

# Foxes & Bunnies



## Jessica Matthews



An "Adult TV" Novel



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# Foxes & Bunnies

by Jessica Matthews

“We need a family conference,” Mother’s text announced. “Please make sure you’re both at dinner on Sunday. Don’t invite anyone.”

It sounded serious. Howard wondered what was going to be said. His sister, Laurel, had won a place in college to study to be a dentist. This was her life’s ambition, and she was struggling to work out how she could afford the tuition fees and all the equipment she would have to buy.

He knew that all the courses she would have to take would cost far more than the maximum student loans she could get, and even with the bursaries available, things seemed impossible. The training was long and arduous; she wouldn’t be able to earn anywhere near enough to bridge the gap, especially with the cost of accommodation on campus.

“I’m never going to be able to fund it all,” she stated as they sat in their yard after mother’s dinner. “I’ve got a bar job for the weekends, but all that’s going to do is pay for living expenses.”

“Are you sure you can manage a job as well as studying?” Mother asked.

“There’s no choice,” Laurel replied. “It’s either that or I’ll have to give up on the idea of studying altogether.”

“Don’t say that,” Howard replied. “I love it that you’re so determined to get there. I really admire you for it.”

“That’s really kind,” Mother said. “I’m so pleased that you two get on with each other so well. It’s not been easy getting you through school on my own, but you both make me proud.”

“She’s the brains of the family though.” Howard pointed at his sister. “I never had any ambition like that.”

“Not everyone can be an academic,” Mother replied. “You’re doing so well in the computer shop.”

“That’s easy,” Howard replied. “I can programme and do tweaks like the best. It’s something I seem to be able to do by instinct, and it’s just the day job. I don’t have anything to carry over into the weekends.”

“But you don’t do anything then.” Laurel butted in. “When was the last time you went on a date or had some fun?”

“I don’t need that stuff,” Howard said. “Girls are too complicated anyway.”

“And computers are so simple?” Laurel jibed.

“They don’t get upset if you don’t notice they’ve changed their hair,” Howard replied.

“You used to be dating a different girl every month,” Laurel chided.

“I got fed up with meeting Miss Wrong all the time,” Howard replied.

“Surely you could find someone steady. You’re young, slim and handsome, well-paid if lacking ambition, maybe not tall enough, but girls these days don’t mind being the taller one in a couple. They get to show off.”

“Have I any other faults you’d care to name?” Howard hit back.

“You could do something with your hair. It hangs over your shoulders, so thick and glossy. It shouts that it hasn’t seen a hairdresser in years,” Laurel said. “And how about a moustache? They’re fashionable in some circles.”

“I like my hair,” Howard almost shouted back. “And you know I couldn’t grow a beard or a moustache if I tried. I don’t seem to have inherited the gene for whiskers, unlike some of the girls round here.”

“I’m sorry, Howard,” Laurel soothed. “We’re getting into an argument for no reason.”

“I’m sorry too.” Howard held up his hand in a peace sign. “The girls always want to change me. They want me to be someone else, like their friend’s boyfriends. I’m not like that.”

“I wouldn’t take bets on it.” Laurel nodded meaningfully with a wink.

Howard blushed. He’d not been dating. He didn’t find that the girls he met excited him in that special way. There was never a spark to take things further.

“So let’s get to the purpose of getting you both here, and stop bickering.” Mother held up her hand to silence them. “I want to propose that Laurel registers for her courses.”

“I’ll second that,” Howard replied. “I’ll pay my share and whatever I can. Then she’ll know why I’m not dating. I won’t be able to afford it.”

“Stop being silly,” Mother interrupted. “We’re not going back to bickering. This is serious.”

“But how do we pay for it all?” Laurel asked.

“I have extra hours working for Mr. Antrobus and I’ve told him that I’m available through weekends and for working away from home.” Mother said. “The real estate business looked like it was quiet, but the other side of the business in supplying serviced office space has really taken off.”

“You’ve always resisted working the weekends and being away from home.” Laurel took her mother’s hand. “Are you sure it won’t be too much.”

"I resisted because you kids needed me at home, but now you need my help in another way." Mother looked from one to the other. "The extra money can go to your fees."

"I'll help all I can. I don't mind not having a vibrant social life. I wouldn't know what to do anyway," Howard said. "You can count on me."

"Can we make it?" Laurel asked. "It's a big sacrifice for you both and I can't say I don't want it, but..."

"There are serviced offices all over the state and beyond now," Mother interrupted. "If they continue to expand, I may get promotions. I'm excited to try."

"If you're doing that, I've the offer of some private work too," Howard said. "It's not much, but I think I can build it up. I'll chip in as much as I can too."

"I don't know what to say." Laurel had tears in her eyes. "Thank you both. I really love you, and I'll not let you down. When I'm a rich dentist with my own practice, I'll look after both of you."

"You don't have to promise that, sis," Howard replied. "There's nothing wrong with my teeth anyway."

"That's not what I meant. I want to help when I can, and meantime I'll get some bar work to help out."

"No you won't," Mother interrupted. "If your brother and I are going to be working so hard, you have to study hard with no distractions. I don't want you to be too tired to succeed."

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"I never thought we'd make it, but we did," Mother confided to her son. "Laurel called me this morning to say she's passed her first set of exams."

"That's great." Howard was as excited as she was.

"I only have to send her five hundred dollars and then she can get her certificate to register for next semester."

“I’m cleaned out,” Howard said with a worried look on his face.

“So am I.” Mother replied. “But we have a few days. Something will turn up.”

“But we have to pay the advance on next year’s fees soon.” Howard was scanning through some of the papers in their accounts file.

“How long have we got?”

“It says that half the fees have to be paid by the beginning of the semester.”

“I have no idea how we’re going to do that, but we must. Laurel’s done so well, and she’s got an internship with Advance Dental through the vacation.” Mother tucked her hair back and looked seriously at Howard. “We mustn’t let her know that we’re struggling.”

“Okay Mom, I’ll say nothing. I know she’s applied for all kinds of grants and bursaries but even if she wins them all, we’re still going to have to find a lot of money.”

“And I don’t know if we can do it.”

“We’ll make it, Mom, have faith.” Howard looked into the distance. “Something will turn up.”

“I hope so.”

“I’ll try and bring some work forward.” Howard hoped that he could. In truth, he had nothing pending.

“I’ll ask Mr. Antrobus,” Mother said.

“You can’t ask him for money,” Howard replied. “It’s not as if he’s family.”

“We don’t have family like other folks,” Mother said. “I wasn’t going to ask him for money anyway. I was going to ask if there was any work going for you. He’s got computers all over the office and I heard him grumbling about their network supplier.”

“That would be good,” Howard replied. “I can do networks easily, unless he’s got remote sites that you haven’t mentioned.”

"I don't know," Mother replied. "I just use the office network; I don't really know what it is, or what it does beyond my work on it, and we can access it wherever we are."

"When will you know?"

"I'll ask tomorrow," she said. "I'm working through the weekend. There's a trade show, Mr. Antrobus is taking a team. I'm the admin support person."

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"Mr. Antrobus has come up trumps. There's a job for you," Mother announced at dinner a couple of days later. "He wants you to go into the offices on a Saturday evening when the network is not likely to be used, and you can work on Sunday as well if you need to."

"Did he say what he wanted me to do?" Howard asked.

"Not really," Mother replied. "He's sending a specification sheet which the last contractors were asked to sort out. It's always had a few glitches, and they've never been able to get rid of them."

"I guess I might be able to do something," Howard's forehead creased in a frown. "I don't really know how your network is supposed to be configured."

"I'd guess that will be in the information he's sending," Mother stated the obvious.

"What's he paying?"

"I didn't discuss that. I guess it depends on what you find and how long it takes you to deal with the problem. The work stations freeze intermittently and no one seems able to fix it."

"It sounds like something I can fix, but I'm not really sure," Howard replied. "I'm hoping it's a system I know."

"But you'll try?"

“I’ll try, Mom,” Howard replied. “I’ll not make it any worse, that’s for sure.”

“I have the office keys so I’ll be able to let you in and show you where things are kept.” Mother held up a huge bunch of keys.

“That’s fine,” Howard said. “Can we go in early, and then I can have a full day undisturbed. You don’t have to stay once I’m there and you can lock me in. I’ll call you when I’m finished and you can pick me up.”

“You’re a good boy, Howard,” Mother smiled. “I’m sure you’re a great brother too. I’m really proud of you for trying so hard.”

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“You’re Howard?” The man seemed to creep into the office whilst he was absorbed in the intricacies of the network.

“Yes,” Howard said, shocked at the intrusion whilst he was absorbed in his work.

He jumped to his feet in surprise and knocked his notepad, pens and phone off the desk.

“I got it,” said the man.

He grabbed Howard’s laptop before it too fell to the floor and placed it safely on the desk as Howard gathered everything else.

“I’m sorry if I startled you, I’d forgotten anyone would be here. You’re Howard, right?”

“Yes, I’m sorry if I’m not supposed to be here.”

“No, that’s fine. The fault is mine for startling you. I’m Larry Antrobus.”

He held out his hand for Howard to shake, then seemed to hold it a little longer than necessary as he looked deeply into Howard’s eyes.

“I’m pleased you were able to look at the problem for me,” he said as if snapping back to reality and breaking his gaze.

"I think I'm finding the glitch," Howard said, launching into a technical explanation. "The drive wasn't configured..."

He looked up to see that Mr. Antrobus wasn't paying attention, but was looking him up and down.

"Your mother works for me," Larry said, as if stuck for something to say.

"She's happy working here." Howard stumbled over his words. "We're financing my sister through dental college, so I was so happy to get this extra work from you."

"That must be really expensive."

"It is, but we're all contributing, that's why these jobs count so much," Howard said. "I'm sorry it wasn't more complicated, and then I could have charged you more."

"You could be too honest," Mr. Antrobus laughed. "I have no idea about these technical things. I pay people to use them. Are you sure it's fixed?"

"I think so. I can't make it freeze again today."

"Fine, I'm happy to take your word for it all. Send me your bill and I'll see that it's settled." He held Howard's eye contact again, and looked him up and down again.

"I think I'd rather wait a week or two and make sure that the problem is fixed." Howard blushed to be under such scrutiny. "I mean, I think I've found the problem, but it really needs to run with all the users are in work to make sure that it's stable."

"Come in again next week and see if you can freeze it again." Mr. Antrobus sat and looked again at him.

"I really don't need..." Howard wondered why Mr. Antrobus was looking at him so keenly.

He ran his hand through his hair. The scrunchie fell out, allowing his hair to fall loose around his shoulders. He picked it up, gathered his hair, twisted it and secured it in his usual low pony tail.

"Send your mother in with the first bill next week, then when you come in again, you can send another

bill.” Mr. Antrobus walked round the desk towards the exit. “I’ll leave you to finish off, and maybe I’ll see you next week. I’d like a personal report on what you find.”

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“You didn’t tell me that you met Mr. Antrobus.” Howard sat across the table from his mother as she served dinner later in the week. “I don’t know what you did, but you really impressed him. He asked me to let him know when you’d be in the office again. The computers seem to be working okay, but they’re a bit slow at times.”

“I’ll go in on Saturday afternoon after the computer shop closes if that’s okay,” Howard replied. “I’ll take my test rigs and I’ve got a programme to run that might show up any errors in your system.”

“How long will that take?”

“It depends on what I find,” Howard said. “If there’s anything to do, I’ll work through the night and get it sorted.”

Howard gathered his laptop on Saturday afternoon and unplugged his outboard hard drive from the workstation he had been using at work. He’d downloaded all kinds of software to have ready for the afternoon’s work

Using his mother’s keys, he let himself into the offices and soon became immersed in his work. It was both hot and dusty around the huge servers as Howard checked physical pathways as well as electronic ones. By evening, he could smell himself. His once clean shirt and trousers were grubby and creased.

He loosened his hair and ran his hands through it, feeling the unpleasant sweat at his scalp and the nape of his neck. It was at that moment that Mr. Antrobus arrived, looking dapper and fresh.

“You startled me,” Howard stuttered. “I’m sorry... dirty work at the back of the server cabinet...”

“Hey, I didn’t mean to startle you,” Mr. Antrobus replied. “I saw the lights as I drove past and thought I’d look in on you.”

“I’m working real hard,” Howard explained.

“I wasn’t checking up on you.” Mr. Antrobus stood back and looked at him, then he reached out and touched Howard’s hair.

“If you get cleaned up, I’d like to take you to dinner to say thanks,” he said.

“There’s no need..”

“I’d like to. You’d be doing me a big favour too.” Mr. Antrobus held his eyes. “I got stood up, and I don’t like to eat alone.”

“You could always order in,” Howard stammered.

“It’s Saturday evening.” Mr. Antrobus put his arm round Howard’s shoulder and stepped a few paces to the office window. “Look out here. Lots of people are out there, all with somewhere to go, and somewhere to have fun. It’s not something to do on your own.”

“I don’t know. I should be working.”

“You don’t have to clock off. Call it your supper break if you like.”

“I’m not dressed.”

“It doesn’t matter. You can shower in my private bathroom, and I’ll lend you some clothes. I always keep something in the office.”

“Okay,” said Howard. “If you’re sure.”

“I’m sure.” Mr. Antrobus took him by the hand and pulled him through the office to a door which he unlocked with a key from his pocket. “There’s everything you need in there,” he said, indicating another door. “If you throw your clothes out, I’ll check the sizes and see what I have here.”

It all happened so fast. One minute Howard was thinking how he could get out of this, the next he was undressing in a modern shower room, throwing his clothes through the door.

“These must have cost a fortune,” he muttered as he looked at the array of toiletries arranged in the cabinet. “I recognise some of these names from Laurel’s magazines, but I bet even she never saw them before.”

He took an array of bottles into the shower stall with him. Seeing a razor on the shelf, he took that with some shaving foam too. He didn’t need to shave much, but the opportunity to do so with the very best products was too much to resist.

“This feels good,” he said to himself as he stood under the shower, allowing warm water to fall all over him like gentle warm rain. A soft perfume seemed to come with the water, calming and relaxing him, as he watched the last of the bubbles swirling away.

“This towel is huge,” Howard thought as he quickly dried himself and then wrapped it round his waist. “It’s too long as well,” he laughed as he tripped over the ends and re-wrapped it just under his arms.

He lost track of time when he noticed a hair drier on a shelf beside a mirror which remarkably remained clear of steam. He opened a drawer and found a hairbrush. He looked at it, pulled away a few long dark hairs which clung to the bristles and then brushed gently through his hair. It tangled and pulled.

He looked again through the cosmetics and found something which said it left hair soft and free. He applied it liberally and began again to pull the brush through his hair. It fell softly and untangled itself to the touch.

He aimed the drier and, remembering his mother and sister, began to pull the brush through his hair as he dried it. It was quite mesmerising, watching the damp lank locks become smooth and shiny. Finished, he shook his head from left to right, feeling the hair swing and brush across his shoulders as he did so.

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He quite forgot where he was until there was a knock on the door.

“Try these.” He opened the door slightly, quite self-consciously, and reached out an arm. He tried to hide the towel wrapped around him but was sure that Mr. Antrobus saw it as he took the clothes from him and retreated into the dressing room again.

“These are way too big.” Howard knew at once that the clothes would smother him. “I’d look a clown if I dressed in these.”

He opened the door and stood, wondering what to do. He coughed to attract attention.

“I can’t wear these,” he said when Mr. Antrobus returned. “They’re way too big. I’d better get my own stuff back and forget about dinner. I could do with my own shorts too.”

“No, I can’t allow that, we’re doing dinner, I promised,” Mr. Antrobus replied quite forcefully.

