



Reluctant Press presents:

A Family History

E. B. Stevenson



ILLUSTRATIONS BY C. PAGANI

A 'NEW WOMAN' E-BOOK

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A Family History

by **E.B. Stevenson**

INTRODUCTION

During the spring of 1998, a number of things had happened in my life. For one thing, I had to end yet another relationship; the sixth failed relationship since I broke off my engagement five years before. Second, I sold my last two fixed base operations in Florida to a larger flight support company; I was left with five; two in Illinois and three in Missouri. I also donated one of the seventeen radio stations I owned to a local college. I could have sold out to a larger company, but I didn't want local programming to be taken off the station. My businesses literally ran themselves; therefore, I was able to take an extended vacation.

I was ready to take that extended vacation in June of 1998. It was the middle of the month, to be exact. I was thirty-two years old at the time; the youngest of ten children. My youngest brother, Steve, all of thirty-six, had just gotten married. His young bride, Jamie, was just twenty-two and getting started on becoming a licensed clinical social worker. Jamie was aware of our family history of one thing that most families don't want to talk about: our family consists of twenty members who are transgendered in various forms. That kind of history is rare in families, as far as I know.

In my own immediate family, it has affected two of my siblings' offspring. My niece Barbara, who was known in her male life as Roberto, is the offspring of my oldest brother Ron and his Mexican-born wife, Amelia. Barbara had left home after finishing college. She had become a gay transvestite, unsure of whether she wanted to go through the hormone therapy and surgery that could turn her into a total woman. My oldest sister, Wendie, had

her first offspring at age twenty when she gave birth to a son, Kenny. As a child, he had felt that he was really a girl. Wendie and her husband, Karl, fought the school board in the Dallas suburb where they lived to allow Kenny to go to school as a girl. Adopting the female name Katie, she started going to school as a girl at age ten. She was now fifteen years of age, and living full-time as a girl in anticipation of a sex-change operation in early adulthood.

On my father's side of the family, I count eight transgendered cousins. The number of my transgendered cousins broke down this way: three transsexuals, three crossdressers and two female impersonators. Of the three transsexual cousins, only one has already had her surgery. My cousin Shauna, daughter of Uncle Sherman and Aunt Belle, was twenty-six years old; she had her surgery just after graduating from college in 1994. Uncle Jim and Aunt Kimiko's daughter, Christie, had just turned twenty-four, and living full-time as a woman for two years; she had been saving up for surgery by working as a model and working on her master's degree in psychology. Aunt Jane and Uncle Nate's daughter, Hannah, had just started to live full-time as a woman.

Of my three crossdressing cousins, two were married. My cousin John, Shauna's younger brother, was twenty-four at the time and he had just celebrated two years of wedded bliss with his wife, Lauren. When dressed as a woman, he goes by the name of Joanna. Aunt Rita and Uncle Louie's son, Albert, had just turned thirty and married his longtime girlfriend, Tressa - he's known as Amber when dressed in female attire. My cousin Walter also dressed in female attire. The son of Uncle Walter and Aunt Josie, he was twenty-two and had dressed off and on since age twelve. He confessed that he only did this as an art form, not for some kind of sexual pleasure. He didn't select a feminine name until he was eighteen; he chose the name Gwendolyn. He had done some modeling en femme while studying to be a writer.

My two female impersonator cousins on my father's side have been very well-known on the circuit for some time. Cousin Walter's older brother, Oran, started as a female impersonator at age twenty-one; he was twenty-seven by that time, and had won several pageants in the process. His stage name was Organza Allen. The other female impersonator on my dad's side was my cousin Quentin, son of Aunt Cathy and Uncle Larry. He had just turned thirty; he has been performing for nine years. He took the stage name Jayne Quentin, and promoted himself as the only "lesbian" female impersonator in the show, as he was married with two kids.

It is more pronounced on my mother's side of the family. There are twelve members of her family who are transgendered. The most notable of my mother's transgendered relatives is Aunt Diane. She's her younger sister; she went through her transition in the late 1960s. She has had a successful career as a legal secretary since she returned to the United States after her sex-change operation in 1969. Of the other eleven transgendered relatives on my mother's side, five others are transsexuals. My cousin Karen, the daughter of Aunt Rae and my late Uncle Edgar, was twenty-nine and living full-time as a woman while owning two businesses. She had not yet selected a surgeon for her operation. Another cousin, Heather, was thirty-three and went through a sex-change operation twelve years before. She had just gone into the real estate business after retiring from her previous career as a showgirl. Heather was the daughter of Uncle Henry and Aunt Jeanne. Yet an-

other cousin, Jessica, the daughter of Aunt Rosa and my late Uncle Vito, had just turned twenty-three, living full-time as a woman since age eighteen, and had just become an art dealer. She had not yet had her operation. The fourth transsexual cousin, Lori, was about ready to turn twenty-nine and preparing for her sex-change operation. Uncle Larry and Aunt Gina were in the dark about Lori's transsexualism before she told them when she began the transition. I really kept up with one transsexual cousin in particular: Sarah, the daughter of Uncle Jeff and Aunt Paula. She was eighteen years old and had just had her sex-change operation late in May of the previous year. She had started her transition at the tender age of thirteen, and was preparing to enter college that fall.

Three relatives on my mother's side are crossdressers: Heather's older brother, Joe, was thirty-eight, married with a son and a daughter. His wife, Cathi, was supportive of his lifestyle; he goes by the femme name Jolene. George, son of Uncle Duane and Aunt Faith, had just turned thirty-six. He was single, but had a beautiful young girlfriend in Brenda, all of twenty-one. She encouraged him to dress up as Gabrielle as much as he wanted to. The third one is George's younger brother, Virgil. He was twenty-eight, dating Brenda's older sister, Brianna, and she also encouraged him to dress as Vanessa when he wanted to. All three were in successful careers as photographers.

Joe's younger sister, Olivia, was a thirty-year-old gay transvestite. Formerly known as Martin, she has dressed full-time as a woman since the age of nineteen, worked two jobs, and sharing an apartment with her male lover, Jim. Like Barbara, she was also unsure about going through hormone treatment and surgical sex reassignment. My cousin Thor, known as Theresa when dressed as a female, was a bisexual transvestite of twenty-five. He worked his job as a travel agent as a man, but became Theresa once he came home from work. He was living with another transvestite, Will, who was known as Caryn while in feminine mode. Thor is the son of Uncle Don and Aunt Nathalie. Another cousin, Michael, is a professional female impersonator of twenty-seven. The son of Uncle Mickey and Aunt Belinda, he adopted the stage name Michelle LaFemme. He had won several pageants in his career; he also was considered a lesbian by his peers, because of his supportive wife, Nancy.

I would be embarking on a trip that not many male members of a family with such a history of transgenderism would ever consider partaking. It would be an adventure I would not forget.

First Stop: Boston

When I departed St. Louis on the afternoon of June 17, 1998, my first stop would be Boston, where my niece Barbara and my cousins Heather, Oran and George were living. I had a smooth, two-hour and forty-five minute flight into Logan; I had a good meal and several cups of hot tea on the flight. While I was en route, I got a call from my sister-in-law Amelia, informing me that a surprise awaited me when my flight landed in Boston.

When I got off the plane, I was amazed to see a Latina woman with a slender build and curly, medium brown hair that cascaded down to her shoulder blades. She was wearing sleeveless and glittery navy blue dress with a skirt that extended to about an inch above

her knees. Jewelry was limited to a pair of rhinestone cluster earrings, a gold necklace with a rhinestone pendant, and a gold bracelet on her right wrist with her name on it. She was wearing three-inch high heels, which put her one inch shorter than my six-foot-one. Without the high heels, she was five-foot-nine. The only ring she had on her finger was a birthstone ring on the ring finger of her left hand. I looked at her, and she flashed me a confident smile.

"You must be my Uncle Eric," she said in a feminine manner.

"How are you, Barbara?" I asked her before giving her a hug and a kiss.

"I'm doing fine," she added; she then asked me: "How's life treating you?"

"Life's treating me great. I've just sold my fixed base operations in Tallahassee and Clearwater, clearing twenty million dollars. I also donated my last radio station in Georgia to a local college, realizing a tax deduction of \$900,000. I have left my lieutenants in charge of my businesses while I'm taking a vacation to see the transgendered members of my family," I replied.

After I claimed my luggage and picked up my rental car, I followed Barbara to her apartment near Boston Common. She had a femininely-decorated apartment with a view of the Common. "So, what brings you to Boston?" she asked while she was preparing hot tea for the two of us.

"I'm here to check up on you, Heather, Oran and George. I've been wondering about you all the past few years," I replied.

When she set the tea service down on the coffee table, she poured a cup for me and one for herself. She then explained: "I'm finally working as a girl now; I work as a clerk at a women's fashion store in Lynn. My boss understood my need to dress as a woman; so she allowed me to come to work as Barbara. Heather has just sold her first home; a three-story mansion on Cape Cod. Oran is performing this weekend at a club I frequent in Boston, while George and Brenda are going out someplace special this evening. I don't know what's up, but I won't be surprised that he'll propose marriage to her tonight. He hasn't been out as Gabrielle in four months."

"Have you decided to have the hormone therapy yet?" I then asked.

"I started hormones a week ago; I don't know if I'll have the surgery, though. I'm becoming more and more convinced that I am a woman," she replied.

"Were these hormones prescribed by a doctor?" I inquired.

"Yes, they were. The effects of hormone therapy are reversible, although the surgery isn't," she then replied.

A couple of minutes later, I decided to crash on the sofa in the living room. Barbara sat in a swivel chair across from where I laid down, and crossed her legs femininely. "Do you still live alone, Uncle Eric?" she asked me.

"Yes, I still live by myself, Barbara. I've just broken up with my sixth girlfriend in five years; it's been a tough road since I dumped Kara," I replied.

"You just haven't found the right one yet," she added.

"Do you live by yourself?" I then asked her.

"I have a roommate; like me, she's a gay transvestite. Her name is Charo Baez; she's a professional female impersonator here in Boston. She is living full-time as a woman and taking hormones, although she hasn't decided whether or not to have surgery," she replied.

"I'm sure she's beautiful, just like you," I added before she gave me a framed photo of Charo.

"See for yourself," she added before giving me the frame.

I looked at it for a minute, before telling her: "Barbara, she's a beautiful young lady."

I was also reading some of their transgender and female impersonation magazines before Charo walked in the door. She was five-ten, with chestnut brown hair that cascaded past her shoulders, a slender build and a face that even a fashion model could die for. She was decked out in a navy blue skirt, matching jacket, white blouse, matching stockings and navy blue pumps. The only jewelry she wore: a pearl necklace, gold bracelet and rhinestone earrings.

"How was your day, Barbara?" she asked before embracing her.

"My day was fine, Charo," she replied before asking Charo how her day went.

"I had a long day today; I spent nearly the whole day modeling ball gowns for a Boston bridal shop," Charo replied.

"I'd like to introduce you to my uncle," Barbara added.

"I'd love to meet him," Charo then added.

I got up from the couch, while Charo and Barbara sashayed over toward me. "Charo Baez, this is my uncle, Eric Fletcher. Eric, this is my roommate, Charo," she said in an introductory manner.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Charo," I said with a smile.

"The pleasure is mine," she said with a sweet, seductive smile.

I decided to rest the balance of the afternoon, as Barbara invited me to a show that evening. I took a long nap before waking up around six-thirty to the smell of perfume. Little did I know that Charo was in the show that Barbara invited me to. She emerged from her bedroom a few minutes later, wearing a red cocktail dress.

While I was still in a daze, she asked me: "How do I look, Eric?"

Her looks shook me awake. "Smashing," I replied before she gave me a kiss on the cheek.

Barbara emerged from her bedroom just as Charo was walking out the door to a personal appearance at a local bookstore. She was wearing a red sleep shirt. "What time should we leave for the show?" I asked her.

"We should be leaving around eight-thirty; the place opens at nine o'clock. However, I must tell you that the ladies, both genetic and transgendered, will be looking for a single guy like you," she replied.

"Thanks for the heads-up," I added.

"Your cousin, Oran, is in the show we're going to see tonight; he's now a regular cast member under the name of Organza Allen. He's been dating this younger girl named Raina. She's twenty-one years old, working as a beautician at the beauty shop where he gets his wigs. She'll be with us tonight. Heather will also be with us tonight to celebrate her first sale," Barbara explained.

I decided to wear a red golf shirt and a pair of khaki slacks for the night at the show, along with a pair of brown loafers. Barbara changed into a curve-hugging pink dress. When she emerged, she asked me how she looked. "Very sexy," I replied before we stole a smooch. After that, we walked out of her apartment, arm-in-arm.

Around nine o'clock, we arrived at the club. A pair of female impersonators and the front door attendant greeted us. After we paid our cover, one of the female impersonators, Daphne Peters, approached us. She was a heavy-set, medium brown-haired girl of fifteen, wearing a royal blue chiffon dress, matching high heels and rhinestone jewelry.

"Are you Eric Fletcher, Organza's cousin?" Daphne asked me.

"Yes, I am. This is my niece, Barbara Valencia," I replied.

"Organza has reserved a table for your party by the stage. Your cousin Heather has already arrived; she's waiting for you at the table," she added.

Barbara and I were shown to the table, where Heather was waiting. She was nothing short of stunning; five-eleven, slender build, blonde hair down past her shoulders, and an infectious smile. She was wearing a pink party dress that was hiked up an inch and a half above the knee, matching flats, a gold necklace with a diamond pendant, and a pair of diamond earrings. I hadn't seen her since she was transitioning from man to woman. When I noticed her, she immediately flashed a big smile.

"Eric, is that you?" she asked me excitedly.

"It's me, Heather...you're more beautiful than ever," I replied before we embraced and stole a smooch. "How have things been with you, Eric?" she asked me.

"As far as business is concerned, I'm doing quite well. I sold off my last two fixed base operations in Florida, and donated my last radio station in Georgia to a local college. I'm now down to five fixed base operations; the two Illinois operations in Peoria and Kankakee, and the three Missouri operations in Sedalia, Joplin and my newly completed operation in Farmington. I now own sixteen radio stations in four states, and just bought a television station in Arkansas. Personally, I still haven't found Miss Right; I've pretty much suspended the search for my true love for now," I explained.

"I was tiring of the whole showgirl routine, Eric...five nights a week of dancing in high heels and wearing skimpy outfits just wasn't for me anymore. I had to fend off more than my fair share of drunken guys in the eleven years I was a showgirl. I wanted a more normal life; therefore, I decided to leave Las Vegas and move to Boston, where I studied for my real estate broker's license. I've been with a local realtor for just two weeks, and I made my first sale this week," she explained.

"I'm glad you've decided to take a more everyday type of career," I added.

"I heard you took a job at a women's clothing store, Barbara. How do you like it so far?" Heather asked her.

"I enjoy it thus far, Heather; I took the job because I really wanted to work a job as a woman. My boss understood my lifestyle, so she let me come to work wearing women's clothing. I work as a sales clerk; what I do is help balance the books, since I have a degree in accounting, help the ladies with their dress fittings, and model for the store's advertisements. We carry career wear, party and formal dresses and even bridal wear," Barbara replied.

