



Reluctant Press presents:

Eric Bunning, PhD



E. B. Stevenson

A 'NEW WOMAN' E-BOOK

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ERIC BUNNING, Ph. D

By E. B. Stevenson

One

To me, it's kind of a slang term to be called a "shrink". I've also heard the term "head shrink" being bandied about. I prefer to be called a psychologist, which I've called myself for the past twenty-five years.

I'm now in private practice, operating out of a small bungalow on my property in Wildwood; it's a short walk from the main residence. Both sit on a five-acre plot of land. I started in private practice in Richmond Heights, shortly after my oldest daughter, Katie, was born. She's now a senior in high school. My oldest son, Eric, is in college as a pre-med major. He hopes to be-

come a psychiatrist. My second son, Chuck, is a sophomore in high school. My twin daughters, Karen and Caroline, are seventh graders. My youngest son, Earl, is a fourth grader. Ten years ago, I moved my practice from Richmond Heights to the bungalow. For the past six months, I've been a widower; my wife of twenty-eight years and longtime office manager, Cathy, lost her battle with cancer. In my practice, I work primarily with people with autism spectrum and gender identity disorders.

It was nine-thirty in the morning on a cold Monday in January. I had just dropped Earl off at his elementary school. I had pulled my Jeep Cherokee into the driveway on my property. I walked over to the bungalow. My new office manager, Gina Summers, had already checked into work for the day. She started just a month after Cathy's passing. She's a middle-aged, blonde-haired woman of five-eight with an average build; she was wearing a navy blue dress, black stockings and navy blue pumps. Gina was going through the transition from man to woman; she was scheduled for her sex-change operation in five months.

"Good morning, Eric," she said with a smile.

"Good morning, Gina," I said as I was picking up a patient's file before getting started on the coffee.

"At least you make better coffee than I do," she added with a twist of sarcasm.

"That's what I hear my patients say," I said with a chuckle.

"How was your weekend?" she asked me.

"It was a great weekend. I went to the combined ceremony for Dr. Bernstein's twins; Isaac was having his Bar Mitzvah, while Shana was having her Bat

Mitzvah. The ceremony was beautiful; I overdid it a little on the knishes, though. Karen and Carrie also had a great time; they overdid it a little on the kosher hot dogs. Eric was home from college this weekend, so he took Katie, Chuck and Earl out for pizza," I replied.

"Did he bring his girl home?"

"Sadly, he didn't. Leah had a death in her family, so she had to return home to Sparta. The funeral is this morning."

I looked over my appointment book, and found that my first appointment was at ten o'clock. I went to the filing cabinet to search for her file. Once I found the file, the phone rang. I answered it.

"Dr. Eric Bunning," I answered.

I spent a few minutes on the phone with a mother whose teenage son was dealing with issues concerning his gender identity. I told her to come into the office at four-thirty the next day. When my watch chimed to indicate it was ten o'clock, the first patient of the day was waiting; a young woman named Gretchen. A red-haired girl, five-ten with a slender build, in her mid-twenties, she was wearing a pink pantsuit and a matching pair of high heels. She was dealing with a double whammy; she was not only dealing with a high-functioning autism spectrum disorder called Asperger's Syndrome, in which social learning is severely delayed, but she was also dealing with gender identity disorder. Gretchen had just started living full-time as a woman in October.

"What's new?" I asked her.

"I explored my sexual feelings with a man over New Year's," she replied.

"Would you tell me more about your experience?"

"I was with a friend of mine, Virgil, for New Year's Eve. He took me to a New Year's Eve party in another town. The deal also included a hotel room, where we spent the night. He bought me the black party dress, matching lingerie and high heels I wore; he was so attentive to me throughout the night. We danced to the slow, romantic songs and a few of the faster songs, too. We shared a bottle of champagne, which we slowly nursed until the New Year arrived. After the party wrapped up, we went to our hotel room."

"What happened there?"

"When he turned on the light in our room, he put on some romantic music on his portable compact disc player. The next thing I knew, he was in front of me, giving me a tender kiss. I told him that he was the sexiest man I ever met, and he whispered that I was the most beautiful girl he's met. I stepped into the bathroom, and changed from my dress into a romantic black baby doll nightie. When I emerged from the bathroom, he was already stripped down to his red satin boxers."

"Did he seduce you, or did you seduce him?"

"I seduced him. I sashayed toward him, wrapped my arms around him, and gave him a tender kiss. The next thing I knew, he gently wrapped his arms around me and gave me a passionate kiss. I had never felt so feminine in all my life. His passionate necking of me made me feel even more like a girl. We both got on the bed, where he gently removed the cups holding up my breasts. I asked him why he would bare my breasts, and he told me: 'Gretchen, I want to make you feel like a total woman.' I whispered to him; 'Virgil, you're already making me feel like a total woman.' He proceeded to gently take my left breast in his hands."

“Is that when he began to fondle your budding breasts?”

“When he took my left breast in his hands, he moved his mouth toward the nipple, and began to suck and lick at it. I must tell you, I was in heaven!”



"He kept licking and sucking at my breast until he was drinking my milk. He told me that it was delicious. He moved his hands to my right breast, took it gently, and started to suck and lick the nipple of my right breast. I had never felt so good and feminine as Virgil made me feel at that moment."

"What were you thinking about next?"

"My entire being told me that I wanted to be entirely a woman, and I wanted to know the pleasure and feeling of being a woman, with a man I truly love. With a sense of urgency, I was feeling down to his boxers, and stuck my hand inside. I could feel his manhood being as hard as a rock! I put the cups of the top of my nightie over my breasts, and began to pull his boxers down. I then took his erect manhood in my hands, guided it to my mouth, and gave him some attention with my mouth and tongue. I began to realize that I was enjoying taking the female role in making love to my man. I kept at it until I could taste his essence. Believe it or not, he was delicious."

"He knows you haven't had the operation yet."

"But, when I am fully healed from having the operation, he'll be the first man I'll make love to in my new body."

"What you've said has also aroused me, although it has been a while since I made love to a woman."

"We didn't finish making love until almost two o'clock. He put his boxers back on, climbed into bed with me, and we kissed until we fell asleep in each other's arms. When we woke up around eleven o'clock in the morning, he was gently caressing my butt, still clad in my panties."

"When do you see him next?"

“I see him this weekend. We’re both on vacation from our jobs; we’re planning to spend a week in Hawaii.”

When our session was finished, I helped her with her faux fur coat, and walked her to the door. “I’ll see you when we get back,” she informed me.

“I’ll be looking forward to the details of your trip,” I said.

When I closed the door, I walked back to the office. Gina had a few papers for me to sign; while I was pulling out the file on my next patient, she asked me: “Eric, I’m going to the office supply store. What do you need?”

“I’m going to need a whole bunch of pens. Katie, Chuck and the twins seem to be taking the pens I’ve had for their school work,” I replied.

“Kids use a lot of pens and pencils in their school work,” she added.

I saw my share of patients throughout the day; I didn’t get my next transgender patient until three o’clock that afternoon. Before my next appointment, Katie walked in. “Dad, may I have a word with you before you see your next patient?” she asked me.

“You certainly may,” I replied.

“I’m planning to be out of town this weekend to visit a college campus,” she added.

“Will you be going with one of your friends?”

“I’m going with Kathy Higgins and her mother.”

“I’m sorry I can’t come with you; I’m on call this weekend.”

My three o'clock appointment was with a post-op transsexual named Paula. She had been through the operation several years ago. She was dealing with the breakup of her latest relationship.

"Eric, I don't know what to do, now that Marty and I have broken up," she said with a sad look on her face and a tear in her eye.

"The best thing you can do is to lay low for a while," I assured her.

"I don't know what you mean."

"I've been laying low for a while now. You probably heard I lost my wife six months ago."

"I'm so sorry to hear that!"

"Cathy had been battling cancer for the better part of three years. She worked as long as her health could allow. Over the thirty-two years we had been together, twenty-eight of those years as a married couple, we endured so many breakups involving our two oldest children. It seemed that Eric was breaking up with a girlfriend more often than Katie was breaking up with a boyfriend."

"How many boyfriends have you had since you started living full-time as a woman?"

"I've had just three; Marty was my third boyfriend. I had one boyfriend while I was transitioning from man to woman; his name was John. The only reason why we had to split was that his employer transferred him out of the country. My second boyfriend was Phil; we met just before I received a final recommendation for gender reassignment surgery. He was the first man I had sex with after my operation. The only reason why I broke up with him was that he reconnected with his college sweetheart, who was actually born female.

Marty was so immature from the start; when I told him I was born a boy, he stormed into a rage, and walked out. We tried to work things out, but I just couldn't see myself having much of a future with him."

"Was it hard to tell him?"

"It was very difficult to tell him that I didn't want anything to do with him. I actually called him a 'transphobic liar', which accurately describes him. I couldn't see myself with a jerk like him. I often wonder to myself where the nice, understanding guys are."

"I often wondered the same thing about where the nice girls were."

"Come again?"

"Before I met Cathy, I also had difficulty getting a date. When I was in high school, I never could get a date. I wanted so much to go to the prom, but since I couldn't get a date, I wound up going to a ball game. The difficulty continued into my years as an undergraduate college student. I was in graduate school when I met Cathy. She was a freshman, majoring in accounting. We met while we were taking a history class together. Before long, we were going to lunch and dinner together. When she received her Bachelor's degree, I asked her to be my wife. She was my only girlfriend, and my soul mate."

"I just hope my next boyfriend is as nice as you are, Eric."

After I finished the session with Paula, I helped Gina get caught up on some paperwork before I closed the office for the day. "What are you doing tonight?" she asked me.

"I'm going to prepare dinner for me and the kids, and maybe help them with their homework," I replied.

"I'm going on a date with a nice young man. He's taking me out for Lebanese cuisine."

"How much younger is he than you?"

"All I can say is that he's young enough to be my kid brother."

When Gina left for her date around five o'clock, I put on my coat, and took the short walk back to my residence. When I walked in the kitchen door, I saw that Katie was doing the cooking.

"What are you making?" I asked her.

"Spaghetti and meatballs," she replied.

"Have you, your brothers and sisters have any homework?"

"Earl is having some trouble in math; I'm helping him with his homework. Chuck got his homework done during study hall today. Karen and Carrie are working on a project for their science class."

Two

Valentine's Day would be hard on me, as it was the first one I had without Cathy. It would also be a full day, as I was dealing with a bunch of broken hearts. One case I dealt with was a man named Derek. He has been dealing with Asperger's Syndrome most of his life; he had been having trouble finding a girlfriend since his last relationship ended fifteen years ago. He was my eleven o'clock appointment that day.

"It's been so long since I have had someone in my life. I've forgotten what it's like to be in love, to hold a beautiful woman and to kiss her. I even forget that to-

day's Valentine's Day," he said with a touch of melancholy in his voice.

I asked him: "Have you ever considered the possibility that the woman of your dreams wasn't born a girl?"

"I never considered it. I never even knew a man could become a woman."

"Many of the patients I see are what we call transsexuals. They have an overwhelming desire to become the opposite sex; in many of the cases of the patients I see, they're seeking the operation that will complete their transformations from men to women. Even my office manager, Gina, is in the process of becoming a woman."

"Do they desire a man for a dating, romantic or marriage partner?"

"Many of them do. Some even start dating men while transitioning to women. There are a few, however, who still desire a woman even after she has her operation. I think that it would help your cause if you become more open to dating a transsexual woman."

"What if I don't become more open to dating such a woman?"

"Then, you will have fewer women to choose from for the purposes of dating, relationships and/or marriage."

"Then, I'm going to have to consider dating a woman who was born male."

"I think you will be well served by the consideration of transsexual women as dating partners. They're more feminine than most genetic females."

When I finished with Derek, Gina informed me that I had a visitor waiting in the waiting room. It was my sister-in-law, Darlene. Somewhat heavy set at five-nine with blonde hair, she worked at a nearby hospital; she was still in her green scrubs. She helped me immensely in the final three months of Cathy's life, and in the months since Cathy died. She had a bag of Chinese food with her. "How are you holding up, Eric?" she asked me.

"I'm none the worse for wear, Dar," I replied before I asked her how she was.

"It's been very hectic the past several days. I thought you could use some company," she replied.

We walked into the kitchen inside the bungalow, where I got out a couple of bowls. Darlene took the three orders of fried rice out of the bag, and set them on the table. One order was beef fried rice; the second was chicken, and the third pork. I also got out a pitcher of iced tea, and put ice in two glasses. Once I set the glasses down and poured iced tea into them, we both sat down.

"I'd take it you've been seeing a lot of broken-hearted people today," she said, making a guess at what I was doing.

"I've already seen more than my fair share," I replied.

"I knew you would on a day like today. I've heard the single nurses complaining about the kind of men they're meeting."

"I had one patient here this morning who was complaining about the same thing. The kind of suggestion I made is something I rarely make to a man in his situation."

“What was that suggestion?”

“He should consider the possibility that the girl of his dreams may have been born a boy.”

“That’s not often I hear that, even from a therapist.”

“How’s everything at home?”

“Greg is doing well; he’s been on a big job discrimination case the past few weeks. It is a class action suit involving a group of workers with various physical, learning and social challenges suing some of the nation’s biggest radio and television station groups over their denial of employment and/or dismissals. School has been great for the younger Greg; he was just named the school’s Athlete of the Month. He broke the hockey team’s record for most saves in a game, when he turned back all forty-two shots he faced in one game three weeks ago. His twin sister, Grace, has been added to the Who’s Who of High School Students for her fundraising efforts, including her recent trivia night to help a student whose father died of cancer. Dan is playing youth basketball right now; his team is in first place. He’s also an honor student at his middle school. Debbie is also an honor student at her elementary school.”

“Eric has made the Dean’s List for the fall semester; he also has a girlfriend. I met her once when I visited the campus; she’s a sweet, small town girl. Katie is going to visit another college with one of her friends this weekend. She should have that choice narrowed down by the time she goes to the prom. Chuck has made the baseball team at school; he’s going to be the catcher and designated hitter. Karen and Carrie got high marks for a science project they did; their science teacher entered it in a competition later this month. Earl had some problems with math as of late; Katie is helping

him. Everyone has pitched in to help with the work around the house since Cathy passed."

"That new office manager you have, Gina? She's had that office organized so well since you hired her."

"I must admit, I did leave it a bit of a mess in the months leading up to, and in the month after, Cathy's death."

"Is it true she's going through the transition from man to woman?"

"She's been living full-time as a woman for the past two years. She's scheduled for her sex-change operation in June. Katie has helped out in the Guidance department offices at school; she's agreed to fill in while Gina has her operation."

"She's so classy and beautiful; not even I would believe she was ever a guy!"

"She dresses very professionally. She's not one for very high skirts or very suggestive dresses, even during her off hours."

"That's a good thing. Greg Junior always complains about the girls who dress suggestively. Some of the kids think he's a prude!"

"Eric had that same complaint when he was in high school."

After finishing my lunch break with Darlene, I drove out to the cemetery to place a dozen roses on Cathy's grave before returning to the broken hearts. My three o'clock appointment was with a young transsexual woman named Laurie. She had been living full-time as a woman since graduating from college the previous summer.

“What’s bothering me is that not many guys ask me out. I’m taller than many of the guys I meet. Most of the guys I meet hover around six feet tall, but I’m six-three. I’ve had a few guys who are my height or taller ask me out, but they’re not that wild about commitment,” she said with a sense of frustration.

“Has the fact that you were born a boy been a factor in their fear of commitment?”

“I don’t think it’s figured into the problem at all. I’ve only been living as a woman for nine months now; it takes time for me to get acclimated with the female role in dating and relationships.”

“Have you got a group of girls you regularly hang out with?”

“I’ve been hanging out with the same group of girls since college. They’ve accepted me as the girl I’ve become. There are a few of us who love teasing and flirting with the guys; I’ve even teased and flirted with the guys on a few occasions.”

“Do you dream of someday meeting the man of your dreams?”

“I’m not counting on it. So many guys feel threatened by a girl like me. I’ve heard the stories of guys running away when the girl reveals she was once a guy herself. There are, sadly, so few guys who would accept us as the girls we’ve become. For girls like me, finding our Prince Charming is, at best, a dream.”

“I’d have to admit that it does take a bit of attitude adjustment before a man even considers a transsexual woman for a dating partner, let alone a marriage partner. I had a patient earlier today who never considered a transsexual woman as a dating partner; in fact, he didn’t know that one could change sexes. I suggested

that he open his mind to the possibility that he should consider adding transsexual women to his pool of potential dating partners. He asked me what would happen if he didn't open his mind to the possibility of dating a transsexual, I told him that his pool of potential dating partners would be much smaller."

"Hmmm...he sounds like my kind of guy."

"He does have one advantage; he's six-four."

"I hope I can meet a guy just like him. They seem to be rare."

At the end of the day, I came home to find that Chuck, Katie, Karen and Carrie had prepared a feast for dinner. "All of this for me?" I asked them.

"It's all for you. We love you, Dad," Karen said with a tear of joy running down her face.

"I don't know what to say. Thanks for doing all of this," I added.

Three

The week Eric was on Spring Break from college, he came back home, this time with Leah in tow. They both had their last classes on a cool Thursday morning in early March. I had to leave town that Thursday evening for a transgender conference in Philadelphia. Eric arrived home around two-thirty; my plane for Philadelphia departed at six o'clock.

"Do you have any requests?" Eric asked me.

"Keep a close eye on your brothers and sisters while I'm out of town. Earl can get to be a little operator," I replied.

“Do you have emergency contact numbers?” Leah asked.

“The numbers are near every phone in the house. I’ll have my cell phone with me,” I replied.

It was nine-thirty when my plane touched down in Philadelphia. After clearing security and claiming my bags, I went to the hotel where the conference was being held. There were quite a few transgender women at the bar, getting a few drinks and engaging in girl talk. I went right to my room on the fourteenth floor, and set my bags down. I thought about turning in for the night, but decided to stay in the suit I was wearing, and go down to the bar and join the girls. I adjusted my tie, and took the elevator downstairs to the bar. I was met by a friend I met at a transgender conference the previous fall. This time, she was in a pink chiffon dress. She was in her early twenties, had shoulder-length black hair, five-nine with a slender build.

