Another account dropped us this morning. Camden Carpets called while you were at lunch. Jack's there now. But this was all his nephew's doing. He screwed up Huffman Interiors, too. This is all his fault."

"Did Brad invite Mike into the business?" I pressed, already knowing the answer.

"Well... no, but-"

"No, you did. You're responsible."

"But I didn't mean for any of this to happen," Pat whined.

"I find that hard to believe," I said coldly. "You better tell me everything – from the beginning."

"If I do, will you help me?" he asked, sounding like a small child trying to negotiate with a parent.

"It depends upon what I hear."

He sighed. "Okay. I found out about Mike from Andrea."

I found that hard to believe. First of all, she couldn't have told him. It was against the rules. She wouldn't have been able to talk about her transformation with Pat, since he wasn't in the loop. I pointed that out to Pat, adding, "Try again, and this time tell me the truth."

"All right," he agreed, eyes downcast. "I saw something on Andrea's computer." He looked at me for approval.

I knew what he had done. Of course. Andrea's cube was next to his. It wouldn't have taken much for him to look at her computer when she was away from her desk. Pat confirmed that.

"I saw an e-mail on her screen. It was from an old college friend of hers, talking about the being that had transformed both of them into women. She had found out that he was getting his messages at a local bar. It seemed crazy. Some sort of an ancient god hanging out in a bar not far from here – one that could grant wishes. At least that's what I thought."

"So you went to the bar and found him," I prompted.

He nodded guiltily. "It took a couple of days, but yes."

"And he promised to grant you all your wishes if you'd just invite him into the office."

"I just had one wish. I wanted your job." He closed his eyes, waiting for the onslaught. I didn't disappoint him.

"That's all you wanted?" I nearly exploded. I was frankly surprised. I had always seen Pat as the stolid second in command – the perfect subordinate. Oh sure, I had had trouble with him when it came to being a little too friendly with the female employees, but he had kept himself within the rules and could never have been accused of outright harassment. I had thought he would have been smart enough to see that he wasn't ready for my job. I had always thought that under my wing, he might be okay doing what I did after I had moved up, but only with close supervision. Instead, he had gotten greedy. Then, his first big test – the hiring of Jack's nephew – he had failed. Now, he was on the hot seat.

"I've had more experience than you," he replied in his defense. "You came in here and took over Art Kane's responsibilities when he retired. Everyone knew Jack would eventually make you his partner – or maybe even sell out to you. That should have been my opportunity."

The poor fool actually thought I had stolen the job that should have been his. "So you agreed to have him turn me into a girl just so you could have my job."

Pat was practically in tears now. "I didn't know he was going to turn you into a girl. The deal was that I bring him in to meet Jack and I could have your job. Then, he changed Tony into a girl, and the rest of the operations people. I wanted to stop him, but I couldn't. I didn't know he was going to change you into a hottie. I couldn't do anything about it."

"No," I countered, "but you did know whatever he did to me wouldn't be good. Then when you saw my department being changed into girls, you decided that might not be so bad. I wouldn't be around to tell you not to harass them. And Jack would owe you for hiring his nephew. You'd be just where you wanted to be."

"I'll make it up to you." Pat was begging now. "I'll get him to change you – to change all of you – back into men."

"And how are you going to do that? You don't know what you're up against, do you?"

"Look, just help me and I'll figure something out."

I rose from the chair. "No deal, Pat. You haven't figured anything out right yet. Don't you see? The damage is already done. We've done the research you never did. This Daeva – Mike – probably can't change us back, and even if he could, what do you have to offer him? He's spent years preying on weaklings like you. As for saving your job, the minute Jack's nephew came on board – something I might have been able to stop, but you could never have done – your fate was sealed. The firm has lost some of its most profitable clients, and Jack is going to make sure you pay the price. If I were you, I'd start working on my resume before word of this disaster makes it all over the city."

As I turned to walk out, Pat called after me, "Wait! You've got to help me. If you don't, I could have you fired."

"You'd be doing me a favor!" I returned, slamming the door behind me. Pat wouldn't be able to fire anyone, I told myself. I was pretty sure that he'd be gone himself by the end of the week.

I was fuming as I returned to my desk. I had to talk to someone, although none of my fellow conspirators were in the office. It was close to my break time anyhow, so I stomped down to the coffee shop where we usually met, found a private table to drink a cup of coffee that I ordered, and called Toni. She picked up on the first ring, and I could tell from the background noise that she was using her Bluetooth in her car. "What's up?"

"Pat did this to us," I spilled out without preamble.

“Did what? Oh...you mean had us changed?”

I gave her the two minute version of my conversation with Pat.

“We should have suspected the asshole,” she muttered. “Wait until Jane and Steph hear about this. We’ll all go in together and kick his ass.”

“I doubt if you’ll get the opportunity,” I told her. “I think Jack plans to fire him.”

“I’m at a client’s office now, in the lobby,” Toni told me. “I’ll call you later and we can talk more.”

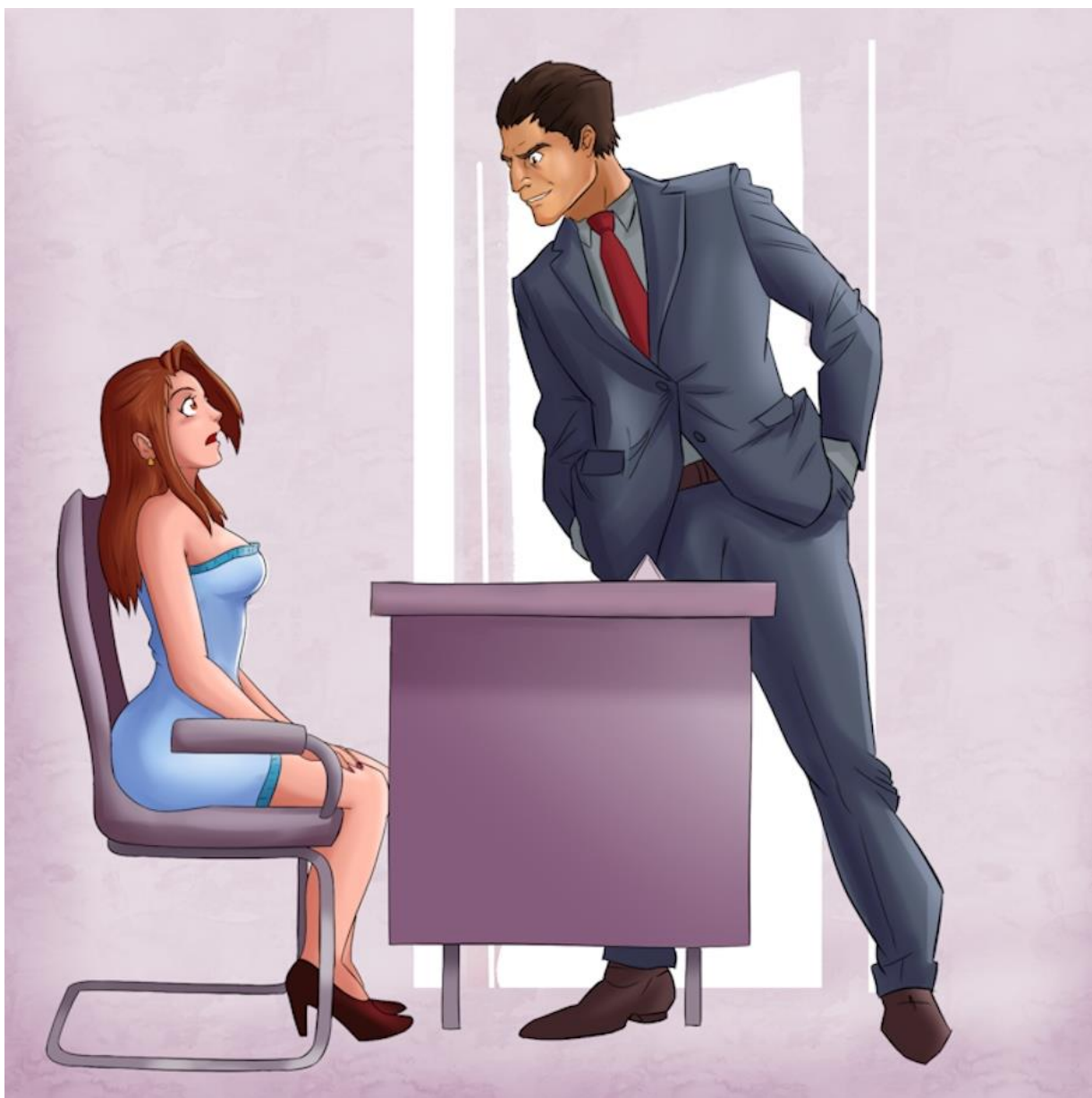
“Works for me,” and I ended the call. I had been so involved in talking to Toni that I hadn’t notice a tall, handsome man standing not far from me. He slipped into the seat across the table. It was Mike.