Daphne then showed Oran's girlfriend to the table. She was a brunette-haired girl of twenty-one, five-foot-six, with a slender build and hair extending down to her shoulder blades. She was wearing a lipstick red party dress.

"You must be Eric Fletcher," she said, unsure of who I was.

"I'm Eric Fletcher," I said assuringly.

"My name is Raina Pyatt, Oran's girlfriend," she added.

"I'm Heather O'Leary, his cousin, and this is Barbara Valencia, Eric's niece," Heather added.

"A pleasure to meet you, Raina," Barbara added.

"How did you and Oran meet?" I asked her.

"We met at the beauty shop where I work. He was looking at several wigs for his act. I was struck by his handsome looks; he is so dashing and so gentle when he's in male attire. When he becomes Organza, he's an entirely different person. He does have the gentle personality when he's in drag, but he's also good at teasing both the guys and the gals when wearing a dress. He's very good friends with Daphne, the show director, who, unlike Oran, lives full-time as a woman," Raina explained.

"What attracted you to him?" Heather then asked.

"He isn't like other guys. All of the other guys I met prior to meeting Oran were basically jerks. I knew that he was different from all other guys, and not because of the fact that he wears a dress on the job. He's an incurable romantic. Every time we go out together, he would always buy a bouquet of flowers; the last time we went out together, he bought me a dozen roses. He really knows how to treat me like a lady; we've done so much together in the two years we've been going together," she then explained.

"What would you do if the two of you decided to get married?" Barbara asked.

"We plan to have a traditional wedding with our families in Danvers, where I'm from; then have a double-gown ceremony at a local nightclub," Raina replied.

After we finished that conversation, a tall, African-American girl named Brittany approached us. She was wearing a curve-hugging tiger print dress, black high heels and a gold necklace with a heart-shaped pendant. "What can I get you tonight?" she asked us.

"I'll have rum and water," Heather replied.

"May I see a wine list?" I asked her.

Brittany immediately produced a wine list. Barbara, Raina and I looked it over. I chose the red wine, while the girls chose the blush wine; all from vineyards in California. Brittany then sashayed toward the bar with our orders.

While we were waiting for our drinks, a lady of six-foot-four, wearing a blue dress, approached us, matching flats, a rhinestone necklace and earrings, and a birthstone ring on the ring finger of her left hand. This was no ordinary girl, but my cousin, Oran. The first person he went to was Raina.

"Hello, darling," he said to her.

"Hi, babe," she cooed.

He then sat down next to his girlfriend, and immediately noticed me. "It's good to see you again, Eric, after all these years," he told me.

"You look great, both as Oran and Organza," I added.

"Why, thank you," he said with a smile.

He then put his arm around Raina, while I asked him: "How well have you done as a female impersonator?"

"I've been doing quite well. Last year, I was voted the Most Stunning Female Impersonator in New England. I've been mainly doing shows and some modeling of fashions for the taller woman the last few years; I've been struggling to pay off my college debts for the last several years," he replied.

"Let me guess...you couldn't find a job," I added.

"I majored in mass communications with an emphasis on public relations in college. When I graduated five years ago, I went looking for a job with a public relations firm. I was searching for two years, during which time I worked as a short order cook, clothing salesman and a supermarket stocker. One night, I put on one of the dresses I had from a masquerade party I went to while I was in college, and I was stunned to find out I still fit in that dress. I went to an amateur night at a club in Atlanta, and it was there that I not only won the talent contest, but also got hired by a Boston club to perform in their show. I'm now at the point where I can pay off those debts inside of two years," he explained.

"I'll tell you one thing...mass communications is a very difficult field to break into," I then added before Daphne called him away to get ready for the show.

The show was nothing short of spectacular. It started with Daphne telling some of the bawdiest jokes I ever heard. Then, it followed with Organza lip-syncing to a song by Madonna. The shortest girl in the show, a five-four pre-op transsexual named Lori Love, did a dance routine to a song by the group Real McCoy. That was followed with an African-American named Lyrica Song, who lip-synced an African-American spiritual song. Daphne returned with more bawdy humor, followed by Organza, this time lip-syncing a song by Cathy Dennis. It was during a break in the show that Barbara told me that she had a surprise.

"What is it?" I asked her.

"Shhh! He's introducing her now," she whispered.

When the introduction was completed, Charo came out on stage, wearing a bridal gown. The only male member of the cast, Robert Michaels, accompanied her. They lip-synced a romantic duet; once it was over, Charo and Robert exchanged a smooch before the lights dimmed.

During the intermission between shows, I was able to pose for pictures with the cast. Charo was still in her bridal gown when she posed for photos with me. We all had a fun time that night; it was a shame it had to end. In all, I took enough pictures to fill a scrapbook, and then some.

When I returned to Barbara's apartment around two-thirty in the morning, I was exhausted, and so was Barbara. I went and changed into a pair of camouflage shorts and an olive drab green T-shirt, while Barbara changed into a sexy babydoll nightie. She sashayed out into the living room, and showed it to me. "That's very sexy, Barbara," I complimented.

"Thank you, dear uncle," she cooed before she sashayed off to bed.

The next afternoon, I went to lunch with George and Brenda; they had some news of their own to tell me. "While you and Barbara were out at the club last night, Brenda and I went to a very intimate restaurant on the Cape. We made a decision on our future while we were there," George said while we were waiting for our meals.

"What did you decide?" I asked them.

"Look on my finger," Brenda clued me.

"It's beautiful," I complimented.

"George and I are getting married this fall. We haven't selected the place where we plan to tie the knot yet, but we have also decided in favor of also doing a double-gown ceremony when we get back from our honeymoon," Brenda added.

"Where do you plan on having that one?" I asked with a dash of sarcasm.

"We plan to have the double-gown ceremony with the local gender support group," George replied.

The last day of my trip to Boston was spent with Heather; we went shopping for new clothes. I needed a few new suits; she bought several new dresses. After resting the night at Barbara's apartment, I was all ready for my train trip to New York to visit relatives there. I left Boston at eight o'clock in the morning, headed for New York's Grand Central Station.

Second Stop: New York

My train arrived at Grand Central Station around eleven-thirty on the morning of June 20, 1998. Waiting to meet me there was my cousin, Shauna. Five-foot-eight, with shoulder-length chestnut brown hair and average build, she was wearing a pair of blue jeans and a white blouse. We hugged each other, before she asked me: "What brings you to the Big Apple, Eric?"

"I'm visiting all of my transgendered relatives on this trip," I replied.

"How's everyone in Boston?" she asked just as we began our walk toward the street.

“Barbara has just started working at a women’s apparel shop; she’s living full-time as a woman now. George finally popped the question to Brenda three days ago; they plan to get married in the fall; they are planning a second ceremony where he will dress as Gabrielle. Heather has just sold her first home as a real estate broker, after eleven years as a showgirl, and Oran’s still working as a female impersonator while trying to pay off his college loans,” I replied.

“I’d take it Oran has a girlfriend now,” she added.

“He’s been dating Raina Pyatt, a beautician, for the last two years. They met at the beauty shop where she works; Oran was there looking at wigs for his female impersonator act. The two hit it off immediately; she’s attracted to his gentleness and sense of romance. She’s the best thing that happened to him,” I then added.

When we came to the street, Shauna hailed a taxi. We got into one of the Yellow Cabs, where I loaded my bags into the trunk. Shauna gave the driver an address in Greenwich Village, where she was living. I got into the back seat with her.

“What are you doing these days?” I asked her.

“I’m now a stock broker for a Wall Street firm; I’m making good money there. After I got my degree in accounting, I realized that I should wait to search for work until after I had my surgery. I also went for my stockbroker’s license while I was recovering, and passed the exam on the first try. I share my apartment with Travis, my boyfriend. He’s a clerk for a law firm on Long Island; we’ve been together for four years now,” she replied.

“Are you considering marrying him?” I asked her.

“I have considered it; yet, he hasn’t popped the question,” she replied.

“I ended another relationship about two months ago; it hasn’t been easy since Kara and I split five years ago,” I added.

When we arrived at her apartment, Shauna guided me up to her apartment. Three of my transgendered relatives from the New York area: my cousins Christie, Jessica and Virgil; the latter dressed as Vanessa. Brianne accompanied Virgil/Vanessa. Christie was wearing a red sleeveless dress; Jessica was wearing a blue skirt, matching jacket and a white blouse, Vanessa wearing a blue dress, and Brianne in a pair of navy blue slacks and a white blouse. The other two transgendered relatives in the New York area, cousins Quentin and Olivia, were not able to make it; Quentin did a show the previous night, while Olivia was at a photo shoot in Manhattan.

The first one who greeted me was Christie. “Let me look at you, Eric,” she said, as if she hadn’t seen me in ages. “I’d like a look at you, too,” I added, looking at her, wearing a plaid skirt and a white blouse. I studied her for a moment, before complimenting her on her feminine beauty. “Why, thank you, Eric,” she said, her facial expression showing an indication she was blushing.

“How’s your transition coming along?” I asked her.

“It’s coming along great; the only thing I’m awaiting now is approval for a sex-change operation,” she replied.

“I’m not looking at surgery for the foreseeable future,” Jessica added.

"How's life been treating you, Jessica?" I asked her.

"It's been treating me okay. Business has been fairly brisk the last three months; I had just come back from Italy, where I picked up several paintings at starving artists' sales. They're for sale at a gallery in midtown Manhattan. I haven't had much luck finding a good man, however," she replied.

"It's very difficult for a woman like you to find a man who loves you for the woman you've become," I added before we sat down.

"It's not just my transsexual nature that keeps many men away. It's also that I have such high standards for the men I date. I prefer someone who is muscular, has lots of money, and keeps himself in shape. Most of the single men in New York who understand what I've been through don't usually fit that description. They're either on the heavy side, like you, or in a lower socio-economic class than me. I still hope that the man of my dreams will come, but I'm not holding my breath on it," she lamented.

"It would help you if you lowered your standards a bit. Open your mind up to dating heavier men like me, as well as men who are even in a slightly lower socio-economic class than you. Many of the men you're looking for are more interested in women who were actually born female. You'll find that heavier men, along with less affluent men, have had somewhat similar experiences to what you've had, as far as dating is concerned. There may be one big guy who would be honored to have a girl like you on his arm. Trust me, Jessica. Open up your mind; you'll be a better person for it," I assured her.

"Maybe that's what I'm doing wrong," she told me, as if she was admitting defeat.

"I've been after unattainable women myself, Jessica...however, most of the women I have been after in recent years were closer to my age. Kara was four and a half years my junior; I left her because there were simply too many problems in her family. The women I had been dating were more interested in finding someone who was muscular, wealthier than I am, and marrying into families of higher status in society than ours. I had to open my mind up as well; the first girl I dated after I broke up with her was a transsexual. I only dated her a few times, before she found someone else. The longest time I have been in a relationship in the last five years has been six months. So, I've had just as tough of a time finding true love than you have had. You're not alone," I said reassuringly.

"Thanks, Eric," she whispered before kissing me on the cheek.

Jessica then sat down on the loveseat to talk about her transition with Christie, while Vanessa and Brianne pulled up their chairs. "How has everything been with you?" I asked them.

"I've been doing great. Brianne and I are about to open a bridal shop in Greenwich Village; it will be transgender-friendly. I'll be able to model both tuxedos and bridal gowns for the larger woman. We've been looking forward to opening this business ever since we met two years ago," Vanessa replied.

"From the beginning, I've learned to love both Virgil and Vanessa. When I was growing up, I had an uncle who worked as a female impersonator in Los Angeles. My aunt was very understanding of his work; he also modeled both men's and women's fashions on the

side. They owned a dress shop in West Hollywood for years, before they retired in 1982," Brianne added.

"Which one is prettier?" I asked her.

"Well...I think Vanessa is prettier," Brianne giggled.

"Don't you think I'm handsome as a guy?" Vanessa asked.

"You're also a handsome guy," Brianne replied before sharing a laugh and a kiss.

The get-together broke up before five o'clock. Shauna wanted me to meet Travis. "I'm fixing him something special for dinner tonight," she informed me.

"What are you planning to prepare?" I asked her.

"His favorite; meat loaf," she replied.

Around six o'clock, Travis walked in the door. He was six feet tall, with a slender, but athletic, build, light brown hair, and wearing a navy blue suit. He had a long day on the job. He walked in with a bouquet of flowers for his beloved Shauna.

"Hi, honey," she whispered.

"Hello, sweetie," he whispered before they exchanged a kiss. He gave her the flowers.

"They're beautiful! Thank you, baby," she cooed before kissing him again. I walked to the cupboard to get a vase for the flowers, and fill it half way with water. Travis then walked toward me.

"You must be Eric. I've heard a lot about you from Shauna," he said.

"I've also heard a lot about you from Shauna. You picked yourself a winner," I added.

"I think so," he then added.

I helped Shauna set up the table for dinner, while Travis went to the master bedroom to change into something more comfortable. We finished setting the table by the time he emerged, wearing a gray golf shirt, a pair of khaki pants and a pair of brown loafers. He was surprised at what Shauna prepared for him.

"It smells delicious, darling," he whispered.

"It's time that someone other than you found out how good my meat loaf really is," she cooed before kissing him.

While having dinner, I asked them how they met. "It was four years ago, just before I had my operation. We were in an American History class together; we spent the first few months studying together and going out for lunch every once in a while. When he wanted to get more serious, I told him that I was transsexual and I was preparing to undergo a sex-change operation. Travis was very sweet about it; he loved me as the woman I had become. He was with me when I had my surgery in Montreal, and he was the first man I made love to as a woman. We've been living together for the last year and a half," she replied.

"Before I met Shauna, I had never met a woman as loving, romantic and feminine as she. It was just before we graduated from college that she told me about herself; I assured her that it didn't matter to me what she was or what happened to her in the past. I told her

that she was the most beautiful woman in the world to me, and I loved her for the woman she had become. Four years later, I'm still madly in love with her. I look forward to spending the rest of my life with her," he added.

"What were the other girls like...I mean, the ones you dated before you met Shauna?" I asked him.

"They weren't very friendly; many had no sense of romantic adventure, some weren't very loving at all, while others weren't very feminine at all. They were absolute nightmares. I was looking for someone different, and I found that girl in Shauna," he replied.

"That's sweet of you to say that," she added.

I took an extra room at their apartment for the night. Before turning in, I set up my laptop on the desk, and wrote my impressions into my electronic diary before plugging into an Internet connection to get my E-mail. I then got into bed with a good comic collection. Shauna checked in on me before I went to bed. She had changed into a red negligee and matching nightgown.

"Are you comfortable, Eric?" she asked me.

"I'm comfortable, thank you," I replied.

"What are you planning to do tomorrow?" she asked me.

"Olivia has another photo shoot in Manhattan; this time, Quentin will be taking part. He'll be in both male and female attire," I replied.

The next morning, I went down to the photography studio where Olivia and Quentin were having their photo shoot. They were doing a spread for a bridal magazine; the morning shoot involved Olivia as a bride and Quentin as a groom. Olivia was five-eight, with long, strawberry blonde hair, slender build and fashion model looks. Quentin was five-nine, with short, medium brown hair, slender build and a look that came right out of the pages of a men's magazine. I arrived about eleven-thirty, just as they were breaking for lunch. I brought them a salad and a bottle of lemonade; I also got myself four pieces of fried chicken.