“Dr. Bunning, it’s great to see you again,” she said as I came into the bar.

“How’s life treating you, Tatiana?” I asked her.

“I’ve been very busy with graduate school; I’m scheduled to finish this spring. The best news is that I’ve been cleared for my Real Life Test,” she replied.

“So, when do you start RLT?” I then asked.

“I’ll start when I graduate in mid-May; I’m also relocating to the St. Louis area to join a group practice,” she informed me.

“We really need people in our area that works with the transgender population. It seems that I’m one of the few offering such services in that area.”

“Do you still have six kids at home?”

"I have five kids at home now. Eric, my oldest, is a freshman in college. He's home on Spring Break with his girlfriend."

"It must have been so hectic since you lost your wife eight months ago."

"Tell me about it, Tatiana."

She then took me by the arm, and showed me to an empty table. We sat down; Tatiana ordered another strawberry margarita, while I ordered a cup of coffee. "How much of your Master's thesis is done?" I asked her.

"It's all done. It's on the advantages and disadvantages of transitioning from one sex to the other before the age of eighteen. I have to defend it back in Atlanta next week," she replied.

"I'm sure you're going to get high marks," I added.

When our drinks were delivered to the table, we were joined by two more women. One was a middle-aged blonde-haired crossdresser in a red velvet dress and matching pumps, while the other one was a tall, brunette pre-op transsexual wearing a black satin sleeveless dress and a pair of black flats. "Eric, it's so good to see you again," the blonde said to me.

"It's great to see you again, Trisha. It's hard to believe it's been five months since Kansas City," I said to her.

"Yes, it's hard to believe it's been that long, Eric," the brunette added.

"You're looking just as lovely as ever, Dianne," I then added before I introduced the ladies to Tatiana. "Trisha Johnston, Dianne Elliot, this is Tatiana Johnson,

a graduate student in psychology and social work at Georgia State University."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Tatiana," Dianne said with a smile.

"I'm very pleased to meet such a sweet young lady as you," Trisha added.

"So, what have you girls been up to?" I asked them.

"I've been given final approval for gender reassignment surgery. I'll be having it here in Philadelphia next month. After I have my operation, I plan to return to my practice in Orlando," Dianne replied.

"I've found a nice guy who understands my need to be a woman. I think you know him," added Trisha.

"My friend Cubby told me about you. He's just perfect for you," I then added.

"How long have you known Cubby Robertson?" Trisha asked.

"We go back to our days in graduate school. I studied psychology, while he was in medical school. I still keep in touch with him; he's sent a few cases my way since he set up his psychiatric practice fifteen years ago," I replied.

Cubby came to our table a few moments later.

"Trisha, dear, you forgot your drink," he whispered to her before giving her a kiss.

"Thanks honey," she cooed before sharing a kiss with him.

"How's everything at home, Eric?" Cubby asked me.

"Eric is keeping an eye on the younger kids while I'm here; he's home from college on Spring Break with

his girlfriend. I've been able to juggle my family and my practice since my wife died eight months ago," I replied.

"Who is this young lady with you, Dr. Bunning?" Cubby then asked.

"Tatiana Johnson, this is Cubby Robertson, a friend of mine from graduate school. Miss Johnson is a grad student at Georgia State, majoring in psychology and social work," I replied.

"Did you remember your tux?" he then asked.

"I didn't forget my tux for the formal dance tomorrow night," I replied.

"I'm sorry to do this, but Cubby and I have to go back to our table and join our friends," Trisha informed us.

"See you tomorrow night," I said as they left to go to their table.

"I didn't know you went to grad school with Dr. Robertson!" exclaimed a surprised Dianne.

"He was one of the groomsmen when Cathy and I got married; he was also one of the pallbearers when she was laid to rest last July," I informed her.

"How's the kids getting used to life without their mother?" Tatiana asked.

"It's been a hard adjustment, especially for my youngest son, Earl. My oldest daughter, Katie, has eased herself into the role of the lady of the house. It's amazing that she can handle all that responsibility...and she's just an eighteen-year-old high school senior. My second son, Chuck, is also taking on more of the household responsibilities," I replied.

It was just after midnight that I walked up to my floor with Tatiana. It was a coincidence that she checked into the room next to mine. Before she went into her room for the night, I asked her: "Would you like to accompany me to the formal dance tomorrow night?"

"I would be very honored if you would accompany me. It'll be the first time I went to any event with a man," she replied.

The next morning, I got up around nine o'clock. I ordered a plate of pancakes and a glass of milk from Room Service. After showering, shaving and getting into a pair of khaki slacks, a red polo shirt, khaki dress socks and a pair of dress shoes, I emerged from my hotel room to see Tatiana emerging from hers, wearing a navy blue pantsuit, a white blouse, a pair of black stockings and a pair of navy blue pumps. It was around ten-thirty in the morning. "Which lecture are you going to?" I asked her.

"I'm going to the lecture by Eric and Amanda Bronson on providing safe learning environments for transgender children," she replied.

"I'm also going to the Bronson lecture," I added.

We arrived at the conference room where the lecture was being held. There were lectures on transitioning, feminine deportment, legal issues, psychological issues and social issues involving the transgender community; however, Tatiana and I were both interested in safe learning environments for transgender children.

An auburn-haired, middle-aged woman of five-eight with a slender build, wearing a black skirt, matching jacket, white blouse, black stockings and

black high heels, walked up to the podium to introduce the couple.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’m Dr. Kristen Lawrence; on behalf of the entire committee, we’d like to welcome you to this lecture at Transgender Philly. Eric Bronson is a native of Creve Coeur, Missouri. He has been teaching at The Rainbow School for Girls’ campus in Casper, Wyoming for the past two years. He teaches in the Social Studies department, focusing on historical courses. He is a graduate of Southern Illinois University Carbondale, with Bachelor’s degrees in Education and Historical Studies. He holds Master’s degrees in Historical Studies and Social Work from Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey. Before coming to Rainbow in Casper, he taught high school and middle school Social Studies for twenty years in the New York Public Schools; the last five teaching remedial students.

“Amanda Kenton Bronson is a native of Buffalo, Wyoming. Mrs. Bronson has taught at the school since she graduated five years ago. She holds Bachelor’s degrees in Education, Historical Studies and Social Work from the University of Minnesota in Saint Paul, and a Master’s degree in Social Work from the University of Colorado in Boulder. The couple recently celebrated their first wedding anniversary with their students. Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to present to you, Eric Bronson and Amanda Kenton Bronson.”

Eric was in a navy blue suit and tie with maroon dress shoes, while Amanda was in a lavender pantsuit with a white blouse and lavender high heels. After a few minutes of thunderous applause, Eric was the first to speak. “When I came to Philadelphia the last time, I was taking my remedial education students through

Independence Hall. They really enjoyed the experience of taking the train from New York's Pennsylvania Station. Little did I know that I would be married by this point, and doing a lecture on the subject of safe learning environments for transgender children. This is the subject we are lecturing on today. My wife and I teach in the Social Studies department at The Rainbow School for Girls in Casper, Wyoming. It is one of the ten Rainbow campuses, with the home campus in San Francisco, California. Originally set up to teach girls from troubled environments, we've become a leader in the education of transgender girls."

Amanda immediately added: "I last visited Philadelphia in my junior year of college, coming in with a group of my friends from St. Paul. When I first took this job right out of the University of Minnesota, I wanted a unique experience close to home. That led me to the Rainbow School for Girls in Casper, where I've been teaching for the past five years. Our esteemed headmistress, Lori Lyons, asked us to come to Philadelphia to give this lecture on creating a safe learning environment for transgender children. Half of our students at the school in Casper are going through the transition from boys to girls. The students we work with are middle and high school students. They come from all social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. A good number of these students start at our school in the seventh grade; others start in eighth or ninth grades, and transition while students. Some remain after their genders are surgically reassigned."

After a moment of applause, Eric went on: "Not very many of our public schools are safe for transgender children, as far as transitioning is concerned. This is the kind of environment that we have sought to create. Thirty years ago, our San Francisco

campus opened its doors to transgender girls for the first time. There were twenty-eight girls in that first group. The teachers that taught the first class of transgender girls wanted to bring out the best in these young women, both personally and academically. Most of the students in that first group were in the seventh, eighth or ninth grades, and were just beginning their transitional periods. These girls were bullied and harassed in a public school setting because of their effeminate ways. In other words, they were not in a safe environment. Those pioneering teachers not only taught these girls how to be girls, as they had done for seventeen years with the troubled girls, but they also brought out the huge academic potential of these young women. All of these girls would have their sex-change operations within three years of entering Rainbow. They all graduated from high school; fifteen of these girls are now teaching at the other Rainbow campuses. Six of these students now work as psychotherapists, who work primarily with transgender students. The other seven became successful in various professional fields."

Amanda then asked: "You often wonder: 'What can I do to create a safe learning environment for transgender students?'" She paused a moment, before answering: "The first thing we have to do is to take a look at the learning environment the student is coming to our school from. Many of our girls are coming from an environment that isn't conducive to academic or social development. Most are bullied in their public school environments for their effeminate ways. They are often made fun of, ridiculed, and some are beaten by their classmates. The public school systems, as my husband has mentioned, do not provide that safe environment. The next step in the process is to assure the

student and her family that the environment we will provide at Rainbow is a safe environment.”

Eric asked: “How can we create a safe learning environment for a transgender girl?” Looking at Amanda for a moment before both of them turned toward the audience, he answered: “The most important elements of a safe learning environment for our students are a supportive group of classmates, teachers and staff. Our students who are from troubled homes and situations are briefed on having transgender classmates before they start at our school. In many cases, our troubled girls become very good friends, even the best of friends, with their transgender classmates. Before I started at Rainbow, I was given training and orientation on dealing with transgender students. Teachers are not the only ones given training and orientation on dealing with transgender students. Our staff also receives this training, from the medical staff all the way down to our custodians.”

Amanda added: “We also have to identify the academic and social needs of the students. First, we take a look at her academic needs. What are her academic strengths and weaknesses? We evaluate each student once she enters our school, and identify which subjects she is strongest in, and which ones she’s weakest in. We tend to work harder on the areas where she’s weakest. For example, if a student is strongest in English and weakest in math, then we tend to schedule more math courses for her. We also do the same thing with her social needs.

“Every girl, regardless of whether she was born male or female, receives instruction in feminine deportment. Many come into our school with little or no skills in presenting themselves in a feminine manner. This is

the most important social aspect we teach at our school. We also emphasize socialization, especially with our transgender students in becoming more comfortable in their social roles as girls. We have various social events planned throughout the year, some of which allow them to interact with the boys. We have numerous students attend their teachers' weddings, too. We had several students in attendance when Eric and I got married."

Eric then asked the audience: "What's the most important way to insure that a transgender girl has a safe learning environment?" I raised my hand, and replied: "A supportive family is most important."

Amanda added: "Dr. Bunning has the right answer. We always ask for input from the members of the families of the transgender students. We can learn a lot about a student's previous learning environment by asking the parents. For the most part, they also provide them with the emotional support they need to transition from boys to girls, and at the same time, maximize their learning experience. We can also learn a lot about the kind of people they associated with from family members, including siblings. The more we can learn about a student's personal history, the more we are able to identify her social needs."

Eric continued: "In conclusion, we find that in creating a safe learning environment for transgender children, we find that learning more about the previous environment the student has dealt with, how often she was bullied because of her effeminate ways, identifying the academic and social needs of the student, training our students and staff on how to deal with transgender students, and getting input from her family on her background are most effective. Teaching at Rainbow

was not my first experience dealing with transgender students. Three years ago, I dealt with a transgender student I taught in my remedial classes in the New York Public Schools. From that experience, I learned about the failure of the local public schools to provide a safe environment for transgender students. I had never shed so many tears for a student in all my life. Last I heard, that student is now at Rainbow's campus on Long Island, and will be undergoing gender reassignment surgery this coming summer."

Amanda informed us: "If you have any questions, we have information available at the table in front of the conference room; you may also ask either one of us. Thank you for the opportunity, and have a great day."

Tatiana and I were still sitting at our seats, comparing notes. "Have you thought of possibly working for a school like this?" I asked her.

"I've thought about it," she replied.

Eric and Amanda approached us. "Eric Bunning, I knew you would be here," Eric said as he walked up to my chair.

"How long ago did you and Amanda get married?" I asked him.

"We married a little more than a year ago," he replied.

"He's been nothing but a sweetheart since we met," she added.

"Who is the young lady with you?" Eric asked me.

"Tatiana Johnson, this is Eric Bronson, and his wife, Amanda. Tatiana is a graduate student at Georgia State in social work," I replied.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Bronson," Tatiana said with a smile.

"What area of social work do you plan to go into?" Amanda asked her.

"I'm hoping to work with transgender people; I'm a transgender girl myself," Tatiana replied.

"Amanda and I were saddened to hear about your loss," Eric said to me.

"Cathy put up a brave fight against cancer," I added.

"How do you know them?" Tatiana asked.

"I spoke at their school just before Cathy got sick. I was speaking to the girls on careers as psychologists and social workers in private practice," I replied.

"That was before we got married," Amanda added.

"Are you two going to be in Philly long?" Tatiana asked.

"Unfortunately, we have to be back in Casper tonight. Amanda has to see an obstetrician Monday morning," Eric replied.

Tatiana and I picked up plenty of information on the school and the services they provide at the table in front of the conference room. "I didn't know the school has a campus close to where you live," Tatiana said.

"The campus is an hour outside of St. Louis; it's approximately forty minutes from my office. There's also a campus outside of Atlanta," I added.

"I interned there last semester," she informed me.

We walked to the hotel restaurant, where we both had lunch. "What are your plans for this afternoon?" she asked me.

"I'm going to the panel discussion on transgender people in relationships, relaxing in my room afterward," I replied.

"I'm going to do a little bit of shopping. There's a notion that a girl can never have enough clothes," she added.

After we ate lunch, Tatiana headed to the shopping district, while I walked over to one of the ballrooms. The room was getting filled rather fast. A young, blonde-haired woman of five-four with a slender build greeted me. "The name is Dr. Eric Bunning," I informed her.

"Bunning... Bunning... yes, you have a front row seat. Let me show you," she said before showing me to my seat. Just as we started toward my seat, she introduced herself. "I'm Lauren Turgeson," she said to me.

"Are you a psychology student, Lauren?" I asked her.

"I'm in graduate school at Temple," she replied.

"I'm in private practice in suburban St. Louis," I added.

"I'm planning to go to St. Louis for my doctoral work," she then added.

"If you play your cards right, I might let you intern with me," I said with a crooked smile.

When I sat down, I pulled up the writing desk attached to the chair, set my notebook and pen down on it, and looked toward the stage. I looked over the program to the discussion before the four couples on the panel took their seats. Only two of them were in male attire. Another friend of mine stepped forward; several

years ago, I did a lecture she attended in Warm Springs.

“Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I’m glad some of you didn’t choose to go to Mr. James or Ms. Phoebe and get made over to look like a Hollywood starlet,” she said rather jokingly. We all laughed for a moment. She then continued: “I’m Loretta Wilson; I’m a licensed clinical social worker from Kennesaw, Georgia, working with people who have trouble in relationships. This afternoon, I’m the moderator for this panel discussion. Being a transgender person presents special challenges when that person is involved in an intimate relationship. Two of my clients are in such a relationship; one of these clients is a male-to-female crossdresser. We have asked four couples to participate in this discussion. Two of these couples are married, while the other two are in relationships, but haven’t yet married. We will have time for questions from the audience later.”

The couple on the far left spoke first. Both of them were in identical navy blue sleeveless dresses, beige stockings and antique white flats. The tall one was six feet tall, had shoulder-length brunette hair, an average build and bust line, and wearing only a white pearl necklace. The shorter one was five-five, had long red hair, slender build, and also wore a pair of diamond stud earrings. A picture from their double-gown wedding was put up on the screen above them. The taller person spoke first.

“My name is Suzanne Milton; some of you have seen me in my male guise as Stephen. We live in Waukegan, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. I’ve been married to this beautiful woman, Meghan, for the past seven years. We now have a set of two-year-old

boy-girl twins named Murray and Stephanie. I've been a crossdresser since I was six years old, when I put on my older sister Sarah's lavender flower girl's gown. While I haven't purged since I bought my first feminine outfit when I was seventeen years old, I have had long periods in my life when I didn't crossdress. It was also at that time I adopted the name Suzanne for my feminine side; Suzanne happens to be the name of my first steady girlfriend. While I was in college, I worked as a model; most of the time, I would model men's fashions. Sometimes, I would also model women's fashions. While I became a successful photographer, I still found time to become my femme self. I also had several girlfriends who actively discouraged my crossdressing through the years. I thought I wouldn't meet such a girl until I met Meghan a decade ago."

Meghan continued: "I met Stephen first. At the time, I was just twenty years old. We were at the wedding of a mutual friend in Lansdowne, where he was living at the time. I thought he was the most handsome man I had ever met. What really caught me off guard was that he looked a lot younger than his thirty-five years could attest to. We got to talking, and realized we had a lot in common. One evening the summer after we met, he confessed to me that he occasionally dressed up in women's clothes. I had known about crossdressing since I was an undergraduate student in psychology at Loyola University in Chicago. When he finished explaining himself to me, I told him that I wanted to meet his feminine alter ego. I decided to wear my baby blue party dress the night I was introduced to Suzanne. She was dressed in a hot pink cocktail dress. I had become well known at many of the area's transgender clubs. Within a year of meeting Suzanne, I knew I was in love with both Stephen and Su-

zanne. Before long, we were in the habit of buying the same dresses for the transgender socials we attended.

“We both wear Misses’ sizes; I’m a size eight, while Suzanne is a size twelve. I encouraged his dressing as Suzanne as much as our time permitted. When he asked me to be his wife, he was in male mode. We decided to have the traditional wedding with our families first. After we got back from our honeymoon to the Bahamas, we had the double-gown wedding. We wore identical sleeveless wedding gowns for that ceremony. Since we married, I’ve allowed him to be Suzanne whenever he wanted. I’m now working on my doctorate in psychology at Northwestern; I’m presently doing my thesis on women who have crossdressing husbands.”