Since I had been changed into a woman, I had begun to know what genuine fear felt like. Seeing Mike there across the table from me, a frown on his face, sent a shiver down my spine. Even if he weren’t some sort of demon, he was big enough to do serious damage to me. I forced myself to calm down, remembering that we were in a public place where he was unlikely to harm me.

“I know what you’re up to,” he began.

That surprised me. “How?”

“I’m a god,” he said simply with a shrug.



"I'm a god," he said simply with a shrug.

"No, you're not," I reminded him. "You're a demon – a Daeva."

"So Andrea told you everything." He shook his head. "That was foolish of her. I would have thought the lesson I taught her and her friends the last time would have been enough to discourage her from trying again."

I didn't tell him that Andrea wasn't going to be directly involved. Although he seemed to know what we were going to do, there were gaps in his knowledge. I thought I knew why. "You had a spy in the Monday meeting," I guessed.

"Two, actually," he admitted with a sly smile. "It wasn't hard to figure out that you were all

planning something. You won't be able to send me back, you know."

"We won't make the mistake Andrea's friends made," I pointed out, becoming bolder as I realized he was no threat for the moment.

"But you'll make other mistakes," he returned. "People usually do."

But not always, I thought to myself.

"Why take the chance? You could just change us all back, you know."

"But I can't," he told me. "And I wouldn't if I could. I think you already knew that. So why bother to do this? To save other men from your fate? How altruistic of you! You'd take the chance that I could do terrible things to you – make your lives even worse – just to save others.

"Or is it revenge?"

I couldn't hide the look of surprise on my face.

His eyes narrowed. "It is, isn't it? I knew you'd be trouble. You're going to risk your lives just because you want to spoil all my fun. It will only be temporary, you know. Eventually, someone else will find the summoning spell and bring me back."

"Probably," I admitted, "but you don't seem to want to go back to where you came from. All of us would be happy if you were just as uncomfortable in your situation as we are in ours. As for someone else finding the spell, how many copies of it can there be? Once we've disposed of you, we'll destroy our copy – one less chance that you'll come back."

Mike sighed and stood up. "Well, I've done my best to warn you. The consequences will be on you. I think I'll make you into a whore, somewhere on the South Side. Maybe I'll make all of you whores."

With that, he turned and left.

This is stupid, I told myself. Why not just accept our fates? Mine wouldn't be so bad if Bobby asked me to marry him. As for the others, they had good jobs in a field that was attracting more and more women. Maybe we should just forget about it .

By the time I got back to my office, Pat was gone and Jack was looking for me. "Where have you been?" he demanded.

"On my break."

"Well, come into my office. I need to talk to you."

He didn't bother to offer me a seat. Instead, he plopped down in his worn leather chair and

began, "Pat's no longer with the firm. I want you to write a memo for my signature. Just say the usual 'left to pursue other activities.' Then get this headhunter..." he handed me a business card, "...and tell him to start looking for a replacement. And while you're at it, have him get a replacement for that idiot nephew of mine."

Could it be? Was Jack actually growing a set of balls?

"And notify the staff that there'll be a nine AM meeting tomorrow. I want to announce the changes as quickly as possible."

I might be stuck as a girl for the rest of my life, but I knew an opportunity when I saw it. I couldn't feel sorry for Pat; he had brought this upon himself. As for Jack's idiot nephew, he wasn't even worth thinking about. Pat's job – my old job – was out of reach. It would probably end up going to Toni. She certainly deserved to be considered. But that would leave two openings at the consultant level.

"Ja- er, Mr. Winslow, I'd like to be considered for the consultant position."

Jack looked at me as if I had just announced that I was from outer space. In that short moment of hope, I had forgotten what a misogynist Jack was. Suddenly all my memories of the crap he had given me when I first hired Andrea come back to me. I had proved him wrong then, but now, with the failure of the consulting department to hang on to some of our larger clients, his dislike of women "in a man's world" all came back. Besides, in his memories, Pat had always been in charge since his partner had retired, and the track record of success I had accumulated was gone. In his mind, the department itself was to blame, and three of the four consultants were women. Never mind that the failure was the result of the actions of Pat and the one male consultant.

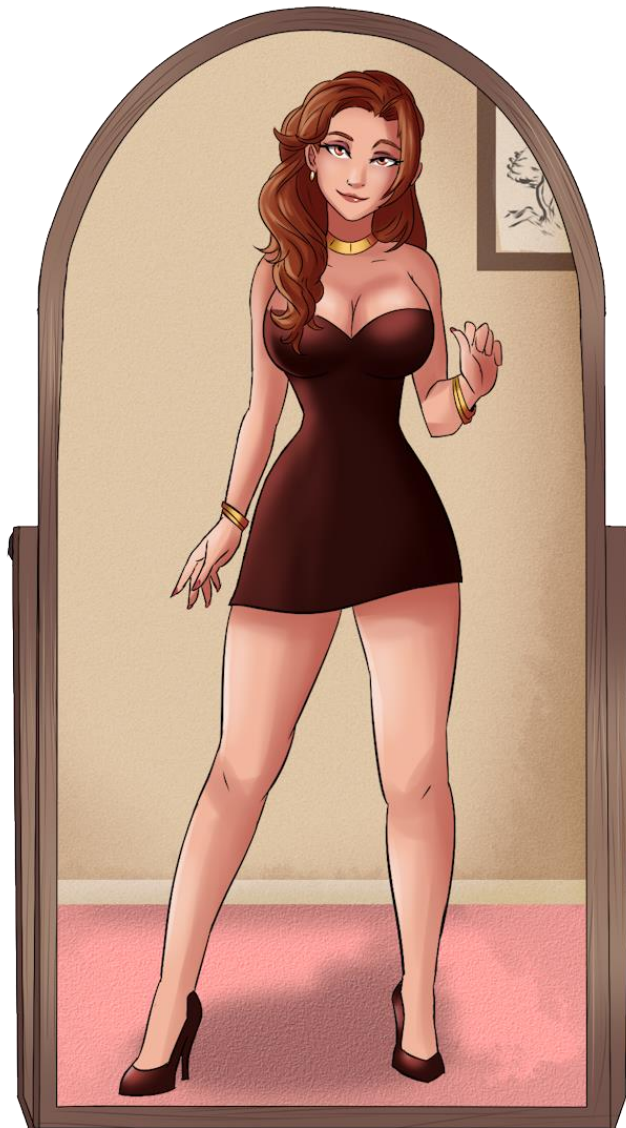
"Dannie..." he began, choosing his words carefully, "I appreciate your ambition, and perhaps in the future, we can bring you into the consulting department as an assistant, but this is a bad time for the company. I need someone with several years of experience."