"What brings you to New York?" Olivia asked.

"I'm visiting all of my transgendered relatives on vacation," I replied.

"Are you staying in a hotel?" Quentin asked.

"I'm staying with Shauna and Travis," I then replied.

After we ate our lunch, a makeup artist arrived. Her name was Kari; she was a tall, red-haired girl who looked no older than twenty. "Would you like to see Quentin transformed into Jayne for the second half of this photo shoot?" she asked me.

"I would love that," I replied.

I was taken into his dressing room, where he changed from male attire into female prosthetics. He put on a pair of life-like breasts and a prosthetic vagina; he covered them up with a pink strapless bra and a pair of pink bikini panties. Kari then applied beard cover, foundation, blush, eye shadow, mascara, lipstick and lip-gloss. She asked me to hand a lavender bridesmaid's gown to Jayne; she was able to get into it with no problem.

She also gave her a pair of pearl drop earrings, a pearl necklace and two pearl bracelets. Topping the look was a shoulder-length, platinum blonde wig.

They did their afternoon shoot as two girls; Jayne started with the lavender gown, with a bow tie in back and a skirt that extended to the floor. Olivia wore a white, mermaid-style bridal gown. After an hour doing photos in these dresses, Olivia changed into another bridal gown, this one a sleeveless design with a cathedral-length train. Jayne changed into a pink bridesmaid's gown, again with a skirt extending to the floor. They switched roles for the last two rounds of the shoot; Jayne wearing a pink bridal gown with puffed sleeves, lace bodice and a cathedral-length train, followed by a long-sleeved design with the same-length train. Olivia was first in a baby blue bridesmaid's dress, then in a red, sleeveless bridesmaid's gown.

That night, Shauna and Travis invited Quentin and his wife, Lynne, over. Lynne was also five-nine, with long, blonde hair and a slender build, like her husband. I decided to take Olivia to dinner at a nearby restaurant.

"How has life been treating you, Liv?" I asked her.

"It's been treating me very well. I've been asked to join Virgil and Brianne in their business; since I know the transgender community of New York quite well, they thought I would be a natural for their new venture," she replied.

"I'm sure that they will have a large clientele among the transgender community of New York," I added.

"I'm feeling more and more comfortable living and dressing full-time as Olivia; I'm not sure if I'm a gay transvestite or a straight woman. I'm feeling more and more that I am really a transsexual," she added.

"Are you exploring these feelings with your therapist?" I then asked.

"I've been exploring these feelings with my therapist for the last year. The more I explore these feelings, the more I'm beginning to realize that I really should have been a girl. I've always liked guys, but I have always felt that it is more appropriate to express these desires in the role of a woman. To express these desires meant assimilating into the world of women: learning how to apply makeup, wearing the latest female fashions, having my ears pierced, growing my hair longer and having it styled in a feminine manner. One of the easiest things I've learned is to flirt with and tease the guys; I'm quite a tease," she explained.

"Have you dated a man?" I inquired.

"I've dated several men; some are nice guys, like you, while others are real jerks. I've only dated one man more than once; we went out on several dates before he was transferred back to Los Angeles," she replied.

"Olivia, if having a sex change is really what you want, I'll be behind you all the way," I added before our meals were delivered.

Olivia and I took in a female impersonator show in Greenwich Village later in the evening, before she took me back to her apartment around midnight. She lived in the same building as Shauna and Travis. "Won't you come in?" she asked me.

"I would like to see what your place is like," I replied.

I followed Olivia into her place; it was full of artwork from her roommate. "Who did these beautiful paintings?" I asked her.

"Those paintings were done by my roommate, Cindi. She went through a sex-change operation last year," she replied.

"Is she also helping you sort out your feelings on being a woman?" I then asked.

"She's been very helpful to me thus far," she replied.

It was at that moment that Cindi emerged from her bedroom. She had shoulder-length black hair, five-foot-nine, with a larger than average build. She was in a black babydoll nightie. "I didn't hear you come in, Liv," Cindi said.

"Eric Fletcher, this is my roommate, Cindi Harris. Cindi, this is my cousin, Eric Fletcher," Olivia said in an introductory manner.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Cindi," I said to her.

"I've heard a lot about you, Eric," Cindi added.

"You're a very talented artist, Cindi," I complimented.

"Why, thank you," Cindi said blushing.

She then pointed me toward a painting she did. "Where was this painted?" I asked her.

"This was painted in Paris back in 1989. The model I used in this painting was a transsexual. I wanted to show her as a refined, fashionable and high-class woman, so we did a painting of her in a lavender taffeta ball gown. The model who worked with me on this painting was also instrumental in realizing that I should have been born a girl. We still keep in touch, nine years later," she replied.



“What’s she doing now?” I then asked.

“She’s still a model, although she’s working in New York now. She just got married last month; I was her maid of honor,” she replied.

“I’m in the process of buying new artwork for my businesses. Where’s your gallery?” I asked in a businesslike manner.

“My gallery is on 42nd Street, near Times Square,” she replied.

“I’ll have to drop by before I leave New York,” I added.

It was one-thirty in the morning that I finally left Olivia’s place, and returned to Shauna and Travis’ apartment. I immediately took off my suit, changed into a T-shirt and shorts, and got into bed. I slept until almost twelve noon the next day. I dropped by Cindi’s art gallery the next afternoon, and looked over several paintings before deciding on one featuring a meticulously restored World War II era plane, and one she did on a trip to France. I had the paintings shipped to my St. Louis home by air.

On my last night in New York, Shauna and Travis took me out to dinner at a nearby restaurant, and took in a concert at Birdland, the famous jazz nightclub. Little did I know that they would surprise me with the most important decision of their young lives. They kept me guessing until the intermission between sets.

“Eric, I want you to witness this,” Travis said.

“What is it?” I asked him before he turned his attention to Shauna.

“Shauna, ever since we met, you’ve been nothing but a sweetheart to me. I’ve never met such a warm, loving, passionate woman like you, and I’ll never find another one quite like you. You’ve shown me that I could love like never before; you’re a very romantic woman, and I will always treasure every moment I’ve spent with you, then, now and in the years to come,” he quietly said to her.

“Travis, I never thought I could meet a man who purely understood the fact I was born a boy, and felt comfortable with it, until I met you. You’ve always loved the woman I am now. I’ll always be grateful for your warm compassion, your passionate love and your never-ending affection for me. You’re the most special man I’ve ever met, and I treasure every moment I spend with you,” she whispered.

“Shauna, will you marry me?” he then asked.

She hesitated for a moment, before replying: “Yes, Travis...I’ll marry you!”

I then signaled to a waiter, who came quickly to our table. “A bottle of champagne; Bollinger ’86,” I said to him.

I then gave a request to the emcee of the show to give to the musicians playing that night. That request was for a tune called “Someday My Prince Will Come”. For Shauna, her prince would be with her forever.

I left New York the next day, having been booked on a mid-afternoon flight to West Palm Beach. I took the subway from Greenwich Village to JFK, and had a good lunch at the airport cafeteria before boarding my flight. Yes, I had more transgendered relatives to see.

Third Stop: South Florida

Four of my transgendered relatives called South Florida home. Of course, there was Aunt Diane. My mother's older sister had lived in West Palm Beach since her 1969 sex-change operation. She had been married and divorced three times; her fourth husband passed away in 1997. She hadn't been dating much since that time, preferring to work and go out on the town with her female friends. The other three were all cousins: Lori, Thor and John. Lori had become a successful businesswoman; she and three other women owned a high-end fashion store in Fort Lauderdale. Thor had become a female impersonator on the weekends; he was working at a Palm Beach travel agency on weekdays. John worked as a loan officer on weekdays; he only was in feminine mode on the weekends. He and Lauren took several trips to various transgender events; they spent the previous weekend in Tampa for a photo session as girls. Lauren has been an equal participant in John's adventures as Joanna since they met in college.

My flight landed in West Palm Beach just before six o'clock on the evening of June 23. Aunt Diane was waiting for me at the airport; she was wearing a peach-colored T-shirt, a pair of blue jeans and blue pumps. She was five-ten, with shoulder-length red hair, slender and looking much younger than her fifty-five years. She hadn't changed since my last visit to her five years earlier. When Uncle Benny died, I sent donations to their favorite charities in lieu of flowers. She immediately noticed me, despite the fact I got a crew cut before I left St. Louis.

"Eric, it's good to see you again," she said with restrained joy before we embraced.

"It's so good to see you again, Aunt Diane. You're looking as great as ever," I complimented.

"Lori's going to be happy to see you, too; she's kept in touch with you over the years," she said, slyly winking at me and giving me a soft nudge on my elbow.

After claiming my luggage, she showed me to her car, a 1996 Chrysler Concorde. "I have a car similar to yours," I said.

"What year is your car?" she asked.

"I have a 1995 Chrysler LHS," I replied.

I put my bags in the trunk, and got in her car on the passenger side. She took a less direct route into Palm Beach. It was another twenty minutes before we arrived at her place, located in the high rent district. It was a four-bedroom house she shared with two other women - both transsexuals. They moved in with her after Uncle Benny's passing. No one was home when we arrived just after seven o'clock.

She showed me to a guest bedroom, where I set my luggage down. I then asked who her two housemates were.

"The blonde who lives with me is Bridget Watkins; she was just hired as a junior partner by the law firm I work for last month. She graduated from law school last December; she aced the Florida bar exam. She's thirty years old, began living full-time as a woman in

San Francisco at the age of sixteen. She underwent a sex-change operation in 1987, just before she turned twenty. After her surgery, she worked her way through law school as a part-time model and a clerk at her aunt's bookstore in Fort Lauderdale. The auburn-haired lady is Patricia Martin; she's a security consultant for the City of West Palm Beach. She's forty-eight years old, had a sex-change operation in 1985, and has been dating a guy from Key West for the last year," she explained.

"Bridget is one beautiful girl; Patricia is quite a classy lady, too," I added.

"She likes to be called Trish," she corrected.

"Where are they now?" I asked her.

"Bridget had to work late tonight; she's handling a breach of contract suit against a major broadcast concern. Trish is meeting her boyfriend in Miami; they're going for a night on the town," she replied.

I went upstairs to change from my suit into a pair of khaki slacks and a blue golf shirt. Aunt Diane went to her room to change into a blue denim skirt and a pair of white high heels. I came downstairs just as Aunt Diane had finished buckling her high heels on her feet.

"Are you ready to paint the town tonight?" she asked me.

"I'm looking forward to it," I replied; then asked her, "When do we go?"

"I'm waiting for Bridget to get home. She'll be with us tonight," she replied.

Bridget walked in the door around quarter to eight, still in her white blouse and pink skirt. She was a willowy blonde, five-eleven with an average build. "Who's this handsome man?" she asked my aunt.

"Bridget, this is my nephew, Eric Fletcher. Eric, this is my housemate, Bridget Watkins," Aunt Diane replied.

"It's my pleasure to meet you, Bridget," I said with a smile.

"The feeling is mutual," she added.

Bridget went to her room to change into something more comfortable; she emerged five minutes later in a baby blue party dress. "Where are we going to take your nephew?" she asked her.

"We're going to Plato's Pizza for dinner, before taking in a drag show," replied Aunt Diane.

The pizza place was on a street facing the beach. After we ordered an extra large sausage pizza, Bridget asked me: "How are you and Diane related?"

"My mother is Diane's older sister; Diane was born fourteen months after my mother was," I replied.

"Is she the only transgendered member of your family?" she then asked.

"I have eleven other relatives who are transgendered in one way or another on my mother's side, plus an additional eight on my father's side," I replied.

“Bridget, I was the first one in his family to go through such a change. Back in the late 1960s, changing from man to woman was unspeakable. I was also the first member of his family to live in a foreign country who wasn’t in the military,” Aunt Diane added.

“Where did you transition, and how did you survive?” Bridget then asked.

“In the spring of 1966, I left Kansas City, the city I grew up in, to work as an entertainer in Paris. While I was in college, studying linguistics, I became very fluent in French. I went to work in one of the most famous clubs in France featuring transsexual entertainers. One of my colleagues pointed me in the direction of a therapist who treated transsexuals; I was officially diagnosed as being transsexual that fall. I began hormone treatments in the spring of 1967; I also took several modeling assignments while I was transitioning, mainly modeling the latest fashions, as well as formal and bridal wear. I even dated a few men during my transition. This was a very open society, unlike the society we faced in America at the time. A number of French entertainers were also transsexual; they told me about a man in Casablanca who performed sex-change operations. I was finally recommended for surgery in the summer of 1968; it wasn’t until the spring of 1969 that I had my operation. I was able to legally change my name from David Michael Roberts to Diane Marie Roberts. I didn’t return to the United States for three months, though. I was able to survive by living in a society more accepting of transsexuals; many transsexuals I’ve met since then have had a harder time because of America’s lack of tolerance for anyone who’s different,” Diane explained.

“What did you do after you returned to the States?” Bridget then asked.

“I relocated to West Palm Beach, where I trained as a legal secretary. When I finished my training, I was offered a job at a law firm in town. It has gone through several changes of leadership, but I’ve been there for twenty-seven years. Many of my colleagues understand what I went through,” Diane replied.

“It’s tough for anyone, even a man, to understand what my aunt has been through,” I added.

“I never revealed the fact I was a transsexual to my first husband. I met Dwayne Janis in 1971, just two years after my operation. He was working for a trucking company in Palm Beach as a dispatcher; we married in the spring of 1973. Unfortunately, he cheated on me with a blonde bimbo in Miami, so we called it quits in the fall of 1974. Two years later, I met my second husband, Fidel Salazar. He had emigrated from Cuba in 1959 after the fall of the Batista regime; he was part-owner of a shipyard in Palm Beach. When I revealed the fact of my transsexualism to him, he was very understanding. He lost his first wife, Juanita, to cancer in 1972. We married in the fall of 1977. Like with Dwayne, Fidel soon met another woman. We got a divorce the following summer. After my divorce became final, I met my third husband, Brian Dyson. He was much younger than I am; he was twenty-three when I met him, and I was thirty-five. He was also understanding of the fact I was born a boy; we married in the summer of 1979. This one only lasted three months; irreconcilable differences led to this divorce. I wasn’t even looking when I met Benny Roberts in 1981. He had lost his wife, Zöe, in an automobile accident in the fall of 1978; he was raising four children alone. He was a very handsome man in his mid-forties at the time we met. We dated for two years; when I finally revealed my transsexualism to him, he was very understanding. His children accepted me as the woman I had become. We married in

the spring of 1984; we were happily married for thirteen years. While I wore a white dress for my first three weddings, I decided to put on a gown for my fourth wedding. Benny was part-owner of an imported car dealership in West Palm Beach. I played an active role in raising his three sons, Ben, Will and Roger, and his daughter, Nora. Benny fought a brave battle with cancer for five years; he passed his portion of the dealership on to Ben and Will when he died. Roger is working on his master's degree in business administration at Harvard; Nora is a junior in college, majoring in psychology," Aunt Diane explained.