Suzanne added: “The most important thing we find in our marriage is that we’ve always been flexible. For example, there are some nights where Meghan wants me to wear lingerie to bed. Most of the time, I’m wearing a nightgown. There have been a few times where we are both wearing baby doll nighties. Before I even consider spending some time as Suzanne, we discuss it first. There are some events where I have to go as Stephen, such as church socials. I also have to present myself as a man at work, and she’s okay with that. In front of our children, I also present myself as a man, since we both think the children are way too young to understand why I like to dress as a woman, and why Meghan encourages it.”

Added Meghan: “We both lead very busy lives, and most of our time is spent in our traditional roles. No matter how busy we become, we always find time to be girls. I know that Suzanne will always be a part of our lives. I love my spouse as both Stephen and Suzanne.

When he takes off the dresses, shoes, lingerie, wig and makeup, he's an everyday guy. But, when he transforms into Suzanne, we can get to be a couple of flirtatious girls. I'm okay with that, too."

Meghan then shared a kiss with Suzanne before the next couple spoke. A picture from their wedding day came up on the screen. I had immediately recognized the man; he was six-one with his medium brown hair done in a flattop, wearing a navy blue pinstripe suit, white dress shirt, scarlet red tie with pinstripes, and a pair of maroon dress shoes. The woman was five-ten, with her blonde hair done in a bob, wearing an antique white long-sleeve blouse, a pink knee-length skirt, white stockings and pink pumps. The last time I saw this couple was at a therapists' retreat in Aspen three years ago; the woman had shoulder-length hair then. "I'm guessing I should go first," the woman said. The man nodded in the affirmative.

"I'm Dr. Erica Bentley; the handsome man on my right is my husband, Dr. Eric Bentley. We are both in private practice out of our home in Canoga Park, a district of the City of Los Angeles, California. We have been in private practice together for the past fifteen years; we'll be celebrating twenty years of marriage in December. Our practice focuses on people dealing with gender identity disorders, with emphasis on young people dealing with the fact they were born into the wrong body. I know this for a fact, since I am a transsexual myself. I lived as a boy until I was seven years old. My case was a rarity; I was the first person to transition from boy to girl while enrolled at a public school in California. I am also the youngest person to undergo a sex-change operation at Charing Cross Hospital in London; I was twelve years old when I completed the transformation from boy to girl," she explained.

Eric continued: "Erica and I actually met when she was still living as a boy. Our fathers were assigned to an air base on the island of Okinawa when we were both two years old. We were best friends by the time we were three. My father was her father's commanding officer. Her family left Okinawa after her father was killed in a plane crash on Taiwan. We didn't see each other again until we were both freshmen in high school. My father had just retired from the Air Force, and we settled in Canoga Park.

"On the first day of my freshman year, a beautiful blonde girl in a cheerleader's uniform took one good look at me. I took a good look at her; she later walked up to me. I knew she looked vaguely familiar. I took her to the Homecoming dance at our school the following month; it was a month after that when I asked her to be my girl. She said that before we commit to a relationship, she had to reveal her deepest secret. That secret was that she used to be the boy I messed around with when I was three years old; she had been through a sex change. The only thing that mattered to her was that she had become the most beautiful girl I had ever met. She's the only girl I've ever been in love with."

Erica added: "The fact I was born a boy was never a factor in establishing an intimate relationship with each other. The thing that mattered to the both of us when he asked me to be his girlfriend was that we were both free of any other relationships. I knew, right then and there, he was the guy for me. From the time we were both fifteen years old, we did everything together. We went to see many movies, gone out to our favorite restaurants, even went to the school dances together. He even accepted the fact that I couldn't bear children for him. We also went to college together at the University of California-Los Angeles."

Added Eric: "I knew, deep in my heart, that Erica was the girl for me. The start of our living together was moved up by several years, however, because my parents had to help my grandfather take care of my grandmother, who had a stroke shortly after we graduated from high school. We continued to build our relationship as we were living with her mother, sister and brother. One Valentine's Day, I finally asked her to be my wife. We had been discussing the adoption of children in the months leading up to my proposing to her. We married the following December. Since then, we have adopted six wonderful children; we're already putting our oldest son through college. We set up our practice in our own home, which allows us time to be with our children."

Erica then added: "The fact that I was born a boy never stood in the way of establishing a loving, lasting relationship. He sees me as a woman; he has always seen me as female, and he always will. The best advice I can give a man who's dating a transsexual woman is to see past what she used to be, and concentrate on the woman she is now. If you're a woman in a relationship with a female-to-male transsexual, see past what he used to be, and concentrate on the man he is now. Eric has followed this advice since we were teenagers."

After Eric and Erica shared a kiss, another man and woman was asked to speak. The man was six-two, short blonde hair, heavy build, wearing a red button-down shirt, black slacks, matching socks, and a pair of black loafers. The woman was six feet tall, long light brown hair, slender build, wearing a white sleeveless dress and a pair of white high heels. A picture of the couple came up on the screen; the man was in a tuxedo, the woman in a royal blue ball gown. The man spoke first. "My name is Donald Van Helsing; I'm a

male model and photographer from New York. Everybody calls me Van. I've been a photographer for the past eighteen years. I've been doing mainly portrait photography, working with both transgender and non-transgender clients. This beauty is my girlfriend, Jennifer Winston. Everybody calls her Jennie."

Jennie spoke next. "Van and I have known each other for the past four years. We met when I came in to have a photo shoot done for a fashion magazine. I was seventeen years old and just started living full-time as a girl. He absolutely admired me modeling different prom dresses. When I graduated from high school, I went to work at his studio, setting up appointments. I also modeled on the side to earn extra money to save toward my operation. He asked me to be his girlfriend when I turned nineteen; he knew about my male past. We started living together this past fall; I haven't had my operation yet, but I'll have it here in Philadelphia after the conference wraps up."

Added Van: "The fact that Jennie was born a boy never factored into why I asked her to be my girl. As I spent more time with her, I realized that she and I were soul mates. I've had several girlfriends before I met her; however, I haven't felt as much of a man as the man I feel like when I'm around her. To me, it's what's in her heart that matters. In her heart, she's a woman; I also see her as a woman. We've been dating each other exclusively since she was nineteen and I was thirty-four. I'm glad that she's finally going to become completely female, because there's something I'd like to ask her."

Jennie asked him: "Can it wait?"

"It'll keep until we hear from the next couple," he replied before the last couple spoke.

The last couple was a blonde-haired girl, six feet tall, slender build wearing a baby blue chiffon dress, white stockings, and a pair of baby blue high heels. The only jewelry she had on was a pearl necklace. The shorter girl was five-seven, also with a slender build, wearing a bright yellow summer dress, white stockings and a pair of bright yellow high heels. A picture of the couple in evening gowns came up on the screen. The shorter girl went first. "I'm Ashley Drucker; this young lady is my companion, Cecilia Rogers. I also know Cecilia in her male guise as Chuck; he's my boyfriend when he's a guy. We've known each other for four years now; we run a makeover and photo service in Orlando, Florida. I do the makeovers, while he does the photography. We started this last year."

Cecilia went next. "We specialize in doing makeovers and photo shoots with the transgender community. We have a growing transgender community in Florida; we often get sent to other areas in the Sunshine State to do makeovers and photo shoots with transgender girls in Miami, Tampa and along the Space Coast, in addition to doing photography at female impersonator shows throughout Florida. I do most of my photography as Chuck; there are times I dress as Cecilia to do my work, such as the work I do at female impersonator shows. Away from our work, we share an apartment together in Sanford."

Ashley continued: "All of the guys I met prior to meeting Chuck were absolute jerks. They didn't know how to treat a woman with respect. We met at a transgender conference in Atlanta; he was taking pictures of the event, while I was doing the makeovers for the girls in attendance. He was in male mode when I met him. He really treated me like a lady. It was a coincidence that he had the room across from mine; he

showed pictures of himself dressed as Cecilia. I thought that he looked beautiful dressed as a girl.

“He told me that I was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. I gave him a wide smile; I then told him that he knew how to treat a woman. He confessed that his dressing up as a girl allowed him a unique perspective into how women should be treated by their men. Before the conference ended, we also discovered that we both live in Orlando. So, we got together often after we got back; sometimes with my companion in male mode, other times in female mode. Two weeks after the conference, I met Cecilia in person. We’ve had so much fun en femme as well as our regular selves. Before long, we both knew we were in love. I fell in love with both Chuck and Cecilia.”

Cecilia added: “I was very grateful that Ashley fell in love with both sides of my personality. I am very blessed to have such a beautiful young woman in my life. She has encouraged me to express my feminine side through crossdressing; we’ve developed many friendships with the men and women in businesses similar to ours. We’ve even used the services of some of our friends for makeover and photo shoots; we learn a lot from each other. This past January, we decided to start living together. She moved in with me; our home also doubles as our studio.”

Ashley then asked Van: “Don’t you have a question you wanted to ask Jennie?”

“I think now is the right time,” he replied as he stood up, took Jennie by the hand, and walked to the left of the table. Van got down on one knee.

“Jennie, ever since we met, you’ve been on my mind every day and night. I have never met such a beautiful and loving woman in all my life. I don’t think

I'll ever find another girl like you," he said to her. With a tear running down his cheek, he gently took her left hand in his right, and asked her: "Jennie, will you be my wife?"

The look on her face was that of sweet surprise. She had a wide smile on her face and shed a tear of joy. "Yes!" she exclaimed before he slipped an engagement ring on the ring finger of her left hand. Everyone applauded after he gave her the ring.

He got up, turned toward her, and said: "Jennie, I love you, now and forever."

"I love you, too, Van, now and for all eternity," she said before they shared a kiss.

Loretta returned to the podium, and asked the audience for questions. "The first question will be asked by Dr. Eric Bunning," she informed the audience.

"This question is for the Bentleys. I am also a psychologist who runs his practice out of his home; I became a widower nine months ago. What kind of advice would you give to a widower, as far as dating a transsexual is concerned?" I asked.

"First off, I am sorry for your loss. I'm sure it was very tough on you," Eric replied.

"I give this advice to those in our practice who have lost a significant other. You should keep an open mind when it comes to dating a transsexual. In your case, you would be keeping an open mind to the possibility that you could, at one point, be dating, let alone involved in a relationship with or married to, a transsexual woman. If you have children living at home, you will have to discuss this situation with your children. It would be a bit easier to explain this to a teenager than it would to explain it to a pre-teen, although we're see-

ing more pre-teens who are dealing with gender identity disorder. You're going to need a little more time, however; Eric and I usually recommend waiting at least a year after the death of your significant other before dating again," Erica added.

Before I left the ballroom to return to my hotel room, Loretta caught up with me. "Eric, I'm so sorry to hear about Cathy. She really put up a brave fight with a real killer," she said with assurance.

"Cathy fought cancer with dignity. Her fight inspired not only my kids, but also my patients," I added.

"How are the kids doing?" she asked.

"They're doing well, thank you. Eric is home from college on Spring Break; he's studying to be a psychiatrist. Katie is a senior in high school, Chuck is a sophomore, Karen and Carrie are both seventh graders, and Earl is in the fourth grade. Eric brought his girlfriend, Leah, home for the weekend; they're helping Katie keep an eye on Earl; he can be a carload at times," I replied.

After the panel discussion, I went upstairs to relax. I took a one-hour nap before ordering a steak, salad and baked potato from Room Service around five o'clock. I decided to get my tux out of my garment bag, and place it on a chair in my room before my dinner was delivered. While I was waiting, I called home on my cell phone.

"Hello?" the voice on the other end said. It was Katie.

"How's everything at home, Katie?" I asked her.

"Earl is not being the little operator he usually is. He's got three tests on Monday, so he's been reading

his spelling, science and math books all day. Eric and Leah went out to a rather expensive restaurant for dinner; Chuck is out with his buddies at the gym. Karen and Carrie are at the mall with the girls," she replied.

"At least Earl is staying out of trouble."

"He's not being the usual pain in the butt."

"I just wanted to check up how everything is going at home. I'm waiting for dinner; I'm taking a young psychology student to the formal dance tonight."

"Have fun; I'll see you when you get back."

I had a nice, leisurely dinner after getting off the phone with my oldest daughter. I was pleasantly surprised that Eric was taking his girlfriend to a nice restaurant; that's what he always wanted to do with a girl. With three tests to study for, Earl kept himself out of trouble. I was a bit concerned about the twins, however. It was around six-thirty that I changed into my tuxedo. When I left my room around quarter to seven, Tatiana was waiting for me. She was in a beautiful red satin Southern Belle gown.

"You look absolutely beautiful and romantic," I complimented.

"You look very handsome," she returned.

"Shall we go to the ballroom?" I asked her.

"What are we waiting for?" she asked me before she gently took my arm.

The skirt of her gown filled a third of the elevator. We were lucky that we went nonstop from the fourteenth floor down to the first floor. When we arrived, Lauren was at the door, wearing a pink evening gown. "Dr. Bunning and Miss Johnson," I said to her.

She looked up our names on the guest list. "Eric, Tatiana, enjoy the evening," she told us before we walked into the ballroom. We held hands as we walked to the bar and ordered two glasses of unsweetened iced tea. We sat down at a table near the bar. "Is this your first dance at a transgender conference?" she asked me.

"Yes, it is," I replied.

"It's my second one. I attended the formal dance at the conference in Atlanta last fall. The curve-hugging gown I wore made me look like a brunette-haired Jessica Rabbit," she said with a twist of humor.

"Scarlett O'Hara can't hold up a candle to you, Tatiana," I complimented.

Once I finished complimenting her, we walked over to the bar. I ordered a glass of iced tea, while she ordered a mimosa. We found a table and observed what was going on. I had not seen a room full of ladies in gowns since the Homecoming dance during my senior year of high school. "I dreamed of being a beautiful girl at the prom," she confessed.

"Some folks call it The Prom You Never Had," I added.

She took a good look at me, and flashed a wide smile. I took a good look at her, and flashed a smile at her. "You're such a handsome man. I never thought I would find a man to be attractive," she said amorously.

"Tatiana, I've always known that a boy could be transformed into a beautiful girl. I haven't met one as beautiful as you," I complimented with a wide smile.

Once I finished complimenting her, a heavy set, strawberry blonde-haired girl approached us. She was wearing a blue evening gown. She was one of my pa-

tients before she moved to Texas. "Dr. Bunning?" she asked.

"How are you, Lauren?" I asked her.

"I'm doing great, Doc. I'm now living full-time as a woman," she replied.

"Oh, by the way, this is Tatiana Johnson, my date for the evening. She's also transitioning while finishing her Master's degree at Georgia State. Tatiana, this is Lauren Oscar, a former patient of mine," I added.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Tatiana told her.

"So, when did you start living full-time as a woman?" I asked Lauren.

"I started just four months ago. I've been on hormones for the last year and a half. I just couldn't hide my huge bust line much longer. I'm fortunate to have such supportive co-workers. I told my family about my transition a year ago; they've been supportive of me. My kid sister, Jeri, has been very supportive; we now share an apartment near downtown Austin," she replied.

"When do you anticipate having your gender reassignment surgery?" Tatiana asked.

"Sometime in the next three years," she replied.

"You must have heard that I'm a widower now," I informed her.

"I heard that your wife died from one of my transsexual friends in St. Louis. I'm saddened for your loss," added a concerned Lauren.

"It's been eight months since I lost Cathy. It's been quite an adjustment for me and the five kids I have at home. My oldest, Eric, is now a freshman in college.

He's home for Spring Break; he brought his girlfriend home," I added.

"Is his girlfriend a genetic female or a transsexual?" Tatiana then asked.

"She was born female," I replied.

A tall, heavy-set, dark brown haired man in a black tuxedo approached us. "My date is here," Lauren informed us.

"Aren't you going to introduce him?" I asked.

"Oh, where are my manners?" she asked, before adding: "Wesley Mulligan, this is my St. Louis therapist, Dr. Eric Bunning, and Tatiana Johnson, a graduate student in social work at Georgia State."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Wesley said to us.

"What do you do?" I asked him.

"I'm an operating room technician at a hospital in Austin. That's how I met Lauren," he replied.

"I'm an emergency medical technician. I had just brought in a car accident victim with my partner, who happens to be a genetic female. It was just after I started living full-time as a woman. He thought I was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen; I thought he was the most handsome man I had ever met. Last month, I told him I was born a boy. The fact I was born a boy didn't matter to him; he was attracted to the woman I'm becoming. I asked him to accompany me, and he kindly accepted," she added.

After Lauren and Wesley left to find a table of their own, the music started. It was a slow, easy tune that Tatiana and I could slow dance to. "Would you care to have this dance?" I asked her.

"I would love it," she replied.

The festivities finally ended around one o'clock in the morning. Tatiana and I held hands as we returned to our rooms. Before we went into our rooms for the night, I whispered: "You were absolutely beautiful and romantic tonight."

"Eric, you were so handsome tonight. You also treated me like a lady. I love that in a man. It seems that all the guys my age don't know how to treat a girl like me with respect. You not only respected me, you made me feel so feminine; so much like a girl living her dream," she added.

"Have you been kissed by a man before?" I asked her.

"I can't say that I have," she replied.

"Are you ready for your first kiss as a girl?"

"Oh, Eric, I have anticipated this moment since I arrived."

We took each other in our arms, and lovingly looked at each other. We flashed wide smiles at each other; we then closed our eyes as we moved our lips closer together. The next thing we both knew, we had just shared a kiss. "You've just made me feel like a woman," she whispered before we shared a long, deep kiss.

As soon as we finished with our long kiss, I whispered: "I'm sure you'll have plenty of sweet dreams tonight."

"I hope your dreams are just as sweet," she whispered before we kissed one more time.