I longed to tell him that I had those years of experience, but there was nothing to back that up. Damn that Daeva! This was exactly the situation he wanted for me. He had created chaos in the firm, and I was probably the most experienced person to fix things. But there was no way Jack or anyone else would see that. At least tomorrow night, I would have my revenge, even if I was left in a woman's body for the rest of my life.

I was still fuming when I got home. I had talked to Toni, Jane and Stephanie, telling each of them what had happened to Pat and then what had happened to me. When they found out Pat had been behind their transformations and been fired for what had ensued, each of them felt somewhat recompensed for the loss of their manhood. Each of them felt sorry for me, and Toni told me she was sure there was no way Jack would ever offer her Pat's job. In fact, she was thinking of leaving the firm after we had disposed of the Daeva.

I looked at the clock. It was nearly six. Bobby would be picking me up in an hour. Damn all this

female preparation shit. When I was male, it would have been easy to get ready. A quick shave, a change of clothes, and I'd be done. As a woman, an hour didn't seem like enough time to get ready. Bobby had texted me earlier, telling me to "dress nice." What did that mean? I was beginning to appreciate Cindy's predicament when I would tell her something like that. "What does 'nice' mean?" she would ask in exasperation. With men, it was suit, business casual, or casual – translation: tie, no tie, jeans. "Dress nice" could mean anything from an evening gown to a nice pair of slacks. With no better information, I did what Cindy always did: I chose the always safe little black dress.



A form-fitting dress ending just above my knees

I let Dannie's experience guide me, opening up to her memories long enough to pick the right dress and the proper accessories. When I was done – with five minutes to spare, I looked myself over in the mirror. There I was – a form-fitting dress ending just above my knees, dark stockings, three-inch pumps that accentuated the shape of my legs, and tasteful evening makeup, with my face surrounded by brunette curls. My jewelry was not expensive, but not

cheap either, with gold around my neck and on each arm. I felt a little like a Christmas tree, but somehow, it made the whole outfit work better.

Bobby was right on time – as always – and I felt a sudden intake of breath as I put on my best and sweetest Dannie expression. I still didn't know what Bobby had in mind for the evening, but I was pretty sure something important in my new life was about to happen. I opened the door.

"Hi."

"Hi." Well, I'd guessed right on what to wear. Bobby was in a suit – a very expensive suit to my eye – and he came bearing roses and a goofy grin to go with them. Okay, it was romantic. I had been a girl for less than a week, and yet I was impressed and overwhelmed. My body was tingling. The old-fashioned term for what he was doing was "courting me", and my body liked it. I couldn't help but think if I had been more like Bobby as a man, I might have gotten laid a lot more. Bobby was certainly going to get laid tonight, I thought to myself, and unlike the last night Bobby and I had been together, this time, I found myself really looking forward to it.

"You look fantastic!" he told me, and I could tell from the sound of his voice that he really meant it. I flushed a little, smiling as I accepted the roses.

We engaged in small talk as I found a vase and put the roses in water. Bobby told me about his trip – apparently a roaring success destined to make the wealthy Moorhead family even more wealthy. I told him about what had been happening at work – not the transformation of course, but Pat's firing and all the turmoil.

Bobby snorted. "When we met Pat for his presentation, I wasn't impressed. That's why I recommended my father not to do business with your company."

Well, that explained that.

"Hell, you could run the consulting department there better than Pat," he went on.

I didn't know whether to be insulted or flattered. Was he saying even a mere receptionist was more competent than Pat, or did he really think I had the talent to do so?

I frowned. "How do you mean that?"

Bobby's answer was the best I could have imagined. Without taking offence, he merely told me, "What I mean is that a woman of your ability could do anything she wanted to do and do it well."

It was the perfect answer.

Bobby wouldn't tell me where we were going. He just said it was a surprise. Apparently he had already given the waiting cabbie the destination, for he wordlessly pulled away from the curb and headed for the Loop. I was extremely impressed when we pulled up in front of the Trump

International Building, for I knew where we were going at last. On the sixteenth floor was a restaurant appropriately known as Sixteen. Pricey, with a view of the skyline along the Chicago River, it was rapidly becoming a place to see and be seen. I had never been there, even as Dan. While it was reported to have an excellent lunch menu, clients actually could become uncomfortable if they were treated to as much extravagance as Sixteen had to offer. Cindy had hinted she wanted to go there, but we had never gotten around to it.

Bobby had somehow managed to get a window table, where the tall windows made you feel almost as if you were outside. As we leisurely sampled the restaurant's impressive fare while sipping wines I knew were way beyond my price range even when I was Dan, Bobby told me more details about his trip. Dutifully, I listened, wondering what Bobby had in mind for us later. Obviously, he was going to get incredible sex that night. I was over my apprehension of sex as a woman, and unlike my trepidation Saturday night, I was really looking forward to it tonight.

If Bobby asked me to marry him, I was determined to tell him yes. After all, I stood a good chance of not surviving the next day, so why not give Bobby a moment of happiness? He had certainly worked hard enough to deserve it tonight. But even more importantly, if I did survive, Bobby was much like the male equivalent of his sister, and the qualities I had always loved in her were present in him as well. If I had to be a woman, I might just as well marry a man I could love, assuming I didn't love him already.

Did I love him? The answer was essentially yes. My Dannie memories told me she – I – loved him, but I wasn't depending upon those re-written memories. I was determined to draw my own conclusions. I had always been comfortable around him when I was Dan. We had become friends – good friends. Apparently the affinity I had to him as a friend now had blossomed in my female body, and I was pretty sure I would never find another man I was as attracted to as I was to Bobby that night.

"I really missed you," he said softly over coffee.

"I missed you too." And I meant it.

He reached in his pocket and pulled out a Tiffany box, opening it to display a stunning ring. "Dannie, will you marry me?"



"Dannie, will you marry me?"

In spite of my determination, I actually hesitated for a moment, hypnotized by the large, sparkling diamond. "Oh, yes," I finally managed. My voice was an excited whisper. My logical decision to marry Bobby was lost in a sudden burst of emotion. Marrying Bobby wasn't the rational decision I had imagined it to be. In fact, as the evening had worn on, I was beginning to think Bobby wasn't going to ask me to marry him, and that had made me anxious. Now, the moment had come, and my desire to marry him was genuine. I was certain I was doomed – no, not doomed – I was destined to marry Bobby. Can I be forgiven that all other thoughts left my mind? Getting rid of the Daeva was forgotten in a surge of emotion, and in that moment, I only wanted to be Bobby's wife.

I was in a dreamlike state for the rest of the night. My nipples had become hard, demanding attention soon. My pussy was... well, it was the center of my existence suddenly. I wanted it filled, and Bobby was the man to do it.

We left the restaurant at once, and it was easy to tell the moment we got into the cab that Bobby's need was as great as mine. He began to stroke my breasts forcefully, and as much as I enjoyed that, I stopped him almost as soon as he began, unzipping his pants and pulling out his

hard member. I had never given a blow job before, but of course I knew exactly what to do. My knees resting on the dirty floor of the cab, I dived on Bobby at once, pleased to hear him groan with pleasure.

