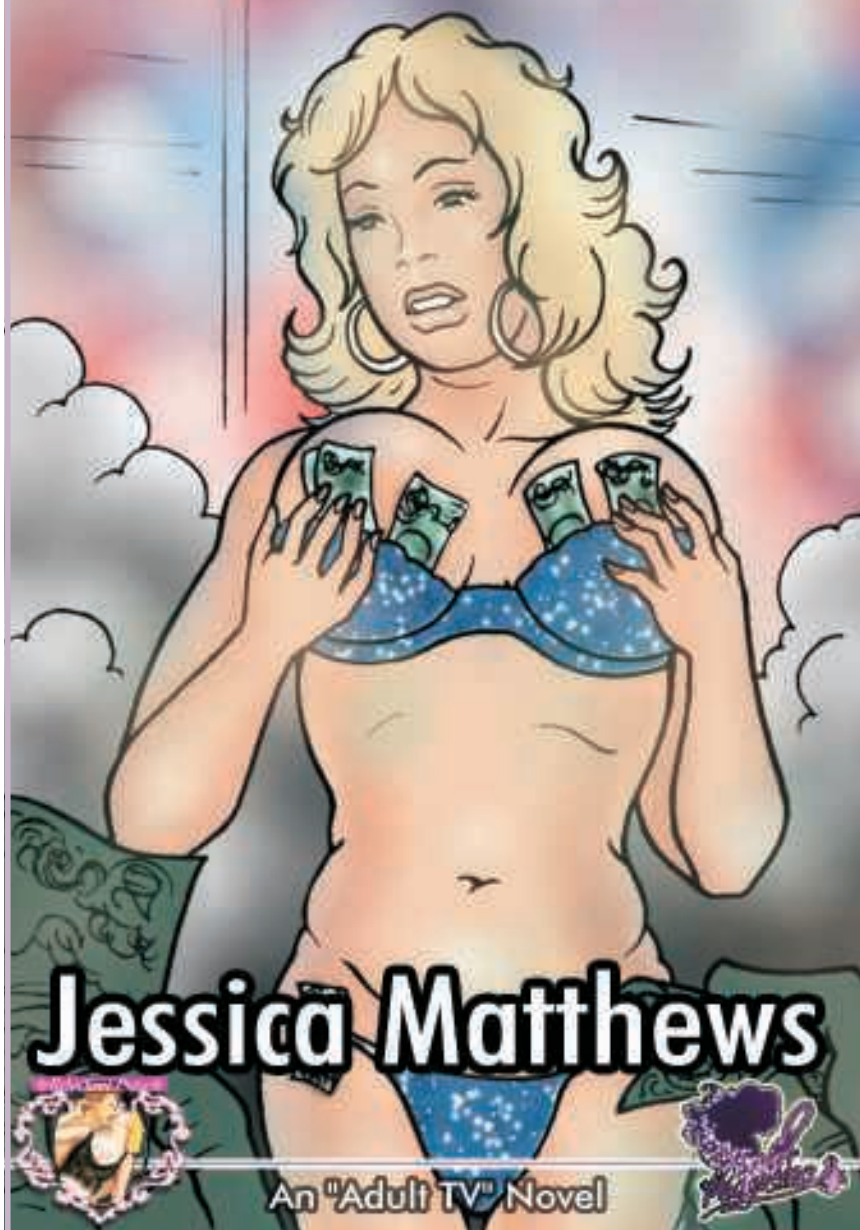


The Go Girl, No Girl Review



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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The Go Girl, No Girl Review

By Jessica Matthews

“No, no, no,” Craig shouted. “I’m not doing it.”

“But we need you,” Kate replied.

“I don’t want to fall out but what part of ‘no’ are you having trouble with?” Craig turned to walk away. “I can’t. I’m not, so that’s it. Subject closed.”

The door slammed, followed by the squeal of angry tires as Craig’s elderly Miata left the car park.

“Well, that went well,” Gary said. “What do we do now?”

“I’ll think of something,” Kate replied. “I can usually get around him.”

“You’d better,” Gary said. “We can’t have ‘The Go Girl, No Girl Review’ without a star performer.”

"I wish we hadn't been talked into this," Kate said. "A sure fire winner," the agent said. They let us take over the bar, do all the publicity, and then they tell us that they can't supply the performers. We're on our way to bankruptcy."

"It's not that bad. Something has to turn up."

"You said that last week and what did we get?" Kate asked. "A pantomime dame who looked like the back of a horse, two ton Tessie from Albuquerque, and a couple of chancers with big egos and bigger expectations of what we could pay."

"But we're not bankrupt yet." Gary tried to be optimistic.

"Maybe not yet, but unless we do something quick, I can hear it calling," Kate said. "There must be some talent out there. I'd better go find it, otherwise we're sunk."

"How do you propose to do that?"

"I have no idea," Kate admitted. "But there must be an answer. I'm going to save this darn business if it's the last thing I do. I need to get on the internet. There must be something out there. I need to know how to find it."

* * * * *

"Is that Daniel?" Kate hoped she'd called the right number.

"Yes, who's calling?" he answered cautiously.

"I'm Kate from 'The Go Girl, No Girl Review' and I'm hoping I've found the right Daniel," she said. "I think you choreographed some cabaret shows a few years back."

"Yes, that's me." He was not very forthcoming.

"I need to get a choreographed drag show at my club in a few weeks' time. I wondered if you might have an opening in your schedule," she asked.

"What are you offering?"

"Well, that's the problem." Kate's heart sank. "I have to explain. We contracted for a show, paid our fees, and then they've absconded. We've no money left and no show."

"Sounds like you've no chance either," he replied.

"But you're not working at the moment. You crashed and burned after you fell out with Girls Incorporated a couple of years ago. The way I heard it, they said you'd never work again."

"So you heard all the calumnies they heaped on me. It was a lousy cast. Not even Busby Berkeley could have made them into an act."

"And your drinking proved that?" Kate snapped.

"No need to go there. I think this conversation is over."

"No, please hear me out," Kate begged. "We'll offer you accommodation while we get it all together and then we'll pay you a percentage of the receipts when we get the show running. Imagine if it all comes together. You've got a show, you've got your reputation back, and who knows where that could lead?"

"Keep talking," Daniel said. "I think you need to know I'm dry this last couple of years. I'm tempted by your offer. What sort of cast do you have for me to work with?"

"I don't have any right now," Kate admitted. "I want you on board, then it might help me to recruit some girls better than TwoTon Tessie from Albuquerque, and we'll have a show."

"Tell me that wasn't her name."

“No, it’s just an accurate description,” Kate laughed. “Seriously, we need some girls, and I’m on my way to recruit them. How can I fail? I’ve the power of Google, and total desperation to help me.”

“I’ll give you a try,” Daniel replied. “I admire your optimism, and I’ve nothing to lose anyway.”

“I hoped you’d see it like that.” Kate told him where to find the theatre and rang off.

She rang Gary. “We have a director,” she told him. “He’s been through it, but he could be great. Now all I have to do is find the girls for him to work with.”

“And where are you going to find them?”

“I don’t know yet,” she replied. “But I’m going to.”

* * * * *

College doesn’t really equip everyone with a lot of interchangeable skills to make a living in the modern world, and not everyone can settle of routine work in an office or call center. For some, the lure of the open road calls; for others, it’s the bright lights of the city. Some feel that they don’t fit in anywhere.

Harper Poole didn’t set out with a name like that, but he decided it was as likely to get him noticed as the one he was born with. He drifted through college, drifted through a couple of jobs and then decided that he’d do anything to avoid the drudgery of a boring day job.

He cashed his meager savings and sold all that he could. He decided what was essential and packed his rucksack to head out to the coast. There was no money for tickets, so he decided to make it an adventure and hitch his way. He didn’t get as far as he hoped before his funds for living expenses ran out.

Ending up in a lakeside resort, he saw a sign outside a cabaret bar that had clearly seen better signs. ‘Acts Wanted,’ it read. He pushed at the front door

but it was locked. He walked round the back and saw a van.

“Let me help you with that,” he said to a sweating man in overalls who was struggling to unload a couple of big storage trunks.

Harper dropped his rucksack which contained all he possessed, and took some of the weight.

“Sure be grateful,” the man replied and together they heaved and grunted until the trunks were in the rear of the building.

“I haven’t seen you before.” He rolled up his sleeves and held out a hand. “Jasper Fulbright, proprietor, cook and bottle washer at this fine establishment.”

Harper took his hand and introduced himself. “It said you were looking for acts on the notice outside.”

“And are you an act?” Jasper asked.

“I play piano, and sing a little. I did a lot in college; plays, shows, dances, cabaret, did a bit of everything, even fixed the costumes.” Harper embellished the truth shamelessly but he needed a job right now.

“Okay, we got a piano in there, I need to get my breath back, and then I’ll hear you. It’s the least I can do after you helped out,” Jasper said. “Are you staying in town?”

“I only arrived today,” Harper replied. “I got a lift on a truck, and dropped off here. Here is where the money ran out.”

“You’re in the middle of nowhere in particular,” Jasper said. “Most kids head out of town when they get the chance. This is the entertainment hot spot of the County. I get a country band in every month or two and the place really rocks. The rest of the time, it’s a few locals and a bit of passing trade.”

“But this place is quite grand.”

"It was when the mines were open, but they closed a decade ago and most people who could, left for better jobs. Now it's a small town in the middle of nowhere in particular."

"I haven't had time to look round."

"You've seen it already," Jasper said. "Let's hear you play."

He led the way through a door, then some double doors, down a short corridor, and then they were on a low stage with dusty curtains open halfway, showing a dimly lit bar with a small dance floor and seats and tables at the side. Harper walked to the piano, sat down and played a few chords.'

"When was this last tuned?" he asked as he adjusted his seat.

"I can't rightly remember," Jasper replied, helping himself to a drink from the bar. "They never listen anyway."

Harper flexed his fingers and started to play 'Exactly Like You.' The old favourite was his opening number whenever he got a chance, and he started running through the melody. The old piano rattled on under his fingers, out of tune, but not too badly.

After running through, he started to sing. He sang it sweetly and plainly, exactly as the song had been written. No trills or R&B effects, just the simple words, enunciated clearly.

He changed a few chords and slipped into 'Someone to Watch Over Me' and finished with 'As Time Goes By.'

Jasper applauded. "Where did you get that singing voice? It's real high for a guy. If I'd closed my eyes, I could have sworn I was listening to some blonde cabaret singer in a slinky black dress, cigarette holder, long gloves, and dangling earrings."

"I can't help your fantasies," Harper replied. "That's the voice I have."

Jasper scratched his head. "You play really well. I'd like to use you, but I can't do much more than give you somewhere to stay and feed you. You'd get decent tips off the audience and if you waited on at the bar, I'd pay you minimum for that. Do you want to stay for a week or two?"

"How many days do I work?"

"Thursday evening through to Sunday lunch and I'd expect a bit of help around the place on the other days. There are rooms out back that haven't been touched in years that need clearing out and you could bed down in one of them if you like."

"I like the idea of staying a while," Harper said. "It'll be good to rest in one place, get cleaned up, and think what to do next."

"Okay, you wait tables through to ten, then you do your cabaret on Thursday through to Saturday," Jasper said. "Play an hour or so, or until the audience start to throw things."

"Are they likely to?" Harper was against violence, especially when directed at him.

"I'm only joking," Jasper replied. "Play an hour and then go back to waiting tables. The more they drink, the better I'll be able to pay you."