After we went into our rooms, I decided to take my tux off, and get into bed. I thought to myself: "Maybe I

should ask Tatiana to share the cab ride to the airport with me." Tatiana was booked on the two-thirty flight back to Atlanta; my flight for St. Louis departed at three o'clock.

The next afternoon, after we went through security, Tatiana and I had lunch at a café near our gates. Our flights were departing from adjacent gates.

"Would you consider joining my practice when you graduate?" I asked her.

"I'll think about it," she replied.

When I got back home around five o'clock, I noticed that the house was in perfect order. Katie greeted me when I got in the door.

"How was it?" she asked me.

"It was very informative, while fun at the same time. I went to a lecture on providing safe environments for transgender children, as well as a panel discussion on transgender relationships yesterday afternoon; last night, I went to a formal dance," I replied.

"Eric, Leah and I cleaned house; we had help from Chuck and Earl. Karen and Carrie have been riding bikes at the park all afternoon with a group of friends; something about raising money for cancer research."

"Where are Eric and Leah?"

"They went to evening services at church; they're now at a Chinese restaurant in Ballwin."

"I can hear Chuck and Earl playing on their PlayStation."

"They're playing baseball. Last I saw, Chuck was leading Earl ten to six in the fifth inning."

Four

It was a Wednesday afternoon in mid-April; I had filed my taxes just after I returned from the conference in Philadelphia. I had a four o'clock appointment with a patient named Sharon. She had been through a sex-change operation fourteen years ago; her son from her male life, Aaron, was away at the same college as Eric. It seemed that she wasn't as focused on herself as she was on her older brother, who was also named Eric.

"I'm not the one with the problem this time. It's my older brother, Eric," she told me.

"What seems to be the problem with your brother?" I asked her.

"I don't know how to explain this, but I'll give you the condensed version. He hasn't been in a relationship in nearly twenty years. He spent eight and a half years during his late teens and well into his twenties in a relationship with an emotionally challenged girl. The only reason why he stayed in that relationship as long as he did was out of fear that he would never find another one if he had broken up with her. It was only after he found out about her family's abusive background and her parents' reluctance to allow her to marry into a stable family that drove them apart. He laid low for nearly three years before he summoned up enough courage to date; however, he dealt with a new problem. Too many young women, many of them around his age, stood him up while he attempted to date. I have gotten very concerned about him in recent months," she explained.

“What led him to be in a relationship for so long out of fear?”

“His life was threatened by the boyfriend of a girl he really liked when he was sixteen years old. I was fourteen years old at the time. As I remember, she was very pretty. A lot of the girls in his high school did not approve of his pursuit of her; however, he just didn’t care about what others thought. It was what he thought that was most important to him. He felt he was deserving of a girlfriend, and the other guy wasn’t. One cool spring afternoon, while he was out on a bike ride, the guy confronted him.

“He grabbed him by the sweatshirt he was wearing, began to yell all sorts of obscenities in his face, called him demeaning names, and threatened to kill him if he even heard that my brother came near her. When he came home, he was very distraught. The funny thing about it was that I was dressed as a girl when he came home, crying his heart out. Feeling my feminine instincts kicking in, I took him in my arms, and comforted him. Our parents knew about my crossdressing at the time this happened. His tears stained the black dress I was wearing. When our mother came home from the grocery store, she was visibly upset at what had happened. Our father was in California on business at the time. I was especially angry at the guy for the psychological damage he did to Eric at the time; I’m still angry at him today, nearly thirty years later.”

“Why would he be in a relationship with an emotionally challenged girl in the first place?”

“None of the girls we knew made themselves available to him, emotionally or otherwise. We had to send him to special education classes after that experience; he was that badly screwed, emotionally and psycholog-

ically. He met her two months before he graduated from high school. She had just transferred to his school from a regular school; he was eighteen years old at the time, she was two weeks away from turning fourteen. She made herself available to him right away; something other girls just wouldn't do for him. Before they met, she went through a battle with meningitis two years earlier; that case aggravated her arrested development even more than it already had. He wanted a monogamous relationship; he didn't want to date other girls.

"He was simply a one-woman man. Despite our concerns, they built a loving relationship. She saw past the turmoil he had been through, and saw the loving man he once was. He saw past what had happened to her, and saw the sweet, loving girl who would date him when no one else would. At the same time, her parents' marriage was falling apart. Toward the end, she told him the sordid truth about her family; a history of abuse that had extended back two generations to her maternal grandfather. Her parents, who were in the middle of a nasty divorce, finally put their feet down. He tried to mend fences with her two months later, but her mother wouldn't let him. The collapse of his relationship came about the same time I began working as a woman."

"Did you have a talk with him about dating women like you?"

"Eric and I had a long talk about that when I began my transition to Sharon. He got stood up by numerous genetic females he attempted to date, many of whom he met online; he just couldn't take it anymore. One summer evening after I began living full-time as a woman, I walked into his room. He was lying on his

bed, feeling sadness and anger. I asked him why he felt this way. He told me, in the simplest of terms, that women just didn't like him, especially those his age. I later found out from one of my female friends that his ex-fiancée spread some vicious rumors about him, which we all knew not to be true. I then asked him if he would consider dating a woman like me; he told me he had seriously considered it at various times, especially with a woman who had been through the operation. He did date women like me for a while; he primarily dated those who were living full-time as women, but had not yet had the operation."

"What happened to change his mind about dating transsexual women?"

"Two months before he turned thirty-six, he mutually set up a date with a post-op transsexual he met online. They had agreed to meet at a coffeehouse in a diverse part of town. He showed up at the time and day they agreed to: two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon in late August. He waited forty-five minutes for her to show up. Usually, he waited as long as an hour before he gave up on the girl. When she didn't show up after he had waited forty-five minutes, he got up and left. As soon as he got home, he E-mailed her; he said he lost interest in meeting her. The same thing happened six months later when he set up a date with a pre-op transsexual who just moved to town from out of state. He waited an hour on a ten-degree February night. They tried to reschedule, but he never heard from her again."

"When did he last date a transsexual woman?"

"Four years ago. Like the previous times, he set the date up online. He met her at a nearby coffeehouse. She was about a year older than me; she was two months

away from undergoing a sex-change operation in Thailand. I went to Colorado to have my operation. She claimed to be unattached. They hit it off right away, and he wanted to see her again. Before she went to Thailand for her operation, she told him that she was already in a relationship with another man. That was the last time he dated anyone in our town."

"When did he last date?"

"The last dates he went on were ones he had to leave town for. He knew this young woman from college; she has a daughter who just adored him. He showed some romantic interest in him; sadly, it wasn't mutual. Her mother had been through a divorce and had been widowed. One sister was mentally challenged, while the other was a recovering alcoholic; he also dated her when he was attending college. After two years of trying to pursue her as a potential girlfriend, he decided, with her mother's influence, that she just wasn't worth the trouble. After eighteen years of trying, he had to give up."

"Did it ever occur to you that there were simply too many men competing for these women?"

"It never occurred to me. When he was in the fifth grade, he had girls dripping all over him. He had it going so good for three years. When he got to high school, the attention he got from the girls dropped off dramatically. He just couldn't accept the fact that there were guys with more desirable looks and physiques that they were interested in. Not even the girls I knew from my grade were interested in him. When I looked back at the makeup of his classes, I knew that there were more boys than girls in his class. Sadly, he was one of the odd men out. Even my age group had more guys than girls. However, I thought he would be just

the ideal guy for any girl. It didn't occur to me until after he told me he had given up on relationships. I think he's beyond help in this area."

"I had these same fears, too, Sharon. You probably heard I lost my wife nine months ago. She fought a brave battle against cancer; after she passed, I thought I would never find a woman like her again. Last month, when I attended a transgender conference in Philadelphia, I was with a young transsexual woman named Tatiana. She's finishing her Master's degree in social work. She gave me a weekend I won't soon forget. I don't think Eric is beyond help here, Sharon. I think what would be best for him is if you take him out for a night with the girls. It really doesn't matter if the girls were born male or female. I think he needs a night with the girls; I'm sure there's one you might know that would love to have a nice guy like him in her life."

"I never thought about taking him out with the girls. There are quite a few girls, especially transsexual girls, I know who are single. I've talked at length my female friends about him; most seem interested in getting to know him, especially the transsexual girls. I think it would be a great idea; I'll try it with him, and I'll let you know how it goes."

When Sharon returned for her next appointment a week later, she gave me a follow-up. "Well, how did it go?" I asked her.

"It went very well," she replied.

"Tell me about it."

"When I got to his place after our appointment last week, I asked him if he wanted to go out on the town with the girls. It was rather funny; he said he had never considered going out on the town with me and my fe-

male friends. He told me this would give him an excuse to wear the nice clothes I bought for him last Christmas. He put on his red polo shirt, a pair of khaki slacks and a pair of loafers, and had a big smile on his face when I arrived to pick him up on Friday. I put on a floral print skirt and an antique white blouse with matching flats; we met up with the girls at a restaurant around seven o'clock."

"Who was with you and Eric that night?"

"We had three other transsexual girls and four genetic females. The three transsexual girls were from my support group."

"What were their first impressions of him?"

"They thought he was very handsome, and a very nice guy. He even held the door open for us when we arrived. He seemed to hit it off with a young girl named Vanessa. She's a blonde of twenty-eight, five-eight with an average build and long hair. Despite the fact he's seventeen years older, she really took a liking to him. One of my transsexual friends, Carolyn, asked why he hadn't had a girlfriend in a long time. I explained the whole thing to the girls, and they found it hard to understand why no girls had ever bothered to pay any attention to him over the years. To Vanessa, that didn't matter. The only thing she saw was the nice man she had just met. After we had dinner, we went out to a club to dance and have a few drinks. Eric and Vanessa were the only ones who didn't order anything with alcohol in it. He was never far from her all night."

"By the way, was Vanessa born male or female?"

"Vanessa was born female. Her best friend, Susan, is a transsexual."

"What did you do after dinner?"



“We went to a nearby club, where we danced. Some of the other guys took a good look at me and my friends. I danced with a handsome young man who drove to the club all the way from Jefferson City. Eric

only danced with one girl all night. They talked and got to know each other throughout the night. We were pretty tired by the time we left the club at midnight; just before we left, Vanessa did something brave. She planted a tender kiss on his lips. He took one good look at her, and began to deeply kiss her. We all whooped and hollered as they kissed. As it turned out, we took Vanessa back to her apartment. She invited us in for a nightcap; the next thing we both knew, he asked her out to dinner. I had a big smile on my face when she accepted his date."

"When does he go out with her next?"

"Their next date is this coming Friday. They're going out to a nice restaurant close to her apartment; they also plan to see a live play."

"How did you fare with the guy from Jefferson City?"

"We only talked for a little bit. We did have one thing in common; we're both divorcees. His ex-wife cheated on him with another man; he was left with custody of his two daughters, ages nine and six. That night, he left his kids with his parents. He held me tenderly as we were dancing. I thanked him for dancing with me, and gave him a kiss on the cheek. He said he went to a few bars in Jefferson City and Columbia to meet women. I didn't tell him I was born a boy."

"How many of the girls danced with more than one guy?"

"All three of the transsexuals who were with us are real flirts. Carolyn danced with at least five guys, and teased at least two more. Susan also danced with five guys, and Michele flirted with at least a dozen guys. She took one of those guys to her apartment, and made

passionate love to him. The other genetic females who were with us weren't as flirtatious. Other than Vanessa, the other three girls were more interested in drinking and socializing with each other."

When we wrapped up our session, she said: "Eric, I hope Vanessa can finally give him the love he needs."

"I hope so, too," I assured her as I walked her out to the front door.

Five

At this point, it was less than one month before Gina's sex-change operation. Just after she graduated from college, I asked Tatiana to join me in my practice. She accepted my offer. Katie had made a decision on where she wanted to go to school; she decided to stay close to home, and attend Washington University.

During the second weekend in May, Tatiana had arrived in town with a female friend of hers from college; they found an apartment in Manchester. They spent the whole weekend setting up housekeeping before they started their new jobs. She had just received her license to practice as a clinical social worker the same week she received her Master's degree. Tatiana reported to my office just before nine o'clock the following Monday morning. She decided on a white blouse, a navy blue pair of slacks, black stockings and a black pair of high heels for her first day. Gina decided to wear her floral print summer dress, a pair of white stockings and a pair of white flats. Gina was already at work when Tatiana arrived.

"May I help you?" Gina asked.

"I'm Tatiana Johnson; I'm joining Dr. Bunning's practice as of today," she replied.

"We've been expecting you, Tatiana. I'm Gina Summers, Dr. Bunning's office manager."

"How long have you been working for Dr. Bunning?"

"I've been working for him for ten months now. This place was a mess before I arrived after the passing of his wife."

"He tells me you're going to take a few months off while you have your sex surgically reassigned."

"I'm undergoing the operation in San Francisco in three weeks."

"I'm going through the transition from man to woman, myself. I've been on hormones for eight months; I just started my Real Life Test."

"I started my Real Life Test three years ago. I was working at another psychologist's office across town when I started. Eric hired me shortly after I received my final recommendation for sex reassignment surgery."

I decided to wear a pair of khaki slacks, a yellow golf shirt and a pair of brown loafers to work that day. I arrived at the office at nine-fifteen, after I dropped Earl off at school. I also stopped on the way back to pick up Tatiana's name plate at the office supply store. I put the name plate in the empty slot below my name plate next to the front door. When I walked in, Gina and Tatiana were still talking.

"Good morning, Gina," I said to her.

"Good morning, Eric. Your new associate has arrived," she informed me.

Tatiana was waiting for me in my waiting room. I walked in and greeted her. "Are you ready for your first day as a clinical social worker?" I asked her.

"I'm more than ready," she replied.

I walked over to a once-vacant office, which I had set up for her. "This will be your office," I informed her.

"Has anyone else occupied this office?" she asked me.

"This office was usually rented out to other therapists, more often for group therapy," I replied.

I showed her the nameplate on the door. "Tatiana S. Johnson, LCSW", the plate said.

"Have you worked with transgender youth?" I asked her.

"I worked with transgender youth when I was interning at The Rainbow School for Girls in the mountains of northern Georgia," she replied.

"I'm seeing an increasing number of transgender folk in their teens and younger. Most of my transgender patients are adults who are either transitioning, like you are, or have been through surgical reassignment. I've also had to intervene in several cases; I've already referred four transgender girls to Rainbow in Jefferson County in the past year. I asked you to join my practice primarily to help me out with transgender youth."

"Will I be sharing your office assistant?"

"Gina is the assistant for both of us. When Gina is away for her operation and recovery, my teenage daughter Katie will be our assistant."

“What will the general age range of my patients be?”

“Your patients will primarily be between the ages of twelve and twenty years. The youngest patient you will be working with is seven years old, and has dressed in his older sister’s dresses since he was three years old. Your oldest patient is twenty-one years old, and getting ready to undergo her operation in San Francisco in July.”

“What kind of occupations do my patients engage in?”

“Most are students at various schools throughout the St. Louis metro area. A few of the patients you will be seeing attend the Rainbow School for Girls in rural Jefferson County. A few are college students attending local colleges and universities. Your oldest patient is a model and clerk for her mother’s dress shop.”

“At what times will my patients have to see you?”

“I’ll be seeing them every three months, so I can evaluate their progress and how they’re adjusting to their new lives. The evaluations I will be making on your patients will determine if your patient is a suitable candidate for hormone replacement therapy or sex reassignment surgery. As a psychologist, I’m part of a gender identity team. There’s also a psychiatrist and an endocrinologist; they help with the medical aspects of the patient’s transition from male to female, or vice versa. You’ll also be helping me and the patient’s gender identity team as a social worker.”

“When do I see my first patient?”

“You’ll be seeing your first patient at ten o’clock. Her name is Kayla; she’s a fourteen-year-old transsexual girl who’s just beginning her transition from boy to

girl. For the first part of her life, she was a boy named Keith. She's known she's been in the wrong body from the time she was eight years old."

Kayla was talking with my ten o'clock appointment, a fifteen-year-old boy named Jim, when the clock struck ten. Jim has Asperger's Syndrome, and he was being taught at home by his grandmother, a retired high school teacher. He was in a red T-shirt and a pair of blue jeans with white sneakers, while Kayla was in a floral print summer dress. "Kayla Rasmussen?" Tatiana asked her.

She stood up, and walked toward her new therapist. "I'm Kayla Rasmussen," she replied.

"I'm Miss Johnson; I'm your new therapist. I'm also Dr. Bunning's new associate," Tatiana added.

Kayla followed Tatiana to her new office, where Kayla sat on a couch and crossed her legs in a feminine fashion. Tatiana took the chair in front of her desk. She sat down, and looked over Kayla's file. "I understand you're going through the transition from male to female," she said in mild, but inquisitive, manner.

"I'm going through the transition from boy to girl," she replied.

"As a matter of fact, I'm in the process of becoming a girl, too. How long have you known that you should have been a girl?"

"The earliest I can recall having feelings of femininity was at the age of two and a half. I sat down and listened to my Aunt Edna play the piano. She was in a very beautiful lavender dress. She had just come home from playing piano at a friend's wedding. I took one good look at my aunt's dress, and thought to myself: 'How would I look in a similar dress?' I didn't put on

my first dress until I was four. That was when I put on a pink flower girl's gown that my older sister, Karen, wore when my Aunt Bethany got married. Karen was shocked when she saw me in her gown. She found an old wig my mother wore when she was working in a local theatre troupe, and put it on me. She also made me up to look like a little girl, and took pictures of me in that gown. When my mother found the pictures when she was cleaning up our rooms a few years later, she asked who the girl was. When Karen answered the girl in the pictures was actually me, my mother asked her why. She said it was for the fun of it."

"When did you finally tell your family that you wanted to be a girl?"

"It was just after I celebrated my eighth birthday. I was smaller than most boys my age, and I often found myself picked on by the other boys. One night, after I finished my homework, I snuck downstairs to the basement, and found another old dress of Karen's. This was the pink sequin dress she wore in a beauty pageant for girls. I also grabbed a pair of panties, and snuck back upstairs. Karen was doing her homework, while my mother was out of town. My Aunt Penny, a makeup artist who has worked with many transgender girls, was watching us while she was on vacation. I put on the dress, along with a red wig that once belonged to my mother, and a pair of pink flats. I pranced about in my room for a while, feeling so girly.