After we had dinner, we went down the road to a nightclub featuring a female impersonator revue. I noticed the name of Theresa Jones on the show bill hanging in the entrance, and noticed the photo of her. "I'm sure Thor has refined his makeup technique since the last time I saw him," I whispered to my aunt.

"He's been performing as Theresa Jones for the past year. When we paid our cover charge, Aunt Diane asked her friend Fran Wheeler, one of the owners of the establishment, to inform Theresa that her aunt had arrived. "I'd take it you have a surprise for Miss Jones," Fran said, acting as if she was taking a wild guess.

"Yes, I have a surprise for her," she added.

Fran got one of the waitresses, Keisha, to show us to a table in front of the stage. A young African-American woman in her early twenties, she worked at the establishment to help pay her college tuition. All the waitresses were in red party dresses, while the female bartenders wore white blouses and navy blue skirts; even the men who worked as women. The waiters and male bartenders wore navy blue slacks and button-down shirts with navy blue ties. We were promptly seated; I ordered a bottle of California wine for myself, Bridget and Aunt Diane. While we were waiting, a female impersonator approached us. She was six-two in high heels, wearing a platinum blonde shoulder-length wig, rhinestone earrings, a rhinestone necklace and a sleeveless, blue sequined evening gown. She sa-shayed to the table in perfect, feminine fashion.

"Good evening, Aunt Diane," she said in a low-pitched feminine tone.

"Theresa, how are you tonight?" she asked her.

"I'm doing great," she replied, before asking her: "Who do we have here?"

"Theresa Jones, you remember your cousin, Eric Fletcher; this is my new housemate, Bridget Watkins," she replied.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Theresa," Bridget added before shaking her hand.

"The pleasure is mine, Bridget," Theresa said with a convincing smile.

"How are things with you, Eric?" she then asked.

"I'm on vacation right now; I've sold several of my holdings in the last several months, while donating one radio station to a college. I'm staying with Aunt Diane while I'm in the area," I replied.

"We're very glad to have you here tonight," she added; then asked Aunt Diane: "Where's Trish?"

"She's in Miami with her boyfriend," she replied.

The show began at ten-thirty, with the show director, Lela Gordon, telling bawdy jokes. After a dance routine by a red-haired performer in a Las Vegas showgirl outfit, and a black-haired performer dressed in a cowgirl outfit and lip-synching a country song, Theresa came on the stage, singing the song "And I Love Him". She appeared on stage toward the end of the show, this time dressed in a red sequined gown, singing a song from the movie "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?" She came to our table once more before we left; this time, she was wearing a floral print dress. "Are you going to be performing outside of Palm Beach anytime soon?" I asked her.

"I'll be entering the Miss Gay Palm Beach pageant next month; after that, I'll be performing in Orlando, Miami and Jacksonville before going on the road to Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis and Detroit," she replied.

We finally left the establishment at one-thirty. We returned to the house, where Trish was entertaining her boyfriend. "I didn't expect you to be here," Aunt Diane said, surprised to see her.

"Neither did I, but Rick wanted to see the house," Trish added, before introducing her boyfriend to us.

"Rick Downes, these are my housemates, Diane Roberts and Bridget Wilkins. This man is Diane's nephew, Eric Fletcher," Trish said.

"A pleasure to meet you all," Rick said with a big smile.

"The pleasure is ours," I added before I shook his hand.

Shortly thereafter, Trish and Rick left to return to Miami. I was totally exhausted, so I went to the guest bedroom to change into a T-shirt and a pair of shorts before getting into bed. I was just about asleep around two o'clock in the morning, when Bridget sashayed into the room. Her hair had been tied back; she was wearing a pink babydoll nightie with matching combing coat.

"What brings you here, Bridget?" I asked her.

"You," she cooed.

"Why me?" I asked with a puzzled look on my face.

"I thought you could use some company tonight," she whispered seductively.

"Did Diane spill the beans about what I've been through since I dumped my fiancée?" I then asked.

"Yes, she did. I want you to know that you're the most handsome man I've come across," she replied with a bit of lust.

"Thank you, Bridget. You're quite a beautiful girl," I added before she took off her combing coat. She set it down on a chair near the bed; she walked over to the bed, removed the covers just enough to slip her feet into them, and then covered herself up. The next thing I knew, we were in each other's arms. "I hope we can make this night extra special," she whispered lovingly.

"I'll tell you one thing, Bridget...my former fiancée was never like this," I whispered.

"Was she a genetic female or a transsexual, like me?" she asked inquisitively.

“She was born a girl; I met her when I was eighteen, she was four years younger. We had fallen in love from first sight; we worked to build a loving relationship despite opposition from our parents. I was with her for nine years; we became engaged after being together for six years. We put off a planned wedding many times; the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back was when her parents separated. They interfered in the relationship; when they tried to drag me into their bitter divorce, she was devastated. I was left without a choice but to break off the engagement and end our relationship. That was in the fall of 1993,” I explained.

“Have you been involved with anyone since?” she asked.

“To be quite honest, Bridget, I have been through six failed relationships since then. None of them lasted more than six months. The first girl I went out with after I broke off my engagement was a pre-op transsexual. We met through a dating service the Christmas after Kara and I went our separate ways. She was a big, beautiful girl with a sweet personality and more feminine than the woman I was once engaged to marry; we were together only six months; I only went out with her a few times. As I look back, I thought it was too soon after the end of a long-term relationship. She found another man, and we agreed to remain friends; we lost touch after she had her sex-change operation in 1995. I wasn’t involved with anyone for two years after that; I was involved with a succession of women; four genetic females and another pre-op transsexual. Although I had built several successful businesses, love was very elusive. My love life had degraded to a series of one-night stands by the end of last year; I got sick of the game. So, I gave up looking for love; I haven’t looked back. I’m glad I gave up looking,” I replied with feeling.

“It must have been tough...giving up on love like that, especially a man as successful as you,” she added, as if she had felt sorry for me.

“It has been a tough go since that relationship ended,” I whispered while I was caressing her on the shoulders. The next thing either one of us knew, our passion had built up enough to share a kiss.

“Kiss me, honey,” she whispered seductively. I moved my lips toward hers; we were engaged in a tender kiss at first, then becoming more passionate as time went on. The next thing I knew, I was caressing her all over her body. Five minutes later, in between kisses, she lustfully whispered: “Make love to me, baby.” I hadn’t made love to a woman since I was engaged.

Bridget removed the top from her nightie, allowing me to fondle her breasts. “That feels so good, darling,” she whispered erotically. I then nibbled and licked her all over her body. We stopped just long enough to allow her to remove my underwear; she began to give my manhood some attention. This was something Kara never did with me. “Bridget, you know how to satisfy this man,” I whispered while my manhood was in her mouth. After she tasted my essence, I removed her G-string panties, and began nibbling and licking at her vagina. After that, she would spread her legs as far as they would go, and inserted my manhood into her vagina. “Eric, baby, you make me feel like a total woman!” she ecstatically said. After we climaxed, she gave me a tender kiss.

“How was I?” she asked me after we finished our sexual adventure.

"It was the best love any woman has made to me," I replied. She put her nightie back on, while I put my T-shirt and shorts back on. She and I slept together that night. And what was Aunt Diane doing while Bridget and I were having sex? She was fast asleep.

It was eleven o'clock the next morning when we awakened; the first thing we shared was a kiss. "Good morning, babe," I whispered.

"Good morning, honey," Bridget whispered before she got her combing coat on. We walked to the living room, where Aunt Diane was sitting down, reading one of her women's magazines. "Were you in bed together last night?" she asked us.

"Yes, we were...it was quite a passionate night," I replied.

"Your nephew is quite a romantic and passionate man," Bridget added.

"It's quite interesting, really; I had a dream that you two made love to each other," Aunt Diane said whimsically.

"While you were sound asleep, we did make love to each other," I informed her.

"Are you serious?" Aunt Diane asked surprisingly.

"Eric and I made passionate love to each other last night; it was an experience we will remember for a long time," Bridget replied.

Bridget and I shared a shower together, before we got dressed for a day at the beach with Aunt Diane. Bridget put on her pink sleeveless bodysuit and a denim skirt with pink flats, while Aunt Diane changed into a red short-sleeved bodysuit, floral print skirt and red pumps. I decided to wear my blue T-shirt, a pair of



blue jeans and a pair of white canvas tennis shoes. We had lunch at a beachfront restaurant; after that, we sat on the beach for a couple of hours. When we got back around three-thirty, I looked at my appointment book, and discovered I had a dinner date with my cousin Lori at eight o'clock. So, I took a nap before I showered and shaved.

I was ready by seven-thirty; I had selected my navy blue pinstriped suit with maroon tie and a pair of maroon dress shoes. Lori arrived just before eight o'clock, wearing a red satin dress and matching high heels; she also wore a pearl necklace and pearl drop earrings. She was five-ten with high heels; five-seven in stocking feet, with strawberry blonde hair that cascaded past her shoulders, an average build and a sweet smile. Aunt Diane answered the door when she rang the doorbell.

"Is Eric ready, Aunt Diane?" Lori asked her.

I had emerged from the guest bedroom, after I suddenly remembered my wallet. "Lori, you look smashing tonight," I complimented.

"You look very handsome," she added.

We walked out of the house shortly thereafter. She showed me to her car, a 1997 Oldsmobile Aurora. I got in the passenger side of the car; as soon as I sat down, I reached over to unlock the door for Lori. She got in through the driver's side, thanking me for unlocking her door as she was sitting down. We fastened our seat belts before leaving Aunt Diane's driveway. We went to a quiet restaurant in Fort Lauderdale, overlooking the ocean.

When we ordered our meals, she asked me: "Eric, do you know Eric Browning?"

"I've worked with him several times in the past; he took the publicity photos for one of the radio stations I own," I replied.

"I worked with his wife, Kimberly, several years ago. She modeled several dresses for the print advertisements for our shop. Like me, she's a transsexual. They've been married for two years now; they're preparing to adopt two children," she added.

"When do you plan to have your operation?" I asked her.

"I'm scheduled to go in next month; I'm going to Dr. Muller in Portland for my operation," she replied.

"Will you be going alone?" I then asked.

"My mother will be going with me. She's been very supportive of me since I told her about my transsexualism. My father is very supportive, too; he's in Poland on business. My older brother, Lawrence, has visited me several times since I began the transition," she replied.

"That makes things easier on you, Lori," I added.

"I was surprised at their response when I told my parents about my plans to become a woman. I expected them to cut me off, as I've heard many parents of women like me have done. Mom's experience with Aunt Diane helped shape her attitudes on transsexualism. They had known I had worn women's clothing occasionally, but they thought I was gay or something. When I finally realized that I was really Lori, the first person I confided this to was Aunt Diane. I confided in her before anyone else because she had been through what I

was about to go through. She referred me to a therapist, who officially diagnosed me as being transsexual. When I told my parents, they asked me why I didn't tell them this before. I told them that I wasn't sure they were going to accept me as their daughter. They accepted me as their daughter, and supported me in any way they could. I sold my interest in a men's fashion shop in Miami, and bought into a friend's business in Fort Lauderdale. I commute every day from Palm Beach to my job; we sell primarily high-end female fashions," she explained.

After dinner, Lori took me to see a play at a local college, before we took a walk on the beach. "Have you considered going steady with a transsexual?" she asked me.

"I've considered it many times, Lori; however, not many are ready for a relationship with a man," I replied.

"Many people often ask me if I've found a boyfriend yet. I tell them that I'm not ready for a boyfriend just yet. Several of my transsexual friends are in relationships with men; one of my closest friends, a pre-op named Julie, is in a common-law marriage with a man. It's not a legal, binding marriage, but they're living together and enjoying the benefits normally associated with marriage. She hasn't decided whether she plans to go through with surgery, but if she does, her common-law husband will pay for her surgery," Lori added.

We returned to Aunt Diane's around eleven o'clock; John, dressed as Joanne, and Lauren were over. Both were in identical blue party dresses; they had just arrived after spending an evening at a local nightclub. "I didn't know you had company, Aunt Diane," I said, rather surprised.

"Joanne, you remember your cousins, Eric and Lori," she said to her.

"Yes, I remember," Joanne said before getting up from the couch and giving each of us a hug.

"Eric and Lori, this is Joanne's spouse, Lauren," she added.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Lauren," I said while gently shaking her hand.

"Pleased to meet your acquaintance, Lauren," Lori added.

"I'm very pleased to meet you both," Lauren said with a smile.

"Eric and Lori have different mothers; both are Diane's sisters. Eric's mother is her younger sister, Melanie; Lori's is her older sister, Deanna. I'm on the Fletcher side of the family; his father is my mother's older brother," Joanne added.

"How many transgendered relatives are in your family?" Trish asked me as she was emerging from the kitchen with a bowl of popcorn.

"There are twenty transgendered members of my family; eight on my father's side and twelve on my mother's side," I replied.

"That's quite a family history of transgenderism," Bridget added.

It was one o'clock in the morning when Joanne and Lauren finally went home. I helped Aunt Diane and Trish with the dishes before turning in for the night. When I got into the guest bedroom to prepare for bed, Bridget was waiting for me; this time, she was in a baby blue teddy.

“Eric, can we talk?” she asked me.

“What would you like to talk about, Bridget?” I then asked.

“I haven’t told you why I got to be the woman I am now. When I was born, my parents gave me the name Ryan Bernard Watkins. When I was three years old, I realized that I should have been a girl. I began crossdressing in secret when I was five years old; I was wearing my older sister’s dresses and my mother’s wigs. I kept those items locked away in a chest my grandmother gave me; I was afraid my parents would discipline me severely if they saw me wearing a dress. Even though I confided in my older sister, Rachelle, that I felt female deep inside, I kept it a secret from my parents for fourteen years. That was before they went to a symposium; there, they met actual people who have varying types of transgender identities. When they came home, they found me in a pair of panties and a bra. When they asked me why I was doing this, I told them the truth. I also told them I wanted to become a girl; the only thing they said was why I didn’t tell them this sooner. I later told them that I was afraid they would reject me. When all was said and done, my parents assured me that if a sex change was what I wanted, they would make sure they supported me during my transition from boy to girl,” she explained.

“How did you choose your name?” I asked after her explanation.

“I considered several different names, including the feminine form of my male name, Ryann. I also considered Rachel, Bettina, Brenda, even Roma, before I settled on the name Bridget Renee Watkins. When I was sixteen years old, I began to live full-time as a girl. Since they couldn’t get me to transition in public school, my parents sent me to the Rainbow School for Girls, an all-inclusive girls’ school. I lived full-time as a girl for four years before I was operated on. In the years since my operation, I worked part-time as a model for an agency in Miami and as a clerk in my aunt’s bookstore in Fort Lauderdale while I was in law school. I have also lived in ‘stealth’ mode; very few people know that I was born a boy,” she replied.

“Have you had a boyfriend?” I asked with the air of a psychologist.

“I’ve had several boyfriends; the first boyfriend I had dated me before I had my operation. His name was Jason; he was a very sweet guy. When I told him I was transsexual, he was very cool with it. We never had sex until after my operation, but we shared a number of deep kisses. My first sexual encounter after my operation was with him; it was his first encounter with a woman, too. I made love to him once more before I relocated. He and I went our separate ways after I relocated to Florida; we’re still friends. When I came to Florida, I dated a number of other men; my last steady boyfriend was named Willie; he was a bouncer at a nightclub. After I graduated from law school, he and I grew apart; we ended our relationship two months ago. You’re the first man I made love to since I split with Willie,” she replied.