"What if they want more?" Harper asked.

"We'll worry about that when it happens. I've got to get some supplies from the wholesale," Jasper said. "I'll get you a key and you can come and go as you please. I'll introduce you round on Thursday."

"Which room should I use?" Harper asked.

"Take any you like," Jasper said. "They're old dressing rooms, wardrobe and storerooms from when this place was busy. Make yourself comfortable."

* * * * *

"Kate, it's so lovely to see you." Diane hugged her and then they went to sit in the conservatory at the back of the house. "How are you doing with the old show bar? I heard you and Gary took it on. I hope you're going to make it fun again."

"It's more of a millstone than a flying success right now," Kate confessed. "I've a show director ready and waiting, just no show for him to produce."

"I'm sure you're planning something spectacular," Diane replied. "I know you, you're never without plans."

"I have plans, just no one to fit them," Kate confessed. "I asked Craig, but he took offense."

"He'll come round." Diane rang a bell and a few moments later a maid appeared. Kate looked at her friend in puzzlement.

"This is Gerald," Diane said. "Curtsey for Kate."

He did so rather elegantly, or as elegantly as a boy could, dressed in full maid's uniform and wearing ridiculously high heels.

"I'm training him," Dianne said in response to Kate's raised eyebrows. "He confessed a liking for women's things and I'm exploiting it. You like it, don't you?"

"Yes madam," Gerald replied, curtsying again. "Shall I do tea now, madam?"

"Yes," Diane said, and he left the room.

"Honestly, Diane." Kate held out her hands. "I don't know where you get them from."

"He came to me, after I'd given a talk. We dated a couple of times and when he let me put him in makeup, I decided I could use him. Despite appearances, he's fun when we're alone."

"I always knew you understood the importance of fun."

"Not only fun, but trust funds too. He has a great one, with full powers which he's kindly assigned to me, access unrestricted. We can't touch the capital, but the income is fabulous. I've become his trust chairman. There's irony. Who'd have guessed that my accountancy qualification would ever be useful?"

"Is he a lesbian? I mean, if that could happen."

"Of course not. He's straight, but dresses female for me," Diane replied. "It's a bit like having a best girlfriend, so gentle, but with a penis when I need one."

"How does that work?"

"I don't know but it works for me, and he does what he's told. He's going blonde when his hair's a little longer, then he's getting implants."

"Isn't that taking it too far?"

"I don't think so," Diane said. "I always fantasised about having a male wife to cook and clean, and to look pretty for me. He came along, and with a little coaxing he's turning out rather well."

"But he's still a he?" Kate said.

"When we're finished he won't look like a he, however hard he tries, but the important bits will still be working."

"Does he know that?"

"I'm sure he does."

"Gosh. Does he want a job at the show bar when he's complete?" Kate almost begged.

"I'll tell him that's what he's going to do," Diane replied. "It's no good giving him choices. There's got to be one person in charge of any relationship and it's always me."

“We really need him,” Kate admitted.

All you have to do is tell me where and when. I’ve decided he’s going to be outrageously glamorous anyway, so he might as well be a show-off in a show bar.” Diane laughed at her joke.

* * * * *

Caspar hated his name. “It’s nasty and sounds brutal,” he told his stepfather. “I don’t know why anyone would give their child that name.”

“Maybe your father didn’t like you either. Did you ever think of that?”

“My mother loved me.” Caspar held back the tears. “I wish she was still alive.”

“But she isn’t. And the sooner you’re able to look after yourself, you’re on your own.”

Caspar went to his room. “There’s no point in having another row,” he told himself. “It’s better to dig an escape tunnel. I can’t stay here.”

He knew he was different from about five years old. He never wanted the rough and tumble, the toy guns, or the bruises he inevitable got from ball games.

“You’re just like a girl,” they’d tell him. He said nothing but deep inside his heart, he would agree.

It wasn’t too bad at his first school. The teachers looked after the children and seemed to take special care of him; as he grew older, he knew he identified with the girls more and more. He joined their games and learned their special language. He wondered if he was really one of them.

High school got harder and harder. He stayed with the girls but the boys used him as a punching bag, and worse when he was older. He was beaten and used brutally until he gave in and let them use him for their sexual fantasies. It was easier to suck a cock than be beaten for refusing.

The more he gave in, the more he was expected to do. The girls sympathised with him, but couldn't save him. The boys were unspeakably cruel.

After his mother died and he was left with a stepfather who hated him, his thoughts turned to escaping. The staying factor was that he didn't know how.

It all came to a head one Saturday night. His stepfather came home more than a little over-served from the bar.

"Come down here, you little fag," he shouted up the stairs. "I've heard what you do for the jocks; you can come and do it for me."

Caspar felt a tear of terror rising in his eyes but then a new resolve shimmered through him. "I'm going," he resolved.

He collected all the money he had concealed in his room. It didn't amount to much, but it was a start. He stuffed what clothes he had into a holdall and grabbed his coat.

"Get down here," came a bellow from below.

"I'm coming," he said sweetly. "I'm a bit embarrassed, can you put the light out and get ready with your pants down?"

"Hurry up." The voice came from the living room as Caspar crept to the top of the stairs and started down.

Taking a deep breath, Caspar hurled himself down the remaining steps, struggled with the lock on the front door, and hurried out into the night. He heard his stepfather shouting and guessed he fell as he struggled to pull his pants up.

Caspar ran into the night, and ran and ran until he had no breath left. "What do I do now? I can't go back ever."

He walked the back roads, heading for the freight yards, a half-formed plan to hide and hitch a lift anywhere.

* * * * *

Left alone, Harper explored the theatre. In front of the bar was an admission desk that looked disused and double doors which would open to the street. Posters, mainly home-made, advertised a few gigs. A price list and menu – drinks and burgers only – was pinned to the doors. He walked back through the main area, over the stage and began to explore the backstage areas.

“This must have been quite a place when it was new,” he thought to himself. “These dressing rooms were designed for quite a cast.”

He saw rooms with bright lights and mirrors on the wall, a counter and hanging space. Two were bigger than the others; he chose one of them with a full-length couch and bathroom to be his temporary home. He left his rucksack there and went to explore further.

The old wardrobe room was obvious. A sewing machine, a long table and an ironing board were still there. Racks of clothes under dust sheets were pushed against one wall.

Small dressing rooms held packing case after packing case; big ones, small ones, others like huge cabin trunks. Some had labels with faded names and addresses of theater companies which must have passed through. Where there were dates, none were more recent than ten years ago.

“I wonder what these can be,” Harper asked himself, trying the fasteners on one of the more accessible cases.

“Whatever they are, they’ve got good locks,” he decided after trying several without success.

He switched on the lights, nothing happened. The bulb remained unlit and in the fading light there was little to do. He walked back to his chosen room, ate a few biscuits from his rucksack and settled down for a long and dreamless sleep.

* * * * *

Although he wasn't a professional piano tuner, he had a good ear and an electronic tuner. The piano had to sound better. A visit to the local auto shop produced a wrench that could double as a tuning key. Several hours later, it was making a sound nearer to the norm.

"Hey Harper, when are you going to start the rehearsals?" Jasper returned from re-stocking the bar. "I'm tired of that one-note samba you're playing. The customers will be coming in on Thursday. You got to have something ready for them. What am I paying you for?"

"You're not paying me, remember?" Harper replied. "And without tuning, whatever I do isn't going to sound great."

"You sounded good to me when I hired you."

"You must have cloth ears," Harper replied. "I was in tune, but the piano was nowhere near."

"Okay, you win, but please make sure you're ready. I've been telling people you can do the good old standards and play a good soft lounge jazz." Jasper coughed with the exertion of lifting another crate of beer. "They'll like the change from those noisy bands."

"And you'll probably get an easier class of customer too."

"As long as they spend, I don't care."

Harper sat at the keyboard and started to play. 'Autumn Leaves' was followed by 'You've Got a Friend' with rippling chords as he changed keys be-

tween the songs. He paused, thinking what to play next.

"That's really good." Jasper clapped. "Did anyone ever tell you you sound like a girl? You sing much higher than you talk."

"I have been told that before," Harper admitted. "I try to sing lower. I even tried to sing like Tom Waites but it doesn't work. The voice goes where it's comfortable."

"I still get the image of the slinky black dress when I close my eyes and listen." Jasper came round to the front of the hall. "Did you ever try that?"

"What do you mean?"

"The dress and all," Jasper replied. "I bet you could look real good and get better tips too."

"Oh sure. I could grow a pair and strip for an encore," Harper scoffed. "Don't be silly. It would be a disaster."

"Okay, only sayin', that's all." Jasper turned and left him to his rehearsal.

Harper ran through a few more standards, a few old popular hits, and tried a bit of country too. "I'm going to have to study a few more lyrics," he told himself as he hummed where the words failed.

* * * * *

Casper woke to the sun shining into the bushes where he had spent the night. There was a bustle around the freight yard with wagons and trailers being hitched and loaded; tractors pulling containers here and there. He edged closer and, taking a chance, ran up to a container, hauled himself in, and hid behind the pallets. An hour or so later, the doors slammed shut and the motion told him that he was on his way.

"You can come out now, before I send the dog in to get you," a voice called after the truck had stopped and the door was opened.

Casper sighed. "Okay, please don't hurt me," he called as he stood and picked up his holdall.

"You're only a kid," the trucker said when he emerged.

"Where's the dog?" Casper asked, blinking in the light.

"There's no dog, but it got you moving. I saw you sneaking in before I set off," the trucker said. "They call me Jock. I figure you owe me some explanation."

"I'll tell you over breakfast," Casper said. He held out his hand to shake. "I'm Cas... Casey."

"Is that a boy Casey or a girl Casey?" Jock asked, taking his hand.

"Can't you tell?" It was as if a light bulb was suddenly turned on in his head. "I'm a girl Casey."

Casey told his story over breakfast. "Are you going to turn me in?" he asked afterwards.

"No," Jock replied. "You want to take your chance, and I don't mind the company. I'll drop you before I get to my next depot. I can't get caught with anyone in the cab there."

"That's so good," Casey replied.

'If I'm going to be a girl Casey, I'd better sound like one,' he thought.

The day passed easily if monotonously as the rhythm of the wheels rolled them across state lines and past strip malls. They talked and Casey found himself revealing more than he intended. After dinner in a truck stop, they went back to the cab and parked round the back.

"You're not really a girl, are you?" Jock asked.

“No.” Casey started to shake with fear.

“I guessed from all you told me,” Jock said. “I guess you’ve decided that you’re going to be one.”

“I know what to do, if you want me to get into the bunk with you.” Casey tried to sound more confident than he felt.

* * * * *

“Gary, we need some more advertising,” Kate paused in her work, clearing and cleaning the show bar. “So far all we have is Diane agreeing to send Gerald over when she’s finished changing him.”

“I already thought of that,” Gary replied. “I still have some contacts. There’s a press release already gone out, and I’ve arranged with a couple of kids from the high school to work Facebook for us. They’re going to get us onto every page they can find that might be relevant to the Review.”

“High schoolers?” Kate raised an eyebrow. “They’re too young, we’ll get into trouble.”

“Relax. These are computer age kids; they know more about the internet than we’ll ever know,” Gary shrugged.

“Are we paying them?” Kate asked.

“Not as such.” Gary hesitated. “We’ve no money for that. I promised they’d get a look in at the shows when we’re up and running.”

“But they’re underage.”