"When Karen saw me in that dress after I had been in it for several hours, Aunt Penny made me up to look like a girl. Karen, who was by that time an amateur photographer, took a whole roll of film of me as a girl. When my mother got back into town after her business trip, I finally told the truth. I told her that I was a girl,

unfairly trapped in a boy's body. She asked me why I didn't tell her this sooner, and told her that she wouldn't approve of my becoming a girl. She said she understood why I wanted to become a girl, and encouraged me to dress as a girl more often. By the time I was in sixth grade, I was going to school as Keith and living as Kayla at home. I have been homeschooled since I finished the sixth grade."

"When did you finally realize you wanted to become Kayla full-time?"

"It was after I finished the sixth grade. I finally told my mother and Karen that I wanted to start living full-time as Kayla. My mother and Karen took me shopping for girls' fashions; I went to see Dr. Bunning a couple of weeks later. He confirmed what my mother and sister knew all along: I was dealing with gender identity disorder. I'm entering my freshman year of high school; Dr. Bunning told me about The Rainbow School for Girls down in Jefferson County."

"It's an excellent school. I did my internship at the campus in the mountains of northern Georgia. The school has ten campuses around the country; their home campus is in San Francisco. They have a stellar reputation for providing a safe learning environment for transgender girls."

"I'll be going to Rainbow in the fall; I got my approval letter last week."

In the meantime, Jim was rambling on about his problems with girls. An interest in girls is quite normal for a teenage boy; however, he was not going about meeting them in the right way. I asked him: "Has it ever occurred to you that while your intentions are honorable, the girls may look at that much differently?"

"It has never occurred to me. I never even gave it thought. I assumed that all girls would look at my intentions in a positive way. I guess I was wrong," he replied.

"That's the first time you told me that. I agree with you in that respect. Not all girls look on your honorable intentions in the same manner. It's becoming very rare in this day and age; a teenage girl looking past your problems, and seeing the nice young man that's locked away deep inside. You're probably getting rejected for dates because these girls aren't interested in you. You may have the idea of taking them out to a nice restaurant, but they'll be thinking you could be taking them to a fast food restaurant. Do not assume that all girls will look on your intentions the same way. I've seen so many young men like you think that, and land in the hospital or, in a handful of cases, the local morgue. Jim, I don't want you to end up that way."

"I guess you're right, Doc. I think it would be best if I pulled back from trying to find a date for now."

"Before you do, I'd like to ask you one question."

"What's that?"

"Have you ever considered the possibility that a girl who would love to go out with you was born a boy?"

"I never thought of it. I didn't even know one could change genders until I was eleven years old."

"There was a girl sitting down with you when I walked into my office to get prepared."

"You mean Kayla?"

"That's the girl I meant."

"She told me all about herself while I was waiting for you. I found her quite charming, and quite beauti-

ful. She even showed me a picture of herself before she began living as a girl."

"When I last saw her two weeks ago, I asked her what kind of guy she would want as her boyfriend. She wanted someone who was nice to her, first and foremost. Second, she wanted someone who saw past the boy she was, and would love her as the girl she's become. It also doesn't matter to her what he's been dealing with; it's the guy he is that's important to her. I hope this is what you're looking for in a girl."

"In the past few months, even the girl's sex at birth has become unimportant to me. I don't know if Kayla is the girl of my dreams, but it won't hurt to try."

When I was done with Jim, I guided him out of my office. Kayla was waiting for him. "What did he say about your girl problems?" she asked him.

"He thinks I should consider girls like you," he replied.

"Jim, that's so sweet of you to say! I would love to meet you for a soda or something."

"I'm free tonight."

"I'll see you tonight, then," she informed him before giving him directions to her place of residence.

Tatiana and I watched them walk out of the office, holding hands. "I didn't know we had such an effect on people," Tatiana said to me.

"It's quite amazing to find out how much of an influence a therapist has on a person," I added.

Six

It was the day that Katie began filling in for Gina as my office manager while Gina was in San Francisco to have her sex surgically reassigned. Her operation was scheduled for that particular morning. The first appointment of the day was with someone I had not seen in four months.

Sheila Bergen, thirty-six years old, underwent her sex-change operation in San Francisco four months prior. When she first became my patient, she was still living full-time as a man named Sheldon. I saw the amazing transformation she went through to become a beautiful woman. Now that her transformation was complete, I was looking forward to seeing her for the first time as a complete woman. She came to the office with her long auburn hair tied back, wearing a pink bodysuit, a long antique white skirt, and a pair of pink flats. The only jewelry she had on was a gold chain with a heart pendant, with "Sheila Loves Joey" engraved on it.

"This is the first time I've seen you since before your operation. What can you recall from your experience?" I asked her.

"The first thing I thought of was when I arrived in San Francisco. One of my transsexual friends, Rosalyn, met me at the airport. She went through the operation two years ago. After I picked up my bags, she took me to her apartment, where her roommate, Stephanie, was waiting for us. She had just had her operation three days ago. Anyway, we sat down and talked about our transitional periods. We went out to dinner, and even flirted with the guys before we turned in early," she explained.

“How do you know Rosalyn and Stephanie?”

“The three of us were in a transgender support group while we were living in New York. The three of us shared an apartment in Greenwich Village. All three of us worked as waitresses at a local nightclub while we were there. All three of us began transitioning while we were in New York. Rosalyn was the first to begin living full-time as a woman; I began transitioning a month after the three of us moved in together, Stephanie began her transition two months after that. That was six years ago. Three years later, Rosalyn and Stephanie took jobs in San Francisco; Rosalyn as a photojournalist for a local weekly newspaper, Stephanie as a clerk and window dresser at her sister’s bridal shop. I came to St. Louis to take a job as a secretary at the office of a lawyer specializing in transgender law. She helped me with the legal name change and with my amended birth certificate. The three of us kept in touch; I sent a get-well card when Rosalyn had her sex surgically reassigned. I did the same when Stephanie had hers; she just got it today.”

“Can you tell me about your surgical experience?”

“The only thing I decided to wear to the hospital was a red knee-length skirt and a white top with white flats. Rosalyn took me to the hospital just before seven-thirty in the morning. When we arrived at the hospital, a handsome young male orderly was waiting for me with a wheelchair. When I got out of the car, I took two short steps before I sat down in the wheelchair. I was taken to the admitting desk, where I signed a number of forms and wrote a check for the cost of the operation and hospitalization. When I finished with the paperwork, Rosalyn came to the admitting desk. She gave me a few comforting words before I was taken in

to be prepared for surgery. I had to take off all of my clothes in private, and put on a hospital gown before I lay myself down on a gurney. I was taken into the operating room, where I was given a local anesthetic in my genital area. That was the last thing I remember as I was given general anesthesia."

"What do you remember when you woke up?"

"The first thing I remember when I woke up was that I felt something different in my genital area. I was still rather groggy from the anesthesia, but it was the first time I realized my surgery was a success. I went back to sleep for a while; when I woke up, Rosalyn was at my bedside with Stephanie. They told me that the operation was a success. I finally thought to myself: 'This is the way I should be. I am now the woman I know I should have been in the first place.' I waited thirty-two years for this moment, and now, it had arrived. Despite the fact I was in moderate pain from the operation, I was really looking forward to my new life."

"Did you think of your boyfriend, Joey, while you were in the hospital?"

"Yes, I did. The first night after the operation, my first dream was of my making love to him for the first time as a woman. I was so ecstatic when I dreamed of his giving my breasts some attention, and his manhood inserted inside my vagina. Throughout the stay, I thought of how much of a woman he's made me since we met at a party hosted by my boss two years ago. He's always looked on me as the woman I've become."

"Who else visited you while you were in the hospital?"

“On the third day of my hospital stay, my parents came in from Sacramento, where I’m from. My mother has always been supportive of my becoming a woman; it took a little longer with my father. He became supportive of my transition to Sheila after I started to live full-time as a woman. My three sisters have also been supportive of my becoming a woman; after all, it was my big sister, Sarah, who dressed me as a girl for the first time. Sarah visited me with her husband, son and daughter the following day. My middle sister, Susan, also visited me on the same day with her fiancé. She asked me if I would be maid of honor when she got married this coming November, and I accepted. The day after that, my youngest sister, Sabrina, who was born two years before I was, visited me with her boyfriend. They all wished me well as I recovered from my operation. Joey was on a business trip to Oakland when he decided to make a side trip to visit me five days after my operation. I was so happy to see him. We spent three hours talking about our future together. On the day before I was released, my friend from my days in New York, Fawn, came to see me. She was in San Francisco to visit her family, and she brought her new daughter, Bella, with her. Her husband, Don, was in San Francisco on business.”

“Did you have difficulties while you were recovering?”

“My doctor recommended that I try getting up on my feet on the fourth day after the operation. I had quite a bit of discomfort when I got up. After moving just a few feet from my bed, I decided to return. Each day, it became less painful until, on the last day, I could walk with only minor pain. I spent a lot of my home recovery time reading and getting caught up with E-mail from friends. All of the E-mails I got wished me well in

my recovery from my operation. When I went to Dr. Johnson last Wednesday, I was very much pain free. Apart from the pain, I had very few difficulties while I was recovering from my operation."

"What else did Dr. Johnson say?"

"He told me that my vagina has healed very well. He told me that I can safely make love to my boyfriend."

"Have you made love to Joey yet?"

"It was last Friday that Joey and I had a date. He took me to a romantic restaurant in downtown Clayton. I decided to wear my virginal white lingerie underneath my royal blue dress. When we finished our dinner, we decided to go back to his place and watch a romantic movie on television. He was a gentleman throughout; he held me gently and shared a bottle of red wine while we were watching the movie. Then, I asked him: 'Joey, would you like to make me a complete woman?' He asked me how he would go about doing that. 'Make love to me, honey,' I replied. The next thing I knew, he swept me off his feet and carried me to his bedroom, like a groom carries his bride on their wedding night. We shared a tender kiss while he was carrying me; he gently set me on his bed, where he passionately kissed me on the lips and neck.

"While we were kissing, I undid his necktie and the buttons on his shirt. Within five minutes, I had all my clothes off, and allowed him to take a good look at my new body. Needless to say, he was in awe at my feminine beauty without a thread of clothing on. Joey and I were totally nude as we were in his bed together, having the most passionate moment of our lives. I tingled all over when he gave my breasts some attention with his mouth and tongue. The next thing I knew, he had

his manhood in my vagina. It was a beautiful feeling; having him deep inside me. I could feel his juices pool inside me as we continued to make love. My first sexual adventure as a woman made me feel like a complete woman. We both fell asleep; his manhood was still inside my vagina. We held each other all night; his handsome face greeted my eyes when I woke up the next morning. That night reaffirmed how much he loves me."

"That must have been some adventure, Sheila."

"That, it was. I have another date with him this coming Saturday night."

After I wrapped up my session with Sheila, Tatiana had just finished hers with Vanity, a fifteen-year-old pre-op transsexual. "What did Sheila talk about?" she asked me.

"She talked about her sex-change operation and her first sexual encounter with her boyfriend since her operation," I replied.

"Vanity was talking about her quinceañera party last Saturday night," she added before she showed me a picture of Vanity wearing her rhinestone tiara and a hot pink strapless gown.

"She is so beautiful," I complimented.

Seven

The first two weeks of July were normally set aside so I could take my family on vacation. The previous year, we didn't take a vacation because we were still shaking off the effects of Cathy's passing. This year was different. Gina came home from San Francisco three days before I took my vacation; she was recover-

ing nicely from her sex-change operation. I took my kids and Eric's girlfriend Leah to the mountains of Oregon to escape the oppressive heat in the Midwest. Before we left, however, we said a prayer at Cathy's grave on the first anniversary of her passing. Tatiana stayed to handle her appointments and take in some of my patients.

The first day back from vacation was quite interesting, to say the least. I had finished a session with a teenage boy named Jon who was dealing with the end of a relationship, while Tatiana had just finished a session with a young female-to-male transsexual named Ralph. We decided to dress for the weather; I was in a pair of khaki Bermuda shorts, a yellow polo shirt, a pair of white ankle-high socks and a pair of brown loafers. Tatiana was in a floral print summer dress and a pair of white flats. Both of us didn't have appointments scheduled until four o'clock. My twin daughters, Karen and Carrie, had a sense of urgency in their faces when they ran inside the office just before two o'clock.

"Dad, may we have a word with you and Tatiana?" Karen asked us.

"Sure," I replied. "What's on your mind?" Tatiana asked them.

"We just came from Jolene Smith's house. We had been out shopping all day, and we came home to see what she bought for herself. She checked her brother's room, and found him in one of her older sister Heather's old dresses," Carrie replied.

"Which one did you see in a dress?" I asked them.

"Their fifteen-year-old brother, Jared," Karen replied.

“Did she freak out when she saw him in that dress?” Tatiana asked.

“She darn well did; she told me to run home and tell you,” Carrie replied with a sense of urgency.

“I’ll stay here while you handle this house call,” Tatiana added.

“I’ll be here with Tatiana,” added Katie.

I ran out to the car with Karen and Caroline; we drove at a rather quick rate to the Smith residence. Jolene and Heather were the Smiths’ only daughters; they had four sons. In addition to Jared, there were Heather’s twin brother Heath, and their two younger brothers, John and Rich. Their parents were both at work; their father was a broadcast engineer, while their mother was an executive at a finance company. When we arrived, Jolene was waiting for us.

“Dr. Bunning, I’m so glad you came,” Jolene told me.

“Where’s Jared?” I asked her.

“You mean Jennifer? She’s in her bedroom. Come, I’ll show you,” Jolene replied.

She showed us to a bedroom on the second floor of the residence. We saw someone dressed in a lavender satin party dress, lavender pumps and a blonde wig. I must admit, he did a good job on his makeup. “I must say, you do look like a convincing girl,” I complimented.

“Thank you, Dr. Bunning,” he replied.

“Would you like to come to the office to talk about this?” I then asked.

“If it would help,” he replied.

Jolene ran downstairs to tell Heath, who was working on a paper for a college class, that she was taking Jared to my office. Heather was working at a friend's lingerie shop, while John and Rich were away at Boy Scout camp. "I'm taking Jared to see a therapist," she told him.

"Did you catch him in one of Heather's old dresses again?" he asked her.

"Yes, I darn well did," she replied.

We decided to keep Jared dressed as Jennifer as we returned to the office. When I arrived, Katie was a bit surprised to see Jared dressed the way he was.

"Who is this supposed to be?" she asked.

"This is Jared Smith, but he's dressed as Jennifer," Jolene replied.

The girls followed us into Tatiana's office, where the three girls and one crossdressed boy sat on the couch. I decided to take a chair. "Who initiated this intervention?" Tatiana asked.

"I did. I'm Jolene Smith, the patient's sister," Jolene replied.

"Who witnessed this intervention?" I then asked.

"We did. I'm Caroline Bunning, and this is my twin sister, Karen," Caroline replied.

"How long has this been going on, Jolene?" Tatiana asked her.

"It's been going on since he was seven years old. That was when he put on an old pair of ruffled panties that Heather once wore. Heather was aghast at what she saw. She then showed it to my brother, Heath. He was quite shocked at what was going on. As time went

on, he dressed more and more often in Heather's old dresses in secret. I found some of those dresses in his room. When he was twelve, I saw him wearing one of the wigs our mother wore many years ago. Today, he borrowed some of my makeup, got the lavender dress Heather wore to the Homecoming during her junior year, a pair of flats that he can fit into now, and did the complete girl thing for the first time," Jolene explained.

"Does he exhibit any feelings that, maybe, he really should be a girl?" I asked.

"I suspect that he's been feeling as if he really should be a girl for quite a while. He's been looking at my fashion magazines as of late," she replied.

"I've been seeing him quite a bit wearing dresses in recent months," Karen added.

"I've been seeing him in Heather's old party dresses and lingerie as of late," Caroline then added.

"Jared, I know you've been wearing Heather's old dresses more frequently in recent months. Is there something that you're afraid to tell us?" Jolene asked him.

"There is, but I don't know if I should tell you," he replied.

"Please do. You're among friends in this room," Tatiana assured him.

"I feel that I am a girl, trapped in a boy's body. I first knew I should have been a girl when I was seven years old. That was the time that I put on a pair of Heather's ruffled panties. As I remember, Heather and Heath were not too thrilled with my wearing Heather's panties. It was about a year later that I put on an old dress of Heather's for the first time. It was a pink satin dress that she wore in a beauty pageant for girls. I had

found my mother's old wigs by the time I was nine. She wore wigs when she was an actress in the local theatre troupe. I put on lipstick for the first time when I was eleven. When I was twelve, I told my parents that I had been dressing in Heather's old dresses. They asked me why I didn't tell them this sooner, and I said that I thought they would reject me if I did this. They told me they loved me, regardless of whether I was dressed as a boy or a girl. When I was thirteen, the same age Jolene is now, I put on Heather's black baby doll nightie. This afternoon, I got into this party dress while Heath was doing work on his paper for school. While I was in my room, reading one of Jolene's fashion magazines, I finally came to the reality that I was a girl, unfairly trapped in a boy's body. I have become more and more attracted to boys in recent months; I feel more comfortable in the female role. I thought about what female name would fit me, and I thought that Jennifer would fit me beautifully," Jared explained.

"Do you know what making such a change would entail?" Jolene asked.

"Should Jared decide to transition to Jennifer, he would first be diagnosed as having gender identity disorder. This is where a person has the body of one sex, but strongly identifies as the opposite sex. Once a diagnosis is conferred, a regimen of hormone replacement therapy is started. He would be given female hormones, which allows for female breasts to develop; the hips become wider, and the butt more noticeable. Before long, he will start what we call a Real Life Test, in which he will be living, dressing and going to school full-time as a girl. Once these doubts are removed, then we can recommend him for surgical reassignment, in which he would become completely female," I replied.

"I'm going through the transition right now. It'll be a while before I have my operation," Tatiana added.