“Bridget, I hope you can find a good man someday. There’s going to be a lucky guy who not only will see past the fact that you were born a boy, but also love you as the beautiful woman you’ve become,” I added.

“I’ll keep you in mind, if I can’t find anyone in South Florida,” she whispered.

“I’ll also keep you in mind, if I can’t find anyone in St. Louis,” I whispered before giving her a tender kiss.

I spent the next day with Bridget on the beach; she turned countless heads in her floral print bikini. I was wearing my shorts and white T-shirt. Bridget and I managed to steal several kisses while we were at the beach. I never thought a woman would be this smitten over me. I didn't know if I was in love with her, but she was very beautiful and sexy. At sunset, we were walking around a nearby park, holding hands. We sat down on a bench, looking at the sunset. She asked me: "Eric, what made you decide to date a transsexual?"

"To be honest with you, Bridget, I've always felt emotionally, physically, romantically and sexually attracted to women, regardless of whether she was born a girl or a boy. I never felt attracted to men. There are several reasons why I decided to date a transsexual. First off, I feel that I have more women to choose from when I add the male-to-female transsexual population to the mix. Although I really want children of my own, I can live with the fact that a male-to-female transsexual cannot conceive a child. I've had to keep my mind open to adopting children, even if I remained single. Second, I don't feel threatened by the presence of a transsexual, unlike most men. My family history of transgenderism has helped me to be a more understanding man. Third, I've had a lot of trouble meeting genetic females over the years. The most important reason is that I see past the person she once was; it's the woman in front of me that matters. However, when I date a transsexual, I require that she's living, working and dressing full-time as a woman and planning to have surgery at some point in the future. I've kissed several pre-ops, a few of them passionately. I never had sexual relations with a pre-op transsexual; you're the only one other than my now former fiancée that I've made love to. I would even be open to marrying a post-op transsexual," I explained.

I spent the night of June 25 sharing the same bed with Bridget. That night, she was in a red see-through nightgown with matching bikini panties. We shared several kisses before we fell asleep. We woke up the next morning at seven-thirty, so that she could get to work. She changed into a white skirt, red blouse and red high heels to go to work. She had to be in court that morning, arguing the breach of contract case. Before she left for work, she had a few parting words for me.

"Eric, this has been the most romantic and passionate three days of my life. You showed me that I could love again; you have made me feel more like a woman than any other man I've met. I will always remember you for the most loving time of my life to date," she said with an air of romance.

"Bridget, this has been the most romantic three days I've had in the last five years. You've made me feel more like a man than any other woman I've met since I left Kara. I hope you will remember this time for a long, long time, darling," I whispered.

"Have a safe trip, honey," she cooed.

"Keep in touch, sweetheart," I whispered before we shared a kiss. I gave her my business card, and she gave me hers. After she left the house, I began packing for the next leg of my trip. Aunt Diane came into the guest bedroom before she left for work, in a pink pantsuit and matching flats. "I thought I'd check in on you before you left town," she said to me.

"Thanks for checking in on me before you left for work," I said.

“Trish will take you to the airport. She’s on vacation for the next few days, so she’ll take you there on her way to Key West to spend the weekend with Rick. I hope you have a safe journey,” she said with a touch of concern.

“I hope you have a safe trip into work,” I said before giving my aunt a hug and a kiss.

Trish and I left for the airport around eleven o’clock; I had a one-thirty plane to catch. When she pulled up to the curb, she told me: “It was a pleasure to meet you, Eric,” then whimsically said, “I think you may have a girlfriend.”

“You mean Bridget?” I asked.

“She did say she’ll keep you in mind if she doesn’t find anyone here,” Trish replied.

“Yes, she confessed it to me last night,” I added.

I gave Trish a hug, thanked her for her hospitality, and proceeded to check in at the ticket counter. I had a nice, leisurely lunch before my flight was called for boarding. This was the first leg of the journey in which I would fly in First Class.

Fourth Stop: Atlanta

I had three glasses of diet soda and a couple of pretzels on the ninety-minute flight from West Palm Beach to Atlanta. My cousin Walter had just started writing a novel based on his crossdressing experiences; another cousin, Michael, shared an apartment with Walter. Another one of my cousins, Albert, and his wife, Tressa, lived in the same apartment building near Piedmont Park. I would not be the only person making it in from out of town. My cousin Karen would be in from Phoenix at the same time on business.

Karen’s flight landed fifteen minutes prior to mine; her flight parked at the gate adjacent to where my flight was parked. Five-six with a slender build, she was wearing a sleeveless red dress and matching pumps; her shoulder-length, medium brown hair was tied back with a red bow. She greeted me with a big smile; I immediately gave her a hug and a smooch.

“How was your flight, Eric?” she asked me.

“It was a smooth one, Karen,” I replied.

“My flight was kind of bumpy after takeoff from Sky Harbor; it was pretty bumpy going over the mountains in New Mexico, too. Once we were past the Lubbock area, we had a smooth ride all the way to Anniston; it was kind of bumpy flying over eastern Alabama,” she added.

After we claimed our luggage, Karen and I went to get our rental car. We requested a Volvo wagon; we wound up with a Chrysler Town and Country minivan. It took us twenty minutes to get to our hotel in Sandy Springs; we got a two-bedroom suite. When we checked in, we both took a nap in our bedrooms before meeting Walter for dinner.

I decided on a navy blue suit with a maroon tie and a pair of maroon dress shoes for our dinner date; Karen chose her red floral print dress. We went to a restaurant in mid-

town Atlanta frequented by the transgender community. Walter was waiting for us, in male mode. He was wearing a red golf shirt, a pair of khaki pants and a pair of red tennis shoes. When we arrived, a crossdresser named Kari, wearing a white blouse, black skirt, matching jacket and black high heels, greeted us. "Your cousin Walter is waiting for you," she said before asking us: "Will you follow me?"

We followed her to a table close to the bar, where he was waiting. "Eric, Karen, it's a pleasure to see you again," he said.

"It's great to see you again, Walter," Karen added before giving him a smooch.

"Is this your night off?" I asked him.

"I'm now working as Gwendolyn only three days a week now. I'm working on a book based on my experiences as a female impersonator. It is one of the few books that take a first-person look at the world of female impersonation," he replied.

"How's everyone else these days?" Karen then asked.

"Michael's doing great; he and Nancy are expecting their first child in November. He'll be performing as Michelle LaFemme later tonight at Club Eighty-Five. Albert and Tressa are expecting their first child; however, they aren't due until next January. He hasn't been out as Amber in several months," he replied.

"I remember the double-gown wedding Albert and Tressa had after they had their official wedding," I added.

"That was some experience, that's for sure. Michael and Nancy did the same thing, but they did it in front of an audience at Club Eighty-Five," Karen then added.

"Have you found a significant other yet?" he asked me.

"I just ended another relationship two months ago," I replied.

"I wonder why," Karen then asked.

"It seems that all of the young women I'm meeting these days are really not interested in a long-term relationship. This last girl, Sara, was only interested in meeting me. When I talked to her a couple of months ago, she told me she wasn't interested in a dating relationship. When I think back at all that's happened since I broke off my engagement five years ago, I often question why I'm looking for Miss Right to begin with. Maybe she doesn't exist. At any rate, I'm getting very sick and tired of my relationships with women constantly failing. I've even thought of giving up this whole dating game, and living the rest of my life as a single man. I'm just sick and tired of having my heart as some girl's plaything, to be stomped on repeatedly," I replied.

"I'd take it the girls aren't fighting over you," she said inquisitively.

"They have other guys to fight over, Karen. I haven't been fought over like that since the eighth grade," I added.

After dinner, we went to Club Eighty-Five, a nightclub with a nightly female impersonator revue. Walter, Karen and I were to meet up with Albert and Tressa, as well as Michael's wife, Nancy. Albert was dressed as Amber, wearing a floral print sleeveless dress, white stockings and blue high heels. Tressa was similarly dressed, although she was two

months pregnant. Nancy was wearing a blue maternity dress and matching flats. We met in front of the club.

"It's great to see you again, Eric," Amber said with a smile.

"It's great to see you, too, Amber. You might remember your cousin Karen," I added.

"It's a pleasure to see you again, Karen," Tressa said with pleasure.

"The feeling is mutual," Karen added.

"It's a pleasure to see you all again," Nancy then added.

We followed Tressa and Nancy into the club, where we paid our cover charge at the door. Once we were inside, the music hadn't started yet. We sat down at two tables near the stage, where Nancy ordered a bottle of wine for all of us. When we had our wine delivered, we noticed that it came from Georgia. Walter and I seemed like a couple of lucky guys with three ladies around, although they were all related to us.

We conversed for a few minutes before Michelle came to our table. She was wearing an antique white blouse, pink skirt, matching jacket, white stockings, pink high heels with pearl drop earrings and a pearl necklace. "Eric, it's a pleasure to see you again. You're looking great!" she exclaimed.

"You're looking fantastic, too," I added.

"You've become more beautiful every day," she then said to Karen.

"Who keeps you so pretty, girl?" Karen asked her.

"Nancy has taught me a few tricks since we've been married, although I learned makeup myself, as well as from my drag sisters," Michelle replied.

"Have you had any other job offers?" I then asked.

"I've also done some modeling en femme. I'll show you some of my photos during the intermission," she replied.

Walter and Amber then showed her photos of an evening they had on the town en femme two months before. "You looked smashing that night," Michelle complimented in awe.

"I remember that night well, Michelle...that was the night I apparently impregnated Tressa," Amber added.

"It was after a show several months ago that I did the same to Nancy; she's very happy that she's going to be a mother," Michelle said with a smile.

"I'm grateful for that, dear," Nancy added before sharing a kiss with Michelle.

"The feeling is mutual, darling," Amber then added before kissing Tressa.

Michelle then asked: "Would you and Karen like to come backstage to meet my cast mates?"

"We'd love that," I replied.

We followed Michelle to the dressing room, where six other female impersonators were getting ready for the show. They had already changed into their evening gowns. "Eric Fletcher and Karen Carlton, I'd like to introduce you to Kayleigh Kane, Jenny Penny,

Brenda Boogie, Jackie Michaels, Darlene O'Hara and the show director, Lillian West, the Bitch of The South," she said in an introductory manner.

"Lillian, you don't look like a bitch to me," I said to her.

"Eric, you don't know what I'm like onstage," she added with a bit of sarcasm.

"It's a pleasure to meet you two," Jenny said.

We conversed with Michelle's cast mates for half an hour before show time, asking them questions about their careers. The last question that Karen asked was: "Which ones are living full-time as women?" Jackie and Darlene raised their hands; Jackie asked her if she was living full-time as a woman.

"I'm living full-time as a woman now; I've been full-time for two years now. I haven't had my surgery yet, although I have a lot of men who admire me for the woman I've become," Karen replied.

"I've been living full-time as a woman for the past four years. Although I've already been approved, I'm not planning on having a sex-change operation at this time, due to the expense of the procedure. I haven't even thought about life after female impersonation," Jackie added.

"I went full-time as Darlene a year and a half ago; like Jackie, I haven't thought about life after female impersonation. I haven't been approved for surgery yet," she added.

Karen and I then posed for several photos with the Club Eighty-Five Revue cast, before we returned to the table. We spent the whole night watching several of Atlanta's finest female impersonators demonstrate their talents. It started with Lillian telling very bawdy jokes, followed by various female impersonators singing and lip-syncing to several different songs. Michelle was the last one on stage in the first half of the show, lip-syncing to "You're So Vain," with a male guest lip-syncing the male part. She was the second one on stage in the second half of the show, this time lip-syncing a scene from the famous opera "Aida."

After the show, we posed for several photos with Michelle before we called it a night around two o'clock in the morning. We were exhausted when we returned to the hotel at two-thirty. I changed into a khaki pair of shorts and a matching tank top, while Karen changed into a fuchsia nightgown before immediately falling asleep in our separate bedrooms.

The afternoon of June 26 was spent typing my observations on the previous night into the word processor program of my laptop, while Karen was closing a deal on developing a Web site for a not-for-profit organization in Roswell. I didn't finish typing my observations until almost four o'clock, when I called the hotel restaurant to reserve a table for two. Karen walked in around four-fifteen. She was still looking bright in a royal blue sleeveless dress, matching stockings and high heels.

"Did you close the deal?" I asked her.

"Yes, I did. I'll be developing the Web site for a historical preservation group in Roswell for the next three years," she replied.

"Karen, dinner is my treat tonight," I added.

"Eric, how sweet of you!" she softly exclaimed before planting a kiss on my cheek.

I decided to shower and change into a beige suit, white shirt, brown tie and beige slacks with a pair of burgundy dress shoes, while Karen changed into a floral print sundress. We took the elevator downstairs to the hotel restaurant, where our table was waiting.

After we ordered our meals, Karen started the conversation. "I'm surprised there aren't any girls who are fighting over you," she said.

"It's very difficult to explain in a nutshell, so I shall give you the whole story. When I was in the later years of elementary school and into my middle school years, I couldn't keep the girls off my case with a ten-foot pole. I just relished in all the female attention I was getting. No matter where I went away from my family, I was surrounded by several girls. By the time I got to high school, however, there were other guys vying to win them over. The attention fell off dramatically; it was very hard for me to accept or get used to. I remember this one girl that I really had romantic feelings for. She was older than I was, and I was really smitten with her. However, she had another boyfriend; he was a bodybuilder who won several titles locally. I've heard nothing but bad things about bodybuilders in general from other people I knew; I saw the abuse in that relationship. He even went as far as to emotionally traumatize and physically assault me when I extended my hand in friendship to him; she just let it happen. When I wanted to press charges against the loser, she wouldn't even give me his name. I remember crying the whole way home on my bicycle that day; it made me afraid of girls for the first time in my life. I was really afraid of being rejected. I spent the whole summer of 1983 at home, only venturing out to visit friends; I also took a much-needed trip to California with my family that summer. When my interest in dating was renewed a year later, I should have realized it was too late. Most of the girls I knew had been dating other guys," I explained.

"So, how did you meet your fiancée?" she then asked.

"We were in a support group for those traumatized by abuse. Members of her own family had abused her, not by those from outside her family. It wasn't until after we met that I finally opened up to the group about the traumatizing experience I had with the boyfriend of the girl I really liked. She felt very sorry for me, having gone through such a horrible experience. I had to spend the last two years of school in special education because of this experience. I grew to love this girl, and stayed in the relationship out of fear that if I had to leave her for any reason, I would not be able to establish another relationship again. When I was emotionally abused by her parents, I decided it was best to break off the engagement and end our relationship after eight years together." I wiped back a tear, and continued: "Since then, I have not been involved with the same girl for more than six months. I tried to fight the inevitable, but it wasn't until I broke up with Sara that I realized that most women were no longer interested in a romantic relationship with me," I cried.

"You must have had a hard time with finding Miss Right. Maybe you should consider ending the search," she added while comforting me.

"I've given that a lot of thought as of late; I think it would be best for me if I did," I whispered, attempting to hold back tears.