The cab continued to head for the Gold Coast where Bobby's condo was waiting, but I sensed the driver was in no hurry. He knew what was going on in the back of his cab, and he wanted to make sure we had time to finish. I suspected he was enjoying the show, and that this was not the first time this had happened in the back of his cab. I was determined to give him the best show he had ever vicariously experienced.

From Bobby's reaction, I must have succeeded. As I gulped down Bobby's cum, he groaned in pleasure, using his hands to push me all the way onto his stalk. The taste of his semen was neither pleasant or unpleasant to me, but the fire it lit in my body was more than enough to compensate.



I had never given a blow job before, but of course I knew exactly what to do

“You kids have fun,” the cab driver called out to us, obviously ecstatic at the generous tip Bobby had given him. Bobby held me close as we walked past the doorman, partially because he wanted to and partially, I suspected, because he had to stuff his still semi-hard penis back into his pants more quickly than he should have. I giggled softly, knowing from experience what that was like. But I couldn’t exactly remember what it felt like. My new body was sending so many signals to me that any memories of what it felt like to have male equipment were buried too deeply to retrieve.

We literally ran to the elevator, and when it arrived, we were blessed to have it to ourselves.

Sure, there would be security recordings of Bobby peeling off the top of my dress, exposing my breasts since the dress had a built-in bra, but what did I care? Most of the time on the ride up, they were pressed against Bobby's chest anyway while we kissed passionately.

We were both laughing when we got into his condo, hurrying to the bedroom where we dived onto the cool sheets. We didn't bother to turn on any lights; the lights of nighttime Chicago gave us all the illumination we needed. I remember us fondling each other while we struggled out of as much clothing as we could, finally getting up with reluctance to discard any remaining garments we couldn't easily remove on the bed.

Neither of us needed any foreplay. We had done all that on the journey to his condo. I lay down on the bed, spreading my legs at once, nearly ready to come without any further action. But when Bobby settled on top of me and gently slid into me, I went over the top nearly at once. The incredibly cool thing about my new body was that I knew this was only the first of multiple climaxes I could look forward to as the evening went on. Poor Bobby. He'd already had one, so how many more could he look forward to? One? Two? I resolved to make him get to three before the evening was over.

Since I had milked him in the car, he took a few minutes to get back to full strength. That was fine with me. I was still enjoying the aftershocks of my first climax. Having him deep inside me was just the promise of more enjoyment as the evening went on. I felt as if I were on a roller coaster ride, experiencing one thrilling hill after another, my orgasm fading, then rising again as he pumped into me. Was it a second orgasm, or just the continuation of the first? I didn't really know; I hadn't been a woman long enough to know the difference. However, compared to the male massive explosion followed be... well, followed by nothing, really, this was fantastic.

Bobby finally came, groaning in pleasure as I felt his warm semen filling me up. What an experience! As I lay there basking in pleasure, I suddenly recalled the first goal I had set for myself:

GOAL 1: I AM DAN WHEELER – NOT DANIELLE. STAY THAT WAY.

I chuckled to myself. Here I was, underneath Bobby with my legs spread wanting still more. Dan Wheeler didn't exist anymore. If the Daeva was telling the truth, he never would exist again, no matter what I did. Danielle was here to stay.

And was that so bad? Not really. Being Bobby's wife could conceivably be the best thing that had ever happened to me. I had no need for higher education, or even a job now. Bobby would take care of me. I had the freedom to do anything I wanted with Bobby at my side.

So why the hell was I wasting time getting rid of the Daeva? I had nothing to gain, and everything to lose. Was revenge worth the price? No, not really.

Bobby had run out of steam for the time being, and he withdrew from me with a sigh. I felt suddenly empty, wanting him back again. But I had been a man long enough to know that he needed time to recharge. Besides, my sudden thought about what I would be doing tomorrow had taken some of the zest out of me as well. I was starting to think that if I made love to

Bobby one more time, that would be the end of my efforts to send the evil creature back where it came from.

If I did back out, what did that mean for my friends? They couldn't change back either. It was possible their sense of revenge was stronger. Toni could carry on in her career, but she would have to change firms. As long as Jack was in charge, she had a glass ceiling facing her. She didn't have anyone like Bobby to help her, either. We hadn't really talked about her love life. I got the idea she had experimented with a few partners since her transformation, but nothing serious. It was probably the same with Jane, I suspected, but I knew even less about her than I did Toni. As for Stephanie, she was trapped in a bad relationship with no good way out.

But how would facing the Daeva help them?

Then it came to me. The Daeva didn't just change men into women – it altered their personal history as well. It gave me Bobby, probably not intending for our relationship to last. Bobby dated girls like Danielle was meant to be – unsophisticated and with limited education – and he had dropped them all after getting into their panties. I didn't judge him. Before Cindy came along, I had done much the same. Many men did until the right girl came along.

Apparently I was the right girl for Bobby. Mike might have taken away my education and level of experience and sophistication on paper, but not inside my head. I had maintained Dan's abilities without fully surrendering to Dannie's persona. It had apparently been enough for Bobby to see me in another light. I had overcome the Daeva's plans for me.

Unfortunately, the others had not. Toni claimed to want her old sex back, but the more I thought about it, she was really more interested in having her old opportunities back. The Daeva had probably made her as ambitious as she had been as a man, but trapped as a woman in a predominately male-centered company would be frustrating to her. Jane was probably just caught in the crossfire. She had come on in the midst of turmoil, and her sweet, caring nature as a woman was bound to lead her to failure under Jack's management. As for Stephanie, what worse fate could there be for a strong, athletic man to find himself in the body of a weak female dominated by a strong athletic man?

Could trapping the Daeva help them? They had all helped me when I transformed. I owed them any opportunity, no matter how slight, to improve their lives. If we trapped it as planned, perhaps we could force them to improve the lots of the others. Then we'd send it back to whatever perverted universe it came from.

I was on board, for my friends. Besides, I didn't want to see Mike at every turn, wondering if he had the power to alter my history again. If I was to have the happy life Bobby was offering me, I would have to get rid of it once and for all.

"Got everything?" Bobby called out to me from the living room. I was in the bathroom just finishing my makeup by adding a final coat of lipstick to my plump lips.

"Almost," I called out. Apparently I stayed at Bobby's place enough times that I had a work outfit stashed there. It was about as sexy an outfit as I had yet worn to work, but I had no

choice. It was a white sweater dress that was cut to display my breasts and my ass as much as the law would allow. I kept trying to pull the very, very short skirt down, too, but to no avail. Thank god I had worn pantyhose since there would have been bare skin above thigh highs.

I was dead tired. Bobby and I had worn each other out with two additional bouts of lovemaking after dozing in each other's arms in between. We had finally gotten to sleep about three thirty, and when I awoke again at six, I was a little bit sore and a lot tired. I had padded into the bathroom and taken a quick shower while Bobby slept. If I spent the rest of my life as a woman, I would always be pissed at him for being able to get ready for work in twenty minutes. It was rapidly becoming the thing I missed most with my change of sex. I vacated the bathroom in just panties and a bra as Bobby sleepily trudged in to take his shower. He had slept in so long that I had time to do my makeup.

Bobby drove me to work in his own car, getting me to the office promptly at five minutes until eight. We had already eaten, so I didn't have to pick up anything to eat at my desk – fortunate, since I knew Jack had always hated to see the receptionist eating while greeting staff and guests. It was only juice, coffee and toast, but that seemed to be all my new body required. Between Bobby taking me out to eat and my diminished appetite, at least being a girl had cut my food bills way down.