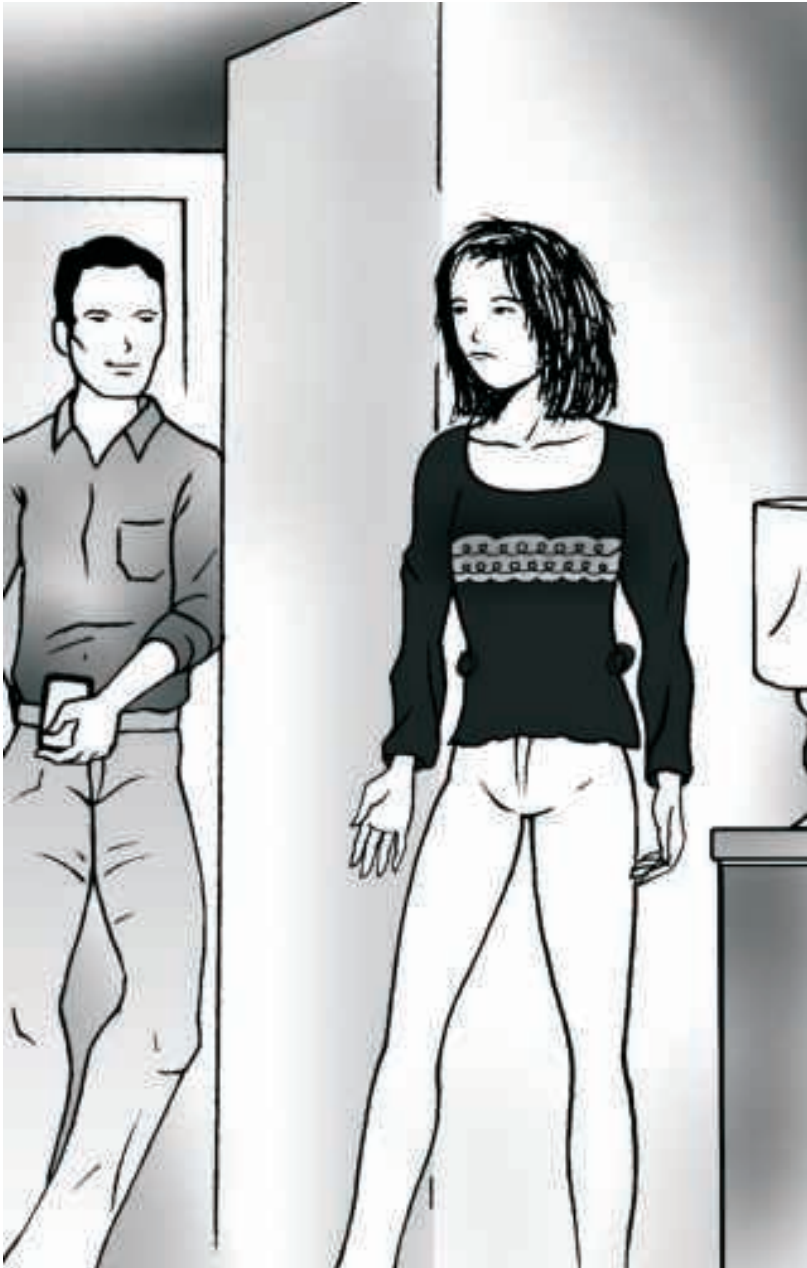
“It was only an offer, not a promise,” Howard replied. “It’s not something you have to do.”

“No, I insist. I’ll find something. Stay there.”

Howard stood, painfully aware that he had no alternative but to stay there, dressed as he was in a large towel and nothing else. He stood for a few moments, alone in a rather comfortable office, which was clearly both office and lounge space.

Nothing happened. He walked into the room and looked around, feeling a little more self-conscious. There was no sign of his clothes anywhere. He sighed. Reasoning that there was not much he could do, he sat, sank down into one of the easy chairs and leaned back.

“I found these.” Mr. Antrobus returned with some clothes hangers held over his arm, and a pink hold-all. He gave them to Howard who took them without really looking at what he was given. He retreated quickly to the dressing room.



He looked through the holdall and found it to contain underwear in soft material. He pulled it out and was surprised to find a tangle of bra and panties, stocking and garter belt. Some flat shoes with sling backs fell out from the bottom.

“Oh no,” he gasped. “This can’t be real.”

He looked at the clothes on the hangers. There were black trousers and a black shirt which felt like silk.

“That’s better,” He thought. “I can do without this underwear.”

He tried on the trousers first. He pulled them up, feeling their comfortable tightness across his thighs. He groped for the fastener but there was none where he expected to find it. Feeling round, he felt a zipper on the side, with a button to fasten over his left hip. The trousers rode low, below his waist. They were snug over his hips and flared out as they fell towards his feet.

They fit but there was an unsightly bulge between his legs where the material was tight.

“What a mess,” he thought. “I’m sure Mr. Antrobus means well, but what do I do?”

He thought of going out and demanding his own clothes back and getting out of there. He wondered if Mr. Antrobus was testing him or playing a game with rules he didn’t understand.

He thought again. What if he did that? Would he get paid? Was he throwing away an opportunity to earn and support Laurel? What about Mother’s job? All these thoughts swirled round his head in an instant. A cold sweat broke out. He looked at himself again.

Suddenly thinking, he pulled off the trousers, and selected the tightest panties he could find amidst the lingerie from the holdall.

He pulled them up, and then the trousers again. He fastened them and looked in the mirror. There was still a bulge, but it was less unsightly, and less prominent. He turned left and right and decided that

he could get away with it, if they went somewhere that wasn't too brightly lit.

He tried the shoes. They were a little on the big side but then there was white flesh showing between the black trousers and the black shoes. That looked wrong even to Howard's untutored eye. He took the trousers off again.

"What am I doing this for?" he asked himself over and over again. "I'm doing it because I'm afraid of losing our jobs..." he paused. "It feels different. I wonder what he's playing at."

He turned again to the lingerie from the bag. There were no socks, only long black stockings. He knew at once that these were the kind that required a garter belt to hold them up, and he knew that there was one somewhere in the tangle.

Remembering his schoolboy days with magazines that they weren't supposed to see in the playground, he knew how they should be worn. He fastened the belt, twisted it so that the fastener was at the rear, and attached the four clasps to the tops of the black stockings which he pulled up his legs.

He stopped there. "What am I doing?" he thought again. "This was never planned."

He stopped to clear his head. Surely Mr. Antrobus must know what he'd been given. Maybe it really was a test or part of a plan. Maybe it was only a step on the way to dinner. He sighed and dressed again in the trousers, fastened them, and stepped into the shoes which now looked as if they belonged on the end of his legs.

He ran his fingers through his hair and looked once more into the mirror. It fell loosely and messily as it dried.

"Maybe it looks better if I leave it loose," he thought. "From the waist down, I look reasonable."

He took the black shirt from the hangar, and looked at it again. It wasn't a shirt with a button front. It was something to pull over the head. He put his arms into the sleeves and let the silky material settle down his body. It had a scooped neck and fell gently over his waist in a series of pleats. There was

decoration across the chest, which really made it clear that it wasn't made for a man. The sleeves billowed out and swung loose and wide over his wrists.

He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. "What am I doing? If I didn't know me, I'd think I was a flat-chested version of my sister, only less pretty."

The thought ran through his mind as there was an urgent knock on the door.

"Are you ready to go?" Mr. Antrobus called.

"Ready as I'll ever be," Howard answered, and stepped through the door. Mr. Antrobus stood a few paces away, looking him up and down. "...if you really want me to go like this?" Howard stood back to give him the full view.

"Yes, of course," Antrobus replied. "You scrub up rather well."

"I'm not sure what you want, but I look like a boy dressed up in his sister's clothes." Howard took a deep breath. "Is this what you intended?"

"I have no idea what you mean," Antrobus replied.

"Was it a test, do I pass?" Howard could feel a little panic as he realised that Mr. Antrobus intended them to go out. "I look wrong. They'll laugh at us."

"They will if you go round telling everyone that you're wearing your sister's clothes."

"These aren't my sister's clothes, and you know what I mean." Howard suppressed a feeling of anger. He remembered the jobs depending on Mr. Antrobus.

"Well, you could do something to make yourself a little less obvious."

"And how do you propose I should do that?" Howard snapped.

"Talk a little softer, use a bit of makeup, jewellery maybe, and no one will ever think twice."

"Look," Howard started. "I'm not a girl. I'm not a guy who dressed up like a girl, let alone one who does the things that girls do on a date..."

"Who said this was a date?"

“No one, I guess,” Howard stopped. “Maybe I’m being foolish. You wanted to go out and these are the only clothes in the place.”

“That’s right,” Mr. Antrobus replied calmly. “There’s a mess of makeup and other stuff in the back room where I cleared it out a few months ago.”

“Why did you do that?”

“Let’s just say it was when I became single again.” Mr. Antrobus opened a door and gestured for Howard to go through. “It’s all there. I’m sure that having a sister must have given you some idea what to do.”

“Okay.” Howard held his eye as he entered, catching a glimmer of humour in his eyes.

“And I’m Lawrence, but you can call me Larry; we can’t have you calling me Mister Antrobus all evening. Anyone would think you’re my secretary, or worse, that I’d hired you for the evening.

“Isn’t that what you’ve done?” Howard inwardly cursed his boldness.

Not at all, I’m treating you to dinner after a hard day’s work.”

“Okay.” Howard forced a smile. Maybe this wouldn’t be too bad.

Larry opened a drawer and left it to Howard to search through. “Come out when you’re ready.”

“When I’m ready,” Howard said to himself. “How about never? What have I got myself into?”

He sighed and sorted through the drawer. “I don’t know how to do makeup like Laurel does. I wonder what he’s expecting.”

Howard sorted some more and separated eye pencils and lipsticks, eye shadow and other things he knew he wasn’t even going to try and use. Hesitantly, he took a black kohl pencil and drew lines around his eyes. He smudged it slightly across the outside of his upper lid and then redrew the line tightly against his lashes.

“Mascara,” he said to himself as he selected a black one. “Extends and thickens, it says on the label. It must be true.”

Holding the wand steadily, he stroked it over his lashes top and bottom, then did it again and a third time. “For luck,” he mumbled. He leaned back from the wall mirror to take in the effect.

“It does make me look different,” he decided. On a roll, he looked for lipstick.

“Not red.” He dismissed one after another. “Maybe this one, it’s so pale it won’t look like anything.”

He stroked it across his lips and did it again, making sure that they were evenly coated. “Good job that I don’t have a manly beard,” he told himself, looking at the way his lips shone with the pale colour. In fact he usually shaved once a week or so, as the hairs grew soft and sparsely.

He stood and looked at the full effect in the mirror. He turned left and right and ran his fingers through his hair again, leaving it tousled and free over his shoulders. His eye caught a lacquered box on the shelf in front of the mirror. He opened it and tipped the contents onto the shelf.

He found an array of jumbled chains, rings and bangles. The earrings were for pierced ears so he put them back into the box.

“Girls wear this stuff,” he thought. “But I’m not a girl. I think I’m dressed like one and now I’m wearing eye makeup. What a mess I’ve gotten myself into!”

Quickly, he fastened a simple chain around his neck and slipped a couple of silver bangles over his left wrist. A small velvet bag caught his eye. He tipped the contents into his hand and found rings which looked as if they were really good rings, not costume items like the rest of the box. He tried them on, first on the ring fingers of each hand and then on the middle.

“That’s too much.”

He looked again at his hands. He took them off and ended with two rings on the third finger right hand and one on the middle finger of his left. He closed his

eyes and counted slowly to ten, calming himself with each digit.

“Are we ready?” He stepped back into the living room where Mr. Antrobus was waiting.

“Almost.” Larry held up a bottle. “You need some perfume.”

Howard submitted as he sprayed. To his surprise, he loved the scent of citrus and lavender. It lingered around him from neck to wrists.

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“I don’t know why you’re making me do this,” Howard asked as soon as they were seated at a table and the waiter had left.

“It’s a challenge,” his new boss replied. “I think you passed. Look around, no one’s staring or pointing. I think you convinced them.”

“But I didn’t expect this. “I don’t want to convince them.”

“Do you want me to stand up and announce that I’ve just found out what’s here?” Larry’s hand slid over Howard’s trousers and felt between his legs.

“Get off,” Howard said rather too loudly as other diners turned to look. He felt himself blushing as he took his eyes from them and smiled back at Larry.’

“So I take it that we have a no to that idea?”

“Yes we do,” Howard replied grumpily, still shocked by the sudden grope.

Howard steeled himself to act as inconspicuously as he could and allowed Larry to order a small steak and salad for him. They drank a soft red wine, which Howard being quite unused to wine, really enjoyed.

Coffee followed and he began wishing more fervently for the evening to end. Larry tried to make conversation but he kept his eyes down, afraid to make eye contact with anyone, painfully aware that he didn’t want to give away any secrets.

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Finally, Larry took his hand and led him to the restaurant door. He signed the bill; clearly he was well known here, and a cab came immediately. Larry took his hand as they left the cab and walked across the sidewalk to the door.

Finally, they were back in his apartment. Larry surprised him with a quick kiss on the lips. Instinctively, Howard pushed him away.

“Please can I have my clothes back?” he asked. “It’s time I was home.”

“Your mother knows where you are,” Larry replied. “She won’t be worried.”

“She would if she could see me now,” Howard replied tartly.

“I don’t think she’d be worried,” Larry said again. “But we’ll not test it out tonight.”

“Does that mean I can go?”

“Yes it does,” Larry replied. “I’ll get your things, unless you’d prefer to go as you are.”

“Maybe not,” Howard replied sarcastically. “It would be too difficult to explain.”

Howard grasped his clothes quickly and went into the bathroom to change. He stripped and removed the jewellery. He washed the makeup off. He peered at his reflection in the mirror to make sure that it was all gone and then dressed once more in his own rather smelly clothes.

“The cab will take you home.” Larry tried a quick hug at the door, which Howard dodged quickly. “It’s all paid.”

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“Mr. Antrobus spoke very highly of you today,” Mother continued. “He said your work at the weekend was so useful. I think he’s going to pay you a bonus.”

"I did work hard." Howard stumbled over his words.

"He wants you to take over as soon as all the staff has gone home on Friday afternoon. There's no one in on Saturday," Mother said. "He said you'd be able to sleep over in the office all weekend so that you could work through the computer problems."

"Really? He never said anything like that to me."

"I think he's only realised it when everyone's in work today and none of the usual problems are there. He said he'd see to it that you were looked after whilst you were there, so you didn't need to worry about taking sandwiches or anything to drink."

"So maybe there's nothing more I can do." Howard hoped she would agree.

"It doesn't matter. Every hour adds to your pay," Mother said. "And we need all we can get for Laurel's next instalment."

"Okay. Maybe I should add a glitch or two so that I can keep working."

"I'm sure you won't do that." She laughed at the thought. "Is there anything you want to tell me?"

"Nothing; why do you ask?" Howard sat across the table from her.

"When you came home after working last weekend, I could have sworn that there was a touch of makeup around your eyes." She looked questioningly at him.

"Really?" replied Howard, feigning surprise.

"Yes, really." Mother looked at him quizzically.

"I guess it was all the dirt and dust from the machines. I didn't have time to wash properly before I came home."

"But you had time to spray some perfume over your shoulders, if nowhere else?"

"It was only a body spray." Howard blushed. "Nothing out of the ordinary. I got very hot in the

room with the servers and it was to cover the smell of sweat.”

The week went all too quickly for Howard.

“Should I go and work the weekend for Larry?” he thought. “I wish I could think of an excuse not to, but if I don’t we have no chance of meeting Laurel’s school fees, and if I kick up a fuss, Mother’s job could be in jeopardy.”

He walked round his day job in a daze, thinking and over-thinking what he might do. In the end, the feeling of resignation crept in as he changed and set off to meet Mother on Friday afternoon. As she left work, he was going in.

“Mr. Antrobus says to make yourself at home and that he’ll be across later,” Mother told him as they passed on the stair.

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Howard really didn’t know what to do. He’d run a few system checks and worked through the computer generated logs to which only a system administrator would have access. Nothing was logged as working incorrectly and there was really nothing for him to do. Except wait.

And he waited through the evening. About half past eight, he answered his mobile.

“Howard? It’s Larry. I can’t make it back, so I’ve ordered in for you. Make yourself comfortable and I’ll see you in the morning. We’re going out for the day. I’ve left an outfit for you to wear in the dressing room.”

“Do I have to wear it?” Howard’s heart sank.

“I’d love you to really make an effort,” Larry replied. “I’ve been talking to your mother this week and I think I’ve an idea of how to make thing easier for her and Laurel too.”

“That sounds really good.” Howard was surprised how this elated his feelings. “Are you going to tell me?”

“Maybe tomorrow. I”m still in a meeting here,” Larry replied and ended the conversation.

Some minutes later there was a buzzer sounding on the receptionist”s desk. Howard flicked a couple of switches but he”d never seen this set-up before and couldn”t answer. The buzzer stopped, followed by a loud knocking on the office door.

“Delivery,” the uniformed man at the door announced. “It”s all paid,” he said, pushing a box into Howard”s hands. “Enjoy.”And he was gone so quickly that Howard hadn”t had a chance to say anything.

Howard locked the door again and went back into Larry”s office where he knew there was a small galley kitchen as well as the bathroom and dressing room he”d used the previous week.

He didn”t like eating alone and wasn”t the sort of person who calls for home deliveries. It was so quiet that he set his mobile to play his favourite music. He opened the box with a little doubt that he”d find anything eatable inside.

The smell when it wafted through the open lid was something else. It was fresh and appetising. It made him realise that it was a long time since he”d eaten.

He took a plate and set himself a place at the big office table. He looked into the box and took out a dish, already plated and ready to eat. He couldn”t read the inner label which looked to be Italian or French, but it smelled good and a first taste convinced him.

There was a napkin wrapped around a small bottle of white wine, even a glass. He poured and sipped. Maybe this wasn”t going to be all bad.

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Howard”s heart sank again after he”d eaten.

“He said that he”d left an outfit for me to wear tomorrow,” he remembered, talking to himself as he stood and went through to the dressing room.

“This can’t have been cheap.” He saw the labels on the covers of whatever was hanging obviously on the outside of the closet door. The covers were opaque so he had to lift them off and slip the hangar from the cover.

“He can’t possibly expect me to wear this,” Howard gasped as a classic little black dress hung in front of him.