"Maybe you should also consider a relationship with a younger genetic female or with a transsexual," she told me.

"I don't know...I've only had one romantic night since then, and that was in West Palm Beach a few days ago, with Bridget, one of Aunt Diane's transsexual housemates," I added.

I regained my composure by the time our meals were delivered. Karen settled for a Caesar salad, while I had a steak dinner. After dinner, Karen and I returned to our hotel room to pack up and check out; we had late-night flights to catch. She had a ten-fifteen flight to Boston to visit her mother, while I would be catching an eleven o'clock plane to Dallas. I thanked Karen for the great time we had. Before she boarded her flight for Boston, I whispered: "Give Aunt Rae my best, and make sure to visit your relatives while you're there."

"I'm sure of it. Take care, my dear," she replied before I gave her the list of transgendered relatives in the Boston area. We parted with a kiss before she boarded her plane.

Fifth Stop: Dallas

No, I didn't feel like J.R. Ewing when my flight landed in Dallas at quarter to twelve local time on June 26. I was there to visit my transsexual cousins Katie and Sarah. The flight only had some turbulence going over the mountains in Alabama; it was a smooth ride the rest of the way into Dallas/Fort Worth.

Sarah greeted me at the gate. She had just gotten off work at the airport newsstand, where she worked the cash register. I gave her a warm embrace; she asked me: "What brings you here?"

"I'm here to visit you and Katie," I replied.

"It'll be the first time any member of this family has visited here in several years. It seems everyone is busy with one thing or another nowadays," she added.

"You're not kidding," I added with a twist of sarcasm.

Sarah guided me to the baggage carousel before I walked over to the car rental counter. On this leg, I did get the car I requested: a 1998 Dodge Stratus. Since Sarah's car was in the shop for engine work, I offered to drive her home before going to the hotel. Halfway to Uncle Jeff and Aunt Paula's house, Sarah told me: "My mom and dad will be happy to see you again."

"So will Wendie and Karl. I often wonder about Katie," I added.

Sarah directed me to Uncle Jeff and Aunt Paula's place, located near Grapevine. I dropped her off. I proceeded to the hotel from there; I didn't arrive there until almost one o'clock in the morning. I was able to get a full night's sleep before waking up at nine o'clock. I worked out in the hotel gym and wrote several entries in my journal before I went out to do some sightseeing. I returned to the hotel around four o'clock. Uncle Jeff and Aunt Paula were hosting me for dinner that night; Wendie, Karl and Katie would also be joining us.

I rested for an hour before getting into a red button-down shirt, a pair of khaki slacks and a pair of loafers. Leaving the hotel around five-thirty, I allowed extra time to deal with the traffic. It was just my luck that I was stuck in traffic on the way over, due to an accident on the airport expressway. I arrived around six-fifteen; Sarah was in the front yard when I arrived, talking with my niece Katie. Sarah immediately noticed me; I could not as easily recognize Katie, though.

The last time I saw Katie, she was a nine-year-old boy who wore a T-shirt, blue jeans, tennis shoes and unsure of whether he was a boy or a girl. Six years later, she had become a beautiful teenage girl with long medium brown hair, pierced ears, and a gold necklace with a heart pendant around her neck. She was wearing a sleeveless red bodysuit, red tiered skirt with white lace trimming each tier, and a white pair of flats. I couldn't place her for a moment, but finally realized that the same nine-year-old boy had become a fifteen-year-old girl.

Katie immediately noticed me; despite the fact I was now wearing a crew cut. "It's been a long time since I last saw you, Uncle Eric," she said with a wide smile on her face.

"Six years," I added before asking her: "How are things with you, Katie?"

"Things have been better as of late. Sarah has been helping me through all the feelings associated with transitioning from boy to girl," she replied.

"She's just the girl to help you through such a delicate time; after all, she went through what you're going through now," I added.

"I was also ten years old when I realized that I should have been a girl. Like Katie, my peers picked me on because I was different. Unlike with Katie's parents, my parents were a harder sell. They often scolded me if they caught me wearing my mother's or Sally's old clothes. I was removed from school and home schooled for a year while I was dealing with these feelings. It wasn't until I was thirteen years old when I finally confided to Sally that I really was a girl unfairly trapped in a boy's body. I confessed to her that I really wanted to have a sex change, that I was attracted to boys, and that I felt more comfortable in female attire than I ever did in male attire. She and I finally had a long talk with my parents, and they felt that they were to blame. I corrected them, and told them I was to blame. It was at that moment they realized what a treasure they had in who had become their second daughter. My younger brothers, Jeffrey and George, were too young to understand what it was I was going through. My parents helped with getting my hormone replacement therapy started, purchasing a new, female wardrobe, and legally changing my name from Jacob Samuel Larkin to Sarah Jeannine Larkin. My parents set up a trust fund for me when I was young; I used half of my trust fund to finance my sex-change operation last year," Sarah explained.

"I had a similar situation, Uncle Eric; however, my mother sits on the school board in Dallas. She fought very hard for my right to start going to school as a girl. Just before I started the fifth grade, I was finally allowed to start going to school as Katie. Mom and Dad also helped me with hormone therapy and my legal name change from Kenneth Fletcher Williams to Katherine Florence Williams. It was a great feeling when my friends finally started to call me Katie. Last year, I made the cheerleading squad; the first transsexual girl to do so. My brothers, Karl and Wally, and kid sister, Ashley, also didn't under-

stand what was happening to me back then. Karl's now fourteen years old, and is coming to grips with his losing a brother and gaining a sister," Katie then explained.

"Do you have boyfriends?" I asked them.

"I have a boyfriend now, Uncle Eric. He's a sweet guy, and he also happens to be named Eric. We met last fall; he's going to be a junior in high school this fall. He's the backup catcher and a utility infielder on the baseball team. When I told him I was transsexual, he didn't feel threatened by that at all. He felt that nothing should stand in the way of a loving relationship. He loves me for the girl I am now," Katie replied lovingly.

"I also have a boyfriend, Eric. His name is Don; he's a sophomore at North Texas this coming fall. I've enrolled there for the fall. He was the first guy I made love to after my operation. I met him while I was still transitioning; he was not a very popular guy in school. He saw me as the girl I had become; we fell in love within two months of the time we first met. He was with me when I had my operation; we've been together nearly three years now. We're studying for different careers, though; he's studying accounting, while I'm planning to major in psychology," Sarah added.

After we ate dinner, Katie played a tape of her cheerleading competitions on the VCR. Sarah and I watched attentively as Katie described the action to us. "How well did your team do in competition?" I asked her.

"We won the All-Metroplex championships, beating out ten other Dallas/Fort Worth high schools. We went on to the state finals in Corpus Christi, and edged out a squad from El Paso. We finished second in the national championships; a cheerleading squad from a high school in Peoria won the competition," she replied.

"And none of them suspected you are going through a sex change?" Sarah asked, somewhat shocked.

"No one; they can't even tell that I haven't had my surgery yet," Katie assured her.

Sarah reached into her purse to pull out a photo album, and show it to Katie and me. "You look beautiful in these photos, Sarah," Katie complimented.

"These photos were from the senior prom," Sarah informed her.

"I'd take it you're the one in the burgundy gown," I added.

"I'm the one in the burgundy gown. My boyfriend is standing next to me," she told me.

"Handsome fellow," I complimented.

Katie then noticed a photo of Sarah with six other girls. She asked her: "Who are these girls?"

"I'm the one in the middle. The one on the far left in pink is Michelle; she graduated with me this year. The one next to her in royal blue is Stefanie, an exchange student from Germany. The girl immediately to the left of me in the photo in violet is Meghan, who's going to be a senior this coming year. The one immediately to the right, in red, is Tara; she also graduated this year. Next to Tara, in fuchsia, is Charlene; she's also going to be a senior this coming year. The girl on the far right, in gold lamé, is Amanda; she was kept back a year in eighth grade. She graduated this year, but was supposed to graduate last year," Sarah explained.

“Do these girls know you’re transsexual?” I asked her.

“Of course, they do. When I told them, they offered me their unconditional support,” she replied.

“What about your friends, Katie?” I then asked.

“When I started going to school full-time as a girl, I was just ten years old. Most of them didn’t understand what I was going through at the time. It’s very rare for someone to start transitioning from boy to girl at such an early age. My parents read about the fights many parents had to get their transsexual children to go to school as girls. My mother, who is a school board member where I live, fought to have me go to school as Katie. When my friends were finally told what it was I was going through, most of the girls offered their support, along with many of the guys. I’ve only been taunted by a handful of the guys; most of them have been moved to other schools,” she explained.

“Do you plan to have your operation soon?” Sarah asked.

“I plan to have the surgery when I graduate from high school in 2003; however, if my parents want to have me operated on sooner, that’s fine,” Katie replied.

I got up from the couch after that, and allowed Sarah and Katie to continue with girl talk. I walked into the living room, where Wendie and Karl were discussing Katie’s situation with Uncle Jeff and Aunt Paula. They were discussing the possibility of starting a support group for young transgendered people in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. “There’s a great need for a support group for girls like Katie and Sarah,” Wendie told them.

“I must agree. Most of the transsexual support groups that Sarah has been in are mainly adult women; some haven’t been in what we consider to be honorable lines of work,” Aunt Paula added.

“I’ve met a number of transsexuals in my lifetime, and our young transsexuals are looking for a group that sees their issues from the perspective of a teen. Most of these groups have adults in their 20s, 30s, 40s or older; while the issues are similar, I wouldn’t think a teenage transsexual would be comfortable in a group where some of them have worked as ‘call girls’. The lifestyle of the ‘call girl’ is not the kind of lifestyle I would expose my teenage transsexual daughter to. Teenage transsexuals may have some of the same issues to deal with, but their issues are unique. Many of them have never worked in what some call ‘the world’s oldest profession.’ Many have the typical problems encountered by teenagers; the fact that they’re transsexual and in transition make their troubles unique. I wish to point out that young girls like Katie and Sarah would benefit greatly by a transsexual support group geared primarily toward teenage transsexuals,” I added.

“I know one girl in Sarah’s support group who escaped from the clutches of the porno film industry. Pornographers love to take advantage of the uniqueness of the transsexual woman, and sexually exploit that uniqueness. This young woman appeared in several adult videos and posed nude for several photographers. After she did such films for six years, she finally had enough money to exit the business. Yet, the porno lords kept calling and calling her until she finally got a restraining order against them. Five years ago, she came to Dallas to lecture young girls on the dangers of the porno business. She has since had her operation, and travels the country to local high schools, girls clubs and transgen-

der support groups to speak on the dangers of participating in the porno industry, and viewing pornographic material,” Uncle Jeff then added.

“That’s not the kind of industry I would want Katie working in,” Karl told us.

“I wouldn’t want my transsexual daughter or sister to work in the sex industry, either,” I told them.

“I’ll talk to Katie’s therapist, and see what she thinks about establishing a support group for teenage transsexuals,” Wendie added.

It was after ten o’clock when I returned to my hotel room. After gathering my thoughts and typing them into the word processing program on my computer, I turned in for the night. The second-to-last leg of my trip was ahead for me.

Sixth Stop: Los Angeles

On June 28, I took a mid-morning flight out of Dallas/Fort Worth, headed for Los Angeles International Airport. This was the second leg of the journey I took flying in First Class. Leaving Dallas/Fort Worth at nine-thirty, it was a rather smooth three-hour, thirty-minute flight, except for some turbulence over Arizona. When my flight touched down at eleven-thirty, I claimed my luggage, picked up my rental car, a brand new Lincoln, and went straight to my hotel in Hollywood.

My cousins Thor and Hannah were living in Los Angeles; both lived just two blocks apart in West Hollywood. After I checked in, I called Thor at his apartment. He told me that he had some news for me. However, it would have to wait until I came over that night. After I had a leisurely lunch, I went to the hotel gym to have a light workout before hitting the pool for a long, intense swim. I took a nap before going to Thor’s apartment that evening. When I arrived around seven o’clock, Thor was dressed as Theresa; she was in a red shirtdress and a pair of red flats.

“Eric, it’s so good to see you again,” she said before giving me a kiss on the cheek.

“The feeling is mutual, Theresa,” I added.

She showed me into her apartment, where several trophies and medals lined a bookshelf. “What’s all of this for?” I asked her.

“These are the female impersonator contests I’ve won. I took up the art of female impersonation in the last couple of years; I’ve won several titles for my work. They include Miss Santa Barbara, Miss San Bernardino and Queen of The Ball in San Diego. I’ve still managed to keep my day job at a travel agency in Pasadena; I only work as a female impersonator on the weekends,” she replied.

“So what’s the big news?” I asked her.

“It’s my roommate, Caryn. You haven’t met her yet; she’s quite a beautiful young lady now. In my E-mail to you six months ago, I described her as a transvestite. Four months ago, she told me that she really wanted to be a woman. I asked her why, and she told a

long story about why she wanted to have a sex change. When she was four years old, her mother, as a way of pulling a prank on her aunt, dressed her young son Will up as a girl. She had him dressed in a frilly dress with a full skirt that required a lacy crinoline underneath, a pair of white tights, a pair of red girls' shoes, and a blonde wig. She even made him up to look like a little girl," she explained, before showing a picture of Caryn at four years of age, dressed as a girl.

"She looked cute and adorable then," I complimented.

"Anyway, he really felt comfortable in that dress. As he got older, he had occasional urges to dress in his older sister's clothing. At the age of fourteen, his sister had photos taken of him in her prom gown, as well as his mother's bridal gown. At the age of eighteen, he left his home in Bakersfield and came to Los Angeles. While attending Southern Cal, she began working her way through college as a waitress at a gay bar. Every night, she wore a French Maid's uniform; her boss didn't care which color the uniform was. A lot of men were really after her. It wasn't long before the owner of a fashion store oriented toward the transgendered discovered her, and put her to work as a model. She also began to work as a photographer at the store during her senior year of college. She graduated with a degree in photography; she opened her own studio while still living as a man. There were some days where she would go into work dressed as a woman. Four months ago, she told me the truth: she is a transsexual. She started hormone treatments a year ago, and began living full-time as a woman just a week prior to our conversation. Her mother is very supportive of Caryn's desire to become a woman," she explained rather gingerly.

"I'm sure she's a beautiful woman now," I added.

Caryn walked in around seven-thirty with a bag full of Chinese food. She was a strikingly beautiful



woman, five-nine, slender build, with long reddish-brown hair. She was wearing a curve-hugging blue nylon dress and a pair of blue high heels. "Caryn, I have someone for you to meet," Theresa informed.

"Who is this handsome man?" she asked her.

"This is my cousin, Eric Fletcher. Eric, this is my roommate, Caryn Vickers," Theresa replied.

"It's my pleasure to meet you, Caryn," I said with a smile.

"The pleasure is mutual, Eric," she said, coyly smiling.

After we had dinner, we went out to a nearby transgender-friendly nightclub to dance and see a female impersonator revue. Caryn didn't forget to bring the camera along, as she was also the club's official photographer. There were quite a few girls, both genetic and transgendered, hitting on me. I danced with five girls that night, one genetic female and four transsexuals. Toward the end of the night, Caryn wanted a picture of me with the entire cast, all decked out in evening gowns. When I finally got back to my hotel room around two o'clock in the morning, I was dead tired.