“I thought of that too,” Gary replied. “I put them on the cleaning rotation so they can stand about and watch the rehearsals. here won’t be a problem.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“It’s the best I could do, bearing in mind that we’ve no money,” Gary said. “I’ve been hearing from agents

wanting us to pay their acts, but the money they want is too much of a risk.”

“Agreed, we have to keep costs down,” Kate replied. “I only hope we can attract girls who won’t put the customers off their drink.”

“I promise we won’t be hiring any Two Ton Tessies. Even if I have to put on a dress myself.”

* * * * *

He left the piano feeling satisfied, both that it sounded better, and that he had refreshed enough songs in his mind to be able to play for an hour or more.

Remembering his explorations of the previous evening, Harper went in search of replacement light bulbs and worked his way through the back of the theatre, changing and checking that all were working. It was dusty work and his nose and eyes were irritated as he worked.

He searched again and found a cupboard that didn’t appear to have been opened in years. A faded overall with a flower pattern hung on a hook behind the door. There was an old vacuum cleaner, a bucket with some cloths, and a liquid cleaner inside.

“So I’m singing for tips, waiting for minimum. I wonder if I could get paid for cleaning as well?” he wondered as he carried his finds into the first storeroom.

He sneezed. “his is awful.” He rubbed his eyes as they watered.

A couple of hours’ hard work and the room looked reasonably clean. He decided to do the same with the other storeroom. He reasoned that as he was so dirty and sweaty, he might as well do it all at once.

“I’m pleased you took my advice,” Jasper laughed as Harper carried the equipment back. “It looks good.”

"I have no idea what you're talking about." Harper was too tired to be polite.

"The makeup and the dress," Jasper replied. "You forgot the heels."

"I still have no idea..." Harper began, but then looked in the mirror behind the bar.

"See what I mean?" Jasper pointed.

Harper looked again. His eyes were ringed with black from the dust and dirt he'd been moving. The overall hung loosely over his thin frame. His hair hung lankly over his ears; one side stuck to his chin with sweat and the other side was tucked behind his ear.

"You think I've dressed like this deliberately?" Harper asked. "I haven't and I'm not going to do the slinky dress. This is what it looks like to be cleaning out your filthy backstage for an afternoon."

* * * * *

Casey squeezed himself into the tiny sleeping platform over the cab, stubbing his toe as he climbed. Jock was already there, lying on his back. Casey knew he was naked under the thin sheet. He swallowed hard to suppress his fear, and tried to think positively.

"Is this your first time?" Jock asked.

"No," Casey replied truthfully. "It's the first time I've wanted to do it. Before, I was always threatened or beaten. They didn't like me much at high school."

"This is the real world," Jock said. "There are a lot worse things out there."

"It can't be worse than my stepfather." Casey shuddered at the memory as he got under the sheet and felt Jock's skin next to his own.

He reached down and felt the hair under his fingers as they moved towards Jock's erection. His fingers gently scraped upwards and he heard Jock gasp softly. His fingers wrapped around the shaft and he started to massage the skin, softly at first, then gripping more firmly.

He knew what he had to do next and began to crouch, moving his head downwards, running his tongue down Jock's chest as he did so. His hand ran round the tip of Jock's erection, then suppressing his feelings of doubt, he moved his head further down. The scent of Jock's body was heavy, sweat mixed with a lingering remnant from the last shower he'd taken.

Casey ran his tongue around the tip a few times. He took a deep breath and allowed the head to enter his mouth. His tongue flicked across it as he released it again. Moving into a better position, he tried again, sucking the shaft deeper into his mouth, sucking and moving up and down. His hand massaged the shaft below where his lips could reach.

Casey worked up a rhythm, sucking and breathing, squeezing and massaging. He guessed he was doing it right from the way Jock sighed and gently rubbed the back of his head.

Casey felt stiffening. He knew what was coming and braced himself. "Don't gag." Those were the words running through his mind. "Don't gag."

A flashback to the last beating at school when they'd taken him behind the sports hall and held him on his knees; slaps around his ears, punches in the kidneys, made sure he'd do what they wanted. When he spit it out, they rubbed his face into the mess.

The feel of the liquid hitting the back of his throat wasn't as awful as he'd feared. Maybe school had prepared him for this. It ran down the back of his throat; warm, salty, yet with a taste he could take now. He felt it subsiding and bent up, leaving hold for the shaft. He wiped his chin where it was wet and sat back.

"I guess you've earned your ride," Jock said as Casey lay back beside him. "I have to drop you off somewhere tomorrow."

"Could I buy some clothes and change in the cab before you do?" Casey asked.

"There's a supermarket beside the next truck stop. You can get most things there, then you have to get out at the next town. It's not the big city, but it's as far as I dare take you."

* * * * *

"I'm Gretchen," the girl said when they met on Thursday evening. "You must be Harper. I'm the waitress and I'm really pleased to meet you. It's been too much work for me on my own."

"I'm the cabaret," Harper replied. "I'm only the waiter for part of the shift."

"All but an hour, Jasper says," Gretchen replied. "Not that I mind. If I'm on my own, I'll get all the tips. I hope you keep them in the place and they spend more."

"I'll do my best," Harper replied. "I need them to stay too. I need all the money I can get in my tip jar."

"Okay, here's how we'll divide the room when we're both working it," Gretchen indicated a fair split of the tables. "I've a good feeling about this. I'm going to get changed. Jasper wants us in all black, with a clean white apron."

"He never said anything," Harper replied.

"Don't worry, you've got black jeans, all you need is a T-shirt and the apron. I'm sure there are a few behind the bar." Gretchen leaned over the counter and pulled out a bundle. "They're a little short, more for me than for a barman, but it's all we've got."

"They're a bit feminine," Harper started to protest.

"They're all we've got for today. You can buy your own tomorrow, if you get paid," she replied. "You'll need the pocket for bottle opener, corkscrew and change."

She winked and walked out back. She returned with her dark hair piled up untidily, red lips and very black eye makeup. Her dress was very short and flared; her heels were higher than he'd ever seen, but she walked so gracefully across the floor, hips swaying as she did so.

The first customers arrived, greeting her by name. They took their places as if the seats had their names on the backs.

"I've got help tonight," Gretchen indicated him.

They looked briefly, as if they had no interest. The jukebox started, a few more came in, and trade started slowly.

"They're a bit lively tonight," Gretchen said as the two stood together at the bar an hour later, waiting for Jasper to fill their orders.

"I think you're busier than I am."

"That's because they know me. I know their names, their wives and girlfriends. You'll get there, but it takes time for a new face to fit around here."

Jasper handed over the bar to an elderly woman. He wondered if this was Mrs. Jasper but didn't ask. He heard his name over the public address as Jasper almost shouted into a microphone, which hissed in protest. He walked to the piano to no applause, and began to play.

Fly Me to the Moon was first up, followed by some familiar standards. The background noise quietened a little, which meant someone was listening. It was a good sign and he hoped his tip jar was reflecting it. He upped the tempo, and played a few Billy Joel numbers.

Before he knew it, Jasper was tapping him on the shoulder. "Time's up," he said, before taking the microphone and announcing the end of the show.

There was a polite ripple of applause as Harper left the stage. He recovered his apron and carried on serving as the jukebox got louder, and the customers dwindled away.

"You sounded really good," Gretchen told him afterwards. "You sing really high though. I thought some girl had come in to sing. Some of the regulars were paying attention too. That's more than they do for most of the bands that come here."

Friday and Saturday night followed. It seemed that Harper never got a chance to rest between waiting on the tables and the piano. He was easier now and allowed his fingers to take their own course as syncopation and improvisation seemed to tumble from his instinct to the keys.

"Can you play for Sunday lunch next week?" Jasper asked. "It's been requested." He nodded towards a table at the back.

"Who are they?" Harper asked.

"Better not to ask," Jasper told him. "They own most of everything round here and they get what they want, including you on Sunday."

"Are they paying?" Harper said.

"If you're good, they'll let you stay for a while." Jasper nodded meaningfully.

* * * * *

Kate and Gary took a night off. A meal in a fancy restaurant was planned, then a nightcap in a bar they knew, before taking a cab home.

It didn't happen quite like that. On the way to the bar, the noise of an upstairs club blared out over the street. Kate looked at the posters outside and pulled



Gary to the entrance. The doorman looked them up and down before admitting them.

It was noisy and badly lit. The music blared too loudly and when they got into position, they could see a drag queen cavorting to the record. It wasn't a good drag queen. Too large and too masculine to approach anything feminine, but the patrons handed her bills. She stuffed them into her bra, which already threatened to burst under the weight of her implants.

"Not good," Gary shouted above the noise. "Let's go."

"Buy me a drink," Kate said. "I want to see the competition for the show bar."

"If I must." Gary signalled a waitress dressed like a bunny girl who sashayed across to their table, and ordered.

"She could have shaved," he whispered to Kate after their drinks were delivered. "And I think I bought shares in the place, with the price of these drinks."

"Think of it as research," Kate replied.

The recording finished and a quieter one followed. The next drag queen slinked rather than walked onto the stage. Her hair was an exaggerated blonde wig, which curled down over the shoulders. She placed a glitter-covered bucket on the edge of the stage, pulled a twenty out of her cleavage and placed it instructively inside.

She was slim and moved elegantly on oversized heels. Her legs were shapely under a flared skirt which rose as she swirled the hem. She moved slowly to the beat, reaching to the standing audience in front of the stage, never touching and never allowing anyone to touch her.

"She's good," Kate almost shouted to make herself heard.

"Better than the rest," Gary said grudgingly.

Her cleavage was generous and obviously a false breastplate. The chunky necklace she wore did a poor job of hiding the join where it met the neck. She mimed well, with a sneer. She seemed to regard the audience with contempt.

They loved it and the bucket filled with notes. Kate took a business card from her bag, wrapped a fifty around it, and dropped it inside.

“We could use her,” she said.

The music changed. The next act was another oversized performer. They left.

* * * * *

“Well, how did your first week go?” Gretchen asked, still counting out her tips for the week.

“Not as good as yours,” Harper replied, pointing to the money he had already counted.

“Okay, but you don’t have to wear a short skirt, get your ass felt and keep smiling,” she said. “Sometimes I think it’s conscience money, but then I know they don’t have one.”

“Is it worth it?” he asked.

“Sure is.” Gretchen put the cash into her purse. “It’s the only job in town that pays above minimum wage.”

“Maybe they’ll get more into the music,” Harper said. “That might get me better tips.”

“Maybe you should get a short skirt, you’d be making lots more than you did,” Gretchen laughed as she waved and walked to her car. “Tits and ass never fail.”

“She’s right,” Jasper said, handing him a few dollars. “You should try it. Maybe for Sunday lunch?” he asked.

* * * * *

As Harper was taking a deep breath and enjoying a break after the weekend, Craig was wondering if he'd been a little hasty. After all, what Kate and Gary had taken on was nothing if not brave.

The old show bar had been a place he'd enjoyed until recently when it had turned from a safe place into a rough house. That's why it had been closed by the County and sold off. If it could be brought back into use, it could be fun.

"But do I want to be part of it again?" he asked himself as he reached for his cell phone and called Kate.

"Hi, Craig," she replied cheerfully. "I'm sorry if I upset you."

"It's okay." Craig took a deep breath. "I think I was hasty. I thought I'd got past all that but you've made me think about how much I used to enjoy dressing up and being someone else."