The seams, the style and the cut suggested it wasn’t something from a supermarket clothes store.

“This is quality, but maybe not the sort of thing for a day out.”

He covered it again and took the next hanger. “Maybe I could wear this.”

He looked at a classic striped blouse, just off white, with classic thin blue stripes horizontally across the body and short sleeves. Under the blouse, he found some navy slacks. He held the two against each other.

“Laurel would wear something like this, and look good.”

With a sigh, he stripped off and put them on. He turned in the mirror, left and right. He loosened his hair and fluffed it out.

“Maybe I could get away with this,” he thought.

He looked in some other packages. He found strappy sandals, finished in matching blue. In another was some black shiny shoes with heels which tapered to a sharp point.

“These look frightening.” He turned them in his hand. “I can’t think of an easier way to break an ankle.”

He looked at them again and temptation proved too much. He sat and put the left one on his foot. He had no stockings, so it didn’t slip easily. He took his foot out and tried again, this time successfully. He put the right shoe on. Holding onto the chair, he stood, then took a wobbly few steps across the room.

“I must be able to do it more elegantly,” he thought. “What would Laurel do?”

He stood tall and felt his shoulders go back and his chest go out. He stepped forward; it was easier now. He walked across the room, turned and came back.

“Lead with the toe.” The phrase flashed through his mind. He’d no idea where it came from.

“Once more with pride,” he muttered and repeated his steps.

“That’s not as daunting as I thought,” Howard congratulated himself. “I could do this easily with more practise.”

He returned to the packages. One contained lingerie. It tumbled over the floor as he dropped the bag. He picked up the items and sorted them out into a dark red set and a pale beige set. They seemed to be identical, with bras that could stand up for themselves. The dark red set had a garter belt, which was absent from the beige one.

The final package contained stockings and tights, cosmetics, all new in their wrappers; so many items that he had no idea what they might be used for. He sat back and looked over it all.

“This must have cost a small fortune,” he guessed. “More than I earned last week anyway.”

He fingered the lingerie and a mental picture of himself, dressed up and made up, flickered through his brain.

“What am I thinking?” he chided himself. “I don’t want more practise. I don’t want to be taken for a girl again. I don’t know what Larry expects, but he’s not getting this.”

He turned and slammed the door as he left the room. He made himself comfortable, lying across the sofa in his clothes and spent a few hours tossing and turning, his mind in turmoil.

Quite to his surprise, he woke to the sun streaming through the blinds, feeling alert and refreshed.

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He went into the shower and wasn't surprised to see it well-stocked with all that he needed and more. Once out, he dried on the softest towel he'd ever used.

"Gosh, this is so big." He tried to wrap it round his waist, but it was too long.

"Oh well, there's one thing I learned from having a sister," he said to himself as he wrapped the towel under his arms and tucked it in so that it was secure.

He looked in the mirror and combed through his hair. He found the hair drier at the side of the mirror hanging on its hook. He tried it. On an impulse, he took a container of blow dry liquid and combed it through, before tilting his head and drying his hair upside down as he'd seen his sister doing. When it was dry, he stood and looked again.

"I never realised that I had this much hair." He ran his fingers through it. "It's so much softer. But there's no shape or style; it's just long."

He held his hair to the left and to the right. He piled it on top of his head and laughed as it tumbled over his shoulders once more. It seemed to know where it wanted to go. He found a robe and looked at it.

"Not too feminine," he thought as he slipped his arms into the sleeves and fastened the belt.

It was a dusky colour with a hint of peach and covered his calves. He went into the kitchen, switched on the coffee machine and scanned through the news on his mobile before setting it to music. Suddenly a cold chill shuddered through him.

"Larry's going to be here soon," he said to himself. "He's expecting me to dress up, but I'm not a girl. I don't want to be a girl. I'm going to tell him that this is too stupid. I'll tell him and then I'm going home."

No sooner had he made up his mind than another thought intruded.

"Oh goodness!" he heard himself exclaim. "What happens if I do that? What happens to Laurel? He

said he had a plan to help her. Mother too. It would help her if Laurel was secure, and what happens to her job if I'm the reason it all falls apart? I'm totally trapped. I'm in a mess whatever I do."

Howard took his coffee and sat at the table. "It's not as if I had a girlfriend depending on me." His mind churned over and over. "There's Laurel and Mother to consider. "We've all worked so hard to get her where she is. I can't let them down."

He sat longer and took another coffee. "I can't do this," he decided. Whatever the consequences, I think Larry's asking too much. I'm sure he'll see reason."

He stood and walked across the room. He looked into the dressing room and saw all the clothes, the lingerie scattered over the chairs and the cosmetics on the shelf.

"It may be fun," he heard his mind telling him. "You could try it for a while. It's not as if he wants to marry you."

He felt the bra and rubbed his fingers around the cups. "It might really be fun," he thought.

He put it down and slipped on the sandals. He stood and walked back to the coffee machine. "I'm drinking too much; I'll be all jittery later."

He turned away and walked across the room, very conscious that he was walking in heels and doing it with ease. He walked a little faster, trying out if he could do it, and turned, flicked up a heel and smiled to himself.

"It may be fun, but I don't want to do it."

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"Are you decent?" Larry had arrived with a big bunch of flowers in his hand and a smile of expectation on his face.

He handed the flowers and a couple of packages to Howard.

“Even I know these are beautiful and extravagant,” Howard said.

“You’re supposed to kiss me, then go and put them in water.” Larry smiled expectantly.

They looked at each other as if spellbound.

Howard kissed him quickly but before he could get away, Larry caught him and pulled him into a tight embrace. Howard dropped the flowers as he felt Larry’s tongue challenging his as it forced its way through his lips.

“Why am I doing this?” Howard’s mind was calling to him but he ignored it, opened his teeth and wrapped his tongue around Larry’s as he instinctively wrapped his arms around him and allowed the embrace to become tighter and closer.

They broke apart and looked at each other as if trying to work out what to say next.

“I don’t want you to read anything into that.” Howard gasped, a little breathless from the suddenness of it all. “I don’t know how that happened.”

“I don’t care how it happened.” Larry held out his hand for Howard to take.

Howard looked at it, then held out his hand too. He turned and picked up the flowers. “I’ll put these in water.”

He returned a few moments later and put the flowers onto the table. “I could only find a water jug to put them in.

“Clearly I didn’t think that through.” Larry came back to stand next to him.

“Just promise you won’t take that as a sign of anything,” Howard said. “Please remember that I’m a boy and I live with my mother who works for you. I’m here because you asked me to fix the computers.”

“But we both know that there’s nothing wrong with them, and yet you came anyway.” Larry’s grin was gentle rather than smug.

“I came because I need the money,” Howard said sternly.

“Okay, but admit that you were a little curious too,” Larry insisted.

“Well, yes; maybe,” Howard stammered. “I don’t know what I’m doing here.”

“That’s simple,” Larry replied. “Get dressed, we’re going out for the day. I want to show you my new house and maybe I’ll see you in that little black dress when we go to dinner later.”

“Don’t bet on it.”

“I bet you can’t wait to get really dolled up.”

“Okay, well maybe.” Howard blushed. “But I’m still not a girl and this is ridiculous.”

“I promise that it may be ridiculous,” Larry replied. “But it won’t be boring. Get dressed and we’ll go.”

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Howard was surprised by how much longer it took him to dress as a girl that it did normally. He’d throw on jeans and a shirt of some kind, trainers and an old leather jacket if the day needed it.

Now he struggled with panties and tights – he knew enough to dress in that order – and then the bra, all adjustable straps, hooks and eyes and nothing to put in the cups anyway. He fastened it at the front, twisted it round his chest until it was in the right position, then slipped his arms into the straps.

Makeup was a different question. The labels on the packages were clear when they said eyeshadow or liner. He guessed what they did, but blusher, highlighter, contouring foundation; it was another language.

I said I wasn’t going to do this,” he said to himself as he drew black lines around his eyes. “If I smudge it over my top lid, it might look as if that was the look I intended.”

He tried and looked at left and right in the mirror. “That’s not even,” he decided and added more to the left.

“Perhaps that will do,” he decided and applied several coats of mascara. “I don’t know how much is enough and how much is too much.” He looked again at his reflection, blinking a feeling the new weight of his lashes.

He heard Larry calling. “It will have to do,” he decided and slipped into the blue and white blouse, pulled the navy trousers up, and fastened the ankle straps on his shoes.

He stood and looked at the full effect in the mirror. “Maybe on a dark night....” he thought as he turned left and right. “Or maybe anywhere if they don’t look too closely.”

At the last minute, he remembered and clipped on earrings, then fluffed his hair again so that it spread into a tousled style, almost as if he meant it to go that way. He fastened a slim necklace round his neck, added a couple of bangles and the rings from last time. Then he was ready.

“I’m about as ready as I’m going to be today,” he announced as he walked back into the larger room where Larry sat waiting with growing impatience.

“I suppose I’ll have to get used to waiting for you,” Larry said.

“Hey, don’t go there,” Howard replied. “I’m not doing this regularly. I’m not a girl, and don’t you forget it!”

“You’ll do,” Larry decided after inspecting him from both sides. “Remember not to flatten the cups of your bra. They’re padded to look as if they’re holding something.

Howard pulled out his tongue and then laughed at the absurdity of it all. Larry held out his hand. Without a thought, Howard took it and allowed himself to be led from the building and across the car park where a white sedan stood waiting.

“I hope no one’s looking,” Howard whispered as he kept his head down.

“Don’t worry. If you try to hide, you’ll draw attention to yourself.”

“That’s what I”m afraid of,” Howard snapped back. “It’s okay for you. You aren’t the one crossdressing in public.”

“Your car, Madam,” Larry said mockingly, holding the door for Howard to get in.

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They drove from the suburbs of the city, through open country, then turned towards the coast. Howard was silent, looking at the scenery and occasionally glancing towards Larry.

“How old is he?” Howard wondered. “Mid-forties; maybe fifty, but well-preserved, slim and athletic. He looks the soul of health in stone slacks and a blue linen shirt.”

He looked again, trying not to stare. “He”s not gone grey and has good hair. I wonder if it’s dyed.”

More random thoughts kept coming as they drove further. The coastline was on the nearside as Larry drove the winding road dipping to sea level beside the beach, then climbing over headlands.

“He’s old enough to be my father.” The thought hit Howard”s consciousness suddenly. “He’s had relationships before. He said he’s single again. What does he want with me?”

These thoughts once raised wouldn’t go away. Howard”s mind kept returning to them and he wasn’t paying attention as Larry spoke. Larry guessed his mind was churning and had the good grace to allow him the silence.

His thoughts were interrupted when Larry pulled off the road and they bumped along a track which climbed a headland. As they rounded the bluff, the sea came back into view, followed by an outdoor restaurant, with tables under sunshades scattered widely to give good views over the coast.

“I thought you’d like a late lunch here.” Larry patted Howard’s hand and got out of the car.

Howard hesitated. "I don't think I dare," he whispered, refusing to take Larry's outstretched hand at the open car door.

"There's nothing to worry about," Larry reassured him. "We're away from everyone, and these tables are too far apart for anyone to scrutinise you closely. Not that they'd see anything wrong if they did."

"Okay, if you're sure," Howard heard himself say and took Larry's hand, allowing himself to stand. Then, hand-in-hand, they walked to the viewpoint.

"What do you really want of me?" Howard asked, as they stood looking out to sea.

"I'm not sure," Larry replied. "You are an impulse, one which I'm enjoying. I'm amazed by myself. I'm here with you. I've planned our day together, but if you were to ask me why...."

"Go on," Howard said. "Tell me why."

"I can't explain." Larry shrugged his shoulders and took Howard's hand as they returned to a table under a sunshade. "I saw you. I liked what I saw. I wanted more of you. And it went on."

"But you want me to pretend to be a girl," Howard asked.

"I do. I didn't plan it like that." Larry took Howard's hand over the table. "I knew there were all the clothes and everything left in the dressing room. I'd cleared them out to there some months ago."

"But why and why me and why last week?"

"I can't answer. I took advantage of you. I should be ashamed, but I'm fascinated to see where this goes and I want you to enjoy it along with me."

"But I'm not a girl," Howard said again. "And I'm much younger than you."

"Let's leave it at that." Larry smiled across the table. "I have a few ideas, but let them develop. I promise nothing hurtful will happen."

The waitress arrived and they ordered, making small talk and sipping crisp white wine, chilled it seemed to just above freezing. It was perfect for the

day, as they ate seafood so fresh that it must have been swimming, or whatever it did, just an hour or so before.

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"I want you to see this," Larry said, pulling the car into a side road and then into an entrance way where electric gates slowly opened. "I fell in love with the place as soon as I saw it and bought it the next day."

"It's amazing," Howard said. A low-rise house came into view as they drove through the grounds.

"I'd love to show you. I think you'll be amazed by how good it looks inside and out."

Larry pulled up near the door and slipped an electronic key into a reader, then opened the door by placing his index finger on a pad. "Security," he explained.

They toured the house. There was a huge living kitchen which opened onto a rear terrace, sunny and surrounded by decorative walls and flowering shrubbery.

The main lounge was open and built around an old-fashioned fireplace. It shouldn't have fit in there, but cleverly, it did. Stairs curved up to a gallery with several bedrooms.

"I only fitted the master bedroom and the guest wing," Larry explained as he opened the door on rooms obviously never occupied, as he led the way to his room. The bed was raised on a plinth, with wrap-around windows opening onto a terrace with views over the surrounding hills.

"They said you could see clear to the coast on a clear day but I've never managed it." Larry laughed. "All real estate agents tell lies."

"But you're in the same business," Howard interrupted. "Do you tell lies too?"

"Maybe in business but never in person." Larry kept his face straight and took Howard's hand. "Come and see the guest wing."

This was a smaller version of the master bedroom, but was furnished and looked as if it could be lived in right away. The window gave the same views and the bathroom and dressing rooms were as big as any Howard had never been in. Another flight of stairs went down to a smaller kitchen and lounge, opening onto the same rear terrace.

Howard was suddenly conscious of how close Larry was standing. He turned to face him and was surprised as Larry gently drew him close and kissed him. He felt his lipstick smearing as he opened his mouth and returned the kiss. They broke apart.

Howard looked at Larry, studying his eyes closely. He saw nothing alarming and, as if drawn by some kind of human magnet, raised his lips to be kissed again. His hands slipped around Larry's shoulders to run fingers through the hair at the back of his head, whilst the other stroked his cheek, willing the kiss to go on.

Howard felt his penis rising and standing strongly in his panties. He arched his back so that Larry should not feel it, and broke away.

"I think I got a little carried away there." Howard took a pace back, still holding Larry's hand. "Maybe we'd better go back downstairs."

"Of course." Larry's face showed a little disappointment and a little concern as he spoke.

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"Perhaps it's time we were going back," Howard said after they'd sat on the terrace as the evening cooled.

"Not yet." Larry stood and pulled Howard to his feet. "You need to change, we've a dinner booked at La Taverna and you know how difficult it can be to get a reservation there.

"But surely it's too expensive."

"I'll put in the company accounts as necessary entertainment."

“Is that what I am?” Howard’s eyes met his mischievously. “Am I necessary entertainment? Are you playing with me?”

“Of course I’m playing with you,” Larry admitted. “Aren’t you having fun?”

“Well, maybe,” Howard agreed. “I’m scared a lot of the time. You’ve got me dressed up and acting in a way that I never imagined. I’ve no idea why or where this is going.”

“Does it matter?”

“Maybe not tonight, but I’m going to have to think this through before I see you again.”

“Does that mean you’re not coming to work for me next weekend?”

“I’m not really working this weekend.”

“Yes you are.” Larry nodded. “It’s seriously important work.”

“Are we back to necessary entertainment again?”

“I can see your time sheet already. Under duties, it says ‘necessary entertainment’. I’ll sign it off and you get paid, with a bonus if that little black dress looks as good as I think it will.”

“Do I have to wear the heels too?”

“Of course. They carry an extra bonus.” Larry pulled Howard to his feet. “I’ll bring everything from the car, then you can change in the guest wing.”

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Two hours later they were pulling up outside La Taverna. Larry parked the car and offered his arm to Howard who gratefully accepted.

The black dress felt comfortable, even though it was the first time he’d worn anything like it. He’d struggled with the back zipper, but had been determined not to ask for help.

He stood for a moment and straightened the dress which was tight and had ridden too high on the jour-

ney. He felt the clasps on the garter belt as he did so, wondering if other people would see what he was wearing. He smiled to himself at the thought. Here he was, a boy made-up, hair teased, perfumed and almost dressed to kill, and he was worried about showing a garter strap

“If I fall flat, it will be because of these heels and it will be entirely your fault. I’ll sue you for all you’ve got.”

“That might take a bit of explaining in court.” Larry wrapped his arm around Howard’s waist as they approached the door. “You decided to wear them. I’d call that contributory negligence.”

The menus were brought and the wine was served. “You choose well.” Howard sipped the deep red wine.