The next morning, I woke up around ten o'clock. I had a cup of coffee and a cinnamon roll in the concierge lounge at the hotel before leaving to meet Hannah for lunch. She had started living full-time as a woman just six months before; she lived the first twenty-three years of her life as a male. I drove to a café in Hollywood to meet her around one o'clock; I ordered a glass of iced tea while I was waiting for her.

Fifteen minutes later, a tall woman arrived at the café. She was six feet tall, had a slender build, long reddish-blond hair, and a sweet smile. She was in a sleeveless floral print dress with a flowing skirt, a pair of pearl drop earrings, pearl necklace and white pumps. She sashayed toward my table, sat down and crossed her legs in a feminine fashion.

"It's been a long time since I last saw you, Eric," she said with a smile.

"Five years, Hannah. The last time I saw you, you were a handsome young man. Now, you're quite a beautiful young woman," I complimented.

"It's amazing what modern medicine can do," she added.

I ordered a ham sandwich with lettuce, while Hannah ordered a cappuccino and a slice of cheesecake. "So, what brings you out my way?" she asked.

"I've been on the road for the past eleven days, visiting all my transgendered relatives. I still have a cousin to visit in Chicago. Over the past eleven days, I've visited Boston, New York, South Florida, Atlanta and Dallas. They're doing quite well. While I was in New York, I witnessed Shauna getting engaged. She and Travis are planning to get married. Heather's left the showgirl routine and started selling real estate in Boston. Sarah is about to enter college this fall, while Katie's cheerleading team won the state championship in Texas, and finished second in the nationals. Lori will be undergoing her operation next month. Karen closed a couple of deals while we were in Atlanta, and I just found out that Theresa's roommate is preparing for her sex change," I explained.

"How's Aunt Diane?" she then asked.

“She’s doing great. She still works at the law office in West Palm Beach; one of her transsexual sisters has joined that firm as a junior partner. She’s over the death of Uncle Benny; she’s taken in two of her transsexual friends, including the aforementioned junior partner at the law office,” I replied.

Once we had our order delivered to our table, I asked Hannah: “How is your transition coming along?”

“I’ve noticed that I’m assuming a more feminine shape. My breasts have been growing; when I started, I could only fit into an ‘A’ cup. Now, I’m in a ‘B’ cup, and my bustline has grown from thirty-two to thirty-four inches. My hips and rear end have also become shapely; I’ve also reduced my dress size to a 12 from the 16 I wore before I began my transition. I hope to have my sex surgically reassigned in the next few years,” she replied.

“Have you had many men show interest in you?” I asked, coyly smiling.

“I’ve had so many guys hit on me, it’s not funny. Regardless of where I go, I have men go after me like I was a complete girl. I wear mainly flowing dresses when I’m out with my female friends, and I get more male attention than they do. I think it’s my height that attracts them,” she replied.

“I also think it’s your beauty. You’re quite a beautiful woman,” I added.

“Why, thank you,” she added blushing.

“Do you remember your earliest recollection of wanting to be a girl?” I asked her, sounding like a journalist.

“It was when I was three years old. I snuck into my older sister’s room, and got her flower girl’s gown, crinoline, a white pair of rhumba panties and a light brown wig. I also got a pair of her white shoes, and went to my room. I changed from the pair of jeans and T-shirt I was wearing, into that gown. I had a mirror in my room, so I was able to get everything straight. I walked around my room for a while, and looked at myself in the mirror. I thought I made a very pretty girl. I also realized, for the first time, that I should have been a girl. When my sister, Elaine, found out, she yelled at me, explaining that I could lose my masculinity if I kept this up. My mother and father also explained this to me. Although two more brothers followed me and Elaine, I tried to suppress my feminine feelings. I took up sports, even attempted to join the Army when I graduated from high school. Four years ago, I took up the art of feminine illusion while I was going to college. I had become increasingly comfortable with being a girl than I had been as a guy. I came out to L.A. after I graduated from college; I moved in with another pre-op transsexual named Dana Marie. It was at that time I really wanted to become a woman; on my last trip home, I confided in Elaine that I wanted to be a woman. She was unconditionally accepting of me as Hannah. Then, I told my parents and my brothers that I had decided to start the transition from man to woman. Mom and Dad asked me why I didn’t tell them sooner, and I told them that I was afraid they would reject me. They told me that they love me, no matter if I was Greg or Hannah. I’m enjoying my new role as a woman, and I’m looking forward to the day when I finally have my sex-change operation,” she explained.

“Uncle Nate will now have another wedding to pay for,” I added.

"He's going to be paying for Elaine's wedding. She and Paul just got engaged, and I've been asked to be her maid of honor," she then added.

Hannah then invited me to a photo shoot after we had lunch; she directed me to a photography studio in Burbank, where she was having a photo session done. We arrived at the photographer's studio around two o'clock, and accompanied her inside. The receptionist, a genetic female named Amanda, was waiting for her.

"Hannah Fletcher?" she asked her.

"I'm Hannah Fletcher," she replied.

"Vince is waiting for you. I'm to show you straight in," Amanda added.

"By the way, this is my cousin, Eric Fletcher. I've invited him on this shoot," Hannah informed her.

"It's a pleasure to meet you at last, Eric. Vince has told me about the great service you provided for his airplane every time he's made it to Missouri," Amanda told me.

"When was he last in Missouri?" I asked her.

"Last week; he flew into Sedalia to take photos for a travel brochure," she replied.

"I've got a fixed base operation there," I added.

Hannah and I followed Amanda to a studio, where Vince was awaiting our arrival. A young man of average height and heavy build with shoulder-length light brown hair, wearing a beige T-shirt, blue jeans and somewhat tattered canvas tennis shoes, he had won several awards for his location and portrait photography. We walked in while he was setting up his camera.

"Good afternoon, Hannah," Vince said to her.

"It's good to see you again, Vince," she said before introducing me to him.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Fletcher. Your guys gave my plane great service when I was in Sedalia," Vince added.

"The pleasure is mine, Vince. We go to great lengths to give our customers the best service," I added.

"My assistant will take her to the dressing room; she has several outfits waiting," he added.

"She's quite attractive," I complimented, before asking him, "Has she modeled for you, too?"

"She's modeled for me several times; she's also going through the same thing Hannah is going through," he replied.

Hannah got situated in the dressing room with Vince's assistant. "I understand you're going through the same thing I'm going through, Hannah," she said to her.

"That's quite interesting," Hannah added, before asking her name.

"Where are my manners?" she asked, having realized she had forgotten, then said: "I'm Daria Terrence; I've been working as Vince's assistant for the past three years."

"How long have you been living full-time as a woman," Hannah asked her.

"I've been living full-time as a woman for two years; I'm scheduled for my surgery this fall," Daria replied.

"I only started living as a woman six months ago," Hannah added.

"Who's the young man accompanying you?" Daria then asked.

"That's my cousin, Eric. He's a businessman, living in St. Louis," Hannah replied.

"Is he single?" Daria asked her.

"He is still single; he can't seem to hold on to one woman for very long," Hannah replied as Daria was beginning to do a makeover on her.

She emerged a few minutes later, wearing a royal blue ball gown. Vince took two rolls of film of her in that gown, before she went back to the dressing room forty-five minutes later to change into a red evening gown with a slit on the left side to show her leg. He shot two more rolls of film of her in that dress, before she returned to the dressing room to change into a pink tea-length bridesmaid's dress, holding a silk bouquet. Two more rolls of film were shot of her in that dress. Then, Daria approached me.

"Would you like to be part of her photo shoot?" she asked me.

"I thought you'd never ask," I replied with a look of surprise in my face.

"Then, you'd accept?" she asked me.

"I'll be more than happy to," I added before I went to my dressing room,

I changed from the red golf shirt and khaki pants into a navy blue pinstripe suit. I walked to the set, where I was waiting for Hannah. She emerged just moments later, wearing a pink skirt, antique white blouse, pink jacket and a pair of pink and white pumps. We



spent over an hour posing for photos in a studio set up as an office. There were several poses where she had her hands on my left shoulder, and several where she had her arms wrapped around my shoulders. After that was over, she planted a kiss on my lips.

“What’s that for, Hannah?” I asked her.

“For being such an understanding man,” she whispered.

The last set of photos had me change into a black tuxedo with a tailcoat, maroon bow tie and black top hat. Hannah emerged a moment later, wearing a beautiful bridal gown. It had puffed sleeves, a sweetheart neckline, bow in the back at the waistline, a lace-adorned bodice, lace designs all over the skirt, lace-trimmed hem around the skirt and train, and a cathedral-length train with a heart toward the edge of the gown, with a lace design inside the heart. Her ensemble was topped with a bridal tiara, from which a fingertip-length veil cascaded. She was carrying the same bouquet she had when she was doing the bridesmaid photos. We had a lot of fun with the bride-and-groom shots, even getting a few poses of us kissing. Vince wound up shooting five rolls of us in that outfit.

Hannah and I were still having fun when we finally finished the shoot around seven o’clock. We would meet Theresa for dinner before going to a nightclub to catch a female impersonator show. We were impressed that many of the girls Caryn took photos of looked strikingly similar to the celebrities I had seen in movies and on television. One did a great impression of Madonna, another one was fantastic as Cher, and there was even a group of three female impersonators who did their rendition of an emerging soul trio called Destiny’s Child. The hostess of the revue was Darlene Teasewell, a young performer equally famous for her curve-hugging gowns and dresses than her comic wit. Hannah and I even posed for photos with the cast, and we both posed for individual photos with several of the girls in the show. When I came back to the hotel, I only had time to pack up and check out, since I was booked on the red-eye flight to Chicago. Hannah was there to see me off.

“We had a great time; the best time I’ve had in a long, long time,” I told her.

“So did I. This is a day that I will remember for a long time,” she added.

My flight was called at twelve-thirty in the morning. “Have a safe trip, Eric,” she whispered before we shared a kiss.

“Good luck in your new life as a woman,” I added before proceeding to the gate to check in.

The Final Stop: Chicago

My flight from Los Angeles to Chicago left just after one o’clock on the morning of June 30. I fell asleep as the fasten seat belt indicator was turned off on the aircraft. I had awakened just before my flight landed at O’Hare just before seven o’clock in the morning. After picking up my bags, I looked my schedule and realized I had nothing to do until five o’clock that evening. I walked over to the car rental counter to pick up the keys to a brand

new Pontiac Firebird, and drove straight to downtown Chicago, where I checked into a hotel and got some sleep.

My cousin Joe and his wife, Cathi, had moved to Evanston six months before from Las Vegas, where he had been teaching world history at a local junior college. He had taken a job as a history professor at a major university, while Cathi took a job teaching English literature at the same university. She had taken several years off from teaching to raise their children. Their son, Joey, was twelve at the time; their daughter, Carlye, had turned nine a month earlier. Joey had just come back from summer camp with his Boy Scout troop, while Carlye had also returned from Girl Scout camp.

It was also their fifteenth wedding anniversary, and they had planned to renew their vows. This time, Joe would dress up as Jolene, and be the bride. Their children knew about Joe's crossdressing; they were also asked to be a part of the renewal ceremony; Carlye as a flower girl, and Joey bearing the vows in an envelope. One of my friends from college, Belinda Jacobs, was putting this whole affair together.

I woke up around noon; the first object that met my eyes was the Amoco Building. After staring up at the building for a few minutes, the phone rang. I walked briskly to the phone, and answered it.

"Hello?" I asked the caller.

"Eric, this is Belinda," she replied.

"How are things with you, Belinda?" I asked her.

"Everything is just fine," she replied before asking me if I was free for lunch.

"As a matter of fact, I am," I replied.

"Could we meet at your hotel for lunch around one o'clock?" she asked me.

"That would be fine," I informed her.

I went downstairs to the hotel restaurant, where a Middle Eastern waiter seated me. From the flag on his nametag, he was from Saudi Arabia. "My name is Khalid, I will be your server this afternoon," he said in an introductory manner before asking me what I would like to drink.

"Iced tea will be fine, sir," I replied.

Belinda arrived five minutes later, wearing her chestnut brown hair down for a change. I had always remembered her wearing it in a bun when she and I were going to college together. "I'm so glad you could come, Belinda," I said with a smile.

"What have you been doing with yourself since we graduated?" she asked me.

"Do you remember Kara Kendall?" I asked her.

"Of course I do. You two were such an item while we were in school," she replied.

"Kara and I broke up five years ago, just after we graduated. Just after we broke up, I went on a buying spree, purchasing seventeen radio stations in a space of two years. Just after I bought my last radio station, my father asked me to take over his fixed base operations. He had fourteen around the country: five in Florida, three in California, three in Missouri, two in Illinois and one in North Carolina. I sold off all but two of the Missouri

operations and the two Illinois operations. I built a new fixed base operation in Farmington, Missouri; it opened last spring. The other ones I own are in Joplin, Kankakee, Peoria and Sedalia," I replied.

"I was in the rat race, too; working as an executive for a Fortune 500 company in New York. The frenetic pace of Wall Street got to be too much for me, so I came to Chicago a year and a half ago, and became a wedding planner. I've been very busy as of late; I haven't had time to find a good man. There are so many single men around Chicago, but most of them have been through too much heartbreak," she added.

"Have you done planning for any weddings that are out of the ordinary?" I then asked.

"I remember one wedding I did last summer at Navy Pier; thousands of people witnessed it. I also had to do a Middle Ages-themed wedding out in Elgin a few weeks ago, where the groom was in metal armor. Another wedding I helped plan was on the lakefront, where the bride arrived in a 1924 Ford Model T," she replied.

"I'm sure you've done a ceremony where both parties wore bridal gowns," I added.

"I've done several weddings for transgendered clients in the last few months. Several of these were ceremonies in which both the man and the woman were all dressed in white bridal gowns. In fact, I'm doing the planning for your cousin's renewal of vows ceremony tonight. There's just one thing missing," she added.

"What is that?" I asked her.

"Someone to give away the bride," she replied.

"I would be honored to give the bride away tonight," I added.

"Do you have a suit with you?" she then asked.

"Yes, I do," I replied.

"Be at the hotel ballroom at five-thirty," she informed me.

I spent the afternoon in my hotel room before ordering room service. After having a sirloin steak, baked potato and Caesar salad for dinner, I changed into my navy blue suit and maroon tie on for Joe and Cathi's ceremony. I took the elevator down to the ballroom where Belinda was waiting. It was exactly five-thirty when I arrived.

I gave her a hug before she accompanied me to meet the minister performing the ceremony. She found him near the altar, conversing with his girlfriend. He was wearing his customary white cassock over his suit. His girlfriend was in a navy blue lace overlay dress. "Derek, may I have a word with you?" she asked him.

"Certainly," he replied.

"Reverend Derek Ballard, this is Eric Fletcher; he'll be giving Jolene away tonight," she said in an introductory manner.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Reverend," I said with a smile.

"The pleasure is mutual," Derek said with a confident smile before his girlfriend approached him.

"Derek, honey?" she asked him.

"What is it, babe?" he asked her.

"Is this the man who's giving the bride away tonight?" she then asked.