"I'm going to have to discuss this further with my family before we can proceed with my transformation into Jennifer," Jared told us.

"That is an excellent idea. I think we should do this together," Jolene added.

A week later, I would meet with their parents, Fred and Becky. "I'm sure Jared has told you he wants to be a girl," Fred informed me.

"We had an intervention last week. Jolene was involved, along with my twin girls, Karen and Caroline," I added.

"I was very glad that Jolene decided to do this intervention. We've been worried about Jared for quite some time," Becky said with relief.

"Did you ever think that his dressing in Heather's clothes would lead him to these feelings about his gender identity?" I asked them.

"We knew that this has been coming. We didn't know whether this was a phase he was going through, or if it was something more serious. We didn't know that putting on a pair of Heather's old panties would lead to wearing dresses, even lingerie. Now that we're coming to grips with the possibility that Jared is a girl, trapped in a boy's body, it's going to take some time to get used to having a third daughter," Becky replied.

"I've been closer to our other three boys, Heath, John and Rich, than I've been to Jared. He's more like his mother and sisters. He's grown slower than the other boys; he's even shorter than Jolene by one inch. He's only five-three; Jolene is five-four. He's also smaller than most boys; he can fit into Becky's old

dresses, which are a size 10. Becky wears a 12 now. He was made fun of for his effeminate ways at first; his classmates have pretty much gotten used to the possibility that he may be a girl. I agree with my wife; it's going to take me a while to get used to a third daughter," Fred added.

"He's already planning to change his name from Jared Eric to Jennifer Elizabeth," Becky informed me.

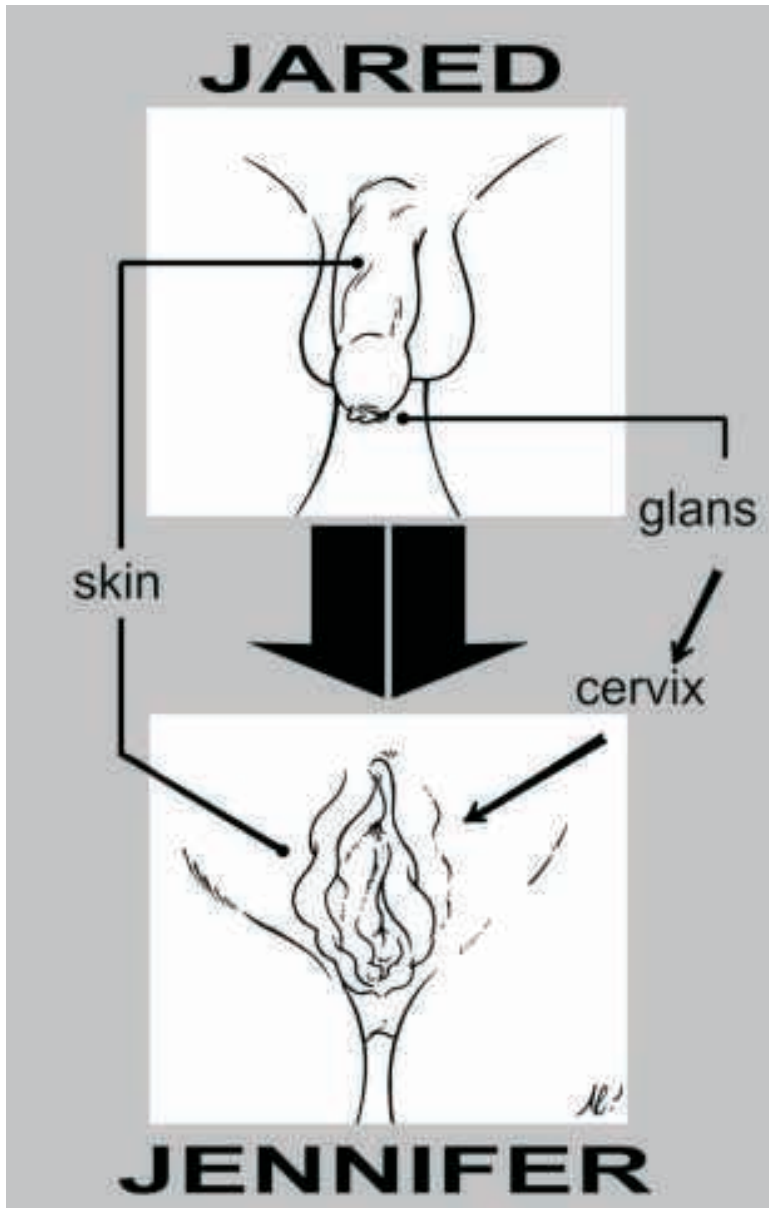
"I've told Jolene this, but now, I think it's wise to tell you. We need to see Jared a few more times before I can confer a diagnosis; however, judging from what you and Jolene have told me, I'm leaning toward a diagnosis of gender identity disorder. This is the condition in which the body may be of one sex, but the person really feels that he or she is of the opposite sex. A regimen of hormone replacement therapy is started; as time goes on, Jared will develop more feminine features. He will be growing breasts; his hips and buttocks will be more pronounced. After a while, he will begin what we call a Real Life Test, where he will be living, dressing and going to school full-time as Jennifer. Once the identity team assigned to his case is convinced of his ability to function in society as a girl, we recommend the final surgery to complete the gender reassignment process," I explained.

"What does the operation entail?" Fred asked.

"In such a procedure, his testicles and most of his penis will be removed. The skin will be used to line the new vagina; the tip of the penis, which is known as the glans, will be used to simulate a cervix at the vault of the new vagina. A vagina and labia are constructed from the penile skin left over. Recovery usually takes three to six months, depending on the patient. This will

complete the transformation from Jared to Jennifer," I replied.

"Sounds complicated," Becky added.



“The transition usually takes two years from the start of hormone therapy to the final operation, depending on the patient. If we were starting the transition today, he’ll be a complete girl by the time the Senior Prom arrives,” I told them.

“He’s already started living at home as Jennifer. Heather has already given him several of her dresses and some of her lingerie,” Becky informed me.

“He’s not ready to step out into the world as Jennifer just yet,” Fred added.

Eight

It was the second week of August. School was close to getting started for another year. Eric was about to leave for his junior year of college, while Katie was about to start her freshman year of college. Chuck was going into his junior year of high school; he made the football team as a backup quarterback and regular place kicker. Karen and Caroline were both entering the eighth grade, and becoming interested in boys. Earl was entering the fifth grade; the girls were already starting to show an interest in him. Gina wasn’t due back from medical leave until the beginning of September. So, Tatiana and I were doing the office chores after Katie left to share an apartment with three friends half way between the Washington University campus and Wildwood.

“Could you get me the file on Roberta Davis? She’s my next appointment,” Tatiana asked me.

“Sure thing,” I replied as I opened the filing cabinet containing the files of cases with last names beginning with the letter “D”. I found the file on Roberta Davis,

and handed it to her. "How's she been lately?" I asked her.

"Her transition is coming along nicely, Eric. She's now living full-time as a girl; she's maintaining an excellent grade point average in school. She'll probably have her operation over Christmas break at the earliest," she replied.

When Roberta arrived at the office, wearing a short-sleeved floral print dress and a pair of white flats, I went into my office to review the file on another patient whom I saw the previous hour, who had a long history of bad relationships with women, due in part to his autism spectrum diagnosis. I was about to write a letter to a dating service, recommending that they reject his application for membership based on that history when the phone rang.

"Dr. Bunning," I answered.

"Eric, I don't think you remember me." A low-pitched female voice was on the other end.

"Hum a few bars?" I asked her.

"You may remember me as Donald Drew. I was in college about the same time you were a doctoral candidate. I'm now known as Dawn," she replied.

"I'd take it you've been through the transition," I added inquisitively.

"I had my sex-change operation three months ago. My employer relocated me to St. Louis two years before my operation."

"I'm a widower now, Dawn; my wife died last year."

"I'm so sorry to hear that. I don't know if you're ready to start dating again."

"I'm ready to start dating again. How would you like to meet for coffee?"

"That would be fine."

"Seven o'clock tomorrow night?"

"That's great."

After I gave her directions to my local coffee house, I resumed writing the letter of disapproval to the dating service. I put a lot of thought into the letter before I signed it. I had addressed the envelope and put a stamp on it before I started on the letter. Once I got the letter folded, into the envelope and sealed it, I headed for Gina's desk to put it in the "out" box. Tatiana was in the office to put the file back.

"What's with the letter?" she asked me.

"I wrote a letter of disapproval to a dating service, concerning the application of one of my patients for membership," I replied.

"Why would you do that?"

"The service asked me for any pertinent information in reference to the psychological health of the person in question. I gave them the full report on why he should be turned down for membership. This patient has had a history of bad relationships with women. He was rejected by girls his age when he was in high school. His first relationship was with a developmentally disabled girl when he was getting ready to graduate from high school. She came from an abusive background; she was abused herself. Since he broke up with her over two decades ago, he's dated numerous women; his relationships have never lasted more than six months. He's even gone as far as to date several transsexual women. Several dates he had ended with him being beaten by the ex-boyfriend of the woman he

was dating. One of those dates landed him in the hospital. I took a look at the sample ad the service provided me, and I thought he sounded desperate. I told the dating service that he's clearly not ready to start dating again. His diagnosis with Asperger's Syndrome also doesn't help his case."

"How old is this guy?"

"He's thirty-six years old."

"I agree; he really needs to take a break from dating, and see whether continuing to do this is good for him, from a psychological standpoint."

After seeing my last patient for the day that Friday, I left the office just after six-thirty to meet Dawn at a coffeehouse in Chesterfield. I was amazed at how feminine and beautiful she had become. She also looked a lot younger than she really was. Her curly auburn hair cascaded down to her shoulders. She was wearing an antique white blouse, royal blue skirt, matching jacket, black stockings and royal blue pumps. "You are such a beautiful woman now," I complimented as I sat down.

"You haven't changed much since we were in college," she complimented.

"Raising six kids did add a tad of gray to my hair," I added.

"By the way, what are your kids up to now?"

"Eric is a junior in college; he lives in Edwardsville with several friends. His girlfriend lives nearby. Katie is starting her freshman year; she and a few friends have moved into an apartment in Creve Coeur. She was my office assistant this summer while my regular office assistant was on medical leave for her sex-change operation. Chuck is entering his junior year of high school; he's on the football team as a place kicker and

backup quarterback this year. The twins, Karen and Carrie, are both in the eighth grade; they're getting used to increased attention by the boys. Earl, my youngest, is in the fifth grade; the girls are already showing interest in him."

"Eric's girlfriend, was she born male or female?"

"Leah was born female."

"It's amazing that you've been able to do it over the past year without help from a wife."

"I had my hands full in the months prior to Cathy's death, not only with the practice, but also taking care of her, keeping an eye on five kids at home and helping with Eric's college tuition. Since Cathy died, I've tried to keep my practice and household together to the best of my ability. I now have an associate in my practice; she joined me in May."

"Who is your new associate?"

"Her name is Tatiana Johnson. She's twenty-four years old, originally from a suburb of Houston; she did her graduate studies in Atlanta. I met her at a transgender conference almost a year ago; I reconnected with her five months ago at another conference in Philadelphia. She's a pre-op transsexual; she just started her Real Life Test when she joined my practice."

"I'll bet she's quite good for someone so young."

"She's taken many of my young transgender patients; they have given her glowing reviews. She did her internship at the Rainbow School for Girls' campus in northern Georgia. Some of her patients attend Rainbow's Jefferson County campus. She's really been a godsend."

"I've been working as a computer technician most of my life. I was in a relationship with a woman in my male life; she gave me a daughter, who's now about a year older than your Katie. I became estranged from them when I began to transition from man to woman. I also had a bad relationship with my father; I also became estranged from him when I began my life as Dawn. I wanted so much to get out of Madison, so I came here two years ago. My employer was so kind to let me take a month off for my sex-change operation. I've been back at work a couple of months now."

"So, what do you look for in a man?"

"The most important thing I look for in a man is that he is understanding of the fact I was born a boy, and that he's attracted to the woman I've become. I also don't mind dating a man who has kids of his own. I've dreamed of being a wife and mother, even if I have already been a boyfriend and father in my former life. I also look for someone who is intelligent, has a decent sense of humor, and still has some romance left in him."

"I look for the same things in a woman. In fact, Cathy said this shortly before her death: 'If I die before you do, I hope you will find another woman who will be as loving and kind to you as I have been. To me, it doesn't matter whether that woman was born male or female.' I have kept this in mind ever since. In fact, this is the first date I've had, other than taking Tatiana to the dance at the transgender conference in Philly, since Cathy passed away."

"I haven't dated a man since I left Madison. This one guy I dated; gosh, he was a creep! He had such a dirty mind, I couldn't stand it. All he wanted to do was get me into bed with him. One night, I finally told him

I had enough. Either he had to act like a gentleman, or he had to go. When I told him I was born a boy, he stormed out. A week later, I was transferred, thank God!”

I took her gently by the hand, and asked her: “Dawn, what would you think about going someplace quiet, just the two of us?”

“Oh, Eric, I would love that.”

We drove to a nearby park to watch the sun set. “When I was younger, I had dreamed that I had become a girl; my Prince Charming would take me away and sweep me off my feet. For the longest time, I thought that it was out of my reach; I mean, being a boy and all of that. When I was transitioning, I was hoping that he would still be out there. Maybe he’s still out there. He may be you.”

“When I was a boy, I had dreamed that I had met a beautiful girl, and that she would become my princess. My dream came true when I took Cathy as my wife. I have never thought the same dream would come true twice after cancer took her life. It’s amazing how beautiful you’ve really become since you became a woman.”

“How long has it been since a woman kissed you... I mean, a complete woman?”

“Dawn, it’s been too long.”

“Kiss me, honey,” she cooed seductively. We moved our lips closer, hesitated for a second, before we engaged in a deep kiss. We continued to kiss until it was time to leave the park. When I pulled up in the parking space next to Dawn’s car, we began to kiss deeply again. When we finished, she cooed: “Eric,

you've made me feel very sweet and feminine. I feel like a complete woman."

"You've made me feel like a man," I whispered.

"When can we do this again?" she asked me.

"Let's do it again next week," I replied before she got out of the car and into hers.

Nine

September was another transgender conference month; Tatiana and I decided to make our first trip since she joined my practice. We would be returning to Atlanta, where we met a year earlier. This time, we would be sharing a room. I decided to wear my navy blue suit, but without a tie to work that day; Tatiana decided to wear her yellow dress and matching high heels. We left St. Louis after our last appointments on the second Friday that month. We arrived in Atlanta just after seven o'clock, and checked into our hotel room.

"What's on the agenda for this weekend?" Tatiana asked me.

"I'm attending the lecture on the transgender person and the family tomorrow morning; we're supposed to be going to the fashion show together tomorrow afternoon," I replied.

"My morning lecture is going to be on the effects of starting the transition before the age of ten," she added.

"Would you like to come down to the restaurant for dinner?" I asked her.

"I would love it," she replied before I took her hand. She was on my arm as we took the elevator

down to the restaurant. When we were shown to our table, Trisha and Cubby immediately recognized us. They were sitting at the table across from ours.

“How’s everything with you, Eric?” Trisha asked.

“Everything is well, thank you. Tatiana joined my practice in May,” I replied.

“Congratulations; I hope everything is working out for you, Tatiana,” Cubby added.

“It’s really a joy working in his practice. I’ve taken so much of his workload off of him,” Tatiana said.

“I still have four kids at home. She’s been a god-send,” I added.

“Have you still found a girlfriend?” Cubby asked me.

“I’m still gingerly getting into the dating scene after Cathy’s death,” I replied.

Tatiana ordered a chicken salad for herself, while I ordered chicken Parmesan. “Do you ever think about finding a boyfriend?” I asked her.

“Sometimes, I think about it. I think you’re a handsome man. I’m not quite ready for a boyfriend just yet,” she replied.

“I didn’t think you would be ready for a romantic relationship with a man just yet. You’re still early in your Real Life Test, but if you want to explore these feelings with me or another man, feel free to do it. I would encourage it.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence in my womanhood.”

When we returned to our room after dinner, I decided to change into a pair of gray shorts and an olive

drab green tank top. Tatiana grabbed some pink lingerie, and walked into the bathroom to change. When she emerged, she was in a romantic pink baby doll nightie. I could not see any sign of the maleness she had left.

“You are so beautiful and sexy,” I complimented.

“Thank you, sweetie,” she cooed with a tinge of romance in her voice before she took a seat on my bed, next to me.

“I have not seen a girl so breathtakingly beautiful since the second honeymoon I took with Cathy,” I whispered while I was gently caressing her shoulder.

“I feel that I have to tell you. Eric, I’m in love with you.”

“That’s quite an admission. I’m becoming more attracted to you, too,” I whispered before I gently took her in my arms. I looked her right in her eyes before we shared a long, tender kiss.

“I love you, Eric,” she whispered to me.

“I love you, too, Tatiana,” I whispered before we shared another smooch.

The next morning, Tatiana and I had breakfast in our room. We each had a cinnamon roll and a cup of coffee. I got into a pair of khaki slacks, a white button-down shirt, a maroon blazer and a pair of maroon wing-tipped shoes. Tatiana decided on her pink blouse, matching skirt and jacket, with white stockings and pink high heels. It was around ten o’clock that we left our room; I arrived at my scheduled lecture a few minutes later. It started at ten-thirty.

A red-haired girl from the college Tatiana graduated from came to the podium to introduce the speaker. “Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this

morning's lecture. Dr. Linda Thomas is a family therapist based in Nashville, Tennessee. She has worked with transgender patients and their families for the past fifteen years. Dr. Thomas got her Bachelor's degree in psychology from Vanderbilt University in Nashville; she received her Master's in social work from the University of Tennessee, and got her doctorate at Stanford University before setting up her private practice in Nashville. She got into working with the transgender community when one of her relatives transitioned from female to male; she has just written a book on the topic, which will be released in November. She lives in Nashville with her husband and two daughters. I hereby present to you, Dr. Linda Thomas."