“I hoped you’d like it. A pinot noir is always something special, especially here where they know the right labels to serve. And I’m driving, so I can’t help you to empty the bottle as much as perhaps a gentleman should.”

They skipped the starters. Howard, remembering his image, chose a small steak and a salad. Larry had the steak and fries with all the trimmings. As they ate, Howard looked round. No one caught his eye; no one was looking at him and seeing through his disguise. He felt his shoulders relax and breathed easily, letting out the tension.

“Maybe I’m getting used to this,” he said out loud.

“Pardon?” Larry asked.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to say that out loud. It’s the tension going. Maybe I’m getting too comfortable with being a girl, I’m not feeling as scared as I was.”

“I’ll drink to that.” Larry raised his glass as they toasted the thought.

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“That was delicious.” Howard stroked Larry’s thigh as he drove. “Thank you so much.”

“If you keep your hand there, I may have an accident.” Larry smiled as he glanced over from the driving seat. “Especially if it goes a little higher.”

“Like this.” Howard amazed himself by slipping his hand between Larry’s legs and feeling for the obvious bulge where his thighs met.

“Stop it,” Larry chided gently. “Wait until I get you home.”

“Have you got evil intentions?” Howard asked. “I’m really a poor defenceless girl who doesn’t know how to behave.”

“I’m sure you always behave well.”

“How would you know?” Howard kept his voice low and breathy. “I bet you’ve never created a girl like me before?”

“Have I created you?”

“I think you’re trying very hard to.”

Larry turned into the drive and pulled up as before. Howard giggled as he walked to the door, feeling Larry’s hand stroking his behind.

“I’m going up to the guest wing for a moment,” Howard said, removing Larry’s hand from his backside and kissing him briefly on the lips. “Wait for me in the lounge.”

Howard knew that Larry was watching as he went up the stairs. He didn’t care and put an extra wiggle into his walk as he went up.

“Why is it easier to go up in heels?” he thought to himself. “I was so awkward and scared of falling when I was coming down.”

In the bedroom, he slipped out of the dress and shoes, letting them fall across the floor. He brushed through his hair and fluffed it out roughly, then sat in front of the mirror, quickly darkening his eye makeup and refreshing his lipstick.

He’d seen Larry hanging more than one garment bag in the dressing room, so he went to look.

“What a lucky guess.” He smiled to himself as he took down a hanger holding an ivory nightgown, short and frilled, with a longer robe. On the floor were some kitten heel slippers decorated with fur trimming. “What a cliché,” he thought as he slipped them on. “A cliché, but it’s one that seems to work.”

As he walked down the stairs, Howard’s thoughts were all over the place. He didn’t know why he was doing this, or what he was going to do next. He was frightened, wondering what he could do, let alone what he should do. He knew something felt right, but couldn’t work out what or why.

Howard got to the bottom of the stairs. Larry was standing by the window, and turned to look at him.

“Wow,” he said, his eyes widening as Howard came towards him.

“You like?” Howard asked, realising that Larry was even taller than he was without heels. He felt a little vulnerable as he realised that they were alone together in this house. He shivered but not in fear this time.

“Come and sit with me.” Larry slipped his arm round Howard’s shoulder and steered him towards the biggest couch in the room. “I have some champagne which I think you’ll like.”

“Nice,” said Howard, as butterflies began beating more frantically in his stomach. He hoped his nerves weren’t too obvious.

The bottle opened with a loud pop and he watched as Larry quickly poured. Froth climbed the sides of the glass flutes, then fell away. He filled the glasses and handed one to Howard.

“To us?” He raised a glass to Howard and looked questioningly.

“Why not? To us,” Howard echoed and touched glasses with him, then sipped. “It tickles.” Howard wrinkled his nose and giggled. “It’s really nice though.”

“It’s the best I have.” Larry refilled their glasses and sat beside Howard.

Larry's arm slipped around him and pulled him close. Howard wondered what was coming next. He knew he should have been cautious or apprehensive, but he wasn't. He was curious. Maybe it was the champagne making him reckless. When Larry pulled him into another kiss, he was ready and responded easily.

The glasses were drained and put aside. They looked at each other and as the second kiss started, Howard felt his instincts take over as if he was as real as he was dressed. His hands cupped Larry's face as he pulled him into the kiss again.

Larry's hands slipped in front, and Howard could feel it roaming where his breasts would be, if he had any. The thought was dismissed as Larry's hand continued downwards and touched his growing penis. Howard let his own hand travel downwards and he felt that Larry's erection was big and strong.

He knew it was wrong to be touching another man's penis, but somehow it didn't matter. He was playing the girl's role now. He was being seduced with champagne after a fabulous dinner and a day of being treated like a lady. The roaming hands told their own story. This was doing something to both of them.

Larry moaned as Howard's fingers explored further. He rubbed and squeezed. He could never imagine that he was going to do next; neither could he ever explain it to himself. His hand slipped up to Larry's belt and pulled it free to loosen the buckle.

Looking up to Larry's eyes so that he could see the intent, Howard slipped the zipper down and reached inside. Larry's penis stood free, tall and rigid, with a drop of something at the tip.

Howard ran his fingers up the length and then wiped the smear from the tip. He wrapped his fingers 'round its circumference and worked his hand up and down, gently squeezing and releasing. Larry's hands reached the back of Howard's head and insistently pushed him down until his lips lingered frighteningly near the tip.

Howard guessed what was expected through his alcohol-moderated brain. He let the hands guide his

head and, when near, stuck out his tongue and licked the head. Before he knew it the shaft was in his mouth and he could feel the girth filling his mouth whilst the head hit the back of his throat, triggering a gag reflex. He held his breath and suppressed the reaction. His fingers took the base again and he squeezed and stroked as his head bobbed up and down.

He knew what was coming and the thought to get out of the way flittered across his mind, but there were other feelings too. It wasn't quite a sense of winning, or triumph. It was a sense of having achieved something. The penis stiffened and swelled. It was too late to escape. Hands were behind his head. He didn't want to escape but there were feelings of fear flashing in bright lights in his brain once again. He ignored them.

It started. The first pulse hit the back of his throat, then he could feel along the length as another and a quickening pulse followed. It seemed to go on and on. Howard gagged and tried to swallow, hardly noting a salty taste as Larry kept on going. Then it was over. The pulsating and spurting stopped and the penis was shrinking away, retreating from the back of Howard's throat.

He raised his head, the tip fell away to lie over Larry's groin. Howard licked it a last time and kissed the tip. He lay back, suddenly conscious that he was wet too. Nothing had touched his penis but it must have had a mind of its own and leaked all over his nightdress.

Suddenly his reverie faded and his senses returned. With a growing realisation of what he'd done, he untangled himself from Larry's arms and stood.

"I'm sorry. I didn't... I shouldn't have done..." He turned and ran to the stairs, slammed the door of the guest bedroom and lay on the bed in floods of tears.

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The sun was streaming in through the window. Howard woke slowly with a banging headache. He rolled over and found he was lying on top of the bed.

He pulled himself to the edge and stood up, shading his eyes against the glare. He walked into the bathroom.

“Why do I look so awful?” A pointless question as memories of the previous evening came flooding back.

His reflection told its own story. Mascara was streaked down his cheeks and around his eyes. His hair was all north and south, in a tangle. He still wore the robe and gown. He felt the front and it was still damp where he'd leaked all over. The stockings and the bra seemed to add to his feelings of anxiety.

He'd leaked all over. Whilst he was sucking Larry's cock, he had ejaculated too. He had been conscious of the feeling and the excitement, but hadn't realised how much there was within him. The thought made him shudder again. What would Larry think of him? How could he have been so stupid? How could he face Larry again?

He shook his head, thinking it might clear the fog around his brain. It didn't, but it did make the throbbing worse. He stripped and stepped into the shower, running hot and then cold water over his naked body. He repeated this several times, feeling easier each time. He washed and dried on another of those huge towels.

He fastened the towel around himself again, tucking it under his arms, and searched the cosmetics until he came to a bottle of makeup remover and some cotton balls. He cleaned the remains of the makeup from his eyes and checked carefully to make sure none was left.

He walked to the door and opened it quietly. He looked out and down the stairs, peering to see if Larry was about. He turned and went back into the bedroom. He dried himself and dried his hair again, using the product from yesterday. As he stroked the brush through his hair and the drier blew, he tried to stop thinking.

Then there was no putting it off. Larry would have heard the drier, he reasoned, and knew he would be appearing soon. He would have to dress and go down, but what to dress in? He had the black dress, crum-

pled where it fell on the floor. That wouldn't be appropriate.

He had the blouse and trousers he'd worn the day before. He put them on the bed and all at once realised that he'd have to dress as a girl again, whatever he may be feeling right now. He wasn't sure what he was feeling anyway.

"When there are no choices, then the choice is obvious," he said to himself, pulling on clean panties and tights. He pulled on the blouse and saw how wrongly it fell over his waist. He pulled it off and fastened the bra, shrugged it into place and pulled on the blouse again. That made it look less out of place than it did with no bra. There was nothing for it. He was back into girl mode until he could get to his own clothes.

As the thought came, the realisation came too; his only way of getting back was with Larry. He had no money and didn't know where he was except that it was up a long drive in a rural area.

He sat and made himself be calm again. He analysed his fears. Maybe Larry would forgive and forget what they'd done last night. Maybe he'd be contrite and not add to Howard's embarrassment.

He slipped on his shoes and fastened them over his ankles, then went to stand in front of the mirror.

"You've scrubbed up well," he said to his reflection, hoping to bolster his courage. "But you don't want to look like a boy in a dress again."

He went to the mirror and carefully did his eye makeup, sweeping the mascara wand over heavy black lines. He congratulated himself when he looked at the effect. This was getting easier; another conflicting thought. Was it a good thing that he could make up his eyes better than he could just a few days ago? He pursed his lips and did his lipstick, then, taking a deep breath, he opened the door and went down the stairs.

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Larry was standing on the terrace outside the kitchen, where the glass doors were drawn back so that the room felt like it was part of the outdoors. Howard coughed softly to get his attention. He turned and came to him.

He looked into Howard's eyes for a moment and then to his surprise, took him in his arms and kissed him softly on the lips.

Howard didn't know how to react. He'd rehearsed it in his mind. He should stand on his dignity and demand to be taken back to his clothes, then he could go home and forget it all. The kiss changed all that. He knew that whatever the ideas he'd had, there were some feelings lingering.

"Sit outside and I'll get you coffee and croissants," Larry instructed, giving him a peck on the cheek. "Then I think we need to speak to your mother and to Laurel."

"Do we have to do that today?" Howard protested. "I don't want them to know what we did,"

"Okay, we can leave it." Larry looked a little disappointed.

"Please let's have this and then take me back," Howard asked. "I want to be myself again and think things through."

Larry returned with the coffee.

"I'm really sorry about last night," Howard began. "I don't know what happened to me. I don't want you to take it out on Mother either."

"I rather enjoyed it."

"It was a moment of madness." Howard blushed. "I think I drank too much champagne for my own good."

"Don't overthink it," Larry said. "I'll do nothing you wouldn't like." He took Howard's hand. "Let's talk about it some other time."

“And not mention it again, not today, not next week, please,” Howard pleaded.

“Not if you don’t want to.”

The journey back was almost in silence. Larry tried to make conversation but Howard was so absorbed in thought that nothing penetrated his distraction. Larry dropped him at the office door and with a peck on the cheek and a wave, he was gone.

Back in the office, Howard showered and changed. He remembered his mother’s comment about eye makeup remaining thus he was doubly careful to make sure nothing remained. He collected everything from the weekend and bundled it up into one big bag; the blouse and shoes, the makeup and the perfume. He checked and double checked, then placed the bundle in Larry’s office with a label which he hoped only Larry would understand and remove the bag with no one knowing anything about it.

He knew he was expected to be there all weekend, so once dressed in his own clothes, he settled down to wait for morning and his release.

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“You must be exhausted,” Mother said as Howard arrived home.

He went straight to his room where he changed clothes and came down again. He scratched and pulled at his underwear to make it comfortable. “The panties were much more comfortable” drifted through his mind as he sat to his breakfast.

“I’ve a busy week,” Mother announced. I’ll be away until Friday evening. Mr. Antrobus wants to inspect some office units and says he needs me to do some costings. I think he just wants company.”

“He did say he was single again.” Howard nearly bit his tongue as he realised what he had given away.

“You’ve seen him?” Mother asked.

“Sure, he dropped by the office as I was working on Saturday.” Howard blushed.

“Is that why Laurel couldn’t get you to answer the door when she called to ask how you were getting on?”

“I never heard her,” Howard said.

“Obviously.” Mother gave him an old-fashioned look as she grabbed her bag and was out of the door with a wave and “See you Friday.”

No sooner had mother gone than Laurel came into the room. “I was only here for the weekend,” she said. “I start my internship tomorrow, so today’s job is getting everything ready.”

“That came round quickly,” Howard replied.

“They said that they were impressed by my reports, although I don’t know how they would have seen them.”

“They must have contacts in the dental schools, you know, looking for talent and junior partners that they can work to death for peanuts.”

“Don’t be horrible.” Laurel pulled a face. “I’m sure it’s not like that.”

“I hope not.”

“And I really appreciate you and Mom; you’re working so hard to get me through with the fees and everything.

“I’m sure you’re worth every penny.”

“I am.” Laurel grinned. “I’m going to make Mom and you so proud.”

“I’ll wear a new suit to your graduation.”

“You’ve never worn a suit in your life,” Laurel replied. “I can’t wait to see it happen.”

“Neither can I.” Howard suddenly got a picture of himself in a suit with a short skirt and pulled a face to chase the thought away.

“I did hear that you’ve got a job with Mr. Antrobus,” she said. “You better be careful, he’s a very demanding sort of guy.”

“Define demanding.”

“He gets what he wants.” Laurel looked him in the eye. “I hear he has exotic tastes too.”

“He has the money for it.”

“And some say he likes boys more than girls.”

“Mother works for him,” Howard said.

“Sure but she’s not some young intern.”

“Neither am I.” Howard wondered where this was going. “I’m only contracting to deal with computer problems.”

“Be careful,” Laurel said. “He has a way of sucking you in if he wants you in his organisation, and you’re a catch.”

“What do you mean I’m a catch?” Howard’s sense of alarm grew.

“Why, you’re the consummate computer professional, of course.” The twinkle in her eye said more than that as she rose and went to get her bus.

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“You’re still here,” Mother exclaimed in surprise as she came home on Friday evening. “I thought you’d be working. I waited for you at the office to hand over the keys and when you didn’t show, I worried in case something had happened to you.”

“I’m okay,” Howard answered.

“Why didn’t you answer your mobile?”

“Because I knew what you would be going to ask me.”

“And that would be?”

“Why I wasn’t at the office.”

“So why aren’t you at the office?”

“I can’t see why I need to be there,” Howard answered. “There’s nothing wrong or you’d have emailed me, or someone would have called. All I can

do is hang around, run a few checks to confirm what I know and send in a timesheet to get paid.”

“And have you forgotten that getting paid is the most important thing right now?”

“Not really.”

“Not really; what does that mean?” Mother almost shouted and then softened her voice. “I can see that it may be boring, but you can do things while you’re there. Don’t forget, Laurel’s depending upon us to keep her at college.”

“I know, Mom. I don’t want to let her down, but I could be doing something else.”

I can understand but please don’t let Mr. Antrobus down.” She looked into his eyes. “I’m not supposed to say anything, but he’s hinted that he might advance me the money for Laurel if we’re short.”

“That’s kind of him.” Howard kept his voice level. “But an advance of that size? It could mean you’re working to pay it off until you’re 97.”

“Well, maybe not that bad. Remember when she’s qualified, Laurel will have a decent income.”

“Maybe but then there’ll be marriage, and mortgages and babies,” Howard said. “Not that I begrudge her any of these things, but her future earnings are something we don’t know about.”

“Okay, I understand, but please, will you go into the office? Pretend if you have to. Take all the hours you can, for all our sakes.”

“Okay Mom, I’ll do it,” Howard said. “Put like that, you’re right and I was being selfish.”

“You’re never that, Howard,” she replied. “You’re really the kindest. I’m so proud of you.”

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Howard trudged across town to Mr. Antrobus’ office and let himself in. He locked the door behind him

and climbed the stair to the private office where the lights were still burning.

“Hi, Howard.” Mr. Antrobus stood and smiled as he entered the room. “I was worried that I’d scared you off last week.”

“No, I just needed to talk to my mom and it took a little longer for her to get home.” Howard blushed as he told the lie.

“That reminds me. I must put her on the list for a car from the company. What does she drive right now?”

“We don’t have a car,” Howard admitted. “It was one of the economies to help towards Laurel’s fees.”

“I never realised,” Larry replied. “That’s admirable.”

“We’re so proud of her,” Howard said. “With no dad around, it’s always been hard for Mom to pay for everything, and she’s always wanted us to be successful.”

“And she should be proud of both of you.”

“I don’t know about me,” Howard continued. “I never was any good at school and I froze up in exams. I have no qualification, but I seem to be able to find my way around computers like I was born to it. Trouble is, that doesn’t turn into big money.”