"See you at seven?" Bobby asked, leaning over to give me a good-bye peck on the cheek.

"Better make it seven thirty. I have to work late," I told him, returning the peck on his cheek.

He looked concerned. "What's up at work?"

Obviously, I didn't want to tell him what we girls had planned. It was unlikely Bobby would believe me if I did tell him, assuming I could. "It's just with Pat being fired, Jack may have some late for me to take care of," I lied.

Bobby gave me a smile. "Maybe we'll eat light and head back to my place."

"I'd like that," I told him truthfully, feeling all the new parts of my body tingle at the thought. I only hoped I was still alive to take him up on his offer.

The office was in turmoil already when I walked in. Everyone had come in early. Whether it was to show Jack how hard they had been working or just to get things out of the way before the nine o'clock meeting, I couldn't say. Whatever the case, everyone knew Jack was in a foul mood, and when the boss is in a foul mood, it's always a good time to bury your nose in your work.

"Where have you been?" Jack snapped at me from the door of his office as I walked in.

"It's just now eight," I pointed out to him as demurely as I could. If I had still been Dan, I would have given him a snarky answer, but given the situation, I did my best not to rile him – really for the sake of others in the office. One way or the other, I'd probably get myself off the payroll by the end of the week.

The nine o'clock meeting was as laughable as I thought it would be. Jack could never run a good meeting. The facts were that in this reality, Pat had fucked up big time and got his butt fired as he well deserved. Now the company was in hot water and layoffs and/or beheadings would probably start soon, due to the loss of some of our largest clients. I knew from experience that receptionists were usually at the top of that list, so it was a good thing I planned to be gone.

Jack told us everything was fine and the company's future was rosy. I didn't buy it for a heartbeat, and from the looks on their faces, Toni, Stephanie and Jane weren't buying in either. In this reality, Jane was new to the company and thus expendable if I knew Jack as well as I thought I did. It was easy to see that Jane understood that as well. Stephanie had been temporarily transferred to operations, and she and I both knew that Jack would eliminate as many women from the department as he could. Even if he kept Stephanie on, her position would be nothing more than a secretary. As for Toni, her job was probably safe – she'd be the "token woman." While she should have been considered as a replacement for Pat, there was no way Jack would give her the opportunity. Toni wouldn't stand for that.

My suspicions were confirmed when we all met for coffee after the meeting in our usual coffee shop.

"I've already sent out my resume," Toni confirmed, sipping on a frappachino.

"I'll have mine out by Monday," Jane added.

"I'll probably get mine out, too," Stephanie said. Then she shrugged. "Of course Dannie and I don't have as good a resume as you guys."

"What about you, Dannie?" Toni asked.

I had been wearing my engagement ring all morning, but of course as former men, none of my friends had the instincts to check that out. In a more feminine gesture than I had intended, I stuck out my hand and flashed the ring.

Toni picked up on it first. "Are you serious?"

"What?" Jane started; then she noticed the ring and gasped, "Oh!"

"Bobby proposed?" Stephanie asked in disbelief.

I nodded my head with a small smile on my lips.

"And you said yes?" she pressed.

I nodded again.

Toni was sitting next to me in the booth. She slumped a little and sighed. "I guess this means

we'll need a new fourth to pull off our little session with Mike today."

"Oh, no!" I said. "I'm still in."

"Dannie..." Stephanie began softly, "... you can't risk yourself. We all know that getting our manhood back is the longest of long shots. Andrea says she doesn't think it can be done, and she know more about this than any of us. If you said 'yes' to Bobby, that means you've become comfortable being a woman. Why risk a great life just to pull Mike's chain?"

I had been asking myself that same question for some time. I knew the answer now. "I'm doing it for all of us. None of us deserved this, and I don't mean just the four of us. The Daeva – Mike – has caused more pain and suffering than we could ever know. How many changed men ended up with terrible new lives? How many even killed themselves? This isn't just about getting our manhood back. I agree; that's very unlikely. This isn't even just about revenge, although that's certainly part of it. This is about ridding Chicago of a public menace. This is solving a problem. That's what we've always done together – we solve problems."

"Yeah," Toni agreed, "but this isn't just a business problem. We're all experts there. This is a magic problem, and we don't know squat about that. Bow out, Dannie. We'll find someone else to do this."

I shook my head. "Ain't gonna happen."

They spent the rest of our coffee break trying to talk me out of doing this, but I was steadfast. We were in this together no matter what. Of course, after we all broke up to try to salvage something of the day before the big event, I was having second thoughts. The rest of our group stayed out of the office for the rest of the day. I just minded my own business and tried to look busy. Frankly, all I was was eye candy. No one gave me any work to do – after all, I was just the receptionist. I would be the most surprised person in the world if I didn't find a pink slip along with my pay check on Friday. If I were Jack, I would lay me off in a heartbeat.

Five o'clock finally came. Tony came up from the garage to pick me up for the big showdown. She was as nervous as I was, and when we got to Becky's facility, Jane and Stephanie wore looks even worse than ours. Andrea and Becky looked concerned; I don't think either one of them approved of what we were going to do.

Andrea confirmed that when she said, "Dannie, it's not to late to stop this."

I looked around the venue Becky had chosen. We were in a deserted basement lab deep in her company's facilities. The floor was concrete, the walls cinderblock, and the ceiling a worn acoustical grid. Becky had already laid out a perfect square for us with the universal do-all: duct tape. It looked perfect to me.

"Let's do this," I said in answer to her offer.

Andrea nodded. "Okay, now here are the rules." They were simple, really – each of us would take a corner of the square, facing inward and aligning our feet at a ninety degree angle along

the sides of the square. No one was to move once we were in place. We all understood.

Then came the unexpected.

"Oh!" Andrea exclaimed. "I forgot to mention; you all need to be naked."

Gulp.

I tried to tell myself that we were all girls, but Mike would see us naked as well. I had been self-conscious enough the first time I had taken off all my clothes for Bobby, but I had been in the throes of sexual arousal then. This was different. Stephanie remained calm; God only knew what Lionel had made her do. Maybe he had even had her strip for his friends, if he was the asshole Toni thought he was. Jane and Tony looked stricken. I knew both of them had dipped their toes in the water by casually dating, but I suspected that neither of them had exposed their bodies to others.

Andrea shrugged. "Sorry."

"Okay," I sighed. "What happens after we're in place?"

"Each of you will recite this phrase in order, starting with you, Dannie." She handed each of us a three by five card with a short phrase – four short words – written in some foreign language that I didn't recognize. "Never mind about the pronunciation. Just remember: Dannie goes first, then the rest of you repeat it starting with whoever is on Dannie's left."

"What happens then?" I asked.

"Just remain still," Amber replied. When the Daeva appears, repeat the words, only in reverse order. That will be a little harder, because he'll be trying to distract each of you. Don't listen to him, though. If any of you speaks any words other than the ones on the card, he'll be free."

"What do you mean free?" Tony asked.

"The initial order of the words calls him – invites him in, in other words. The reverse order sends him back to where he came from. If anything else is spoken, all bets are off. If he's freed, he can do whatever he wants with each of you."

That sounded bad.

"Oh..." Toni whispered.

"What else?" I asked.

Andrea shrugged. "That's about it. Remember, we never got that far. It's supposed to work, and it's supposed to be pretty spectacular. Still, when the fireworks stop, stay in position for a few minutes to make sure he's gone."