Everyone applauded as a tall blonde woman in a fuchsia dress came to the podium. "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Working with the transgender community in Nashville, as well as their families, has given me the kind of experience very few people have. I began working with the transgendered and their families after my cousin, Karen Roberts, told me that her daughter, Kayla, was becoming a male. She had two other daughters, Renee and Susan, along with one son, Reg. Karen and her husband, Reggie, were unsure how to approach the possibility of one of their girls becoming a boy. I told them that they should be as supportive as possible as Kayla was transitioning to manhood. I also told their other children to be as supportive as they could, and try to understand why Kayla wanted to become a male. Now, Kayla is known as Ken, and has just had his operation to complete his transition to manhood last month."

After showing a slide show of Kayla's transition to Kenneth, she continued the lecture. "You often wonder why someone in your own family would dress in the

clothes of the opposite sex. What if that also includes putting on a wig? How about putting on jewelry or makeup? If it involves your family member perfecting the look more common to the opposite sex, then you must try to ask that family member if he or she strongly identifies with the opposite sex. If the answer is yes, ask them why your family member didn't tell you before. Don't be afraid to ask them what they need. Most importantly, no matter how difficult it may be, give that family member your love and support."

A moment of applause ensued before she continued on with the lecture. "Here's a case of a person who transitioned from man to woman with the support of her family. Alison started life as a boy named Aaron. The first time he put on an article of female clothing was at the age of five, when he put on a frilly dress that his older sister, Amy, wore in a girls' beauty pageant. Amy, who was nine years old at the time, laughed when she saw her brother in her old dress.

"Their parents, Allen and Stephanie, thought nothing of it. As time went on, Aaron's dressing in feminine attire increased. Amy even helped him with his feminine image. The rest of their family just didn't know what to think. When he was fourteen years old, and having just finished the eighth grade, his family was getting ready to relocate to Nashville from a small town in Kansas. He finally told his family that he wanted to become a girl. In addition to her parents and Amy, her big sister, Sarah, big brother Al, and younger brothers Steve and Seth, also pledged their support as Alison transitioned from boy to girl.

"Her parents went as far as to pay for her hormone treatments and new wardrobe. Her sisters, Amy and Sarah, threw a formal birthday party for her when she

turned fifteen; this kind of party is called a quinceañera party. After finishing her sophomore year of high school, her parents, aunts, uncles and even cousins pitched in to pay for her sex-change operation. She was operated on in San Francisco; her sisters threw her a Sweet Sixteen party when she turned sixteen years old. She's now a nineteen-year-old sophomore at the University of Southern California, majoring in psychology. She's working as a model for a top agency in Los Angeles, and has a wonderful boyfriend. Her family still visits her several times a year. They are very happy to have another daughter. She has been very well-adjusted, thanks to the love and support of her family."

After going through a slide show of Alison's transition, Dr. Thomas began on another case. "Lack of support from family members can have a lasting impact on a transgender person. Take the case of Danica. She began her life as a boy named Daniel in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. At the age of four, he first put on a dress that his older sister, Donna, wore to a Christmas pageant. Their father had left them when he was five years old. Being raised by his mother, he had continued to deal with his feelings that he was in the body of the wrong gender. Neither his mother nor his sister was at all supportive of his dressing in girls' clothes.

"When he was eighteen years old, he told them that he was a woman, trapped in a man's body. His mother and sister summarily threw him out of the house. He escaped to Atlanta with all of his personal records, and began to work as a photographer's model. He was modeling mainly women's clothing. When he turned twenty-one, he started a second job as a waitress at a nightclub. That was when he began to live full-time as Danica. She moved in with a couple of young transsexual women, who encouraged her in her transition. She

even worked briefly as a prostitute while trying to earn money for her operation. She remained bitter toward her mother and sister for not accepting her as the woman she had become. I talked at length with her mother and sister about this case. Her mother was brought up in a strict, fundamentalist Christian home in Alabama; she was taught not to accept anyone who was perceived as 'different'. Unfortunately, she passed it on to Donna. I asked what she would do to get both of them to change their minds about accepting Danica as a girl, and they wouldn't have any piece of it. They only accepted her as a man, and, to them, he was dead. Danica tried so hard to convince her family to accept her as a woman. Despite her rejection by her family, she has adjusted to her new life. She has met a supportive boyfriend; they met a year ago at the club where she works. He will be by her side when she has her sex-change operation next month in Philadelphia. She hasn't quite forgiven her family for blatantly rejecting her, forcing her to leave home three years ago."

After showing pictures of Danica's transition, the lecture continued. "Along with my colleagues who work with the transgender population, I have seen both types of cases. It saddens and hurts us when we find a transgender person whose family is not supportive of their family member's transition from one gender to another. The support of the family in one's transition from one gender to the other is very important if you are to have a well-adjusted person once the transition is completed. If you have a son who wants to become your daughter, and vice versa, please ask what you can do to help them. Your support is the key to a happy transgender family member."

Everyone applauded as she finished her lecture. I took plenty of notes on the lecture, and returned to the

room. Tatiana hadn't gotten back from her lecture yet. So, I opened my notebook to read the notes I had taken. She walked into the room five minutes after I returned.

"How was your lecture, dear?" she asked me.

"It was interesting. I took plenty of notes," I replied.

"I also took plenty of notes on the lecture I attended," she added.

Tatiana and I went to a café across the street to have lunch. We both ordered roast beef sandwiches with onion rings; she had a glass of ice water, while I went for a glass of lemon-lime soda. When we got back to the hotel room, we realized that we only had a few minutes before the doors opened for the fashion show. All of the models in the show were transgender. First, we saw several post-op transsexuals walk down the runway in lingerie. The last three models were in bridal lingerie, complete with short veils. Then, we saw several pre-op transsexuals model the latest dresses. That was followed by a group of transgender teenage girls modeling the latest prom and homecoming gowns and dresses. Finally, the show wrapped up with some of the area's top young female impersonators modeling bridal gowns. Tatiana noticed a strapless design with a huge skirt. "That's what I would want to wear whenever I get married," she whispered in my ear.

"Your dream might come true sooner than you think, darling," I whispered before we exchanged a smooch.

That night, we would go to the party. Tatiana selected a royal blue mermaid-style gown for the occasion, while I wore my navy blue suit and maroon tie. We met Trisha and Cubby when we arrived; Trisha

was in a red formal gown, while Cubby was in a forest green suit.

“Did you enjoy the lectures today?” Cubby asked me.

“I did enjoy the lecture I attended. Dr. Thomas gave great insight into the importance of having a supportive family,” I replied.

“I saw Tatiana at the lecture I attended. Lori Lyons delivered a great lecture on young transgender folk,” he added.

“I learned a lot in that lecture,” Tatiana then added.

The four of us found a table, where we ordered two pizzas for the four of us to split. One was a sausage and hamburger pizza, the other being sausage and pepperoni. We shared two bottles of red wine from Georgia. Just after nine o’clock, the dancing began. When we heard a slow song, I asked her: “Tatiana, may I have this dance?”

“You may, honey,” she lovingly replied.

We held each other close as the song played. It was a slow, romantic song. It was while we were dancing that we both started to realize that it was true. Tatiana and I were in love. “You are the most beautiful woman in the world,” I whispered in her ear.

“You’re the most handsome man to me. You make me feel so feminine,” she whispered seductively. When the song ended, we shared a tender kiss in front of everyone.

When we returned to our table, Trisha and Cubby both had smiles on their faces. “Are you two in love?” Trisha asked us.

"If you have to know, Trisha...yes. Eric and I are in love," Tatiana replied.

"We finally confessed our love for each other last night," I added.

It was around one o'clock in the morning that we returned to our room. I decided to change out of my suit into a red pair of boxer shorts and a white T-shirt. Tatiana grabbed some black lingerie, and changed in the bathroom. When she emerged, she was wearing a black see-through nightgown with satin, lace-trimmed cups for her breasts and matching G-string panties. She sashayed toward the window, where I was standing.

"You look so romantic tonight," I whispered as I took her in my arms.

"So do you, honey," she whispered as she wrapped her arms around me.

"I never get tired of any city view," I whispered as she snuggled up to me.

"Neither do I," she cooed as we looked in each other's eyes.

After hesitating for a moment, she whispered: "Eric, my love, kiss me."

We then engaged in a series of deep, but tender, kisses. I was tempted to make love to her, but she would only allow me to neck her. "Oh, Eric, you make me feel so much like a woman in love," she whispered erotically as I gave her neck numerous nibbles and kisses.

"Come to bed with me, my love," she whispered lustfully.

I swept her off her feet, and gently set her down in her bed. I knew it would be the first time I would share

a bed with a woman since Cathy got sick. I whispered: "I have never felt this strongly for a woman in a long time."

"I've never felt this strongly for a man in my entire life," she whispered before we deeply kissed. We fell asleep in each other's arms. When we got back home, I asked her to be my girlfriend. She accepted unconditionally.

Ten

By the early part of October, Tatiana and I had become very good about separating our professional relationship from our personal relationship. Gina was the only one who knew I was now dating Tatiana exclusively, apart from my children and several of Tatiana's closest friends. On our lunch break on my birthday, the twenty-fourth of the month, Tatiana wanted to talk about her family. They have always been supportive of her transition.

"My mother called me last night," she informed me.

"What did she want to talk about?" I asked her.

"She wanted to see how I was doing. I told her about joining this practice, and the work I was doing. When I told her that you were my boyfriend, she was very happy to hear it."

"What else did she say?"

"She told me that she and my father are coming up to St. Louis to visit me next week."

"I'll be looking forward to meeting them."

"They want to meet you, too. That's why they want to take us out to dinner."

“I’ve heard that they’ve always been supportive of your transition from man to woman.”

“My mother has been nothing but a sweetheart. When she first saw me dressed as a girl when I was six years old, she just doted over me. When I was ten years old, I went out on Halloween in my mother’s wedding gown. It was such a special time; she made me look my best. Even my father was thrilled at my beauty. I have two younger brothers and a younger sister; they were also supportive of me whenever I dressed as a girl. When I finally told them that I was a girl unfairly trapped in a male body, they helped me with a new wardrobe, and got my hormone treatments started. Even my father is pleased I’ve found a boyfriend.”

“My parents are closing in on eighty now; they’re glad I’ve found a new girlfriend. Even Cathy’s folks are pleased I found someone new.”

Four days later, Tatiana’s parents, Christopher and Tanya Johnson, arrived in town. They checked into a hotel close to our practice. After we finished our final sessions around six o’clock, Tatiana and I headed for the hotel to meet her parents.

When we arrived, we were met by a middle age couple. Her father was six-seven with an athletic build, salt-and-pepper hair and wearing a maroon polo shirt, a pair of khaki slacks and a pair of brown loafers. Her mother was five-eleven, with shoulder-length brunette hair, wearing a yellow chiffon dress and a pair of yellow flats. They were thrilled as to how beautiful their daughter had become.

“You’re looking even more beautiful than ever,” Christopher complimented.

“Thank you, Dad,” she said before they exchanged a smooch.

“I’m very pleased you’ve found something you like,” Tanya added.

“Mom, Dad, this is my partner, both in professional practice and in life, Dr. Eric Bunning. Dr. Bunning, these are my parents, Chris and Tanya Johnson,” she told them, looking directly at me.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” Christopher said while shaking my hand.

“It’s an honor to meet someone who is interested in our daughter’s professional development, not to mention her development as a woman,” Tanya added.

After we sat down and ordered our dinners, Christopher asked me: “What do and Tatiana do in your practice?”

“Tatiana and I work with a variety of patients. She’s taken over much of my workload with young transgender patients like her. I’m mainly working with older transgender patients, as well as patients who deal with relationship problems and those who are diagnosed with high-functioning autism spectrum disorders. Tatiana joined my practice in May; I started to become overwhelmed with patients by that time. It got to the point where I didn’t even have time to make house calls, especially for interventions. My physician recommended that I cut back on my workload; he was concerned that I was becoming a workaholic. So, I asked Tatiana to join my practice; she accepted. She’s been a blessing for me,” I replied.

“I wanted a real challenge; Eric has eased me into that role as a partner in his practice. I’ve taken a lot of his young transgender patients. Most of the patients I

work with are in their teens and early twenties; I have a few patients who are in their mid to late twenties. Eric mainly works with transgender patients over thirty years of age. We feel it's an excellent arrangement," Tatiana added.

"She's done a great job so far. She has a lot of empathy for her patients, especially since she's a young transgender woman herself," I then added.

"Has your relationship become more than professional?" Tanya asked.

"It's become personal in recent weeks. At the transgender conference in Atlanta last month, we finally realized that we were in love with each other," Tatiana replied.

"She's made me realize that there is love after the loss of a spouse," I added.

"She told me you lost your wife. Tanya lost her older brother to cancer about the same time you lost Cathy," Christopher told me.

"It was really tough for us, just as it was tough for you. He left behind a wife and three girls," Tanya added.

"She left behind six children in addition to me," I told them.

"Let me ask you something," Christopher said to me.

"What is it you wanted to ask?" I asked him.

"Did the fact Tatiana was born a boy deter you from dating, let alone falling for, our daughter?" he then asked me.

“As a matter of fact, the fact Tatiana was born a boy never crossed my mind. I’ve only known her as a woman; she’s just as feminine as my late wife,” I replied.



“He knows how to treat me like the woman I’ve become. That’s what I like about him,” Tatiana added before we shared a kiss.

After dinner, we went to their hotel room to socialize for a while. “What was her growing up like?” I asked them.

“When Tatiana was born, she was a boy. We gave him the name Troy. The first sign we saw that maybe he was different from other boys was when he was three years old. He got into a box of clothes that I wore when I was a little girl. He chose a frilly dress, and put it on. His growth was slow; he was shorter than most boys in his age group. His crossdressing increased as he got older. By the time he was ten, he could fit into my old prom gown. He was twelve years old when he got into my wedding gown and veil. When he was fourteen years old, he finally broke down and bought his first female outfit; a black dress, matching stockings and a pair of flats. We finally realized that we had to encourage his feminine side, so, for his fifteenth birthday, we had him do a photo shoot made up as a girl, dressed in a quinceañera gown and rhinestone tiara with a pearl necklace and rhinestone dangling earrings. We also got him to do a feminine photo shoot for his sixteenth birthday; this time, we put him in my wedding gown. It still fit him.

“One of our suspicions was confirmed shortly after, when he told us he was attracted to men. Just after graduation from high school, he told us that he was really a girl, trapped in a male body. When he went to college, he was able to get a job where he could work as a girl. After graduation, he started to live full-time as a girl. We helped her with the legal name change from

Troy Stephen Johnson to Tatiana Stephanie Johnson,” Tanya explained.

“We were sad that we were losing our oldest son, but were happy when we gained a beautiful, loving daughter. We would be happy to help her when she gets approved for her sex-change operation,” Christopher added.

“I hope that, by that time, I’ll know her well enough to ask her to marry me,” I told them.

“Eric, I didn’t know you would consider making me your second wife!” exclaimed a surprised Tatiana.

“I just thought of it, dear,” I whispered before kissing her.

Tatiana and I realized it was getting late. It was around ten o’clock that we made our way back to my residence. When we arrived fifteen minutes later, Tatiana told me: “Eric, my parents really like you.”

“I was very impressed with them. They’ve always been supportive of you, no matter what you’ve done in your life,” I said quietly.

“It makes me realize how much I love you.”

“I love you, too,” I whispered before we shared a long, tender kiss.

Eleven

Just a few days before Thanksgiving, Tatiana and I had a full schedule. One of my patients on that day was a pre-op transsexual named Madeline; everybody called her Maddie. She had just turned thirty-three, living full-time as a woman for two years, and living with her boyfriend and another transsexual roommate.

“What are your plans for Thanksgiving?” I asked her.

“I’m just going to spend it with Dave and Michele at our apartment,” she replied.

“I’ll be spending the day with my kids and Miss Johnson,” I added.

“Maddie, do you remember what Thanksgiving was like when you were younger?”

“I don’t really remember much of Thanksgiving when I was younger. There was one Thanksgiving I do remember, though. I was fourteen years old; I was living in Milwaukee, where I grew up. I had found a box of old dresses that my older sister, Jennie, wore when she was a teenager. After we ate our Thanksgiving dinner, I decided to change into a pink nightgown for my nap. When I woke up, I changed out of that nightgown and back into my male clothing. I put the box of Jennie’s old clothes in the closet. When I came downstairs, Jennie took me aside, and asked me: ‘Marty, my box of old clothes is missing. Did you take it?’ I sheepishly explained that I took it, and that I couldn’t help myself dressing in her old clothes.

“The next day, she gave me a pair of her panties, a bra and breast forms she used in her stage work, and allowed me to put them on. She then put me in a mauve party dress she wore to Homecoming when she was a high school freshman, then put a strawberry blonde, shoulder-length wig on my head, and made me up to look like a girl. The final touch was a rhinestone tiara. I felt like a princess as she took several pictures of me in that dress in my father’s photography studio. Our parents were out of town, visiting our maternal grandparents. When they came back the Sunday after Thanksgiving, they found the pictures on Jennie’s

dresser. We both got asked a bunch of questions in reference to the photo shoot.”

“Were there any other Thanksgiving weekends you spent dressed as a girl when you were younger?”

“I remember one weekend when I was twenty-three years old. I had left home to start a career as a photographer. I had opened my own studio in St. Louis when I graduated from college; I decided to close it for the weekend, and go down to Atlanta. I had just gotten my transgender ID card, and decided to break it in there. I brought down my shoulder-length brunette wig, along with a variety of fashions. My oldest sister, Monica, lent me her wedding gown. I was smaller in both build and stature than most men my age, so when I got down to Atlanta, I decided to get out of my male attire and into female attire. The only bit of male attire I had was a change of clothes for the trip back. I changed into a little black dress, complete with black lingerie, stockings and high heels, and went out to a bar that a transsexual friend of mine told me about.