"You used to be such a perfect girl." Kate detected that he could be persuaded back, and encouraged him to talk more. "I loved the way you'd be Dotty, the blonde bimbo one day and then you'd be Lavinia, the professor of women's studies, the next time I saw you."

"Those were the days," Craig agreed. "I haven't been either of them for over a year. I used to be able to slip into either character as soon as the wig was on."

"You could always handle the audience too." Kate wanted to keep him talking. "It's a rare talent to be able to improvise so well."

"It didn't seem difficult," Craig replied. "It wasn't me anyway. The girls took over as soon as I was out there."

"I loved the way you could stay in character too." Kate really wanted him to feel good about returning to perform. "It was amazing to be with you."

"It was fun," he agreed. "It's because I decided to move on. I thought being a serious actor was going to be easier and more respectable."

"Surely having an audience is good too."

"Of course, and I didn't do too well as a serious actor. Too many auditions and too few callbacks. Perhaps being what I am should be enough."

"We'd love to have you back," Kate insisted. "Why not do a couple of days and see how you feel?"

"You've persuaded me." Craig knew he was going to agree when he'd picked up the phone to call. Now he felt good once he had done it. "I'll be in touch."

"We're only opening the bar on weekends, Friday to Sunday," Kate said. "Any other time you want anything, call me."

* * * * *

Craig had lived alone most of his life since Mother had died a few years back. He drove out to the small frame house he'd inherited and, taking a deep breath, he opened a room which had remained closed for the past year since he'd metaphorically hung up his heels.

"I wonder what Dotty would look like today," he thought, peering into the mirror. "That laser treatment was worth it." He felt his smooth chin, and stared critically to see if there was any moustache showing. "Smooth as a girl," he laughed to himself.

Drawing the blinds, he opened the closets and inspected his wardrobe. As Dotty and Lavinia, he'd divided them into separate areas. Their clothes and shoes, their makeup and wigs were carefully stored. They may have been two sisters as he played with their images, but they never shared anything.

"You're both a bit behind fashion," he said when he inspected their clothes. "Not *too* bad though."

He took out Dotty's favorite dress and held it against his slim figure. "You're not too out of date with this," he decided.

"Lavinia always was a bit conservative and behind fashion," he thought as he turned to the other section of the closet. "She'd look okay quite easily."

He opened another cabinet and looked at the wigs on stands staring blankly out as if blinking in the light. "You need a good hairdresser, both of you," he chided them as if they were able to hear.

He walked through to his tiny office and turned on the computer. A few favorite websites were stored. He placed a few orders to update his makeup case, then checked to see if places he'd not used for a year were still open.

He pulled his phone from the back pocket of his jeans, and made a call. "Are you still able to style wigs?" he asked, then listened. "I've some to drop off in the morning. I want them re-styled, and set firm. I'll go through styles with you in the morning when I drop them off." He gave his thanks and ended the call.

"It seems as if I've made a decision," he said to himself. "Maybe Kate knew I would."

He reached for his phone again, and fingered down the contacts.

"Can I make an appointment?" he asked. "It's Craig, err, Dotty." He listened. "No, I've been away for a while. Can you fit me in on Friday, please?" He waited for a reply. "Yes, that's great, last customer like I always used to be. I'll see you then."

He gathered the wigs carefully, and placed them in two special cases. He loaded them in his car, locked the house, and set off.

* * * * *

Casey hurried round the super store. He knew his chest was 36 and waist 28. He studied the size charts and the confusing array of clothes around him. He selected a bra and panties, matching in a deep rose colour. Black knee-high stockings went into his basket. His hands felt the fabric of the dresses.

“Soon,” he promised himself, and walked over to the jeans section.

This was easier. He took two pairs; one said it was skinny, the other was boot cut. Two T-shirts and an over shirt followed, with a furry collared zip jacket. He crossed to the shoe section and sat to try some ballet flats, which fit him fine. A cheap pair of boots with a chunky heel, and he was done there.

From the toiletries aisle, he picked a body spray and some eye makeup pencils, then black mascara and a pale gloss lipstick. He looked through the rest of the displays, checked his cash, and decided against anything more.

“How do I get through the checkout and explain all this?” he thought.

He walked up to the cashier and loaded his selections onto the conveyor belt, as the customer in front was being dealt with. He closed his eyes in silent prayer and it became his turn.

“Cash or card?” the cashier asked him, totally uninterested in what he had bought.

Casey handed over the cash, bagged his purchases, and went out to re-join the truck.

He changed clothes as the truck returned to the freeway. If anyone was watching, he didn't care. He struggled into his first bra and felt the lightness of the panties. The skinny jeans hugged his legs from calf through hips to waist, and the boots slipped easily over the stockings. The powder blue T-shirt

showed the outline of his bra, even though there was nothing in the cups.

"They'll think I'm underdeveloped," he thought, making a ball out of some tissues to make it look as if there was something there, no matter how small.

He packed his old clothes and shoes into the plastic bag in which he'd carried his new ones. "Goodbye to Casper," he thought. "And goodbye to the old life."

"Here's where you get out," Jock said, pulling to the side of the road on the approach to a small town centre.

"Thanks for everything," Casey replied, climbing down from the cab. "Please can you throw away the stuff I've left?"

Casey stood and looked round as the rig pulled away. "I'm a girl now." The thought hit hard. "Everything I had is gone. This is a new beginning."

A feeling of panic came suddenly. He forced himself to walk away from the road and into the town. He pulled his cell phone from the bottom of his rucksack.

"If I switch it on, will they be able to track me?" he wondered. "But no one will be bothered anyway, and I'm on the main road through so it won't reveal much."

He clicked through to Facebook. No one seemed to have missed him, and he thumbed through a few favorite pages.

"The Go Girl, No Girl Review." He saw the headline and read on. He clicked a link and then looked at Google Maps. "It's only about fifty miles away. I'll head there. They can only tell me to get lost."

He turned back to the highway, turned off the phone, and stuck out his thumb.

* * * * *

Monday was quite a relief for Harper. The weekend was over and he planned to try out some new songs, and tune the piano. He ran through the music and it felt as if it easily fitted his fingers once again. The only study was to get the words into his mind. The image of playing without the music in front of him was all important.

Rehearsal finished for the day, he made a start on clearing the storerooms. Now that they were lit, he could work into the evening. He hauled the cases and boxes down from their stacks and looked for keys. There were none, but it didn't matter. He knew how to pick the locks. Old as they were, with a little patience and a lot of penetrating oil, he had no doubt that they would open.

He waited for the oil to seep through the aged locks, then with a fine pick he started opening lock after lock, resisting the temptation to open the cases until all were ready.

He heaved the first into a space and sneezed as the dust irritated his nose. "What have we here?" He started to unpack. "Aladdin's lamp perhaps, a scimitar, it looks like some more props from an old production." He looked at a stuffed parrot. "Probably junk," he surmised.

The next case held some old fashioned military uniforms. "The Ruritanian Guard, perhaps?" He rummaged to the bottom and pulled out imitation guns in crackling leather holsters that split with age when he touched them.

"Have you found any antiques?" Jasper poked his head round the door.

"There's a lot of rubbish," Harper replied. "What do you want me to do with it all?"

"If it's no use and you can't sell it, put it in the dumpster out back." Jasper sneezed and sneezed

again. "If you get through it all, you can sell anything worth it and keep the money."

"That's decent of you," Harper said sarcastically.

"No it's not." Jasper wiped his eyes. "I let them store it a couple of years ago; 'for a couple of weeks,' they said. Now I don't think they're coming back and you might as well clear the space."

"It's a lot of things for eBay." Harper waved his arms round the cases.

"I don't care what you do as long as the space gets cleared," Jasper said. "If it doesn't go, it'll attract mice and who knows what else."

Harper worked on, opening case after case. More props and uniforms, oriental costumes and Japanese robes appeared, all dusty and some stale and tattered. The last few which had been stored underneath all the others seemed to have come from a different source.

"Dresses and ball gowns." Harper lifted them reverently and laid them aside. "I wonder if Gretchen might like any of these," He thought. "These look more modern and less like old theater pieces. It's like someone's packed up all their clothes to move and forgotten them. And this case is full of shoes in boxes. Whoever she was, she had size 11 feet. That's my size too."

The last case was a real jumble. There was a huge box of cosmetics, another of accessories of all kinds. The scents were really feminine and perhaps a bit overpowering. The paste and costume jewellery ranged from the tasteful to the bizarre and really eccentric.

"I wonder if this is what Jasper would like me to wear." He held a long black silk gown against his body and twirled, watching the skirt flare out. "Tits and ass,' Gretchen said. But would they improve my tip jar if they knew it was me showing them?"

He packed up for the night, intending to talk to Gretchen about it all when she came back.

* * * * *

Craig collected his wigs from the hairdresser. "Are you going back to performing?" the woman asked. "They're such good quality and easy to work. I've updated the styles like you said. The blondes are fun; the darker ones are more formal and serious, with one exception."

"I thought they were all similar." Craig handed over the dollars. "Did I mix something up?"

"No, but there was a longer one and I couldn't resist finishing it a bit more full," she said. "It's the last one in the case, with the net protecting it."

"I'm sure it'll be fine," Craig replied. He loaded the car and drove back home.

Once there, he couldn't wait. The urge to dress again was burning. He wanted to assure himself that he could still do it after a year of abstaining. He showered and saved his legs, then with mounting excitement, he began to dress.

The bra around his chest felt good and the weight on his shoulders when he dropped breast forms into the cups sent a shiver through him. He felt the grip of the gaffe as he tucked inside it, then panties and tights followed.

"I haven't lost it," he mused as he saw himself in the mirror. He struck a pose and held it, remembering how it felt to play the girl's part. With a deep sigh, he stood, thinking whether he wanted to carry on, yet at the same time, knowing that he couldn't stop.

"Lenses," he decided. "I think I left them in the bathroom cabinet. I wonder if my eyes will still tolerate them."

He washed his hands carefully and with a rising sense of excitement, looked inside the case. "I didn't

remember these properly,” he thought. “Blue circle lenses in an almost natural colour to look so bright and appealing. I bought them specially to be seduced.”

He slipped the first one in, blinked and held still whilst his eye filled with tears. He blinked again and held the second poised on the tip of his finger, then slipped it in too.

“They look better than I remember.” He sat back from the mirror, taking time for his eyes to settle. And then he started to do his makeup. He knew what to do; contouring carefully and taking his time.

“I really missed this,” he thought as his fingers worked their old familiar magic.

He loved the process of makeup. Changing a dull and uninteresting male face into an attractive female one was a fascination which had got him into performance in the first place. The fact that he felt more comfortable as a girl had taken him by surprise at first, but now it was part of his life.

He’d tried to overcome this desire. He’d tried hard and struggled. The temptation, when it came, provoked him into harsh words to Kate, which he now regretted.

He decided on smoky eyes with neat lashes, contrasting with paler lipstick and carefully curved brows. As he worked, he realized that none of his skills had left him, and a lightness of feeling grew as the maleness disappeared.

Dressing had been quick and easy; the simple black dress he’d paid so much for, and then the heels; five inches and sleek. Only one thing remained as he pulled the wig cap over his sparse hair.

“I remember this one.” He looked for a few moments as if daring himself to put it on. “It’s Lavinia’s favourite.”

He took the longest wig from the case and removed the net. He fluffed it out and then bent to fit it into

place. With a toss of his head, the hair fell over his shoulders. He felt the old familiar excitement as he looked in the mirror. With practiced skill, he applied spirit gum to the lace front, then patted the wig securely into place.