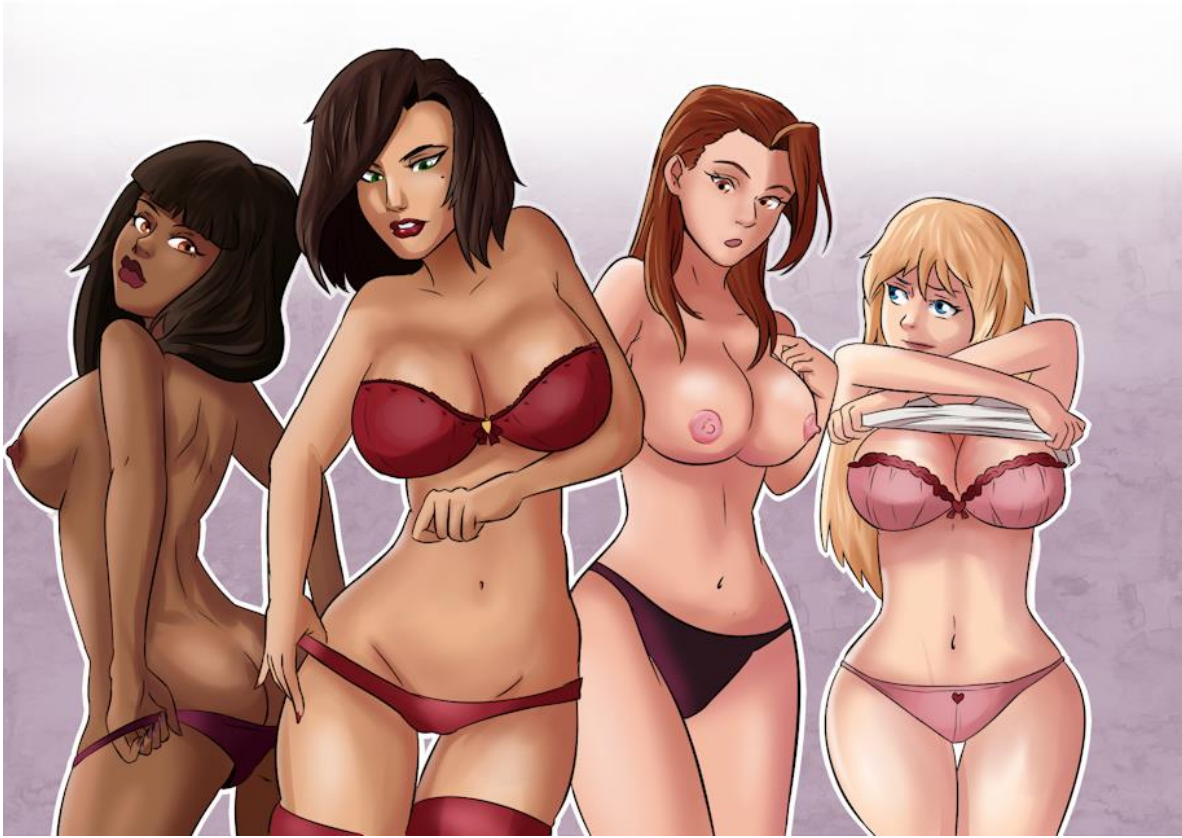
Okay, if we did this, we had to do it right. If we weren't set up right, he'd have us. When we didn't say the right words in the right order, he had us. If we moved too quickly after banishing him, we might still be in trouble. The alternative was to walk away, be good little girls, and hope the son of a bitch never bothered us again. It was tempting, but to be honest, I don't think any of the four of us wanted to be the first to walk away. Looking about, I saw three determined faces; I only hoped I looked as determined myself.

"All right. Let's do this," I sighed.

I wanted to look away as each of us stepped out of our clothing, but I couldn't. Just because I was now attracted to men didn't mean I had lost appreciation for a beautiful female form. We each stared at the others, trying to be casual about it. Toni was probably the calmest of us all, and to my mind, the most beautiful. Her dark hair and Mediterranean olive skin tone spoke of warm summer nights. Of the four of us, I realized she was the most attractive, with full breasts, narrow waist, curvy hips and incredible legs, she was every man's wet dream.

Stephanie was beautiful as well, but her skin tone wasn't dark enough to hide a couple of ugly bruises on her ribs. I couldn't help thinking it was unfortunate we couldn't get the Daeva to change Lionel into a woman and see how he liked getting knocked around.

Jane seemed to be watching us more closely than the rest of us were. The look on her face was one of interest. I had a sneaky hunch suddenly that Jane was into women. Was that the way the Daeva made her, or had she been into men when she was Jason? The latter, I suspected. Well, so what if she was. To each her own. Since she was at the corner opposite mine, I found myself staring back at her, proud of my own body. Strange, when I had been a man, if I had seen another man staring at me, I would have been uncomfortable. As a woman, though, it didn't seem to bother me that Jane appreciated my body. Maybe women are more comfortable having members of their own sex appreciate what they look like.



As a woman, though, it didn't seem to bother me that Jane appreciated my body.

We took our positions as Andrea had instructed us, standing with our feet at a ninety degree angle. Andrea went around to each of us, asking the same questions: “Are you menstruating? Are you pregnant? Any piercings? Any clips, hairpins? She then checked our ears for earrings and our hair for any pins or barrettes. Finding none, she stood in the center of the square and addressed us.

“Okay, you’re all ready to go. Be sure about this, though. If you have any misgivings, now’s the time to mention them. Does everybody have their four words memorized, forward and backward?”

We all nodded. In my mind, I repeated the four strange words over and over. If anybody screwed this up, I didn’t want it to be me. I took a deep breath. There was no sense in waiting. I nodded to Andrea, who nodded back and left the room. I assumed she and Becky could see us from a hidden vantage point. Then I saw a camera in one of the corners of the ceiling. Were there others? I didn’t know. I stayed frozen in position, staring in Jane’s direction.

There was an odd feeling in the air, almost like the moment in the Midwestern countryside on a summer afternoon as the skies become gray and quiet as a precursor to a rising storm. Like the rising storm, the center of the square seemed quiet, but somehow disturbed. Andrea had left the lights on in the windowless room, but they seemed to be dimming, and in their place,

the room was taking on a light of its own – an unearthly shade of green. Again, I was reminded of the sky in a Midwestern storm – the kind that generates fearsome tornadoes, to be exact.

Waiting no longer, I began to utter the words, rewarded with the swirl of the air inside the square. Strangely, the air behind me, outside the square, stayed calm. The green light became more focused within the square, and I realized I could no longer see anything beyond it. I sighed. It was time to start.

After I recited the four words, I realized there was definitely something magical about them. I had pronounced them as if I had known the words all my life. As I did so, the light in the square became a little brighter. Toni was next, speaking confidently and faster than I had spoken. Jane hesitated as the square brightened again, then spoke the words nervously. Stephanie sounded almost defiant as she was the last to speak, and when she had finished, the world went crazy.

The light in the center of the square was almost too bright to watch, and a gust of wind began racing around the interior, blowing our long hair into our faces. A shrill note sounded tunelessly from out of nowhere. I began to worry that we wouldn't be able to stay in our positions as the gust became a full gale nearly pushing us away from our marks. I felt relief as the winds subsided and the shrill tone faded away. Even the light in the center of the room became more subdued, and I could now see something – or someone – standing in the center of the square.

It was the Daeva.

It was as naked as we were, and I could see a massive penis between its legs. Its skin was pebbled – almost like grayish rock, and its face looked like a malevolent version of Mike's face. The nose was too long, looking almost like a knife. Its mouth was misshapen, with teeth larger than a human's pushing out from its dark gray lips. Its eyes, though, were the biggest surprise. They were red, but looked as if they were twinkling as if finding something very funny.