“I had a few drinks, saw a female impersonator show, and was hit on by a few of the guys. It felt great to be hit on by the guys. The next afternoon, I had a photo shoot at another place a friend recommended outside Atlanta, where I did my bridal photo shoot. That night, my friend and I went shopping; I bought a lot more dresses, lingerie, skirts, blouses and even a couple of pairs of high heels. We even hit on a few guys while we were there. Before the night was over, she told me: ‘Madeline, I think you would make a fantastic girl.’ I told her that I would make a wonderful girl. It was the first time I realized that maybe, I should become a girl. When I got back home, I decided I wanted to do this more often. So, I decided to work

more with transgender subjects in my photography business, and let Maddie become more integrated into my professional life.”

“When was the last time you visited with your family over Thanksgiving?”

“It was four years ago, after I was officially diagnosed with gender identity disorder. My parents invited me home for the holiday. They had known for many years about my dressing as a girl. I sat down with my parents and my three sisters, Monica, Jennie and Julie, as well as Monica’s husband and Jennie’s fiancé, and told them that I was becoming a woman. Monica and Jennie told me that they had always looked at me as one of the girls, and accepted me wholeheartedly. Julie, who’s younger than me by six years, also accepted me with open arms. My mother asked me why I didn’t tell her long ago that I was a woman, trapped in a man’s body; I told her that I was afraid she would reject me if I did. She told me that she would love me and support me, regardless of whether I was still her only son or become her third daughter. My father said that even though he was losing his only son, he was happy that he had gained another loving daughter. My last trip home was this past summer; my first trip back home as Madeline. Some of the guys that put me down for my effeminate ways were now directing wolf whistles at me; I really enjoyed it.”

After I finished the appointment with Madeline, Tatiana came up to me. “Honey, how many patients have you seen that reminisced about Thanksgivings past?” she asked.

“It’s been practically every patient I’ve seen this week,” I replied.

“The patient I just saw is spending her first Thanksgiving as a girl. She just turned thirteen last month. Her family has accepted her as a girl; it was a relief when she told them last summer she was a girl trapped in a boy’s body. It’ll be the first time she’s been home with her family since they sent her to the Rainbow School for Girls.”

“One patient I had earlier today told me about her first Thanksgiving as a girl. She was about the same age your patient is now. She was living in California, where she grew up, and was home for the weekend from Rainbow’s home campus in San Francisco. She had just her mother, who owned a women’s fashion boutique, and four sisters; her father had left them for an Asian woman when she was six years old. She remembered how her sisters wanted to see her in her school uniform. They had a lot of fun for their first all-girl Thanksgiving.”

“When did she have her operation?”

“She had it after she finished the eighth grade. It’s been eighteen years since her operation; she’s now a model and clerk at her sister’s bridal shop. She had one other announcement.”

“What’s that?”

“Her longtime boyfriend asked her to marry him.”

“What did she say?”

“Yes. They’re hoping to get married next summer.”

“By the way, who’s cooking Thanksgiving dinner?”

“Eric and Katie wanted to do it this year.”

Tatiana would have Thanksgiving dinner with me and the kids. It would be her first Thanksgiving dinner with my family. They were very impressed with her

beauty and really liked her taste in fashion, although Eric would tell me: "I often wonder what a woman only four years older than me would find in a man like you."

"What Tatiana finds in me is a kind of maturity she doesn't find in men her age, in addition to the fact that it doesn't matter whether she was born a boy or a girl. To me, it's the woman she's become that matters most," I informed him.

"Ah!" was all he could say.

Twelve

It was amazing that time had flown by so fast. It seemed like yesterday that I was in the month of January. A lot had happened in the space of one year. Little did I know that I would not only have a new partner in my practice, but also a new girlfriend, in just one year. Cathy's passing was becoming more of a distant memory by that time.

Tatiana and I got invited to our fair share of parties during the month of December, both as singles and as a couple. While we attended several parties separately, the party we decided to attend as a couple was the Christmas dance at the Rainbow School for Girls in Jefferson County. That dance would be on the second Saturday in December.

The day before the dance, I had just finished with one of my autism spectrum patients. Tatiana had just arrived from a meeting with her gender identity team. I knew she had a wide smile on her face.

"Eric, guess what?" she asked me.

"What is it?" I then asked her.

"I've been given final approval for gender reassignment surgery," she replied.

"That's wonderful!" I exclaimed.

"I'll be having it next spring in San Francisco," she added.

After hearing that, we celebrated by sharing a deep, tender kiss. Gina busted into the room while we were kissing. "Are you two lovebirds at it again?" she asked us.

"Gina! You scared the living daylights out of us!" I said with a tinge of shock.

"What are you two kissing about?" Gina asked.

"Tatiana has been approved for her sex-change operation," I replied.

"I'm going to have it next summer in San Francisco," Tatiana added.

Gina took her aside to tell her more about the surgeon in San Francisco, while I got ready for my next patient, another one of my autism spectrum patients. When I got finished with that patient, the both of us went home for the day to prepare for the party we were going to together.

I decided to get into my best suit for the event. Chuck was in charge of the younger kids this time, while Eric and Katie were still at school, preparing for final exams. I drove over to Tatiana's apartment to pick her up. When I arrived around six o'clock, her roommate answered the door. She was five-six, average build, with long blonde hair, wearing a pink party dress and a pair of pink high heels. She spoke with a hint of a Southern accent.

"You're here for Tatiana, right?" she asked me.

“That’s right. I’m Dr. Eric Bunning,” I replied.

“I’m Audrey Lawrence, Tatiana’s roommate,” she said.

I walked into the apartment, and sat down on the loveseat inside their living room. “This is a lovely place you have here, Audrey,” I complimented.

“We do our share to keep it nice and neat,” she added.

“I understand you and Tatiana went to college together.”

“We went to graduate school down in Atlanta. I’m originally from Hahira, Georgia. I got my Bachelor’s degree in social work at the University of Georgia in Athens. After I graduated, I went into Atlanta to attend a college there to get my Master’s. That’s where I met Tatiana. She had just been diagnosed with gender identity disorder; she attended school and did her graduate studies as Tatiana. During that first year, she began living full-time as a woman. When we decided to come to St. Louis together to start our careers, I decided to go to work for the Division of Children and Family Services. I do a lot of counseling with abused children, women who have been abused by a boyfriend or husband, as well as men who have been abused by a girlfriend or wife. I see so many of these cases on a daily basis; it’s enough to make you cry. I’m sure you’ve run across several people like that in your practice.”

“I mainly run across this among my autism spectrum patients; not as much among my transgender patients, though.”

“Tatiana tells me some of her transgender patients are also dealing with such troubles.”

"I've seen that patients process such negative experiences differently."

Just as I was finishing that thought, Tatiana emerged from her bedroom, wearing a red cocktail dress. "You are so smashing tonight," I complimented.

"You're so handsome, honey," she cooed as we shared a kiss.

Audrey asked us to pose for a few photos before we left for the party. She even asked us to kiss for a few of her photos. "Where are you going, Audrey?" I asked her before Tatiana and I left.

"I'm going to a wedding reception in St. Peters. One of my friends from college got married today," she replied.

It took us nearly an hour to get to the school. We had to deal with heavy traffic due to an accident on Manchester Road. When we arrived at the rural Jefferson County campus, we drove along nearly two miles of winding road to get to the security gate at the entrance. After we were cleared, we found a parking space, and walked straight to the gymnasium. Another of Tatiana's friends, this one from her internship, greeted her at the door.

She was a tall, thin, auburn-haired girl, approximately thirty years old. She was wearing a sleeveless red gown and matching flats. She spoke with a moderate Southern accent. "I didn't expect to see you here, Tatiana," she said with a tinge of surprise.

"Shari Hanley, this is Dr. Eric Bunning. Eric, this is my friend from my internship, Shari Hanley," she said in an introductory manner.

"I've heard a lot about you. It's a pleasure to meet you," Shari told me.

“Tatiana has told me a lot about you, too,” I added.

We held hands as we walked to the concession stand to get a couple of hamburgers, some onion rings and two glasses of lemonade. When we sat down, I asked her: “What did Shari do at Rainbow in northern Georgia?”

“She taught computer science. When I interned at the school, I lived with her and her husband, Pete, in their rented house in Canton. She’s originally from Ocilla, Georgia. She got her Bachelor’s degrees in education and computer science from Kennesaw State University; she got her Master’s at the University of Georgia in Athens. She taught computer science to remedial studies students in Tallahassee, Florida. That’s where she met her husband. Pete was a successful aircraft mechanic who grew up in the Philadelphia suburb of Bala Cynwyd. He worked at a fixed base operation in Tallahassee when they met. Despite his success as an aircraft mechanic, he was not very lucky in love. Despite the fact she’s eighteen years younger, Shari changed his cynical views on love and romance, not to mention his life as a whole. They married four years ago; while they were in north Georgia, he took a job as a helicopter mechanic for the Georgia State Patrol. He now works for a fixed base operation in Chesterfield,” she explained.

“What got her into teaching troubled and transgender girls?”

“One of Shari’s cousins from Long Island has a transgender daughter named Patsy. She’s seventeen years old now, a junior at the Rainbow campus on Long Island, and underwent her sex-change operation three years ago. When Patsy started her transition from boy to girl, Shari visited the school, and talked to other

transgender students. One of them lived in Georgia before moving to New York; she commented that the Georgia campus was looking for a computer science teacher. Just after her husband took the job in Georgia, she got a job teaching computer science at the Rainbow campus in north Georgia. She developed that department into one of the best high school computer education departments in the state. Shari is now the chairperson of the Computer Science department at this campus."

After Tatiana and I finished our meal, one of the girls at the school approached us. She looked familiar to me, although her hair cascaded down past her shoulders. She was wearing a lavender party dress. When I last saw her, she had shoulder-length hair. "Dr. Bunning?" she asked me.

"Samantha Geyer?" I asked her.

"Yes, it's me. You probably noticed the longer hair," she replied.

"How have you been?" I then asked.

"I've been doing very well. I'm maintaining an 'A' average here at Rainbow, very active in after school activities, and share a room with a transgender girl and a girl from a troubled family. My parents have been very supportive of me as I transition from boy to girl," she replied.

"Samantha, have I introduced you to Miss Johnson?"

"I don't believe you have."

"Tatiana Johnson, this is Samantha Geyer, one of my patients. Samantha, this is Miss Johnson, my new partner in my practice."

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Samantha,” Tatiana said with a smile.

“The pleasure is mutual, Miss Johnson,” Samantha said with a bigger smile.

She sat down with us, and talked about her roommates. “Dr. Bunning, Miss Johnson, I’ve really become close to my roommates this semester. Stephanie Troy is the transgender girl I share my room with. She’ll be thirteen years old in February; she’s originally from Maroa, Illinois, outside of Decatur. She started living full-time as a girl in June, after twelve years of living as a boy named Seth. Her mother is a sales executive for a luxury car dealer in Decatur; her father is a psychologist in private practice there. She’s the third of four children; she has an older brother, Tom, and an older sister, Edie. She first dressed up in feminine attire when she was three years old. That was when he put on a flower girl’s gown Edie wore when their aunt got married. Edie was shocked at what she saw. A year later, after their kid brother, Keith, was born, Seth began taking more after Edie instead of Tom. After he finished the sixth grade, he told his parents and older siblings that he hated being a boy, and wanted, more than anything else in the world, to become a girl. Her father got the wheels rolling on getting her into Rainbow and starting her transition to Stephanie,” Samantha explained.

“What about your other roommate?” Tatiana asked.

“Becky Daniels comes out of a troubled environment. Her father, Bob, is presently serving time in the state pen at Potosi for armed robbery. He was convicted on federal charges of bank robbery when Becky was just two years old; he just finished ten years at Leavenworth. Her mother lived on her family’s farm

near Olympian Village, Missouri; she cooked methamphetamines in a separate dwelling. Last year, the authorities finally got wind of her mother's operation. Her mother, Andrea, both of her aunts, Amy Dwight and Jessica Terry, and her uncle, Jack Dwight, were arrested; their oldest brother, millionaire philanthropist Aaron Dwight, turned them in. Her Uncle Aaron and Aunt Marie took her in; they sent her to Rainbow upon the recommendation of a therapist working on her case. She's remarkably well-adjusted since coming to Rainbow," Samantha replied.

As a slow, romantic song was starting, I got up and asked Tatiana: "May I have this dance, babe?"

"Yes, my love," she replied as I took her hand.

We were surprised that we were sharing this dance with a number of teenage girls and their male guests. "I didn't know girls this young were into such music," I whispered.

"They really are. I noticed this when I attended a dance at their Georgia campus last year," she said quietly.

We both saw the boys holding the girls close as the song played. Toward the end, we also noticed a few of the boys kissing the girls they were dancing with. When the song ended, Tatiana and I shared a kiss.

The dance ended just after eleven o'clock. Tatiana and I were holding hands as we walked to the car. It was a long ride on a cool, moonlit night. When we arrived back at her apartment, she invited me in for a nightcap. She brought out a bottle of red wine and two wine glasses.

"What do you look forward to in the new year?" I asked her.

“The biggest thing I’m looking forward to next year is my sex-change operation. I have dreamed of being completely female since I was younger. I also look forward to building our practice together,” she replied.

“I also look forward to building our practice together next year. Your operation will not only make you a complete girl, but also, make something legal that I’m now considering,” I added.

“What’s that, dear?” she cooed.

“I’ve thought about asking you for your hand in marriage,” I replied.

“Are you serious? Me?”

“I’m darn serious. You’ve shown me I could love again. When Cathy lost her battle with cancer, I thought my life was over. It was just me and the kids. When you joined my practice, I thought you would be a great partner in my practice. You not only turned out to be an excellent partner in my professional life, but also in my personal life. You’ve shown me I could love again. Ever since our trip to Atlanta, I’ve been giving some thought to asking you to be my wife someday. Right now, I just don’t know you well enough to ask that question.”

“Honey, I’ve thought about marriage, too. I’m not quite ready to make that leap just yet. I really would like to build our relationship; I’m sure you want to wait until after I have my operation before we make any decision on our future together.”

“I think it would be wise to wait until after you have your operation before we make such a life-changing decision. Baby, I really want to spend my remaining days with you.”

“I really want to spend my life with you, too,” she cooed before we clicked our glasses. We gently set them down on the coffee table, looked each other in our eyes, and flashed huge smiles. The next thing we both knew, we were engaged in a deep kiss. Before long, I was planting tender kisses on her neck. “Oh, Eric...you make me feel so feminine,” she cooed lustfully while I was kissing her on her neck.

Tatiana and I bravely decided to work on New Year’s Eve. My last patient for the year was Wendi, a tall, light brown-haired transsexual woman of thirty-eight. She had been through the operation fifteen years ago. She had become a successful attorney, specializing in gender law. Her boyfriend, Johnny, is a successful restaurateur.

“Eric, I have some wonderful news to tell you,” she informed me.

“What is it, Wendi?” I asked her.

“I spent Christmas with my boyfriend’s family. I’ve been dating Johnny for the past four years. He and his family know about my past, and are very comfortable with it. He gave me a small wrapped present, and told me that before I could open it, he wanted me to ask what he said was the most important question of his life. I asked him what he was going to ask. He took my hand gently, and asked me to be his wife.”

“Well, what was your answer?”

She then showed her left hand to me, and pointed to the ring finger. “Does this answer your question?” she asked, showing her sparkling engagement ring.

“Wendi, I’m so happy for you!” I exclaimed.

“I was so surprised when he popped the question. I’ve always dreamed of being a beautiful bride; I’m

glad that my most romantic dream will come true this summer."

"So, when's the big day?"

"It will be the Saturday after the fourth of July; we're having a church wedding."

"When did your family find out?"

"They found out the day after Christmas. They've always liked Johnny ever since I took him to meet them shortly after we started dating. They were so happy to hear that I'm finally going to get married."

"So, who have you asked to be in the bridal party?"

"The only person I've asked so far is my best friend, Tiffany. She's also a post-op transsexual. I've asked her to be my maid of honor."

"What did she say?"

"She said she was happy to be my maid of honor. Johnny has already asked her boyfriend, Roger, to be best man."

"So, what are you going to do first?"

"The first thing I'm going to do is to shop for a wedding gown. I'm a taller girl, so a gown in my size will be a bit more difficult to find than one for a typical girl. I really want the most romantic gown for my wedding day."

"You'll be having a lot on your mind between now and the day of your wedding."

"That's for sure."

It was just after four o'clock when I finished my session with Wendi. Tatiana was in her office, reviewing her notes from her last session of the year. "Are you ready to wrap up this year?" I asked her.

"I'm ready for a nice, quiet, romantic evening with you, honey," she replied before she got up from her desk.

"So am I, darling," I added as we walked out of the office, arm-in-arm.

We locked the door to the office behind us as we walked back toward my residence. Eric was in Sparta, spending his New Year's Eve with his girlfriend, Leah. Katie went to a party with one of her college friends. Chuck, Karen, Carrie and Earl went with their friends to a party hosted by their church's youth group. Tatiana and I would have a quiet and romantic New Year's Eve together.

"At this time last year, I never thought I would have a beautiful girl in my life, especially after losing my wife to cancer. Nor did I think I would have such a valuable young colleague join my practice. You've shown me that I could love again," I whispered to her.

"Last year, at this time, I never thought I would have a special man in my life, and that I would start my career so soon after graduating from college. You've given me so much in the past year; the most important thing you've given me is love. The kind of love that makes me feel so tingly and feminine deep inside."

"You've made me feel so much like a man over the past few months. I hope it goes on forever, baby."

"I hope it will last forever, too, my love."

I gently stroked her hair, and whispered: "Tatiana, I love you more than any other woman in the world."

She smiled at me, and cooed: "Eric, I love you more than any other man in the whole wide world." The next thing we knew, we were kissing each other with heated passion.

When the midnight hour arrived, we shared a bottle of champagne, toasted our love and shared our hopes for the New Year. "Happy New Year, babe," she cooed.

"Happy New Year, sexy," I whispered.

"That's the first time any man has called me sexy," she cooed seductively.

"You are sexy, darling."

"You're such a sexy man, sweetheart," she romantically cooed before we shared the first kiss of the New Year.

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