"My manners have gone by the wayside again," he said rather forgetfully. "Christina Wilson, you know Belinda, this is Eric Fletcher," he then said in an introductory manner.

"A pleasure to meet you, Christina," I said to her.

"Please call me Christy," she corrected me.

"It's quite a life being a minister's girlfriend," I added.

"Even when you share one thing in common with him that most ministers would find revolting," she informed me.

"What is that?" I asked her.

"Derek and I were both born boys; I'm going through a sex change," she replied.

"I have several cousins going through the same change now, and my aunt went through the operation nearly thirty years ago," I added.

Belinda interrupted me, saying: "If you will excuse us, I have to take him to a suite on the first floor, where a makeup artist is transforming Joe into Jolene."

"Of course," Derek added.

I was taken up to a suite facing the lake, where the makeup artist was putting the finishing touches on the transformation before taking photos of the bride before the ceremony. Jolene was absolutely smashing when the transformation was finished. She was wearing an antique white bridal gown with puffed sleeves, floral lace on the bodice, heart designs in pink floral lace on the sleeves, pink lace adorning the skirt, with a chapel-length train of pink tulle. Topping the ensemble was a headpiece from which a fingertip-length veil cascaded. Her bouquet was a silk flower bouquet. "Jolene, you look marvelous tonight," I complimented.

"Why, thank you, Eric," she added, before asking me if I was giving her away to Cathi.

"I'm giving you away tonight; Belinda asked me this afternoon," I replied.

It was twenty after six before Belinda told us that it was time. Six bridesmaids were in the party; all but one of the bridesmaids were crossdressers. The bridesmaid who wasn't, Jane, was a mutual friend of the couple from their college days; she was a pre-operative transsexual. She would go first, followed by four of the bridesmaids, before the maid of honor, a crossdresser named Cyndi, walked toward the entrance to the ballroom. She would be met by one of Cathi's best friends, Allison. Everyone fell quiet as Jolene and I walked down the aisle toward where Derek was standing. After giving her a smooch, I turned to Cathi, who was in the bridal gown she wore when they married in 1983, gave her a hug, and sat down in the first row. Belinda stood in as mother of the bride.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today, in the presence of the Almighty, to witness the renewal of vows between Catherine and Jolene. Fifteen years ago, they were joined together in Holy Matrimony in a traditional ceremony. It has been a dream of theirs to have this type of ceremony; tonight, their dream of a double gown ceremony has come true. It is my honor to witness this wonderful renewal of the most sacred vows any couple

can confess; the renewal of marriage vows. This is what these two lovely brides are here to do tonight," Derek said to those gathered.

After going into a long speech on the importance of keeping the marriage vows, he asked the couple to renew their marriage vows, which they wrote themselves. Joey walked up to the altar to hand them the vows, for them to read. "Catherine, fifteen years ago today, you took me as your spouse, to have and to hold, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, for as long as we both shall live. You have been a wonderful spouse to me, and a fantastic parent to our children. Today, I come before you and our friends to renew these sacred vows. I will continue to have and hold you, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, for as long as we both shall live. I love you now, and always," Jolene said to Cathi.

"Jolene, I took you as my wedded spouse fifteen years ago. Through thick and thin, through good times and bad times, through times of sickness and health, and through times of prosperity and poverty, you and I have stuck together. You've been a great spouse for me, and a wonderful parent to Joey and Carlye. Tonight, I come before you and our friends to renew the vows we exchanged on June 30, 1983, and I promise to continue to have and hold you, in good times and bad times, through times of sickness and health, and through times of poverty and prosperity, for as long as we both shall live. We have shown each other a side of ourselves that we didn't know before we met on that cold winter's night eighteen years ago in college. I love you now, and I will love you forever," Cathi said to Jolene.

"Through the strength of your vows, you have shown us that you're a loving couple, excellent parents to your children, and I hope you will spend many more years together. Through the renewal of your vows, you have affirmed, before your family and friends, that you have remained faithful to these vows that you exchanged fifteen years ago. I now pronounce that your marriage vows are officially renewed, in the presence of your friends, family and the Almighty," Derek said to them. He paused for a moment, before informing Cathi that she may kiss Jolene. Both of their maids of honor lifted their blushers, before facing each other. They embraced each other before they kissed and hugged.

After the ceremony, there was a reception in the same ballroom where the renewal ceremony was held. Belinda and I approached Jolene and Cathi, and congratulated them on renewing their vows. "I've got to ask you one thing, Cathi," I said to her.

"What is it?" she asked me.

"Did you know about Jolene before you got married?" I asked her.

"I first knew about Jolene just after we started dating. We were out in a park near the campus of the college we attended. Joe told me that he had planned to go out on Halloween as the Queen of the Ball; he then showed me a photo of himself as Jolene, taken at a photography studio in Los Angeles in 1979. I told him that it didn't matter whether he was wearing a suit or a dress, I love him and her just the same. Just as much as he is a handsome guy, Jolene also makes a beautiful lady, too. When we decided to renew our vows, he wanted to wear a wedding gown. So, we both decided to wear wedding gowns. Even after having two kids, I can still fit into the gown I wore back in 1983. Since we've married, we have spent numerous Saturday nights out on the town as girls," Cathi explained.

“She’s been a wonderful spouse to me. I wouldn’t know what to do without her,” Jolene added before sharing a kiss with Cathi.

“Would you like a picture taken with me and Belinda?” I asked them.

“It would be a pleasure,” Jolene replied. I handed the digital camera to Joey; he took two photos of the four of us.

Toward the end of the night, both brides decided to throw their bouquets. Jolene threw hers to the single transgendered women in the party. The girl who caught Jolene’s bouquet was Renee, one of the bridesmaids. Cathi threw hers to the genetic females: Belinda caught that bouquet. Then, Jolene raised the skirt of her gown to reveal a garter on her left leg. Cathi slowly took off the garter, and threw it to the transgendered ladies of the party. Christy caught Jolene’s garter. Cathi would then raise the skirt of her bridal gown to reveal her garter; Jolene threw it to the single men of the party. As it turned out, I was the lucky guy who caught it.

After the wedding, Belinda accompanied me back to my hotel room. “Did you have a good time, Eric?” she asked me.

“I had a wonderful time, Belinda. I haven’t been to many weddings in recent years; most of my old friends are married now. Since I’m still single, I’m basically an after-thought. Since Kara and I went our separate ways, I have not been able to hold on to a woman for more than one or two dates. I wish I could find someone to share my life with, but I haven’t been able to find a marriage-minded woman, regardless of whether she was born male or female,” I replied.

“Eric, you’re welcome to go out with me anytime you’re in Chicago,” she added.

“You’re welcome to go out with me whenever you’re in St. Louis, Belinda,” I then added.

“Would you like to come in for a nightcap?” I asked her.

“Sure,” she replied.

I prepared a glass of iced tea for myself, and one for Belinda. “Tell me something, Eric,” she said, as if she was whispering.

“What is it?” I inquired.

“Is Jolene the only transgendered member of your family?” she asked me.

“No, she isn’t. I have nineteen other relatives who are transgendered. I have an aunt who underwent a sex-change operation nearly thirty years ago. In addition, I have seven transsexual cousins and a transsexual niece. Three of my cousins have already been through sex-change operations, another cousin has hers next month. Besides Joe/Jolene, I have five other cousins who are crossdressers, along with a niece/nephew. I also have four female impersonators among my cousins. It’s not very often that a family has twenty transgendered relatives, but I must admit to being part of a unique family. I’m proud of them for who they are. I’ve spent the last two weeks visiting them,” I replied.

“That’s quite a family history,” she added.

“Do you have a boyfriend yet?” I then asked.

“No, I don’t. With the kind of work I do, I don’t have much time to meet eligible men,” she replied.

“I haven’t met any eligible women over the last five years, either,” I added.

“I’d like for you to know something, Eric,” she whispered.

“I’m all ears, Belinda,” I whispered back.

“Even when you were with Kara, I’ve admired you from afar. I couldn’t bring myself to admit this while you two were still together, but now that you two have been apart for several years, I thought I would admit this to you now. I’ve always wanted to be with you,” she said with all her heart.

“What would you think about meeting all my relatives, even the transgendered ones?” I asked her.

“I would love that, Eric,” I replied before turning on the laptop, and showing the diary of my trip to her.

“This is quite interesting,” she added while reading through the entries.

It wasn’t until one-thirty that Belinda and I wrapped up the evening. “Eric, thanks for such a wonderful evening. I hope I made you forget about Kara,” she whispered to me.

“You made me forget about her altogether. You showed me a time I haven’t had in a long, long time,” I whispered. After that, I began to move my lips toward hers. We hesitated for a moment before sharing our first tender kiss.

“Keep in touch,” she whispered to me.

“I will, darling,” I whispered before she left the room.

The last entry of my diary took up ten pages, telling not only about Jolene and Cathi’s renewal ceremony, but also my feelings about sharing a kiss with Belinda. This was the first time in several months I shared a kiss with a genetic female. Maybe some things were meant to happen; I knew, somehow, that even after being friends for several years, that I would share a kiss with her. She even made me forget about the time I made love to Bridget, the sexy post-op who lives with Aunt Diane. After I finished that entry, I turned in for the night.

Back Home

I woke up at nine-thirty on the morning of July 1, 1998, preparing to return home. When I got to the main desk to check out, I had gotten two messages. One was from Joe and Cathi, thanking me for being a part of their renewal ceremony. The other was from Belinda, thanking me for her first romantic evening in years. I couldn’t get her out of my mind as I drove from downtown Chicago to O’Hare. When I turned in my car, I walked to the gate to take the noon flight home.

When I landed in St. Louis after one o'clock, my secretary, Stephanie Anne Jeffries, greeted me. "How was your trip?" she asked me.

"It was a fun trip. I have so much to tell you," I replied.

"I'm glad you're back, Eric. Things have been rather quiet since you've been away, except for planning a retirement party for your longtime receptionist," she added.

"Joan Callan is retiring?" I then asked.

"She's been with the company since your father ran it. She's retiring tomorrow, after thirty-two years on the job," she replied.

"I'll have to find a new receptionist," I added.

While I was waiting for my baggage, I remembered that someone from an earlier relationship was now looking for a job. Mandi Crane had been living full-time as a woman since the age of sixteen; she had plunged into the world of being an escort since losing her last job in 1997. Stephanie and I walked out to her car, and drove me to the office. After dropping my luggage in my car, I walked into the office to give her a phone call.

"Mandi, this is Eric Fletcher," I informed her.

"It's been a few years since that time we spent together," she added.

"The reason for my call is that we're now in dire need of a new receptionist. Joan Callan, who has been our receptionist since 1966, is retiring tomorrow. Since no one has applied for the position, I took a quick look at your resume, and thought you would be perfect for the job. It's also a great chance for you to get out of the unstable world of an escort, and get back into the everyday world," I explained.

"When would you want me to come in?" she asked me.

"Four o'clock this afternoon," I replied.

She arrived at my office around four o'clock, wearing a red sleeveless dress. "I'm so glad you could come, Mandi," I told her succinctly.

"What do you have in mind?" she asked me.

"Mandi, I would like for you to be our new receptionist. According to your resume, you have extensive experience as an office and administrative assistant. It's a much more stable job than the one you've been doing since you got laid off, and it will pay more than being an escort," I replied.

"I'd take it I'll be working every day," she added.

"You'll be working Monday through Friday from nine in the morning until five in the afternoon, and you'll be making twenty dollars an hour. For your schedule, you'll be making over thirty-eight thousand dollars a year. That's more than enough to take care of your mother and niece. You will also be allowed medical leave when you decide to have sex reassignment surgery, too," I then added.

"Do you have any other transsexuals working for you?" she asked me.

"I have one transsexual working for me; my secretary, Stephanie Anne Jeffries. Everyone calls her Steph around here. She's been my secretary for four years; she's taking time off for medical leave later this month to undergo her sex-change operation," I replied.

"Then, I'm not alone," she added.

"I'm going to offer this job to you, Mandi," I informed her.

"I'll take your offer, Eric," she informed me.

"Joan is still at her desk. I'll tell her you're coming down for training," I added.

I got on the phone to Joan. "Mrs. C, Mandi Crane is coming down to train for the receptionist position," I informed her.

The next day, I attended the retirement party for Joan. My father even came up from Hawaii to attend the party. This would also be Stephanie's last day before she left for Montreal to undergo her operation. When it was all said and done, I removed Joan's nameplate from the receptionist's desk, and gave it to her. I then slid Mandi's nameplate in to replace Joan's.

Within the space of a month, I got on the phone to a literary agent friend of mine, Bob Powers. He wanted to read the diary of my visits to my transgendered relatives, and see if he can get it published. I put a copy of the manuscript on a floppy disc, and gave it to him. He would then offer it to twenty different publishers; all of them turned it down. His final stop was one of the largest publishing houses in New York; they accepted the manuscript. Bob and I would split a seventy percent take on the book, with the publisher taking the remaining thirty percent.

For my transgendered relatives, everything turned out quite well. Lori would have her operation on July 15, 1998; she was back at work by early September. Karen would sell one of her businesses for a tidy profit in January 1999. Heather would be the top real estate agent in Boston for 1999, selling over twenty million dollars' worth of homes in one year. Sarah would have a 4.0 grade point average her first year in college. Shauna and Travis would marry in November 1999; they adopted a newborn baby girl named Katrina the following summer. Christie, Jessica and Katie were all cleared for sex-change operations by the beginning of 2000. Walter's book on his experiences as Gwendolyn was finally finished at the end of 1999; it was released in June 2000. Olivia began living full-time as a woman in February 1999; she, Virgil and Brianne built a very successful business. Everybody else continued in their successful careers.

As for me, I held on to my five fixed base operations; I purchased five more between September 1998 and the end of 1999. I bought operations in Columbia, Poplar Bluff and Vichy, Missouri, along with Danville and Mount Vernon, Illinois. I also cut my last radio properties outside Missouri and Illinois loose; donating two radio stations in Alabama to the state public radio network in January 1999. I also purchased two radio stations in the Carbondale area in August 1999. Both of my transsexual employees underwent successful operations. Stephanie had hers on July 5, 1998; she was back at work on September 1. She would get married in October 2001; her husband also happens to be named Eric. Mandi didn't have her sex-change operation until February 2003; she had hers in Thailand. Both are still employed by me.

One romantic possibility went out the window when Bridget was promoted to a full partner in the law firm down in Florida in October 1999. She started dating Aunt Diane's youngest stepson, Roger, the previous spring. By the end of 2000, Bridget and Roger were happily married and preparing to adopt a child. One did turn out very well. Belinda, the

friend from college whom I fell in love with when I was in Chicago to attend Jolene and Cathi's renewal ceremony, opened a bridal shop in St. Louis in September of 1999. The diary I kept of the trip I took was published at the end of the year. I proposed to Belinda when 2000 arrived; we married on Valentine's Day 2001.

My parting message to you is that you should be proud of your transgendered relatives, no matter how many of them you have. They're the most unique, most beautiful and most treasured members of your family. Treasure your transgendered children as much as you would any other offspring. Every moment you spend with them is precious. It is my hope that you will find acceptance within your own family, as much as you have found acceptance among your transgendered brothers and sisters and your true friends.

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