And then it laughed.

It was a deep, derisive laugh, echoing throughout the room. I gasped at the sound. Had we done something wrong? Was that why it was laughing? I suppressed the scream that was building up inside me. I think I might have screamed anyhow, until its gaze shifted from me to each of the others. I only hope that they had the strength to suppress their screams as well.

Then, as suddenly as it had appeared, it reshaped itself into a semblance of Mike, but it seemed to be having trouble holding the proper shape. I shuddered at the thought that this creature had invaded each of us. How had we withstood that massive dick without splitting apart? I could no longer call him "it." His manly attributes had to be acknowledged

"Thank you!" a voice sounding like Mike's voice amplified many times boomed throughout the room. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

Thank you? We had just called him up to return him to whatever hell he came from and he was thanking us? Something was seriously wrong. I opened my mouth to say the words in reverse,

but nothing came out. What was going on?

The Daeva swirled around, facing each of us for a moment before turning to the next. "You don't understand, do you? As I'm sure your transformed friends told all of you, I must be called before I can change you, and once I am called again, I must leave you. I left all of you too soon, I'm afraid. I wanted to stay longer, but I was invited into the Chicago Bears organization. It seems a backup player heard of me and wants to eliminate his competition. Can you imagine the fun I would have?"

He laughed so coldly I swear the temperature of the room fell.

"Well, another time," he sighed dramatically. "Now that I've been recalled, I can finish what I started with each of you. I had no idea the four of you would be so much trouble. Let's start with you, Danielle..."

He moved so quickly from the center of the room to stand menacingly inches from my face that I never saw him coming. I nearly shrunk back, almost losing my footing, but somehow I managed to stay in place with my feet still at a ninety degree angle.

"You're the luckiest of all my new girls," he told me, so close to my face that I could feel his hot breath. It smelled like burning rubber, even though he was holding his Mike image better now. "I meant for you to become one of Bobby's little toys, to be discarded like all the others. You seem to have charmed him, though. I wonder how you did that?"

I actually wondered how myself. As Danielle, I had only known Bobby for a few days. But I think my Danielle personality in this rewritten reality hadn't been as weak as I had supposed. I had done my best to keep it in the background, so as not to taint my new life with the underachieving thoughts of an uneducated receptionist. Perhaps that had been a mistake. The female me may have been every bit as savvy as the male me. She had just made a mistake, following her heart instead of her mind. Could it be that what separated me from all of Bobby's other girlfriends was my mind?

If so, I wasn't about to tell the Daeva. I knew the rules: say nothing to him except the words to send him back. I sensed I was regaining the ability to say the words. That meant this was a test of some sort. I sensed I could speak to the Daeva and refute his challenges, but to do so would ruin the ceremony. The only words I was determined to speak were the words to banish him. Andrea couldn't have told me about it, because she and her friends had not gotten this far. As I became more able to withstand the creature's onslaught, I must have been earning the ability to send him back to where he came from. I just hope the others understood this as well.

But I wasn't able to speak the words quite yet, and the Daeva wasn't finished with me. "Do you think you'll like being a sweet little trophy wife for Bobby? Just think, you don't have a career anymore. You're just a ditsy little receptionist, made to take orders. Won't you just love taking orders from Bobby in the bedroom? You don't have the talent anymore to be a business leader, so you can just watch them all at Bobby's parties, and smile sweetly and flirt with them."

I held fast. I knew he was only taunting me. He couldn't do anything to me if I didn't let him. With fury, I pushed the needed words through my lips, watching the demon retreat from me as if burned. In an instant, he was in front of Tony.

"And you, Toni," he went on. "You had high ambitions in business, but look at you now. You should make better use of that body. You're probably going to get fired any day now, and who else will hire you? You'll have a questionable work history, thanks to Jack, so you might as well get the most out of that beautiful body of yours. Perhaps as a stripper? You could be a natural, and your reluctance to give in to your sexual urges could be mitigated by performing for sex-hungry men."

Toni's face flushed. I had thought Toni was conforming to being a woman – had even dated a few times. But according to the Daeva, she had tried to repress her femininity by working all the harder at her job. With Jack fully in charge, though, all her hard work would have been for nothing. Without even a decent reference, she'd probably have to find other work. I knew she was unlikely to end up as a stripper, but whatever she chose to do would be limited.

I could tell Toni wanted to refute all of this, but she took her cue from me and remained silent while the Daeva tried to break her down. Eventually, though, she spit the words out to him and was rewarded with a flinch that told me she had won.

The creature moved on to Jane. I was worried about Jane. I hadn't really known her as well, since she was new. What kind of a person was she? I was about to find out.

The creature grinned so widely that I could tell from its facial muscles even as it was turned mostly away from me. "So how do you like men now?" he taunted. "Not so much, eh?"

Jane looked stricken, as if a huge secret had just been revealed. So it was as I suspected. Jane, as a man, had been gay. Now, her sexual interests had changed to women, just as the rest of us now favored men. She looked around, expecting disapproving looks, but fortunately, she got none. I had known Toni and Stephanie well as men, and they had no innate prejudices against gays. Jane looked relieved and held her ground.

"Which of these lovelies would you like?" the Daeva asked smoothly. "All it would take is a minor adjustment and you could have any of them – even all of them if it pleased you."

We were winning, I realized! The Daeva was no longer taunting. Now, he was bargaining. What kind of a person would Jane prove to be? She had looked longingly at each of us when we were disrobing. Would she take the bait?

After a few minutes of sweetening his offer, the Daeva was chagrined to hear Jane utter the four words that brought him closer to the end of his time on Earth.

"What is wrong with you?" he roared in a voice far louder than his current human form seemed capable of producing. "You are women! You are inferior!" Then he composed himself, concentrating on Stephanie.

I was concerned about Stephanie. Of all of us, the Daeva had done the worst to Stephanie. At work, she was nothing more than a secretary on temporary assignment to our department. The best she could hope for in Jack's reorganization was to be a career clerical staff person. To make matters worse, she had an abusive boyfriend, thanks to the Daeva's twisted sense of humor. Poor work prospects plus the danger of an abusive boyfriend gave her the strongest incentive of any of us to make a bargain to improve her life. Hell, any of us would have been tempted if we had been in her place.

"Stephanie," the Daeva began, smiling beguilingly, practically nose-to-nose with her, "how would you like it if I changed Lionel into a woman, too? I could make her completely submissive to you. You could make her go get a job while you lounged at home, instead of the other way around. And I could rewrite reality so you had your old job back."

Stephanie looked uncertain for a moment. I could see she was considering the deal. If she didn't take it, she'd probably lose her job, and Lionel would soon be beating her up until she found another position to support him. Sure, we'd all do what we could to help her; that was what friends were for. But I doubted if all four of us combined would be able to get Lionel out of her life.

And how much browbeating had she already taken? When she had been Steve, she had been a strong, confident person. Mike had done a thorough job of reducing her into a proper victim. I could see she was having a harder time than the other three of us had experienced. She was practically off balance, barely holding onto her stance. Her lips were moving, but she seemed unable to say what she wanted to say. I could see the Daeva smiling in triumph, awaiting her agreement to his terms.

Then, it happened. Stephanie began to speak the words. They were slow and halting, but they were the words.