“But like you said, it’s a skill that you have.”

“And I’m sorry I was late.”

“That’s okay; we’re not stopping here this weekend,” Larry said. “I’ve planned a few things for us to enjoy.”

“What kind of things?”

Howard was apprehensive.

“We’re going out to my house. I’ve got caterers in to leave us a supper, then tomorrow is a pamper day for you.”

“A pamper day?” Howard repeated.

“Yes, you’ll love it. I think we had so much fun last weekend, I wanted to take it all in again and I want you to feel more relaxed than you were.”

“I was on edge a lot of the time.”

“I know and I was leading a bit hard.” Larry took his hand. “This time, I want you to feel really treasured and relaxed.”

“Maybe I was a bit too relaxed when we got back to your house last time.”

“I wouldn’t say that.” Larry smiled. “I rather enjoyed it, and I’ve thought of a way to make it easier and better.”

“I’m not sure I know what you mean.”

“You don’t have to,” Larry said. “All you have to do is let it all happen. If it’s any help, I’ve put you down for double time in your payment this week.”

“Is that a bribe?”

“Most probably.”

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There was a blue van in the drive as they pulled up. Howard looked quizzically at Larry who caught his anxiety.

“I recognise that van,” Howard said. “Laurel used to drive in on a vacation job.”

“It’s the caterers I told you about,” Larry said. “You run upstairs and get changed. There are new clothes in the dressing room.”

“You won’t let them see me, will you?”

“Of course not.” Larry opened the door. “Run upstairs and come down when you’re ready.”

Howard followed Larry through the door and ran up the stairs into the guest wing. Larry called out something and walked through towards the kitchen.

“Why have I let myself in for this again?” Larry asked himself. “I should have objected. I know what

he wants me to do but why I'm doing it, I don't know. It's not as if I ever did this before."

He went into the dressing room and gasped in amazement. Where there had been three hangers the week before, there were a dozen or more. There was a new shoe rack, with shoes in several colours and styles.

"This is amazing, and far more than I can wear in a weekend," Howard said to himself. "And there's no underwear either." Then his eyes alighted on another door in the dressing room. "So that's the underwear drawers. There seems to be everything here, and more."

He pulled out a stiff black corset, slightly shiny, with embroidered decoration all over. "Maybe he's into saloon girls as well."

Howard smiled at the thought, then a second thought hit him. Maybe he was to be a saloon girl this weekend but there were far too many clothes for a single weekend. And a saloon girl was a bit trite anyway.

"I'm going to enjoy this," Howard told himself. "I'm here, whether I intended to be or not. I'm getting paid, although I bet courtesans get paid better than computer guys."

"Courtesan," Howard thought. "I think it means some kind of expensive lady, an expensive mistress with high status. Maybe it means some kind of prostitute but that's not even on the horizon for this girl." Howard stopped suddenly. "Girl; did I just call myself a girl? I guess that's the part I'm playing; so be it."

He looked again at the corset. It had garters for stockings and might look good under the black silk robe that he spotted at the back of the clothes rack. He held it against himself and smiled. It was almost opaque, but wrapped around him would conceal what was underneath.

"If I wear that with some black heels?" he wondered, and went to the shoe rack. "These might do, but they're really high and the heel is only a steel spike. It's far too thin for balance. I don't know if I can walk in them."



Howard tried them on and walked across the room. "I can manage them if I go downstairs barefoot and then put them on. I bet they won't stay on long anyway."

"Am I thinking like a courtesan now?" Howard threw off his clothes and headed for the shower. "I wonder if I can get into the right mindset. Yes, that's it! Think courtesan and act the part. I'll show Larry a thing or two, if I'm brazen and demanding instead of letting him think he can persuade me into anything, then maybe he'll leave me alone?"

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He showered quickly, then dried his hair, this time doing his best to make the volume as big as he could. He brushed the outer hairs of the resulting tangle so that the bulk remained but the effect was smoother.

"I wonder what a hairdresser would call this colour." The thought came from nowhere as he sprayed some lacquer to hold it in place. "Maybe blonde in the mud, or clay blonde, but maybe that's not romantic enough?"

"I never thought it could be so complicated." Howard had fastened the busk at the front of the corset and was pulling the laces tighter and tighter. He looked down. "It almost looks as if I have breasts when my bit of spare flesh is forced up so much."

Gasping for breath, he stood and fastened the laces in a bow. "Maybe I should have put the stockings on first." He struggled to reach his toes. "I can understand why they had dressers to help in olden times."

He fastened the clasps and slipped lacy black panties over the stockings and made sure that they stayed at the level of the corset. He looked in the mirror and smiled at what he saw.

"This could be looking good, for a courtesan."

He slipped the robe over and fastened it with a tie belt. Looking in the mirror, he drew the now familiar black lines around his eyes and followed it with several coats of mascara. He noticed it was getting a lit-

tle messy. That was the look, he decided and added another couple of coats. The usual lipstick followed.

“Maybe I should get some lessons in all this stuff,” he thought as he looked at the contents of the makeup drawer, all neatly packed and sectioned for him. “Maybe that’s something I don’t need to know anyway, but it could be fun.”

He picked up his shoes, opened the door and softly went down the stairs. He stopped at the bottom and slipped into the shoes. He took a deep breath, feeling five inches taller which was down to the shoes, and walked confidently forward.

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“Hi Larry.” Howard stopped at the kitchen entrance, put an arm up the side of the door and one leg forward on tiptoe. “You approve?” he said raising his eyebrows.

“I approve.” Larry stopped what he was doing and came over to his, touched his hair, looked into his eyes and bent for a quick kiss. “Come, let me serve you dinner.”

“That’s a good start for a courtesan,” the words ran through Howard’s mind. He smiled to himself and followed Larry, walking slowly and deliberately on his heels so that Larry had to stop and turn to watch him as he approached the table set by the doors, which were open.

“Could you close the doors, sweet?” Howard heard himself vamping it up and watched as the doors were closed. “This dress isn’t meant for the great outdoors.”

“Of course.” Larry held a bottle for him to read the label. “It’s the same as last week.”

“You’re trying to get me tipsy again,” Howard said. “I did get a little carried away last week.”

“I wouldn’t say that.” Larry popped the cork and filled two flutes. He handed one to Howard and raised it in a toast. “To this evening,” he said.

Howard touched glasses. "Yes, why not?" He drank and held out the glass to be refilled. "If that's the way he wants to play it, why not?" Howard thought.

They ate and moved into the lounge with a second bottle. They sat on the couch again and Larry dimmed the lights as the evening faded into night.

Howard moved towards him, kneeling on the cushions and undoing the bow on his robe. It fell open, just as he intended, exposing stockings and garters, lace panties and the tight embrace of the corset itself. He saw Larry's eyes linger where his breasts would be, if he had them.

Recognising the glance, Howard moved in and kissed him hard and pushed his tongue into Larry's mouth. He knew then that he wanted to be in the driving seat this evening. Larry wanted this, so now Howard was going to see how he could handle it.

Larry's hand moved to touch. "I wonder," he said.

"Wonder what?" Howard moved closer.

"I wonder what you'd be like if you really had breasts to show off like that."

"I'm not showing off and anyway, boys don't have breasts."

"They could."

"Well I don't, and let's not go there," Howard said softly. "Am I not good enough?"

"I didn't mean that." It was Larry's turn to blush. "I was speculating, that's all."

"And of course you're good enough or we wouldn't be here."

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Larry tried to pull Howard into an embrace, but he stood and threw his shoes to the side. He let the robe slip off his shoulders and stood. A finger touched his lip and the other hand stroked his crotch where an erection was straining the panties.

“Maybe you should come and take a closer look,” Howard said, stroking the front of his panties.

Larry stood, came across the room and dropped to his knees. He stroked the front of the panties as Howard ran his hand through his hair. He wondered if it was the alcohol making him bolder, but he knew he was leading this time.

“Is that enough?” Howard asked. “Are you examining my problem closely? He pushed his hips forward towards Larry’s mouth.

Larry pulled the panties down, slipped them off one foot and then the other. Howard’s erection stood strong and obvious in front of him. Howard put his hand on his own shaft and moved it towards Larry’s mouth. He hit him on the lips with it, stroking left and right, then hit his chin. He wiped the tip across Larry’s lips.

Larry opened his mouth. Howard thrust hard inside, feeling teeth scrape against him, but then feeling Larry’s tongue brushing left to right under his shaft. Howard pushed harder, feeling really mean and in control again. He moved back and forth, willing his climax to come whilst Larry was on his knees.

Both his hands were on the back of Larry’s head as he thrust more and more urgently. He realised that he was enjoying himself. This was his game. Larry gagged; Howard ignored it and thrust again, feeling the climax mounting. He knew it was there and he clung tightly to Larry, not letting him withdraw. And then it was there. He felt the pump, pump, pump of his penis. He heard Larry gagging, but still he continued until he felt the spasms fading and as he began to shrink, he pulled his penis out. Larry was a mess with globs dripping down his chin.

“Cleat me up,” Howard demanded. “Use your tongue.”

When he had finished, Howard stopped and picked up his panties. “You’re a mess.” He handed them to Larry. “You’d better wipe your chin.”

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“That was unfair,” Larry said a few moments later when he’d cleaned up and changed into a robe.

“You brought me here to have your evil way with me,” Howard said. “I thought I’d show you that I could play that game too.”

“You really did.” Larry put his fingers in Howard’s hair and felt the lacquer stopping him running his fingers through. “I never felt so controlled before.”

“You deserved it,” Howard said, relishing his new role. “I saw you looking down my cleavage.”

“It was a fantasy,” Larry replied.

“But you got your fantasy when you got me here and made me dress up for you.”

“I didn’t make you chose to dress like that, and I never thought you could act like that either.”

“Who said it was an act?”

“It was as if you were someone else,” Larry said. “Last weekend you were so timid.”

“So maybe I chose my own role this week,” Howard mused. “I decided I could be someone else and my female alter ego was a powerful woman, not a doormat.”

“I think I could get to like that.” Larry opened his arms and Howard accepted the invitation.

They sat together on the couch. Howard put his legs over Larry’s knee and placed one of Larry’s hands on his now flaccid penis. Larry took the hint and started to stroke it gently. They kissed and Howard wriggled round to be closer. He nuzzled Larry’s ear, before kissing him again, their tongues grappling gently again and again.

“I think its bedtime,” Larry said, pulling away as Howard’s penis stayed flaccid. “I guess your little man has had a hard day and wants to go to sleep.”

“You could be right.” Howard stretched. “You’ll have to help me out of this corset, before I can lie down. It was so difficult to get on.”

Howard smiled as Larry looked at the fasteners. “How easy it is to get him to do things with just a little white lie,” he thought as Howard loosened the bow and went round to his back to ease the strings.

“Don’t do that,” Howard said as he felt Larry’s penis rising towards his cheeks and slipping between them. “Don’t put it there.”

“You might like it.”

“Maybe, but I’ve never done that before and tonight is not the night for trying. I know what you want to do, I know and I know that there’s got to be some preparation. I don’t want to be sore tomorrow.”

“So you’re not saying no to the idea forever.”

“Maybe I’m saying not tonight. You need to listen,” Howard said. “I know what you’re trying to do, but I’ve never done it before. I never thought about it before last week. I know it’s going to hurt if I let you but I’m not going to even let you try because I don’t want to be sore tomorrow.”

Larry stood and moved close. Howard held him at arm’s length.

“You can kiss me goodnight and then I’m going to my bed alone.” Howard leant in to be kissed. “Who knows what the morning may bring?”

He turned and walked towards the stair, hesitated, turned and blew a kiss and went up without looking back again.

In his room, Howard showered again and stood after he had washed, letting the water ease his body and his mind.

“I don’t know what made me act like that,” he thought. “But I liked it. It’s not going to be all about what he wants.”

He selected the most extravagant nightdress that he could find and sat on the edge of the bed, thinking things through. Then he lay down and slept.

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Morning seemed to come all too soon. Howard stretched and turned over. He lay a while, intending that Larry should be up and waiting for him. To prolong Larry's wait, he showered again. He dried his hair which had needed washing after the tangle it got into whilst he slept.

He looked in the mirror, examining his face minutely. He pencilled in the black kohl on his eyelid and on the waterlines, both top and bottom. A touch of mascara and he was ready. He put on the nightgown again, found a matching robe, and went downstairs barefoot.

There was no one in the house as he walked through. He found the coffee machine was on and poured a cup. He sat at the breakfast bar and looked out. Larry was standing on the terrace in the sun, talking on his mobile. He caught Howard's eye, waved and mimed something about the telephone.

Larry came in and put his hands on Howard's shoulders. He kissed the top of his head, then came to sit opposite him.

"I've arranged some treats for you today," he said. "Before you say no to everything, let me tell you that I've also arranged that you'll go home looking exactly as you do now."

"That wouldn't be appropriate," Howard pouted.

"I mean you'll be able to go home, looking as if you'd never been here."

"Okay, that makes more sense." Howard smiled. "Mother wouldn't understand if I turned up with full eye makeup let alone dressed like you probably intend for me today."

"I hope you like it here," Larry said, changing the subject.

"I do, but why not tell me what you want me to do today?" Howard detected that Larry suddenly had an attack of nerves.

"I've booked a couple of mobile treatments for you," Larry said. Howard raised a sceptical eyebrow. "Don't worry; they're the best in the business."

"Best at what?" Howard asked.

"The first is a mobile nail technician. She's going to do your nails."

"But I've seen these nail jobs. I won't be able to use my hands if I get nails like the girls wear."

"You won't need to use your hands for anything other than looking pretty," Larry replied.

"Nothing at all?"

"Well, maybe somethings you can do with nails anyway."

"I don't know what you mean," Howard replied coyly. "I'm a good girl anyway."

Larry didn't know what to say to that. "Then there's a mobile hairdresser. She's going to trim and shape your hair."

Howard looked shocked and started to speak. Larry didn't let him.

"Don't look so shocked, it's only a little to give it some shape. No one will know if you've got it tied back as usual on Monday."

"Okay, go on," Howard said. "I can see you're not finished."

"She's going to give you a colour rinse too. Something that will wash out. I thought you might like to be a little more blonde for a couple of days."

"Would you like me as a blonde?" Howard asked languorously, leaning towards him and holding out a lock of his hair, which he twirled round his fingers.

"Of course, I'd love to see you as a fabulous blonde; maybe one day, but this won't be a permanent colour, otherwise, what would your mother say?"

"You're right," Howard replied. "I must remember my responsibilities."

“You have a lot of changes today, and it’s going to take time. I want you to bathe in femininity today, even if it takes all day.”

“Is that it?” Howard asked. “It sounds as if there won’t be much of the day left after all that.”

“There’s all evening at least,” Larry said. “But lastly, I’ve decided that you should have some decent jewellery of your own. The jeweller is coming later this afternoon when his shop closes.”

“But I’m okay with the stuff in the dressing room.”

“You may be, but I’m not,” Larry said. “I think your jewellery should reflect how well I’m treating you.”

“I don’t understand.”

“If you wear the cheap stuff, you look cheap,” Larry said. “It’s a thing that I feel very conscious of.”

“So have you decided what he’s going to sell you?”

“No, that’s for you to choose. He knows what I intend to spend and he won’t be telling you the price of anything. You decide and then you can impress me tonight.”

“You’re spending money like it doesn’t matter,” Howard said. “I wish I could do that. All our problems would be over, Laurel’s I mean.”

“I may have a solution to that as well, but let’s see how the weekend goes.”

“That’s even more mysterious than before,” Howard said. “Are you going to sell me into white slavery?”

“I’m serious,” Larry protested. “Let’s leave that for next week. By the way, you’re having your ears pierced.”

“No, that’s going to be visible on Monday when I go home.”

“Maybe, but so many men your age have pierced ears these days. You can tell her anything and it won’t matter. If you take the earrings out when your mother can see you, she’ll never notice the holes unless you draw attention to them.”

"I guess you're right," Howard replied. "I think I like the idea of being able to wear earrings anyway. Can I have big gold hoops and some dangling ones with diamonds?"

"You can choose whatever you like from whatever he brings."

"Will he know that I'm not really a girl?" Howard was suddenly fearful. The manicurist and the hairdresser hadn't bothered him, but this one struck a different chord.

"To be honest, he may guess, but he'll say nothing and I'm sure he'll be perfectly polite and correct."

"He can't be calling me Howard though. That's a dead giveaway."

"What would you like to be called?" Larry asked. "Choose a name and I'll use it from now on so that you'll get used to it."

"I don't know." Howard looked thoughtful. "I've never thought. What do you think? Am I a Jody or a Charlotte, a June, a May or even April, but not September?" He giggled at the thought.

"I'll think," Larry said. "Perhaps you'd better dress; the nail lady will be here soon."

"That doesn't leave me much time to think of a name," Howard said.

"It doesn't matter too much. You can change it if you don't like it."

"Maybe you just lack that romantic touch." Howard stood and leaned over Larry, putting his arms round his neck and kissing his cheek from the side. "I'm giving you the chance to think up my name and you say I can change it anytime."