“Lavinia’s here for sure, I think,” he said with approval. “All dressed up and nowhere to go.”

He reached for his tablet and went to Facebook. ‘The Go Girl, No Girl Review’ he read.

“I’m going to call them. I think Kate was right, I was hasty.”

* * * * *

Harper’s next rehearsal went like a breeze. The words had slipped into his mind and followed the chords without hesitation. He upped the tempo and started to swing, then rattled off a few old rock and roll standards just because he could.

He finished with a run right across the keyboard and was startled by whoops and cheers from the back of the bar.

“You have to do that on Saturday.” Gretchen applauded. “I’ve come to look through the dresses and stuff you told me about.”

“Sure you have to sing those numbers. I insist.” Jasper added. “But can’t you sing lower? I keep imagining a girl up there, then I get real disappointed when I see it’s only you.”

“What do you want me to do?” Harper said sarcastically. “I can’t grow a pair overnight.”

“Maybe you could buy some.” Jasper walked out laughing at his own joke.

“Not on the money you’re paying me,” Harper shouted to his back.

"But maybe you could pad a pair out," Gretchen said thoughtfully.

"Don't be silly," Harper replied. "How could I change from waiting tables to being a showgirl behind the piano?"

"Don't be a waiter, be a waitress. Tits and ass will get you anywhere." Gretchen wagged a finger under his nose. "It's the way to bigger tips."

"And do I have to get my ass pinched as well?" He snapped back.

"If you squeal, it embarrasses even these guys in our audience. They tip to say they're sorry, and if they don't, then I spill some of their beer over them. They soon learn."

"Seriously, do you think I could get away with it?" Harper asked.

"You don't have to get away with it." Gretchen held his chin and turned his head from left to right. "Get the dress. You can pad the figure. A bit of confidence will take you a long way."

"But I'm still going to look like a boy in a dress," Harper protested. "They'll laugh at me, they won't listen and I can't see the tips flowing."

"You're being negative," she told him. "Try it, but take it seriously. Don't be a boy in a dress, be a woman. Be feminine. Exaggerate the image and make them accept it."

"I don't know how I could do that."

"It's easy. If I can be a woman, dumb as people think I am, then I'm sure you could be one too," Gretchen said.

"But you were born to be a woman."

"Maybe you were too." Gretchen laughed at the thought. "With a bit of study, and a lot of enthusiasm,

you could be too. You're half way there. Your singing voice could fool anyone.'

'I'll think about it.' Harper said.

'Don't think. Do it.' Gretchen replied. "Now is the time. The audience has seen you once or twice. Most of them weren't listening or looking carefully."

"Gee, thanks," Harper replied.

"They'll look again if it's a girl up there, especially if she looks the part," Gretchen said. "They'll look and remember. Think about it."

She blew him a kiss and went to look at the dresses out back.

"I can help you, if you'd let me." Gretchen fingered the black silk dress. "This would look fabulous. Dark hair, long dangling earrings, dark eyes, and Jasper may even give you a raise."

"As long as that's all he wants to give me," Harper said.

"Seriously, I'm good with makeup, and there are enough cosmetics in those old packing cases."

"Okay, maybe try it out next week, when the bar's closed." Harper gave in to her enthusiasm. "No promises."

* * * * *

Gerald had learned that to please Diane, he had to do what he was told. He didn't mind. Life was exciting and he was turned on by the challenge of both being constantly embarrassed, and not allowing anyone to notice that he felt so.

"You like being turned into my plaything," she had told him when their relationship was starting, and sure enough, each challenge, each additional humiliation, fed into his need to serve her. He tried so hard to appear like a normal woman, but she wouldn't al-

low it to be perfect. He had always to be a man dressed up.

“May I ask what Kate was talking about, madam?” he asked. “She mentioned a show bar.”

“She did, Gerald,” Diane replied, holding out her glass for him to replenish. “She wants some female impersonators to take part in their show.”

“And could I be part of the plans?” he asked.

“I think you may,” Diane replied. “Of course, your femininity will have to be improved before you’re good enough. The audience must wonder, but never really know.”

“I think I may enjoy that, madam, if you would allow it.”

“It rather appeals to me as well,” Diane replied. “I may advance your changes. I do like the idea of giving you real breasts and making them impossible for you to hide, even if I chose to dress you as a man.”

“You wouldn’t do that, madam, please.” Gerald felt a pang of fear run up his spine. “I don’t mind being humiliated as a girl, but please don’t make me dress as a man with breasts.”

“I’m not sure I get the difference,” Diane replied. “But I have no plans for you to become male again.”

“Thank you, madam.”

* * * * *

“Hi girls, I’m your five o’clock appointment.” Lavinia waited at the reception desk.

He took a deep breath in. The familiar scents of the nail salon filled his senses, reminding him of how he’d enjoyed it all so much.

“We haven’t seen you for ages,” the technician said. “You look like a million bucks.”

"I haven't been around," Lavinia stated without explanation. "I decided to come back, and pick up more or less where I left off."

"We're pleased to see you," the tech replied. "Your usual, or have you decided to change?"

"I think something conservative for today. French manicure, understated and medium-length please."

"Do you prefer gel or acrylic?"

"I think gel is more comfortable," Lavinia replied.

He sat and waited, then sat and watched as the nails appeared on the ends of each finger. It was almost magic as they brushed into shape and grew against the forms on each finger. He felt a slight tightening under the lights as they hardened and a formerly familiar sequence of colour and topcoat sealed the finished product.

When all was finished, he checked his makeup and hair, catching sight of his once familiar nails as he did so. He turned, confident that he looked as female as any other girl in the street. He collected his car and drove to the show bar.

"Craig, is that you?" Gary blinked and looked again.

"It's Lavinia," he replied, modulating his voice to something approaching a feminine pitch.

He moved into the light. "I've come to say sorry to Kate," he purred. "I was a little rude and hasty when I left last time."

"You stormed out in a cloud of dust as I remember," Gary replied.

"I wasn't myself." Lavinia crossed the room towards him, her dark brown hair swinging in time with her hips, each heeled foot carefully placed in front of the other. "I'm usually a pussy cat, not a screaming bitch. I'm sorry."

"Apology accepted," Gary said. "I'm sure Kate will understand."

"I so wanted to see her. Please would you tell her that I'm available now?" he purred again, turned and blew a kiss as he left.

Gary found his phone and called Kate. "One of your wishes has been granted," he told her. "Lavinia's been by to say she's willing to work here."

"And I bet Dotty's not far behind," Kate laughed with delight. "That's good news."

* * * * *

Harper thought about what Gretchen had said. It made a bit of sense, so he followed her.

"I was thinking about what you said back there," he began. She looked at him, waiting for him to say more. "I mean about being a woman.., well, dressing as a woman. Do you think I could get away with it?"

"Why would you want to get away with it?' she asked"Let the audience play along with the image. You'd have more fun being obvious. Be a trannie, or a female impersonator. Don't say it out loud to the audience, but be whatever you want."

"You mean I *could* get away with it."

"You can be anything." She held a dress against him, the same black silk number he'd picked up before. "Dress and act the part. Put your mind to it. The power of being a woman is in having the right attitude."

"But attitude isn't going to increase my tips," he said.

"Okay attitude with heels, makeup and all the little things that girls do that men would never do."

"But surely that's too much to learn?" he asked.

"No it isn't, don't be negative. If you dress for the part, you'll find that you'll be acting and speaking the part too. You'll become feminine simply because you have to look your best. The dress, the hair and the body language will come together as you get into it."

"I don't have to kiss Jasper, do I?" They looked at each other. He kept a straight face and then they laughed together.

"Don't discount that you might want to kiss someone, but if it comes, let it happen," Gretchen replied. "Do whatever you're comfortable with."

"How come you know so much about all this?" he asked.

"I wasn't always a waitress," she replied. "I used to work in a theatre and in college, I did the dress and makeup for the theatre group. I was really stage struck, then I had to come back to help the family."

"Do you miss it all?"

"No, I have a little regret, but I'm taking over the family farm, which is what I always hoped would happen. My brothers didn't want to leave the city." Gretchen looked at him. "No more questions. Get into the dress and let's see what we can make of you."

* * * * *

"Is Kate here?" The boy looked nervously round the show bar. He was skinny and undersized.

"She'll be back soon," Gary said. "I'm her partner, can I help you?"

"She left her card the other night. I guess she wanted me to call her, but I thought a ride out this way might be better," the boy said. "I remember this place. Are you going to open it again?"

"We might, if we can get something together. That's what Kate's researching right now."

"I was performing, miming in a club,' the boy explained. "I found a fifty wrapped around her card."

"I remember," Gary replied. "We thought you had some talent. Kate hoped it might get you to call."

"I'm new at this. Dressing and miming is the closest I've got to a job. I always wanted to be a girl. I was seduced by the thrill of it all and my headmaster's son when I was away at boarding school."

"Did he, err..."

"I was very foolish, I know that now. It was good for a while, then when everyone knew, I was expelled from school, disowned at home, and ran away to join the circus. There wasn't any circus so I ended up doing drag."

"Kate probably wants you in our drag show," Gary replied. "This is a show bar, or it will be when we get it open again."

"I can do that. I want to move on. That place is too tawdry. I'll go down if I stay."

At that moment, Kate breezed in. "I recognise you; don't tell me, the blonde in the drag bar."

"Guilty. I'm Rowan." They shook hands.

"So how would you feel if there's a spot here?" Kate asked after they'd recapped the conversation.

"I'd love it," he replied. "But I haven't got much stuff to use. I need some costumes and things."

"We'd probably be providing some, and there's accommodation above the bar if you need it."

"Can I move in tomorrow? I could help clean up and tidy the place. I'm a good worker and I'd do it for food and somewhere to stay. I wouldn't ask, but I really want away from the club. It's awful, and I'm being forced into things I don't like. I'm not a prostitute."

"In that case, welcome on board," Kate said. "You can move in as soon as you're ready."

"So it looks like we have our first new girl," Gary said when Rowan had gone to look at the rooms upstairs.

"And our show director too," Kate reminded him. "Daniel called to say he'd be here by next weekend. You said Lavinia was with us."

"Pity that Lavinia and Dotty can't be onstage together," Gary said. "He's going to be with us but only as one at a time."

"Then I need to tell you about Gerald too," Kate replied. "He's Diane's latest project."

"So if we can find another couple of ladies, we'll be able to rehearse and open?" Kate asked.

"I can have the place ready to go when we have enough people to staff it," Gary replied. "We need some bar staff, and a waitress or two."

"We can ask the girls to double up on that," Kate said. "We can tell them it's only to get us started."

"Okay. if they agree," Gary replied. "All we need is some wet stock behind the bar, and we could be going anytime soon."

"I'll get on it."

* * * * *

Harper sorted through the dresses. He put a pile to one side, to be discarded if Gretchen thought they were past the point of rescue. The rest he sorted according to size and hung them on racks he found at the back of one of the storerooms.

"Not many of these are my size." Gretchen looked through them carefully when she arrived the following Thursday afternoon. "These on the other hand are *your* size. Have you tried any?"

"Of course not." Harper blushed. While it was true that he hadn't tried any, he'd looked at them very closely.

"With the proper underwear and a bit of padding, these would suit you fine," she said. "The little black number would make Jasper have an orgasm all by himself."

"It may, but I couldn't," Harper protested.

"If you couldn't, why did you put all these to one side? You knew they wouldn't fit me."