The Daeva became wide-eyed, losing for a moment some of Mike's form. "N-OOOOO!" he wailed as a strong wind began to encircle his form, creating a whirlpool to nowhere as it enveloped him entirely. He began to twist out of shape, becoming darker with each passing second. His words of protest began to lose themselves in the roar of the savage wind. Oddly, each of us felt only a slight breeze, protected from the unworldly storm. I could sense the world into which he was being drawn. It wasn't a pleasant place, a chaotic landscape where others of his kind dwelled. They were like our Daeva, only with different powers, equally as mischievous as Mike's. They had no victims in their realm, but I could almost sense that they were reduced to using their powers on each other in an eternal hell of confusion.

Then, suddenly, all was quiet. The lights in the room got brighter, and we could all see beyond the square. It was done. We had won.



It was done. We had won.

Becky and Amanda joined us quickly, and I was relieved to see them, but after a few minutes, Amanda and Becky were working on something on the other side of the room while Toni, Stephanie, Jane and I stood closely together, in the same order we had stood in the square. Something had changed for us. We were almost like sisters now. It was the same relationship as I understood military personnel feel after being together in combat. We had just gone through something no one else had, in our knowledge, ever experienced. We had faced, if not death, something perhaps even worse, and won.

“What do we do now?” It was Jane who asked the question all of us were asking ourselves.

“We stay together,” Toni said after a moment’s thought. We were all still naked, and not one of us had glanced at the pile of clothing in the far corner.

“How do we do that?” Stephanie asked. “All of us will be lucky to have a job by the end of the week.”

I was already giving that some thought. The moment I had basked in the relief of watching the Daeva disappear into other world, I had realized I had survived and now faced a future as Bobby's wife. But being his wife wasn't going to be enough for me. I was already developing a plan. After all, that was what I did best. "Let me work on that," I told them all. "For today, let's just try to get back to normal."

"Normal?" Toni laughed while motioning to her body. "Like this? We'll never be normal again."

"Oh yes, we will," I promised. "We'll never be men again, but we'll be more than normal eventually. You'll see."

Stephanie was looking at Jane, appraising her body. "Well I need a new place to sleep for awhile," she announced. "I'm not going back to Lionel. Not now."

She had definitely gotten her self-confidence back.

"Any offers?" She was looking straight at Jane, who picked up the cue at once.

"I've got a spare room," she offered, almost shyly.

The way Stephanie was looking at Jane, I realized it was highly unlikely that the spare room would get much use.

I got home with an hour to spare before Bobby was due to pick me up. The reality of my new life hit me full force the minute I got out of Toni's car. I was going to be a woman for the rest of my life. I was going to be a wife. That could lead to all sorts of things I had never planned on experiencing. I would be a bride. I could already imagine Cindy dragging me around the city trying on dresses and picking china patterns. I looked down at my engagement ring thinking of my unanticipated future. I could be a mother. I would spend my life draped on Bobby's arm and in his bed. When I had agreed to marry him, I really hadn't expected to survive this long.

As I opened my closet deciding what to wear, I began to question what I wanted to do and what I really wanted to be. These were important questions which I really needed to answer before things went further.

I planned to be happy with Bobby. Being a woman was going to work out okay, I told myself. Being a wife and, potentially, a mother was going to work fine, too. But there was more that I wanted to be besides Bobby's wife. Then it struck me. Out of nowhere, I knew what I wanted.

I wanted to be in charge.

That's all I'd ever really wanted, I reminded myself. When I had been a man, I wanted a consulting business of my own. It was what I wanted most for years. Sure, I had wanted Cindy to be my wife, but deep down in the very core of my being, what I wanted most in life as a man was to build my own business.

Now, as a woman, that was still what I wanted.

I began to draw my plans. First, I'd have to convince Bobby. That meant starting now, I would be in charge of our relationship. Bobby would be with me just as much as I'd be with Bobby. When we attended events, everyone would say, there are Bobby and Dannie – not just Bobby and his wife. I would be more than window dressing. I'd be an equal partner in our relationship, starting tonight.

Bobby showed up right on time. I buzzed him in, not bothering with my front door. Bobby had a key. I heard him unlock the door and come in. "Dannie?"

"Just a second," I called from the bedroom.

I let him wait a few minutes. I didn't want to come running out to meet him. Let him wait. When I felt it had been long enough, I opened the bedroom door, standing in the doorway until he noticed me. Notice me he did. His eyes opened wide. Standing there in his suit, he had expected me to be ready to go out. Sorry, buddy, plans had changed. I was standing there in a little next-to-nothing I had found in one of my lingerie drawers. It was hot pink and covered very little, and whatever it did cover wouldn't be covered long. "I decided we'd stay in tonight," I told him, my voice inviting and demanding all at once.

He got the message.

Epilogue

All that happened a year ago. A lot has happened in that time. As I look around the modest offices of Moorhead and Associates Consulting, I sometimes think this was the way things were always meant to be. Being a woman turned out to be one hell of a ride – the best ride I could ever have imagined.

Bobby and I got married in the summer. It wasn't a big affair, like many on Chicago's Gold Coast might have expected, but it was what Bobby and I wanted. All of my workmates, plus Cindy, were in the wedding party; Toni was my maid of honor. After a honeymoon in Rio, it was back to work.

That night, after we sent the Daeva back to wherever he came from, I gave Bobby the best sex he could possibly have ever had. As a former man, I knew just what he wanted, and by three in the morning, I was ready for the big pitch.

"Bobby..." I whispered softly.

"Yeah, babe?"

"Can I pick my own wedding present?"

"Sure, anything you want."

"I want to start my own consulting firm..."

That brought Bobby out of his blissful state. He sat up in bed and looked at me lying next to him, naked, in the sexiest pose I could manage. "Haven't you had enough of consulting?"

"I've had enough of being a receptionist," I clarified. "Let me tell you my idea..."

What else was he going to do but say yes? I had the game plan laid out in my mind. Being a mere receptionist, Jack hadn't bothered to do the complete employee package on me. Toni and the other girls had signed a one-year non-compete agreement, but I hadn't. The clients Jack's nephew had lost would be easy pickings for someone like me. Granted, I was "just a receptionist" as far as this reality knew, I knew both the Huffman Interiors and Camden Carpets accounts intimately, and while we had some competition, they were our second and third new accounts.

Who was first? Why, Far Horizons Biotech – Becky Glazer's firm. Then, with Stephanie's help, Chicago Timber and Oil went with us instead of signing with Jack. She had been behind the scenes, too, when I signed Illinois Premium Products. Another takeaway from Jack. We were suddenly on every company's radar in the Chicago area.

Jack had screamed bloody murder when we began picking up some of his best accounts. He threatened to sue, but the Moorhead family lawyers got into the act and stopped him in his tracks. The latest rumor around Chicago said Jack was ready to throw in the towel – sell his firm and retire while he still had something worth selling.

Excuse me, there's the phone. "Moorhead and Associates," I answer professionally. We can't afford a receptionist just yet, so Toni, Jane Stephanie and I take turns answering the phone.

The call is from a small manufacturer who wants a consulting firm that will give them "the woman's perspective" on their product line. That's becoming a specialty of ours, and since all four of us are owners of the firm (I control fifty-one per cent of the stock, though), we're well staffed for the job. The problem will be who to put on the job. Toni is tied up in a major project for Huffman Industries. She's also pretty well tied up in a new romance with my old friend, Parker Huffman Jr. It looks serious, too.

As for Jane and Stephanie, both have substantial workloads. They have some shared accounts, and since they moved in together, it seems they've found a lot of other things to share, too.

As I talk to the owner of the manufacturer, I become more and more convinced that it will be a good project for me to handle personally. I don't want to get too busy, though, because Bobby and I are talking about starting a family soon. I may have to hire a new consultant. Maybe it will be a man this time.



I'd hate to be accused of being sexist.

The End

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