He felt Larry's hand sliding up the inside of his leg. "Stop that, you said the nail lady's due and it would never be good to let her catch us doing something at this time of day." He turned to go upstairs. "Besides there's plenty of time for that later."

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“Darling, the manicurist is here,” Larry called through the closed door.

“I’ll be down.” Howard finished another coat of mascara. He put the wand away. “This is getting addictive,” he thought, closing the drawer and standing.

He opened the door and Larry caught his first glimpse of Howard coming down the stairs, almost regally, poised and confident. He wore a simple black T-shirt with sleeves and a scoop neck, over black jeans. He was barefoot and a little curvier than usual. He passed Larry at the bottom of the stair, stroked his face and gave him a peck on the lips.

“Hi, I’m Sophia,” Howard said, holding his arms out to the lady, who put her case down and accepted the hug. “You can call me Sophie. Where would you like me?”

“I’m Helen,” she replied. “Helen’s Magic Mobile Nails.”

“Gosh that is a mouthful,” Howard said. He saw Larry’s reaction to the word “mouthful” and cringed. He obviously had such a schoolboy sense of humour.

“Darling, why don’t you make yourself scarce while we do girl things?”

It wasn’t a question, more of an instruction. Larry got the message anyway and walked through to another room.

“Maybe we’d be better in the kitchen, there’s more light and lots of sockets if you need them.”

“What style did you want?” Helen asked. “I can do acrylics, silk or gel.”

“Which do you feel would be best? This is a first for me,” Howard replied, holding out his hands for Helen to inspect. “Larry set up this appointment as a surprise. I’ve always been afraid that they’re too brittle.”

“I love doing acrylics best of all,” said Helen, looking closely at Howard’s fingers. “I can sculpt them to



look thin and elegant so that they won't look too artificial."

"I thought that was the point of having you do this."

"Well, yes. Maybe I put that badly. They'll look as striking as you want them to look, but they won't look cheap, and they won't look like an afterthought that you've stuck on with superglue."

"I think we understand one another," Howard replied.

"Good." Helen opened her case and spread her equipment behind her. "What shape did you have in mind?"

The question took Howard by surprise. He knew there were different shapes that girls wore, but he had no idea of what he should ask for.

"Well," he started slowly. "He's taking me out somewhere really special this evening. How about something to impress, never mind what's practical. All I have to do is dress, makeup and hair. He's promised I won't have to lift a finger."

They laughed together at that thought.

"And if you can do something really special, I bet I couldn't lift a finger to do anything more than what we girls do best."

"I get your meaning." Helen rummaged in her bag and brought out her mobile. "These are some of my latest styles. Maybe you'd like this one. I call it the short stiletto."

"I can see why it's called that." Howard looked through the photos and then decided. "Tell me more about the short stiletto. Will I be able to dress with those nails?"

"Yes, easily. They're long nail extensions, but they come to a point only in the last fraction of an inch." Helen flipped through her photos. "They're quite sharp, but I always blunt the point so that you can't hurt yourself. I think you'll like them and if you don't, I can reshape them. I think they look good with a pink base shading to almost white at the tips, but

you can have them blood red or any colour you choose.”

“Okay, let’s go with that. I’m going to enjoy this.”

Howard relaxed as Helen worked. If he was to be a girl this evening, then every bit of disguise would be very welcome.

Helen chattered as she worked. Movies she’d seen and enjoyed and then movies she’d hated.

“This is a wonderful house you have, Sophie.”

“It’s not mine, it’s Larry’s, I’m just the girlfriend visiting for the weekend.”

“If I were you, I’d grab him quick and move in.”

Howard didn’t take this line further. Helen continued, not noticing that the subject had been closed. She told how her boyfriend cheated on her and how angry he’d been when she dumped him.

It was a monologue. Howard was grateful that he didn’t need to do more than agree at the appropriate places.

“Okay, nearly done.” Helen sat back in her chair. “Would you like your toes the same colour?”

“That would be lovely,” Howard said and watched as she fitted a spreader to keep his toes apart, then painted them with two coats and a shine finish.

“Now you’re really done,” Helen said. “Here’s my card for next time. I hope you’ll become a regular.”

Howard sat back and held out his hands, palms up, to look at them. He turned his palms out and held them face down, then at arm’s length. He wondered if he could really dress with these nails but dismissed the thought. Larry could fasten things for him. He’d probably enjoy doing that anyway.

“Helen, you’ve passed the test, these are lovely,” Howard gushed enthusiastically and smiled widely. “I’ll tell Larry to give you a big tip. I think he’s sulking in the lounge so if you go through when you’ve packed, he’ll be ready to pay you. I’m going to change.”

"It's wonderful when a client so loves their nails," Helen said. "Thanks for being my best client this week." They air kissed on both cheeks like old friends.

Howard went through to his dressing room, leaving Helen and Larry to sort out the transaction.

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Howard sat and admired his nails. He looked at them in the mirror, close and far away.

"They really don't look like a boy's hands anymore," he thought. "But I've no idea if I can do anything with them." He looked again. "But that's the price of beauty, and it's only for the weekend."

He refreshed his mascara and found it surprisingly easy. He tried his kohl pencil and lipstick. They were easy too. "Maybe I'll get to like this too much," he said to the mirror and went to the door and then downstairs.

Larry heard him and was standing near the last step. Howard held out his hands for approval.

"Aren't they lovely?" he asked. "I was really frightened about letting her do this, but now I'm really pleased. I suppose I should worry about getting back to normal after the weekend, but right now, I don't care."

"Hold that thought," Larry said. "The hairdresser and beautician are next. She should be here in about fifteen minutes. That means you've time to make me a coffee."

Howard stroked his chin and disappeared toward the kitchen. You can't expect me to do anything sensible with these nails." She saw his face. "Don't grumble, it's your fault."

"Where did Sophia come from?" Larry asked as they sipped their coffee. He held one of Howard's hands across the table. "I like it, but I'd never have thought of it."

“It just came to me,” Howard said. “It can be Sophia, Sophie or even Soph, but I don’t really like that last one.”

“So I’m to call you Sophia or Sophie, and never Soph. Which do you prefer?”

“You can call me Sophie, but you have to introduce me as Sophia. It’s much more formal and feminine, and that’s the impression we want, yes?”

“I’m beginning to think that I’m creating a monster,” Larry joked.

“Sophie says be careful of what you wish for, you may get it.”

Howard leaned across and kissed him quickly on the mouth. His tongue flicked out briefly and then he pulled away.

“I’d better get ready for the hairdresser,” he said.

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“Hi, I’m Sophia, but you can call me Sophie.” Howard ushered her in, a dark girl with really curly hair which tumbled down in loose ringlets. “I bet it takes ages to get your hair that good.”

“It’s natural,” she replied, holding out her hand for him to shake. “I’m Zoe, and I’m pleased you called me. This is a great house.”

“Thanks, it’s my boyfriend’s home. I’m only here for the weekend. Would you like coffee before we start, there’s some fresh in the kitchen.”

“That’s great; I always like to talk to my clients before I start. Hair is such a personal thing. I think you feel better if your hairdresser is a friend rather than someone who’s only doing it for the money and not really listening to what you want.”

“Come through and we’ll chat, then you can tell me where you want to work.” Howard led the way. “I only want you to tidy me up and even it out. I’ve been rather neglectful in recent months. Larry insisted I see you.”

“That’s nice of him, I don’t know how he got my name, but I’m grateful. He gave me a list of dos and don’ts which were pretty much what you’ve told me. He said you wanted a bright rinse too, something temporary. Is that right?”

“I think you’ve got it all.” Howard liked her attitude and her ability to listen. “I don’t want it to look any different come Monday.”

“It will be a little less shaggy,” Zoe said. “That’s inevitable, but if you tie it back, no one will notice.”

“That’s great. When you’ve finished your coffee, you can tell me where you want to work.”

“I think a bathroom or shower room,” Zoe said, feeling Howard’s hair and running her fingers and a comb through it. “Your hair needs nourishing and I’ve the ideal product for that. Then we can do the colour and I’ll style it for tonight.”

“That sounds great,” Howard replied. “We’ll go thorough to the dressing room I’m using and you can work there.”

“Show me the way and I’ll get my bags from the car.”

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Two hours later, Howard was looking at a different picture in the mirror. His hair was smooth and glossy. He could tell that the colour was a bit lighter, but he loved the way it would swing and fall back into place. The parting, just off centre, was just right.

The makeup by Zoe was also amazing. Howard had been so nervous in case she found a beard that he didn’t know he’d got, but she found nothing. She used a foundation and shading, powder and contouring to produce a face which he recognised, but wondered how it could be so different.

He should have refused when she wanted to tidy up his eyebrows and had to sit patiently as she waxed away the stray hairs. It hurt and he was not sure that the new shape would remain unnoticed

come Monday when he had to revert to his normal style.

“That’s really different,” Howard said as he looked in the mirror, thinking that he’d never get away with it when he went back to being himself again.

“It needed doing,” Zoe replied. “I’m surprised that your girlfriends didn’t take you to a threading salon before.”

His lips were more prominent too after she’d shown him how she was drawing a lip line and filling it in with two shades, with the glossier in the centre,

His eyes were a work of art themselves. He saw smoky greys, a hint of silver in the inner edges on his lids, with highlighter just below those immaculately sculpted brows.

Zoe glued false eyelashes onto his lids. He felt hesitant at first, but decided that Sophie would always say yes. To stay in character, he said yes too. It was a good decision, he decided, as he saw the girl in the mirror. He felt the weight of the eyelashes, and blinked to see what they looked like.

“I bet you haven’t worn eyelashes much before?” Zoe said, holding a mirror so that he could see the reflection in the hand mirror and the bigger one on the wall.

“Not really,” Howard replied truthfully.

“Zoe, I’d never have believed it,” Howard said when she’d finished. “I knew it needed something but I never guessed how good it could look.”

“It’s all down to knowing what to do and listening to what you said.” Zoe packed her bags. “I hope I’ll see you again.”

“I hope so too,” Howard replied and directed her to Larry, with the instruction that she was to ask for a large tip.

Howard took a deep breath when she left the room and thought about what to wear. He didn’t want to mess up his hair and felt the vanity when he realised this need.

“Is that still you?” Larry arrived. “You really look like Sophie now.”

“I feel like Sophie now too, and I need to change. Your man is coming later and I want to present a proper image, so keep your hands off.” Howard swerved ‘round Larry’s attempt to grab him.

“Maybe later, if you’re good,” he chided, wagging a finger at him. “You may sit there and watch. I may need you to help me dress. I can’t do a thing with these nails.”

He went to look through the racks of clothing. “Will we be going out to dinner?” he asked.

“Of course,” Larry replied. “When you look so good, it would be a crime not to go out.”

“I really feel better about going out like this that I did that last time,” Howard admitted. “I was terrified in case someone shouted ‘impostor’ or something like that.”

“I’d never have taken you if I thought that might happen.”

“That’s as maybe, but now I am Sophia. I feel comfortable with the image that conjures in my mind and I can act the part with so much more confidence. I have to thank you for making me realise that I wasn’t just another computer nerd.”

“You were never that to me,” Larry said. “I knew as soon as I saw you that there was this fabulous woman hidden inside you.”

“Be that as it may, Cinderella has to leave the ball and turn into a computer nerd on Monday morning.” Howard looked wistful. “But never mind, we have the weekend and I have you to myself, at least after your jeweller has gone.”

“This weekend is all about you.” Larry looked out of the window.

“And right now I need to change. If we’re going out, which shall I wear?” Howard held out a deep burgundy dress, with a deep V-neck, which would drape to his calves.

“Or this.” He held a black dress, shorter and quite severe, with a boat-shaped neckline and short sleeves.

“Or maybe this?” The third choice was a strapless dress in a dusky peach colour, with a high neck, and long sleeves. He looked at it again. “What were you thinking of when you decided to put this in my wardrobe? I’d need some decent breasts to hold this one up, tempting as it is to wear it now.”

“How about the black one?” Larry pointed to it. “It will show off your new jewellery.”

“Yes, good idea. I’d almost forgotten that now I have to get used to wearing jewellery as well as nails and hair.”

“You’ll love it.”

“I’m sure I will, and it’s all part of the service.” Howard stopped with a thought bubbling to the surface. “Just listen to me. You’d never think that a few short days ago, I was all boy, and now I’m wittering like a silly girl. What’s more surprising, I’m enjoying it more every minute.”

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“Come in, Albert.” Larry ushered in his jeweller friend. “I’ll have to call Sophie; she should be ready by now.”

“That’s women for you.” Albert shook his hand. “Never ready when they should be and then they blame you for being late. You can’t win.”

“Never could and never will,” Larry agreed. “This one looks promising though.”

“You’ve always had good taste.” Albert said. But you’ve never been lucky in love. Beats me why you don’t give up.”

“Maybe hope springs eternal?” Larry replied. “Where’s going to be best for you to display what you’ve brought?”

“Somewhere bright please. It makes the sparklers sparkle better.”

“The brightest place is in the kitchen, where we have our dining room as well.”

“That will do fine. I brought the painless ear piercing gun you asked me to bring, but it beats me why a woman of whatever age you say Sophie is hasn’t got her ears pierced already. Most young women wear several sets these days.”

“You know, I never asked that question,” Larry replied. “Ah, here she is.”

Howard, as Sophie, was so pleased he’d chosen the black dress and heels. It gave him a feeling of control and confidence that took him by surprise. “Maybe being a girl is easier it seemed thought last week,” he thought, watching Albert appraise him as he walked across the room.

“And the answer is I never got anyone to buy me anything special.” Howard held out his hand and allowed himself to be pulled into a polite kiss by Albert.

“And now you have.” Albert smiled and gestured towards the table, where he had opened his case and laid a mirror by the side.

“I suggest we deal with your ears first.” He gestured that Howard should sit, which he did.

“I’m terribly nervous,” Howard said. He sat still as Albert looked intently at him from the front and marked his ears.

“Distract yourself,” Albert invited. “Look at your choices. Larry said you had to have a pair of hoops, drops. For starters, we’ll give you some studs for the holes to heal.”

“They look really good.” Howard looked at the brilliance of some diamond studs.

“They are good, almost flawless and a good colour. You can tell, because the butterfly on the back screws on, so you can’t lose them easily.”

“Hold still.” Howard held still and heard a pop. A little tug on the ear, then Albert repeated the process on his other ear. A little more tugging and he stood back.

“That’s it, almost as painless as your dentist,” he joked.

Howard blinked and took it in. “Is that it?” he asked.

“Look.” Albert held out a mirror.

Howard took it and looked from left to right. “I never knew it could be so easy,” he said, admiring the effect of diamond studs in his ears.

“Now, I have to leave you quickly. I intended to do a big sales pitch but my wife has arrangements and I must fly,” Albert said. “I need to take your ring sizes, then I’m going to leave you with a few items to look over.”

“You trust him?” Howard raised his eyebrows questioningly.

“Of course, he’s my oldest friend,” Albert replied. “And he knows I’m going to overcharge him anyway.”

They laughed and Albert used his ring gauge on Howard’s middle and ring fingers.

“Right, I’m going,” Albert said. Here’s a plain necklace, more a chain than anything fancy, a couple of chain bracelets and a bangle. Your earrings are in this box but don’t change them until the holes are healed or they’ll hurt. Above all, keep them clean.”

“Thank you so much.” Howard touched his new studs. “I’m going to love these.”

“That’s not all. There are rings in these boxes which should fit. Choose the ones you want and I’ll know which you’ve kept when you bring the others back.” Albert stood and walked toward the door, his case tucked under his arm. “Enjoy, my friends.” And he was gone.

“He’s a whirlwind,” Howard said. “I can’t wait to see what he’s left. I’m so excited. Do you think I’m really turning into a girl?”

“I think you’re doing your best.”

Larry pulled Howard to his feet and pulled him close with one arm. Howard felt the other sneaking round his rear and pulling his rear cheek close into

his body. Howard put his arms round Larry's neck and pulled him close. They kissed gently.

Larry's hands didn't stop roaming. With one hand holding the rear, the other felt the front. "You've padded your bra," he discovered.

"I had to," Howard replied. "Didn't you notice earlier? You wouldn't want your friend to think you were with a girl with no boobs."

"Clever girl," Larry said. "I should have thought to get you something more lifelike."

"Yes, you should. These rolled-up panties are no substitute for something more realistic. I'm worried in case they fall out, or squash horribly."

"Just like the real thing." Larry squeezed one.

"Stop it! I'm going to sound like a real girl now." Howard pulled back. "Don't mess up my makeup. I don't think I could do it this good if you do. Minor repairs okay, but not major ones."

"But you'll learn?"

"I promise I will if you really want me to, but not tonight," Howard said. "I believe you have other plans anyway."

Howard started opening the boxes Albert had left. There was so much to look at. He admired the earrings, held one of the hoops next to his stud, then one of the drops, which caught the light as it swung in his fingers.

"I think I'm going to like these," Howard said, picking up the chains. "Fasten these for me, darling." He held them out to Larry. "I can't possibly manage without damaging my nails and you wouldn't like that after you've spent so much money getting me ready to have your evil way with me later."