"They were good quality," he said lamely.

"Let's cut to the chase here," Gretchen said. "You decided these were the ones that would fit you. You guessed that I'd help you with the bits that you don't know about, and you guessed that you'd like to pretend to be a girl." She put her hands on her hips and demanded him to deny it all.

"Let's just pretend you're right," he said hesitantly. "Is that something you could do?"

"Yes, I can do that," she replied. "It's paint and padding. The right clothes, the right body language and you're there."

"I think I want to do it," Harper admitted. "I really need your help. If I'm singing and playing seriously, I don't want to look like some kind of bad joke."

"I'm sure we can change you into the sort of girl you'd love to be seen with," Gretchen said. "I understand what you mean. If the music is good, the vision that goes with it should be good as well."

"What do I have to do?" he asked.

"Get your ears pierced for a start," Gretchen said. "There's a hairdresser one block south. They'll do it while you wait."

"They'd have to do it while I wait," Harper laughed. "I couldn't leave my ears and collect them later."

"Don't be silly. I mean you don't need an appointment. Go on. Do it now."

Harper did as he was told.

* * * * *

Daniel arrived and looked 'round the theatre. He inspected the stage and the lighting, the curtains and the backdrops.

"Old and creaky, but it should all work," he decided. "The stage floor could do with some attention. There's a loose board and the color is uneven."

"I'll get onto it," Gary replied. "How is your accommodation?"

"I've moved in across the street," Daniel replied. "It's better to keep a bit of distance since they're all going to hate me when we get into rehearsal. I rented an apartment for a few weeks, renewable if it's worth staying."

"But we haven't got all the cast yet," Gary admitted. "Rowan and Craig are somewhere around; Gerald will be here whenever Kate asks, but we're still looking for a couple more."

"That should be enough to start," Daniel said. "The stage isn't big enough for a full extravaganza. Get the girls lined up for Monday noon. I want them to arrive in drag. Let's see how natural they can be before we start."

"One of them is living here," Gary said.

"OK, so tell him to get dressed, go downtown and walk round a couple of blocks first," Daniel replied. "I want these guys to be natural women before we start."

Gary called Craig and told him.

"Does he want Lavinia or Dotty?" Craig asked.

“He said natural, so Lavinia would be a better bet.”

“I guess you’re right.”

Rowan took the news with apparent delight. “I can do that,” he replied. “It’s great to walk ‘round as a woman and get all the stares.”

“Isn’t that scary?” Gary asked “I mean, it must be challenging at least.”

“Sure it is, but its fun,” Rowan replied. “It’s how I know what I’m doing is right.”

“Kate, can you call Diane?” Gary shouted from the office door. She came and he told her what Daniel wanted.

“I don’t know what you’re afraid of,” Kate told him. “There’s nothing wrong with calling Diane.”

“She always makes me feel like she’s looking for her next plaything,” Gary replied. “I don’t think she likes men at all.”

“She’s only a little eccentric,” Kate said. “And she’s never done you any harm.”

“That’s why I’m worried,” Gary replied. “You never know what’s coming next.”

“I’ll go and see her,” Kate decided. “I need a few hours away from this place.”

She pulled into the drive and walked to the door. She pulled the bell and waited a few moments.

“Good afternoon, madam. Miss Diane is in the library.”

“Gerald?” She looked at him closely. “Is that you?”

She took in the figure who answered the door. She wore a summer dress, with a scooped neck revealing more than a little cleavage. A small stone on a chain glittered between the tops of her generous breasts. Her blonde hair was pulled back in a high pony tail,



which tumbled to her shoulder blades. Her makeup was simple; black rimmed eyes and a hint of lip gloss. Three small stones glittered from each ear lobe. Her nails were of business length and deep crimson with glitter embedded towards the tips.

"I am myself." Gerald stood back and waited for her to enter.

"You've changed," Kate said. "It looks good on you."

"Thank you, madam," he replied. "I'm sure Miss Diane will describe what has happened."

"Tea for two, Gerald," Diane said over her shoulder as she hugged Kate in greeting.

"He's different," Kate said at once.

"If you mean he's had breast implants, a nose job, a bit of work around the eyes and chin, he might have changed a little."

"A little?" Kate laughed. "I'd say that's rather a lot."

"If he's going to go into show business, he's got to be as perfect as I can make him," Diane replied.

"Does he like it?" Kate asked. "Surely he's objected or threatened to leave?"

"Not at all," Diane replied. "We discussed it all carefully. He didn't want his breasts to be ridiculously large, so I allowed him to have them smaller than I would have chosen. At least, that's what he thinks."

"How big is he?"

"He's a big C, or at least that's what I tell him. He's actually a D cup."

"And you got away with that?"

“Once they’re in, there’s little he can do. He wanted them to look as natural as possible too, so I sent him to research it and get the best.”

“I was surprised when he came to the door,” Kate admitted. “I wondered if it really was him.”

“Who else could it be?” Diane indicated the table as Gerald retuned with a tray. “I told you that I’d be changing him, and best of all, his trust fund paid for it.”

Gerald poured tea and handed cups to each of them. “Will that be all, madams?” he asked, and was dismissed.

“You’ve not come simply to take tea with me,” Diane said.

“No, we’d like... that is Daniel our choreographer, would like him at the bar, dressed as if he were going shopping with the girls on Monday at noon. He’d like to get an idea of what he can do with them.”

“He’ll be there,” Diane replied. “Can I come too?”

“I think Daniel wants him as natural as possible,” Kate said. “I don’t think that he’d like the idea that you were looking over his shoulder.”

“Okay, I get it,” Diane replied. “You shall have him at noon on Monday. I’ll send him shopping first. He’ll be on his best feminine behaviour. Will that do?”

“That sounds perfect.”

* * * * *

Harper was idly playing a few chords. He was thinking about the dress, and the way Gretchen was encouraging him to wear it.

“Maybe she’s got a thing for boys dressed as girls,” he thought.

He hummed a tune over the chords, then it began to roll. He imagined the pain of a rejected lover, maybe for dressing up, but it could have been about anything. The verses formed in his mind, then the middle eight. He hummed it through again, then grabbed a pencil and piece of paper to write bits down before he forgot them.

He kept the paper with him all day, jotting down new couplets as they came to his mind. He went back to the piano and sang it, tentatively at first, and then louder, pushing it up into an emotional ballad.

“Wow that’s great,” Gretchen was clapping from the back of the bar.

“How long have you been there?”

“Long enough to hear the whole rehearsal,” she said. “But I don’t recognise that song. It’s such a strong one, I feel as if I should know it”

“You don’t know it,” Harper laughed. “I haven’t finished it yet. That was the first run through. If I’d known you were there, maybe I’d have played something else.”

“I bet you wouldn’t.”

“Probably not,” he admitted. “It’s the best idea I’ve had for quite a while.”

“You should send it somewhere.”

“Where?”

“I’m sure you know someone; a producer; a publisher; but send it.”

“I need to finish it first, then record it properly, and make a proper notation for it,” Harper said. “There’s a lot of work between writing a song and getting someone to pay attention.”

“I loved it.” Gretchen came to the piano and put her arm round his shoulder. “Please play it again for me.”

He played it again, a little faster this time. Gretchen seemed to ease herself closer as he played. When he finished, she kissed him on the cheek. It took him by surprise.

“Did you mean that?” Harper turned to look her in the eyes.

“What? This”

She moved closer, put both her arms round his neck and pulled him closer. They kissed this time, lip to lip, tongue to tongue.

“I thought you’d never get round to that,” she whispered as they pulled apart.

“Me neither,” Harper said.

“You’ve no chance now,” she told him. “You are going to be my best songwriting, piano playing girlfriend.”

“I haven’t agreed,” Harper started.

“Maybe not, but *I’ve* decided.”

* * * * *

“At least it’s a start,” Kate said as they stood at the back of the bar and watched as Daniel talked through a few moves with Rowan, Gerald and Lavinia.

Lavinia was the sophisticated brunette, and today was too stiff and haughty to take direction. Gerald, for once away from Diane’s direct influence, was wooden and unresponsive. From the back of the bar, Gerald looked the perfect lady.

Rowan was altogether different. He was dressed as a boy, yet the girlishness in his posture came through. He was probably the most feminine of the three. It showed in his willingness to take direction and to follow every exercise Daniel gave.

"I think Craig should have let Dottie out," Gary said. "His Lavinia is too sophisticated. It needs to be looser and a bit off-the-wall."

"That's the problem with him having two alter egos," Kate agreed. "I don't know how he does it but it's as if there are three personalities inside his head; two girls who are poles apart and Craig himself."

"I can see Daniel getting frustrated," Gary replied. "I know our stage is only small, but it would look better with more people up there."

"I think we need more advertising," Kate said. "I wonder if going to more bars ourselves might help."

"You mean we should poach some acts from other bars. We've no money to pay the ones we have, let alone more."

"We need girls whatever you say," Kate shot back. "If we get the right people, they'll fall into place, and we'll find a way to pay them."

"Okay, you're the boss," Gary agreed. "We'll do it, after all, how much more bankrupt can we be?"

* * * * *

Harper dressed as Gretchen told him, "Start with the underwear and everything will follow. Don't think you can use boy things under that dress."

He did as he was told and remained passive when Gretchen fastened a bra behind his back. He sat and allowed her to roll tights up his legs, dark and glossy.

"You'll have to get those legs waxed," she said. "It's a good thing that the dress is long. You couldn't wear anything short with all that hair." She held the dress for him to step into, and he heard her close the zipper at the back. He sat as she fastened the ankle straps of matching shoes with slim heels.

"I feel really wrong," Harper said as he stood in front of the mirror. "And I can hardly walk in these shoes. How do you do it?"

"Practice," Gretchen told him. "You'll soon be walking so easily that you'll forget how high they are."

"I hope you're right," Harper replied. "I don't think this is going to work though. I'm going to get changed back."

"Oh No." Gretchen pulled him back. "You promised and you're nowhere near finished."

"Okay." Harper gave in and sat down. "I'm in your hands, do your worst."

"Nails first," Gretchen said, taking his hands one after another. "How did you let them get into this state? They're awful."

"I'm the one that's been working around here," he protested. "It's been days of struggling with old locks and seized-up hinges. What did you expect my hands to look like?"

"Better than this." Gretchen started to work on them. "I'm going to stick basic false nails over them to hide all the damage."

"Don't go overboard," he cautioned. "I have to be able to play when you're finished."

"Don't worry; I'm only feminising your hands, not paralysing them."

Harper watched as she worked quickly, one nail after another. Plain French manicure, not too long, yet differently feminine. It was, he thought, such a change from so little work. He looked at the new nails, thinking for the first time that his hands looked like those of a girl. Maybe there was something to this after all.

“That’s better. Do you want to watch me working in the mirror or shall I cover it and do the big reveal when I’ve finished?”

“Do I have a choice?”

“No, I’m going for the big reveal.” Gretchen covered the mirror with a large sheet. “I think this will be easier. I won’t have to answer questions as we go.”

She put a cape over his shoulders, then looked at him intently, studying the shape of his face.

“You don’t shave much, do you?” she said. “But your eyebrows need some attention.”

“Ouch.” He felt the first hairs being plucked.

Gretchen worked steadily, plucking and checking the shape of the first one.

“Are you leaving anything there?” Harper protested. “Remember, I have to live with this afterwards.”

“No one will notice,” Gretchen said. “It’s not as if anyone knows you here anyway.”