"Am I going to have my evil way with you later?" Larry fastened the chains, firstly the necklace and then two chains on Howard's left wrist.

"I'm going to be really disappointed if you don't," Howard said

The bangle slipped over the same wrist and jangled gently against the chains as he lifted his hands to Larry's head and kissed him again gently. Larry moved to tighten the embrace but Howard slipped away.

"I think I should try rings now. I've never ever tried a ring before," Howard said. "Look, there's a wedding set there too, and look at the rubies. How did he know I would love the red stones and the diamonds?"

"Perhaps years of experience and a shrewd guess?" Larry replied.

"Pooh, do you mean he wasn't channelling my unknown girlish wishes?"

"Perhaps he didn't know you had any?"

"That's true. After all, I didn't know I had any girlish wishes before you started all this... whatever it is... fling, romance, affair... and dressed me up like someone I never knew was in me."

"But you like it."

Let's say that I'm happy you introduced me to Sophia."

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"You look really lovely tonight." Larry poured more wine as they sat after dinner.

"Thank you, darling." Howard held out his hand to clasp Larry's. "I could do real damage to you tonight with these nails and these rings."

"I'm really afraid." Larry grinned.

"I hope you are." Howard played with Larry's fingers across the table. "After all, I look like an old married woman." Howard straightened the wedding set he wore.

"I can't understand why you're so fascinated by that set," Larry said.

“Neither can I.” Howard looked at the rings again. “I guess they could say so much, and they’re so feminine. A man could never wear them.”

“But you are.”

“Don’t spoil the illusion; work with me on this one.” Howard withdrew his hand and made a pretend slap against Larry’s wrist.

“I think it’s time to go home,” Larry said.

“I thought you’d never ask.” Howard stood and picked up the dark red pashmina he’d used as a shawl. He played with it through his hands as they waited for the cab to arrive at the door, keeping his hand in front of him, which stopped Larry from getting too closely amorous at the door.

Once home, Larry pulled Howard into his arms. “Now you can’t stop me.” He kissed him squarely on the lips, the hunger and desire bubbling through his veins.

“I could shout for help.”

“Okay, shout for help.”

“Help, help,” Howard whispered and pulled himself into Larry again.

Kissing again and again, they stumbled through into the lounge and fell onto the couch. Howard could feel Larry’s fingers at the zipper at the back of his dress. He giggled and wriggled to make it easier for the zip to come down. He stood and kicked off his heels, letting the dress fall to the floor.

Larry grabbed for his penis and touched it lightly as Howard swayed back out of reach. Howard looked at Larry and, holding his eyes, deliberately moved forwards, almost offering his penis for Larry to touch.

He gasped as Larry took hold, gently at first, then massaging and stroking more insistently. Howard could feel it growing.

He fell onto the couch and reached for Larry’s trouser belt and pulled it.

“You’ll have to help me,” he whispered. “I don’t want to break a nail.” Larry took both hands to undo the belt and the top of his trousers.

Howard reached for the zipper there, struggling to grasp it, until he decided to use the sides of his fingers. It felt awkward as he looked into Larry’s eyes.

“Don’t look at me like that,” he chided. “You made me this way.”

“I did and I intend to take full advantage.”

“Do you?” Howard pulled away. “You’ll have to convince me that you can.”

Larry caught him by the wrist and pulled him closer so that they both tumbled across the couch with Howard on top. He could feel Larry’s penis now, pushing into his chest as his bra shifted and the wad of panties fell out.

“Whoops,” Howard said. “You’ve lost my breast.”

“I’ll have to find it again.” Larry took the nipple in his mouth and licked, then nibbled, around it. Howard squirmed and offered the other nipple, throwing the panties from that cup over his shoulder.

“Keep going.” Howard pushed the nipple towards him with his hand.

“There’s not much to nibble on.”

“Pretend.”

Larry pretended, sucking and licking as his hands went further down. Howard shifted to accommodate him, urgency rising in his movements as if some instinct were taking over again. He twisted round so that his mouth worked its way towards Larry’s crotch.

He saw his fingers wrapping around Larry’s penis, the nails and the rings shouting that he was a girl in this game. He stroked it up and down, letting Larry know his nails were really there. He did it again and was rewarded by a movement, an intake of breath, as Larry rolled to give him greater access to play with the shaft.

He reached up and pushed his hand under Larry's shirt. He scraped his nails down his chest, then scratched his way gently from side to side, ever downward until both hands were working on the shaft, which grew and firmed under their touch.

He felt Larry grasping his own penis as he scraped his fingers up the shaft and held the sac with his other hand. Howard knew that with every touch, he was trying to use the nails, to remind Larry that these were girl hands attached to his body, almost as if this would transform the rest of him for the evening.

Then it changed. Larry freed his hands and pulled Howard's head up towards his lips and kissed him. He kissed him again, this time thrusting his tongue inside his mouth, then quickly withdrew it. He did it again and just as quickly withdrew his tongue.

Howard felt the rough surface of the tongue going in and out. He kissed harder and again it flicked in and out as the kiss was broken and renewed. Howard could feel his control slipping. He kissed him again and wrapped a hand around the back of his head, the other still wrapped around the shaft. This time, Larry helped him and his tongue wrestled with Howard's and pushed it back as the kiss became harder and harder.

Howard was panting and whimpering; he knew he was losing control. He decided in an instant that he liked it. He moaned and his tongue lay supine beneath Larry's as if in surrender.

Slowly and gently, Larry moved Howard's head downwards across his chest. Howard licked his way down, knowing where he was heading. He resisted but only gently and allowed his eyes to become level with the tip of Larry's penis, standing strong and tall, with Howard's feminine hand still wrapped around it.

The sight of the rings and the nails seemed to have a spell of their own. As if watching a movie, Howard opened his lips and put out his tongue again to lick the tip, then to swirl his tongue around the head. He saw the veins standing out and registered the power there.

Then it was in his mouth, pushing and thrusting. He opened wider, careful not to let his teeth get in the

way. He knew what was coming. He thought he should withdraw, but then why should he? He felt the stiffening and swelling, then the release as the back of his throat was engulfed. He suppressed a gag reflex and swallowed as it came. Then it was over and Larry was shrinking and slipping out of his mouth.

“Good?” Howard whispered.

“The best,” Larry replied. “Lick me clean and then I’ll take you to bed.”

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Howard didn’t really know how it happened. He woke at first light and turned over in a big bed. He slipped out from the covers, carefully so that he didn’t disturb Larry who slept beside him, and walked to the bathroom.

He switched on the light and blinked. He was wearing a dark red chemise which he didn’t remember putting on. He looked again and remembered how they’d wrapped around each other, touching and holding as if afraid to let go as they came up the stairs and into the room.

He felt the dampness around his penis and wiped it clean with a cloth and dried it carefully. He slipped back into bed and was asleep in an instant.

He woke to feel something between his rear cheeks. He knew what it was as Larry was nuzzling against his neck. He arched his back and pushed back against the intruder. Larry pushed forwards and slowly they began to move together, each moment getting more charged than the one before as if synchronised by some instinctive hand.

Howard arched his back and moved over towards his front, gripping the penis as tightly as he could as he turned. Larry sensed what he was doing and moved with him, moving back so that he came to his knees, as Howard presented his rear to him.

Howard put his head down and in a fluid movement, arched his back again and pushed against Larry. Larry’s penis, standing hard, edged towards Howard’s rear and started to probe. He steadied the

shaft with his hand and he heard Howard moan softly. He moved further and felt the entrance at the same moment as Howard, feeling the tip, clenched his muscles against him.

Howard eased back and, licking a finger, eased it into the entrance and carefully held it still as again all the muscles clenched against him. He eased the finger further and was gripped again. He held still and Howard pushed back, gently and only a small movement, but again the grip tightened.

"I want to, but I can't," Howard whispered. "Don't hate me. I don't know how to do it, but I really want to."

Larry came to lie beside him. "It's all right. If you want it, it will come. All you have to do is learn to relax those muscles."

"It may take some time."

"Once you've done it, you'll have no fear. You'll want to do it all the time."

"Don't make promises you can't keep."

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"I don't think I want to go home," Howard said next afternoon after a very late start. "I want to stay here and be a girl."

"Maybe it could be arranged. I quite like the idea of keeping you here too."

"I could call in to work and say I'm taking a holiday. They owe me lots of time off."

"Maybe I could call them and say I've sent you on a trip to deal with a problem out of state. It was an emergency, so I said I'd call them and fix up a contract. I could tell your mother the same thing."

"They'd all call my mobile."

"I could say I found it on the desk when it rings," Larry said. "I never noticed that you hadn't picked it up."

“Mom will ask for a number. She’s a great lie detector. It’s fraught with danger and she’ll find out.”

“So we could be reckless and worry about that when it happens?”

“And I could stay female all week?” Howard asked. “Really be Sophia and have fun playing house here?”

“If you want to do it, we’ll do it.”

“I want.”

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“Can we talk about sex?” Howard asked as they were relaxing on the terrace, chilled wine in the bottle on the table in front of them.

“We could do a practical exercise.” Larry turned, suddenly more energetic.

“Down, boy,” Howard said. “Be serious for a moment.”

“Sophia, when you look so delicious, how can I keep my mind on anything serious?”

“Well, this time I think you’d like to keep your mind serious, because I want to ask some serious questions.”

“Okay, ask away.”

“I want you to be honest with me here. Whatever the past was, it’s the past. This is now, you and me. Really honest, okay?”

“I promise.”

“I’m guessing that I’m not the first boy you’ve known.”

“Known?”

“As in ‘had a relationship with’.”

“No, you’re not the first, but I’ve been single for a long time now. To be honest as you want me to be, I didn’t think I’d ever have another chance.”

“So are the things you’re doing with me things that you did before?”

“Yes and no,” Larry said. “Don’t think badly of me, I’m not repeating behaviour or trying to turn you into someone else. I do like boys who are girls on the surface. I love the way they can take on a different personality and become more feminine that they could believe possible.”

“Am I like that?”

“You’re the best.” Larry smiled. “Look at you. You’ve never stopped trying to be more female all weekend, since the manicurist came.”

“Really?” Howard asked. “I’m not conscious of doing more than dressing in the clothes you provided.”

“But I didn’t make you act this way.” Larry waved his hand towards him. “You’ve taken to makeup and jewellery. You could have decided not to bother, but today, when we emerged...”

“This afternoon.”

“Well, we were rather athletic before we got up.”

“You could call it that,” Howard laughed. “I never liked athletics, but I enjoyed the wrestling.”

“That’s what I want to talk about.”

“It’s healthy to talk about these things in a relationship.” Larry spoke quietly

“And are we in some sort of serious relationship?”

“As serious as you want it to be,” Larry replied. “I think you’re the best ever.”

“And am I girl enough?”

“You can be as much girl as you want to be.”

“I’m not sure what you mean by that.”

“There are no limits,” Larry said. “I’ve not worked so hard and built my company not to be able to enjoy it. I know we’re new, but we can take this as far as you want, within limits.”

“There are limits?”

“Of course there are. I’ll pay for most things. You can be blonde, or brunette, or change week by week. You have to stay slim and look good. You can get the best breast prosthetics you can find, or you can have your own breasts. That could be fun.”

“Would you like me to have real breasts?”

“Yes, if I’m honest,” Larry said. “I’d love the idea that you couldn’t just dress as a boy and walk away.”

“So big breasts, like I’m out of proportion.” Howard got angry.

“No, nothing like that,” Larry replied. “Nothing out of proportion. You can choose the size. I want a pretty girl, not a freak. I want to have you as my arm candy and to show you off. I don’t want you to be someone that people laugh at behind their back.”

“This is getting deeper than I intended,” Howard said. “I wanted to ask something more basic. I want you to have sex with me as a girl. You know what I mean. What do I need to do?”

“Relax more, accept what you want,” Larry said. “I’m flattered that you asked me that.”

“I’m flattered that you want to buy me some breasts.” Howard blushed.

“Yes.” Larry hesitated. “I’m not forcing you into the sex thing.”

“And I’m not being forced.”

“You need to make sure you’re clean, maybe use an enema, and you could try some kind of plug to ease your opening.”

“Ease my opening?” Howard asked, then stopped and blinked. “I’m not deliberately trying to sound like a parrot.”

“It would help you get used to something in there.” Larry hesitated. “It would open you up so that I could enter.”

“Is this on the internet?” Howard asked. “I’m too embarrassed to ask more.”

“You could probably find it,” Larry answered. I’ll give you the company credit card. You can use that to get whatever you think you need, if you’re serious.”

“Larry, look at me.” Howard took his hand and stroked the back of his head. “I’m serious; I want to feel you in me.”

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“Your mom was okay when I told her you’d gone to sort another site out for me,” Larry said as he arrived back on Monday evening. “There was a look in her eye that said she might not believe me, but she was okay.”

“Do you think she suspects I’m really with you?”

“Who knows? If she does, it’s too late to worry. What about your work?”

“They were fine.” Howard twirled a strand of hair. “I think they were pleased not to have me hanging around doing little jobs in the office. There’s not much work in at this time of year.”

“So we’ve a week to ourselves,” Larry said. That feels better and better. It’s a shame that I have to work a couple of days. I can’t get away from the meetings.”

“Where are they?”

“One’s back at my office, the other is up the coast.”

“I could come with you. I’d love to try myself out.”

“That doesn’t make sense.”

“I mean I’d like to be out somewhere away from where anyone might know me,” Howard said. “It’d be an adventure. I could pretend to be your secretary.”

“That may work,” Larry replied. “I’m going to look at a property. All you need to do is stand there, look interested, and don’t say a word.”

“Nothing.”

“I mean nothing,” Larry said. “The guy up there fancies himself, so you might get your butt pinched,



or he might accidentally brush against your breast...”

“Which I haven’t got...”

“... accidentally a few times. But you’ll be able to handle him. Just act cool and indifferent. He’ll get the message.”

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“You’ve enjoyed playing housewife, haven’t you?” Larry asked when he came back early on Thursday.

“I may even get used to it.” Howard flung himself into Larry’s arms. “Come and sit on the terrace, I’ll get us a drink.”

“There’s something different about you,” Larry said slowly.

“Really?” Howard stood across the table and handed him a glass.

Howard stood to let Larry look again. He wore a pale blue silk shirt, with short sleeves, over a denim skirt which flared out into pleats and ended above his knee. He had blue mules with two-inch heels on his feet.

“You’ve changed the earrings,” Larry said. “I think those hoops are really sexy.”

“Okay, that’s one point out of a possible four or five.”

“You’ve had your hair done,” Larry said. “It’s got highlights.”

“Yes, I got a cancellation and she came this morning.”

“If you got your hair done, you must have got a manicure as well.”

“Correct. Is that all?”

He rubbed the second finger of his right hand around his breast, the dark nails emphasising the move.

“Your breasts look a better shape.”

“I got proper silicone prosthetics delivered. They fit in the bra and shape to my chest almost like the real thing. But that’s not all.”

“Am I so unobservant?” Larry asked.

Howard turned round. Larry gasped and reached out to feel... what exactly?

“Don’t touch,” Howard commanded.

“Is that a tail?” Larry looked at the full furry tail which hung below the back of the skirt and swayed as Howard walked.

“Yes, it’s my tail. Do you like it?” Howard swayed to make the tail wag.

“Guess where it’s fitted.” He smiled and picked up the tail and wagged it at Larry. “If you’re really good, I’ll let you see where it’s fixed.”

Larry looked and then grinned as the obvious place where it was fixed sprung to his mind. Howard saw the look.

“You could be so right.” Howard came to crouch at Larry’s feet, walked his fingers up his thigh and started to loosen his belt. “If you take me to the bedroom, we could look closer and see why I’ve grown a tail.”

His fingers probed through Larry’s clothing until they touched his growing shaft. “I can tell you’re interested.”

Larry stood and, gripping his pants with one hand and Howard’s hand with the other, he pulled him towards the bedroom. He stepped out of his pants and threw his shirt to the floor as Howard watched. He reached for him and pulled him into a kiss, one hand holding his waist, the other reaching down and around.

“Wait and I’ll show you.” Howard stroked his shaft gently and went to stand beside the bed. He undid his shirt, showing a full bra.

“I’m going to try and keep these on,” he said, a hand under each breast.

He put both hands behind and the skirt fell to the floor. He turned his back to Larry and bent forward a little, showing the tail was fixed inside his hole.

"I'm told this will have made your entry a little easier," he said, bending and turning the tail towards Larry. "You can try me if you'll be gentle."

Larry helped Howard onto the edge of the bed and pulled him gently into position. His arms were reaching forward; his feet were apart and on the floor. Howard's rump was presented proudly, with the tail hanging in a cascade of fur down to his calves.

"I'm clean and lubricated," Howard said. "The package I got said you should lubricate too."

He pushed a tube to Larry who squeezed a dollop from it and rubbed it on his erection. Larry's hands went to Howard's back and pushed him a little further forward. Then with his penis in contact with his leg, he carefully reached for the top of the tail and pulled it slowly out. A shiny shaped plug came with a gentle plop from the hole.