“That’s not the point.”

Gretchen turned to the second brow, plucking as fiercely as she had at the first. She looked and compared, then plucked some more, this time working on each side, comparing and shaping.

“You must be done by now,” Harper complained.

“Less brow opens up the eye; with makeup, they’ll look bigger and of course, more seductive.”

“I don’t want to be seductive.”

“Oh yes you do,” she replied. “Remember the tips. The guys react to basic senses. Look right and they’ll behave right.”

Gretchen started to cream his face, moisturising gently, then started with colored sticks of foundation, blending and shaping, then powdering it all down so that his complexion was even and smooth.

He felt the drag of a pencil as she drew over his plucked eyebrows. "I thought you'd left some," Harper protested.

"Of course I have, this is to define the shape and make your brow line more prominent."

When she was satisfied, she started on his eyes. Shades of shadow were brushed over his eyelids, and then a darker one close to his lid edge.

"I have no idea what you're doing. I can see the containers and the colors, but that's all," Harper said. "Can I look yet?"

"No. Wait until I've finished."

He could see her take a pencil-like wand and felt it being drawn along his lid close to the edge. "Don't blink, and look upwards," she told him. The pencil stroked along the under-lashes. The process was repeated with mascara on the lashes.

"If you're going to be Jasper's fantasy, you'll need false lashes too." Gretchen rummaged through the makeup container. "There are some here, I know it."

"Do you have to do all that?" Harper grumbled. "It's been over an hour."

"I'm enjoying it," Gretchen replied. "I want to do it well. I'm not going to stop halfway."

Harper watched as she applied some glue from a tube to the lashes she found. "They look far too long to be real."

"We're not going for reality here. They have to see you when you're behind the piano, and you have to look like you belong there."

Harper opened and closed his eyes as he was instructed. She applied one, then the second, correcting the position carefully. He felt the strange weight of the lashes on his eyelids and blinked a few times. More mascara blended the lashes to his own.

“Now the lips.” Gretchen looked at him intently. “Are you going to be blonde for Jasper?”

“Since you’ve gone this far, I might as well do the whole fantasy,” Harper replied.

“That determines how I do your lips.”

She pulled her face, expecting Harper to follow. A pencil outlined his lips, then a lipstick followed.

“It’s almost a nude colour,” Gretchen said. “It’s a shade darker than neutral, and really shiny. I thought of using a matte one, but when you’re at the piano, matte would be lost.”

“Are we done?” Harper was getting impatient.

“Not until we get your wig on,” Gretchen replied.

She turned, went into a cupboard, then turned, shaking out a pale blonde wig.

“How long is that?” Harper asked. “I’ll get tangled up.”

“Maybe that would be good,” Gretchen replied. “A messy blonde hairdo always has its attraction.”

She held it over his head. “Now put your hands where the temple will sit and we’ll lower it into place.”

He did as instructed and felt the weight of the hair as Gretchen adjusted the way it covered his head. “There are some small combs inside to secure it,” she said, pulling them into place, then with brush and comb teased bangs over his forehead, finishing off with a long spray from an aerosol.

“Are we done?” he asked.

“Almost.” Gretchen turned and fumbled in a drawer. “You have to wear the dangling earrings.”

“How could I have forgotten?” he said as he turned his head to allow her to remove his studs, and replace them with these silver creations which looked as if they’d touch his shoulders.

“Now are you ready for the big reveal?” Gretchen held one end of the cloth covering the mirror. “Here goes.”

Silence; Harper turned and turned back, watching the girl in the mirror as she raised her hand to touch her face at the same moment that he raised his hand.

“Is that really me?”

“Who else could it be?”

“Okay, I guess I need to play the piano right now, only while I get over the shock.”

Harper stood and took careful steps in his new heels. He sat the keyboard and ran a few chords slowly. ‘Love is the Sweetest Thing’ rippled from his fingers, slowly the first time, then as a softer jazz version, and finally with a boogie beat. Song followed song, as if he dare not stop.

“Hey, did we get a new piano player?” Jasper’s voice called in the pauses between songs.

“You got your wish,” Gretchen told him. “That’s Harper, doing what you wanted.”

“Well, I’ll be darned if I wasn’t right.” Jasper clapped. “He looks the part now as well as sounding it. How’re you going to get him from waiting on tables to being a girl at the piano?”

“I think you’ve gained an extra waitress,” Gretchen said. “There’s no way he could do a quick change from boy to girl; it’s not like changing a dress or a shirt.”

"I guess not," Jasper said thoughtfully. "And I don't have to pay more anyway"

* * * * *

Dottie came to the next rehearsal. She'd turned into a blowsy blonde in a red dress just the right side of decency; red heels, red lips and red nails, and the darkest of eye makeup.

Loud and eccentric, clearly a man in a dress, but only just enough 'man' to fool most of the audience, if one had been there. It was the voice and the body language, not the appearance. This was the Dottie that Kate and Gary remembered. Daniel hadn't been prepared for this onslaught of quasi femininity.

"Can you calm down and take direction?" Daniel shouted at one point in their rehearsal.

Dottie looked at him and with a sigh, she sashayed across the stage, swaying her hips and smiling as if there was an audience waiting to share a secret.

"Darling, this is as calm as I get." Dottie stroked her fingers under his chin. "You may have to think of a way of calming my nerves," she purred and slowly stroked the crotch of his jeans, holding eye contact all the time.

"Okay," he spluttered, moving backwards and turning away. "I'm the director here."

"And you're doing a wonderful job, darling." Dottie blew him a kiss. "I have performed before you know, both in public, and in private. If you ask me nicely, we could do the private audition later."

"What's she been drinking?" Gary whispered to Kate as they watched from the back of the bar.

"Nothing at all," Kate whispered back. "That's Dottie. That's why we need him."

* * * * *

“Hey, you hurt me.” Harper slapped the hand that had pinched his rear. “That’s not polite.”

“So spank me,” the elderly customer grinned as Harper placed a beer mat, then a glass, in front of him.

“That’s an extra charge.” Harper held his tray lower so that the tip jar was in front of his nose. The old man laughed and put a folded twenty in.

“Can I get spanked for so little too?” one of the other guys at the table chipped in.

“You never know your luck in a draw,” Harper pouted, and walked back to the bar.

“What’s got into you?” Gretchen asked as they stood back against the bar, waiting for the next orders. “You’re playing these guys like you’ve been doing it for ages, not hours.”

“Nothing; I feel different, as if I’m playing a part,” Harper replied. “It’s all an act, but I am enjoying it. I’m getting to like the attention. Do you think they know?”

“If they do, they don’t care,” Gretchen replied. “I’m beginning to regret putting you into a dress as short as mine.”

“I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve felt a hand up my skirt.” Harper smoothed the material down. “Is it like this all the time?”

“Mostly,” Gretchen replied. “Remember the rule; tits and ass for tips.”

“I have to get ready to play,” Harper said.

“I’ll come and help you change into the dress,” Gretchen replied. “It should only take a moment. I’m so pleased you decided to go with the full makeup earlier.”

"I'd quite forgotten I was wearing it." Harper slipped off the short dress and stepped into the long black silk number. "But I'm very conscious of these earrings swinging as I move."

"Make them swing," Gretchen giggled. "Play up the girl stuff for all it's worth."

She gave a play slap to Harper's ass as he walked out towards the piano.

* * * * *

"How soon do you think it will be before we have enough to open?" Kate asked Daniel after another rehearsal.

"We really need another girl to lift it, Daniel replied. "Gerald is absolutely perfect when you look at him. There's no chance that he'd ever be mistaken for a boy. He's got the figure and the poise. It's amazing. He's a novice as far as being onstage is concerned, but I think he's getting there."

"Diane wouldn't let him be anything less than perfect," Kate replied. "She's very strict."

"What about Rowan?" Gary asked.

"He's a mystery," Daniel admitted. "Have you checked that he's legal? Is he old enough?"

"He showed me a driving permit," Kate said. "I assume it was correct."

"It's as if he decided to be female all of a sudden," Daniel replied. "Every day, he's changing. Dottie may be to blame for part of that, she's been teaching him how to walk with a wiggle. I see them huddled together in breaks."

"I thought I'd seem some of the clothes he's wearing before," Kate said.

"Probably from Dottie," Daniel nodded. "They're different heights, but more or less the same build."

"Except that Rowan hasn't got any tits," Gary interrupted.

"Padding can fix that, at least at a distance," Daniel said. "He's learning fast."

"Do you think he can do it in front of an audience?" Gary asked.

"I'm as sure as I can be of that. He's very ladylike. Dottie is the exact opposite and I've worked up a few routines to play them off against each other," Daniel said. "They may be old routines, but these guys haven't done them before."

"Dottie's outrageous," Gary interrupted. "How did you get her to be so compliant when you were telling her what to do?"

"That's a secret," Daniel replied.

"Could it have something to do with the lady you were seen drinking with last night?" Kate asked. "I thought she looked a lot like Dottie."

"I said it was a secret." Daniel blushed as Dottie came to join them, pulled him close and kissed his cheek. There wasn't room for a cigarette paper between them.

* * * * *

Harper made it swing. He played and pouted, stood and walked across the stage a couple of times, taking the microphone and telling stories about the songs. Gretchen watched in admiration.

"Girl, you really got them." Jasper clapped as Harper finished the set and left the stage after long and loud applause.

"Quick, get changed," Gretchen hissed. "I can't cope with it. They were quiet while you were playing, but now everyone's calling for more."

"I'll grab a tray and get serving."

“But your dress...”

“They know who I am now, so it doesn’t matter,” Harper replied. “Besides, this long dress may protect me from hands wandering up my thigh.”

“Okay, your decision.”

Harper reached behind the bar and squirted perfume, too much perfume, over his neck and dress. He reached for a tray and set off. His progress was slowed by congratulations from the audience. He tried to work as fast as Gretchen, but it was impossible not to say something nice in return. His tip jar was filling fast and he had to take some notes out when he returned to the bar for yet another round.

“You’re doing well.” Gretchen nodded towards the money.

“Can we share?” Harper asked. “I think you’re working faster than I can.”

“I think you earned it,” Gretchen replied. “If we swap sides and you go ‘round my tables, I think you’ll get a lot more.”

“We must share,” he insisted. “After all, you got me ready, and Jasper’s paying me to play.”

“If we don’t move quickly, neither of us is going to get much.” Gretchen gave him a playful slap, and a push towards the crowd.

* * * * *

“Shona, what are you doing here?” Kate gasped as a figure from her past came into the bar.

She was expensively dressed from the heel of her shoes to the scarf at her neck. Makeup subtly disguised her age, and her russet hair was glossy and perfectly in place.

“Can’t a girl look up an old friend?” Shona replied.

"I never thought I'd see you again," Kate said softly, taking her hand. "You and I didn't part as friends. I felt betrayed when you changed."

"We didn't part on the best of terms, I agree, but that was in the past. I hope we've grown up since then." Shona looked 'round. "Aren't you going to introduce me?"

"This is my partner Gary." He went to shake her hand, but Shona pulled him into an embrace.

"Shona and I used to be close, when she was Simon," Kate explained.

"Very close," Shona laughed. "It was when Simon decided to become Shona that we parted."

"Oh, so you're..." Gary looked from Shona to Kate, not quite knowing what to say next.

"Yes I am, and I was." Shona swirled her dress around her legs and sat down dramatically. "I had to do things that Kate wasn't happy to live with."