Larry felt Howard tense as he touched his penis to the outer region. He pushed and felt the tip engage and slip inside. He felt the tightness as he tried to go further. He slapped Howard as hard as he could on the cheek. Howard tensed again and relaxed. Larry pushed and was inside.

Howard held still, clenching and trying to relax. Larry pushed and the lubrication worked. He could feel the pressure trying to keep him out, but he was strong and rigid this time. He slipped further in, then withdrew a little. He slipped further in and pushed, relaxed and pushed.

Howard moaned and gasped but still Larry pushed. Then he was sure he was in as far as he could go. Howard could feel Larry's sac slapping against his cheek.

They held still and close. Howard arched his back and pushed backwards. Larry stayed motionless and when he felt Howard relax, he started to move back and forth, gentle at first, then more and more forcefully. This had turned to pure animal lust for both of them.

Howard marvelled at the new sensations running through his body. Larry felt his need to keep going, to tire and exert his strength over him. They thrust and counter thrust. Howard tried to speak but no words came out as he gave himself to the sensations.

He imagined how it had been when Larry had come in his mouth. He felt the stiffening and the swelling. Then with a gasp, Larry was pumping and pulsing. Howard sighed in pleasure. He'd made Larry come. He'd made him make love to him as if he were a real woman.

He felt the spasms go on and on. He knew it was going to be messy but he didn't care. He could feel Larry shrinking now, reducing and retreating, then slipping out. A trickle ran down his leg as he stood and turned to kiss Larry, who leaned forward and fell on top of him onto the bed.

They lay together, gently kissing. Then Larry moved away.

"What a mess." Howard felt between his legs. "I need to get a tampon to soak all this." He stood and went into the bathroom.

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Next morning Larry woke to Howard running his fingers up his shaft, then gently scratching with his nails.

They kissed and Larry flipped Howard onto his back. He rolled over and came to kneel between his legs. Howard felt something cold being slathered on his butt and then a finger probed.

"I need to take the tampon out," Howard said and reached for the dangling string which Larry had ignored.

He put it to the side of the bed and allowed Larry to lift his legs so that they rested on his shoulders. The nearly familiar feeling returned as Howard felt the tip probing. He willed himself to open and moved towards Larry as Larry began to pushing forward. Then he was in and they were moving together again. This time Howard moved with feelings of anticipation.

Waves of pleasure washed over him. He heard moans of delight, then realised he was making them.

Larry came slowly this time, taking time to slow down and allow Howard to writhe and move his hips, allowing him to make the pace. When he could take the waiting no more, Howard began to thrust against the penis and Larry responded until once more he was spent.

They lay for a while. Howard was conscious of leaking again but couldn't be bothered to care. He was happy being held and fondled, even if his silicone breasts became dislodged and fell to the floor. Eventually, he had to go for another tampon.

"I'm sore," Howard complained with a languorous sigh and flopped back onto the bed and into Larry's arms.

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They set off early next morning to visit Larry's prospective acquisition. Howard was dressed as the secretary in a grey business suit and blouse with a tight pencil skirt that slightly hobbled him at the knee. He wore his hair straight, lacquered against the breeze and his makeup was precise.

Larry and he had agreed that they would play the part of boss and slightly dubious secretary. He wore the wedding set and the diamond studs. Larry told him to overdo the eye makeup as they approached their destination. Howard looked at him, then with pencil and mascara, did as he was asked.

"Maybe you should chew some gum," Larry said. "And remember, not a word. Play dumb."

A man in a shiny business suit and slicked-down hair greeted them as they parked. Larry and he talked and Howard did his best to look bored and indifferent. They walked through a low-rise office block, inspecting empty room after empty room.

They came to the only office with furniture. They talked prices and square feet, internet connections and parking spaces. Howard looked bored, inspected his nails ostentatiously, and redid his eye makeup.

The meeting over, the man in the shiny suit invited them to a bar. Larry accepted. Howard pulled a face and had to be coaxed. Larry gave him a secret smile and excused himself for a moment. The man slid up to Howard and, as predicted, stood too close. His stale aftershave drifted into his space. Howard turned a shoulder to get away from the smell and felt a hand on his rear.

He grabbed the hand and slapped the man across the cheek. "Yours, I believe." He held onto the hand at the precise moment that Larry returned.

The man coloured up and talked quickly to Larry. Howard feigned indifference, contempt, but said nothing. They got back in the car and held a straight face until they turned a corner. Both burst out laughing.

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"It's been a week," Larry said. "We'd better think of what we're going to do."

"I know," Howard agreed. "I've been putting off thinking about it. I suppose I will have to go back. Mom will be worried about me and worried about money for Laurel. I've been selfish with you. I never imagined this could happen and how much could change in such a short time."

"It's what you want to do next that matters," Larry said.

"I don't want to lose this thing we have. I think I'm more Sophia than ever before. I think I want to stay that way."

"What would Mom say to that?"

"I have no idea. She'd be shocked. Laurel would be amazed, and I don't know if either of them could accept it."

"We could present it to them in a way that they might find acceptable," Larry said slowly. "How about if I told them I was employing you, and as a condition you had to become Sophia?"

“How could that ever work?”

“I’ll say that you’re travelling ‘round my sites as a spy, checking on misuse of company information,” Larry continued. “You’d have to be away from home for days, weeks even. We could provide a company apartment so that no one would see you changing back and forth, Howard to Sophia.”

“That might work, but Mom would know about a problem in your company if there was one.”

“I could tell them it was a new corporate service for our clients, not because we were having problems ourselves.”

“Okay, that might work,” Howard agreed. “How do I explain the breasts you promised I could have?”

“That’s going to come later. We can’t spring it on them all at once.”

“And what about Laurel’s fees? I can’t back out of helping all I can.”

“Let me think.” Larry took a deep breath. “How about I said it was part of the contract that you would stay in disguise for as long as I needed you, and that while you were working for me, I would pay Laurel’s fees, give your mom a raise, and make it clear that the success of this deal depended upon you continuing to work undercover for me.”

“They’ll see through it,” Howard said. “But you know what? I don’t care. They can accept it or not as they wish.”

“It’s your choice.”

“I think they’ll be so happy to get the money, that all else will fade away and they’ll play along.”

“Let’s do it.”

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Howard called the manicurist and the hairdresser for Sunday visits.

The manicurist made his nails look as plain and unadorned as she could. They weren't quite male, but they weren't ostentatiously female either.

His hair was stripped of the dye and recoloured as near to his old dirty blonde mouse colour as possible. She couldn't disguise the new health of his hair but tied back, it was a reasonable approximation of Howard's natural state.

"I feel really drab and dowdy, no makeup, no perfume," Howard said as he appeared before Larry for approval, dressed in his own boy clothes and flat shoes. "Did I really look like this?"

"They're your clothes and it's how I first saw you, so yes, you did look like that."

"I don't like these old shoes, and I feel naked without jewellery."

"But that's what you looked like for ages."

"But you saw something else in me."

"I still do, but this isn't about me today," Larry replied. "It's about selling a story to your mom and Laurel."

"You're right."

"I'll drive you home," Larry said.

"It's better if I go alone." Howard hugged him and pecked his cheek. "It feels wrong to be doing that as a boy after these times as your girl."

"I never asked," Larry said. "Do you drive?"

"Yes, but only occasionally. I have a licence, but I've only driven Mom's old Ford."

"I'll lend you a company car," Larry said. "Your mom will recognise it, I'm sure."

"Okay, that should make it more plausible."

"And when we're together, you'll get a better company car."

"How about a little rag top thing, a real girly car? To celebrate real girly breasts when I get them?"

“You’ll deserve one and I’ll make sure you get it.”

“How do I introduce the subject though?” Howard asked. “I can’t simply walk in and say, ‘Hey mom, I’ve accepted a job as Larry’s mistress.’”

“You need to be a little more subtle. How about if I invite you all to dinner and I tell them there? It will be in a public place so they can’t make too much fuss.”

“It might work.”

“And I can present it as a sort of bonus cum thank you for what you’ve done, and for considering the job in future.”

“As long as you don’t tell them what we’ve really been doing.” Howard kissed him briefly, laughed and took a deep breath. “Let’s get this show on the road then.”

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Howard sat behind the wheel of a little Honda and checked the controls. He felt nervous. He checked himself out in the mirror and wondered if he was nervous to drive, or because of where he was driving to.

It was late afternoon, he knew that Laurel would be visiting. His nerves jangled as he pulled into the space in front of his old house. He went to the door and entered as he usually did.

“Hi mom,” he called. “I’m home.”

His mother came to hug him, closely followed by Laurel, who clung to him for longer than seemed usual.

“How’s the internship?” he asked her.

“I’m doing great,” she replied. “I’m so convinced that this is the right thing for me now. They’re letting me do more and more, under strict supervision of course, but they say I’ve really got the touch and the technique.”

“So even more need to get the finances straight,” Mom added. “Put your dirty stuff in the laundry bas-

ket. You've just time to clean up and then we'll have supper."

"It's all right," Howard said. "I haven't anything to wash. I'll go and clean up though."

Howard could feel Mom and Laurel looking at him as he went to his old room. He went to wash and dawdled until he heard his name being called. He sat at the table with them.

"There's something different about you," Laurel said. "Don't you think so, Mom?"

"I can see something, but it's only because he's been away."

"No it's not," Laurel persisted. "Your eyebrows are plucked, and..." She pushed his head around. "You have pierced ears."

Howard blushed. "It's nothing special," he said.

"I think there's a story to be told." Laurel looked intently at him. Howard said nothing, blushing even more.

"Leave him alone, Laurel," Mom said. "If there's a story to tell, I'm sure your brother will tell us if he wants us to know."

The rest of the meal passed in stilted conversation and uncomfortable silences. It felt really awkward and as soon as he could manage, Howard was off to his bed.

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Howard was last up in the morning. Mom and Laurel were already out and away. He wanted to call Larry, then cursed himself for forgetting his mobile. He drove to work and hung around listlessly and pointlessly. They had nothing for him to do. The week dragged along.

He delayed going home as long as he could, then he could avoid it no longer.

"Mr. Antrobus has invited us all for dinner this evening," Mother said as she returned home on Fri-

day. "He says you're not to go into work, he'll square it with your pay office."

"What's the occasion?" Howard asked, acting as innocently as he could.

"I'm not sure. He said something about a plan, but it's probably that he had such a successful week. He told me that if all the deals fall into place, he's really taking the company into a higher league," Mother said. "Laurel's invited too."

"Who else is there?" Howard asked, suddenly suspicious.

"I've no idea. I think it's just us and him," Mother replied. "It's a good job I got my nails done at the salon in the hotel last week. What about my hair? Does it look okay?"

"Mom, he sees you every day," Laurel added. "I'm sure he's not going to worry about a chipped nail."

"It isn't chipped, is it?" Mother scrutinised her fingers.

"That wasn't what I meant." Laurel laughed at her insecurity. "You always look good. When is this happening?"

"It's this evening." Mother looked at her watch. "A car's coming for us all in... err... about three hours."

"So you've plenty time to do your hair, makeup and change," Laurel replied. "I need to get a shower too. Howard, you'd better change your T-shirt and make sure that there's nothing sticky on your leather jacket."

"Do I have to come?" Howard asked. "I'd rather sit this one out."

"You were specifically included in the invitation," Mother said. "You have to come. Just tidy yourself up a bit, comb your hair, tie it back again and don't look as if you just got out of bed for once."

"I've really reverted," Howard thought. "Whatever will become of me?"

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I'm pleased you could all come," Larry welcomed them to the restaurant. "This is a bit of a special occasion. I think I have good news for you all."

"I can't wait," Mom said, hugging Larry. "It's exciting."

Laurel remained silent, accepting a peck on the cheek from Larry, whilst he shook hands formally with Howard.

First, the good news," Larry started. "You're getting an upgrade and it will entitle you to a company car and a mileage allowance," he said to Mother. "It's backdated to the beginning of the month. I expect you to supervise a section of our estate and take over some of the management that I've been doing."

"That's great." Mom beamed and smiled at each of her children.

"Laurel, I've come to a package deal for you. As long as Howard will work for me, I'll arrange for a bursary to pay your fees for the duration of Howards employment."

"I don't know what to say." Laurel teared up and Mom put her hand over hers as she reached for a tissue with her other hand.

"Say thanks to Howard," Larry continued. "You can get a small car and an allowance for living expenses. I'll get my secretary to draw up all the terms and you can call in next week. I can probably use a little influence with the faculty and internships if you need them."

"I've a good one right now," Laurel said.

"Advance dental," Larry said. "I know the partners there and they like you. I'm sure they'll be pleased to give you some security for your placements."

"But you said this depends on Howard working for you," Laurel asked. "What does that mean?"

"He's going to work undercover for me," Larry said. "He did a great job last time and I've been asked to ex-

tend it by our more important clients. He has unique skills.”

“Is that why he’s got pierced ears and shaped eyebrows?” Laurel asked bluntly.

“Bonus points for observation,” Larry said to Laurel. “Yes, he was disguised as a girl and went into an office. They didn’t rate his skills but he was able to penetrate a plot to rake off substantial sums. It could have cost me the company if he hadn’t agreed to do this.”

“So what’s he going to do?” Mom asked. “You’re being very generous to us but there must be some return for you.”

“I don’t want you ever to mention this,” Larry said. “Not a whisper anywhere, ever again.”

“Okay,” Laurel replied. “You’re being very mysterious.”

“It’s sensitive, that’s why.”

“I understand,” Mom agreed.

“Howard has agreed to continue undercover work for me,” Larry said. “He’s going to be disguised as a girl called Sophia. I can’t give you any details. He’s going to continue doing what he did last week.”

Howard nearly choked when he heard this. “Do what he did last week,” he thought. “Just give me the chance.”

Mom and Laurel looked at Howard, then at Larry. “This must never be mentioned again. If he comes home in disguise, I’m relying on you both to act along with it and keep the secret. One wrong word could give it all away.”

“How do you like this arrangement, Howard?” Mom asked.

“It’s a challenge,” Howard replied. “When Larry proposed this to me, I didn’t think I could pull it off. I tried and really enjoyed the experience. If it gets Laurel qualified, and makes life easier for you, I’m satisfied.”

“But we won’t see you,” Laurel protested. “And you’re willing to sacrifice your career for us.”

“You’ll see him,” Larry added. “I can’t guarantee that you’ll recognise him, but I’ll make sure he doesn’t lose touch, within the parameters and demands of his duties.”

Larry sneaked a look at Howard and caught his eye. It was all he could do to suppress a desire to raise his hands in triumph and shout out loud. This had gone better than he ever hoped.

“Howard, you’ve a couple of days to sort out whatever you need to do. Then you’ll report to the secret address, which I’m not going to reveal, and we’ll go from there.”

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“I don’t think I can ever thank you enough for my own breasts.” Sophia lifted them to look at the image in the mirror. “They look so good, really natural, the surgeon said at my last examination. I think I’ve become a show-off.”

She walked round the couch, her breasts straining in a strapless dark blue top and flared skirt which finished five inches above her knees. She loved her new stiletto heels and the way they drew men’s eyes to her legs. She saw them looking.

“I thought the bruising and scares would never fade,” Larry said. “I should have had more faith in the hospital.”

“And you got what you wanted.” Sophia waved her finger at him. “You always get your way. They’re too big for me to pretend that I can dress as a boy ever again.”

“But they’re proportionate.” Larry put his hands under each one. “And they feel nice.”

“Stop teasing.” Sophia pushed his hands down. “It’s amazing that a boy who likes other boys wants one with breasts who looks like a girl.”

“It”s the secrets that are part of the fascination. What we know but the world doesn’t know.”

“It’s given me so much more confidence,” Sophia said. “I’ve left Howard way behind.”

“I think you left Howard behind the day after that meeting with your mom and Laurel. You came home the next day and seemed to relax instantly.”

“Yes, I remember feeling as if such a worry had been lifted.” Sophia instinctively played with her earrings. “I loved that I could come here and dress, put my makeup on, and the jewellery. It felt so good.”

“I know,” Larry kissed her gently. “When I’d gone to work the next day, I never knew you’d called Zoe and Helen already.”

“I kept that one secret,” Sophia laughed.

“When I came home, there was this gorgeous blonde, with nails and makeup to kill any red-blooded man who looked the other way.”

“And I wore my tail.” Sophia turned and let him see the tail was hanging beneath her skirt.

“That was a really great idea,” Larry replied. “I always know you’re extra ready for me when I see you wearing it.”

“I do love it, although I’d never wear it outside the house. It’s only for you to see.

“And I suppose I should go and see Mom and Laurel soon,” Sophia sighed. “Do you think they’ll accept me as I am now?”

“I think they’ll love you,” Larry replied. After all, if it wasn’t for you, they’d never have got all the things they have now. They’ll be grateful for your sacrifice.”

“Yes, I did sacrifice a lot for them.” Sophia stood and made her tail wag. “How about coming to play foxes and bunnies with me?”

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