"You've changed a lot," Kate said. "I didn't want to live with a female partner, so when you... err... did what you did, it was time to part."

"I know, I felt it too." Shona held up her left hand, the rings glittering. "I have no regrets."

"Whatever happened to you?" Kate asked. "I never heard anything of you. I worried for a while, but you disappeared completely."

"I left town, then left the country," Shona said. "I'll give you the shortened biography. It says I met an older man, married well, into old money. We lived well and happily until he died suddenly. Now I'm a merry widow."

"You married?"

"Yes, we lived abroad, where equal marriage has been possible for years," Shona replied. "It was a fairy tale wedding too. He wanted me to have everything."

“What brought you back?”

“I wanted to see old friends, to mend a few fences too,” Shona said. “I’m a free spirit now. I’ve a decent income from my husband’s property and investments. I can do what I please.”

“That must be comforting,” Kate replied. “You always said that you were never intended to be poor.”

“Did I?” Shona smiled knowingly.

“Well, you’re welcome.” Kate looked from Shona to Gary.

“Yes, any old friend....” he said, not really knowing what to make of it.

“Now you must tell me all about this place.” Shona took Kate by the arm and they walked towards the exit. “What plans do you have?”

“Great plans, but no money to develop them,” Kate said. “I’ll tell you all about it.”

“I’ll be your silent investor,” Shona replied. “Money’s only worth what it can buy. I owe you, Kate. You were always kind, even when I was being cruel.”

* * * * *

“Jasper’s dead.” Gretchen came into the bar in a state of shock. “Collapsed and died without warning in the bank.”

“I can’t believe it!” Harper replied. “He was fine this morning. We talked a little about this place finally making money.”

“I’d guess it won’t be doing so for much longer,” Kate replied, as the telephone started to ring.

She took the call and listened, saying little. She turned to Harper. “That’s it,” she said. “The bank has appointed a receiver, we’ve three days to pack up and get out. We can’t open anymore.”

“What do we do?” Harper asked. Gretchen noted that he said ‘we’ even though her mind was racing.

“We move all the stuff that we can use into my apartment,” she said.

“I’ve never been there,” Harper said. “How much room is there?”

“Enough for all your girl things,” Gretchen said pointedly.

“You mean I’m going to need them?” he asked. “I thought this was only a job until something better came up.”

“Maybe, but have you thought how much you were getting as a girl,” she asked. “It probably beat anything you were getting before.”

“Well, yes,” Harper admitted. “But I don’t know how long I can keep it up.”

“You can keep it up – and I’ll forgive the pun – for as long as you want,” she replied. “I’ve seen a flyer or something. Leave it with me for a few days; meanwhile you stay female all the time.”

“Why?” Harper asked. “Surely that’s more trouble than it’s worth.”

“No it isn’t.” Gretchen wagged a finger at him. “Trust me. “I want you to learn to be female when you’re not preforming in the bar. We’re going for natural here. I have an idea.”

“re you going to share it?”

“I’ve seen something somewhere,” she replied. “I think it was called ‘Go Girls’ or something like that. I’m going to find them and then give them a call.”

* * * * *

“So tell me again.” Gary leaned back in his seat. “She really offered to invest in this place?”

“She said so,” Kate replied.

“Do you believe her?”

“No reason to doubt what she says,” Kate replied. “She never used to joke about money and now it looks as though she has plenty.”

“Why doesn’t she simply buy us out?”

“She’s no interest in running the place,” Kate replied. “She wants to sit back and watch.”

“And interfere,” Gary snorted. “I remember my old uncle saying that the worst ship that ever sailed was a partnership.”

“I don’t think she will,” Kate said. “But bearing in mind we need the money, and it’s being offered with no strings, I vote we take it, and as I’m a woman and therefore have more votes than you, I think that settles it.”

“Girl Power?” Gary asked.

“Absolutely,” Kate laughed. “What can we lose? We get the money we need to make the opening look good, and to pay people. The alternative is sitting here scratching our heads to think what we can do to get the money.”

“Okay, we accept,” Gary replied. “Now all we need is some more cast members”

The telephone rang and Kate answered. She listened for a while. “Yes, you have the address right,” she said. “We’ll expect you in a few days.”

“I think we might have another girl on her way,” she said.

“Why don’t you stay and have a drink with us after rehearsal?” Dottie asked as she and Rowan linked arms. “It’s quite safe and you’d be really welcome.”

“I’d love to get some tips from you,” Rowan added. “You always look so cool.”

"I really can't," Gerald said. "My mistress will be waiting for me. I have so many things to do at home."

"Another time then; please promise you'll come," Rowan replied, then stood to watch as Gerald walked to a black limousine where a chauffeur waited with the rear door held open.

"One day, we'll find out," Dottie said, taking Rowan's arm and lead towards the bar across the road.

"I can't stay long," Rowan insisted. "I've got to find another room. The landlady says I'm too much of a risk to stay there much longer because people are beginning to talk about me."

"What nonsense," Dottie replied. "You can come and stay with me."

"Do you have a spare room?" Rowan asked.

"Only a small one but I've a huge bedroom, big enough for two," she replied. "Seriously, you're welcome to the spare room. Pay me when we get paid, if we ever do."

"I'll get a cab and collect my things," Rowan smiled in relief.

"No, we'll take my car. It's behind the bar."

It didn't take long to pack up and load the car. Rowan had arrived with next to nothing and had only accumulated a few things; enough to fill her rucksack and a holdall. In no time at all, they were in Dottie's place.

"Let's have a drink to celebrate my mew roomie." Dottie waved a bottle of wine in the air.

The cork popped and bubbles fizzed all over the place. Rowan tried to get glasses underneath, and giggled as it spilled all over. They drank, then another bottle appeared.

"What I don't understand is why you live alone," Rowan said.

"I never found anyone to stay with," Dottie replied. "I mean how anyone could cope with me is a mystery. I'm Craig, I'm Lavinia, and I'm Dottie. I change with the weather."

"I think you're pretty wonderful," Rowan blushed.

"Poor child." Dottie hugged her closely. "I'm afraid if you say things like that, I'll be unable to resist taking advantage of you."

"Maybe I want you to take advantage of me."

"Maybe I will." Dottie pulled Rowan close and they looked into each other's eyes. "Shall we play at being lesbians?" she said.

"I thought you'd never ask."

"Let's dress for the occasion." Dottie stood and pulled Rowan to his feet. "I've a nightdress that I've been saving for a special occasion, and another which would look just divine if you'd wear it for me."

* * * * *

"You're coming with me?" Harper asked as they sat in Gretchen's old station wagon.

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," she replied. "I've got great faith in you, and I don't want to let you go anyway."

"You never said anything," he replied.

"I was afraid of scaring you away." Gretchen put the car into drive. "The more female you became, the more I wanted to touch you."

"That sounds like a serious start," Harper blushed.

"And you'd never manage without your dresser, makeup artist, hairstylist and all-round good friend," Gretchen said.

"That's probably true," Harper admitted. "How many years does it take to be able to deal with false lashes anyway?"

"More than you have to spare for this job."

"Are you always this forceful?"

"Now I know what was missing in my old relationships." Gretchen looked at him. "I wanted something more exciting. Being a waitress isn't the greatest job in the world, but being with you in a Review bar sounds better and better."

"They may not like me," Harper said. "Have you thought of that?"

"They'll like you." Gretchen stroked his knee. "If they don't, you can change into someone they will like. After all, it's a Review bar. They said they want female impersonators, not drag queens, and I reckon you fit that description."

"Well, we'll find out in a few days."

"And we'll know when we get there in seven days, if we're going to stick as an item." Gretchen grinned at him. "I booked us into a spa for a couple of days on the way."

"Why are we going to a spa?"

"I thought you could do with a few beauty treatments before we arrive," Gretchen replied. "I'm going to have the same."

* * * * *

"Have some more fizz." Dottie passed the bottle to Rowan, as she took off her wig and fluffed out her hair. "You are so lucky in having hair like that." She ran her fingers through Rowan's shoulder-length hair.

"It's not a great color," he replied. "I love the way you can change from day to day."

"It's true, the wigs help me change. Dottie is always some shade of blonde. You haven't met Lavinia, have you?"

"No, I know she's your other girl."

"She's always a brunette, and much more serious."

"I can't believe you'd ever do serious." Rowan leaned across suddenly and kissed Dottie on the lips.

He pulled back and smiled. He put his finger to his lips and looked down, then kissed the finger and pressed it to Dottie's lips. They kissed again, and Dottie felt an old familiar surge running through her senses.

"What have we here?" she asked, grasping his penis and stroking it, feeling stiffening.

She shifted her position, turned Rowan onto his back, and gave it a tentative lick. She came up to kiss his lips again.

"I like the taste of your lipstick on my lipstick," Rowan said. He felt down to where Dottie's penis stood ready, thick and hard.

"Now you've found it, you'd better kiss it." Dottie pushed his head downwards.

As his lips touched it, she took her hands on the back of his head and, kneeling over him, forced it into his mouth. He gagged and then withdrew. Gently, she pulled him back and touched his lips. They opened but Dottie held still, waiting for him to make the next move.

His tongue came out and flicked across the tip a few times, then gently he took the tip into his mouth. He did it again, and again. Dottie took her hands to the sides of his head and gently began to make him take more into his mouth. She drew him back and then forwards a little more.



She set a rhythm going, coaxing him and moaning gently as if to tell him that he was doing the right thing. She took her hands away and reached around to his rear cheeks. He didn't stop licking and sucking.

Gently, her fingers moved forwards until she found the entrance to his anus. This time he froze and moaned. She explored a little further, gently and slowly, but not losing contact. He seemed to accept it, so she explored a little further, entering with one finger.

"Are you going to come into me?" he asked, the question taking her by surprise.

"I think you're too tight," Dottie replied, but she knew she wasn't going to stop now.

She thrust her hips forwards, pushing her penis into Rowan's mouth before he could answer. One by one, she raised his legs to her shoulders, so that her avenue of entry was clear. She knew it might have been easier to get him onto his stomach and do it doggy style, but she wanted to look into his eyes as she took him. She wanted to see what happened when the realization that he'd been entered and used penetrated his mind.

"I'm going to try and lubricate your opening," she said, taking her hands away and reaching for something from the bedside drawer. "It's only oily jelly stuff," she assured him as she applied some to her hand and rubbed it onto her penis.

"It's cold," Rowan giggled as she rubbed some across him and slipped her finger inside, then two.

She worked them back and round gently then applied more lubricant and carefully pushed three fingers into the hole. He didn't protest. He didn't go rigid in shock. She pushed a little harder and he moaned.

Taking that as her cue, Dottie pushed the head of her penis into the hole. He stiffened as it went in just as far as the tip. She waited and slowly rocked back and forward, ever so slightly and ever so gently. It

had been a long time since she'd done this and it felt too good.

Rowan's breathing came in short pants as he held himself so tense against the intrusion. Dottie knew that this was a crucial moment and she held her patience. Sooner or later, he'd have to relax a little, maybe breathe normally or even speak.

She waited, feeling his breathing slow a little. Still she waited, judging her moment. Once he relaxed, she'd be further in. She held her hands against his cheeks, letting the fingers run down to his chin; then with her nails, she softly scratched the area under his chin. His breathing softened.

"That tickles," he said. When his voice started, the muscles relaxed and Dottie pushed hard.

Rowan's eyes opened wide in horror and in shock at the pain of the intrusion into his passage. Dottie felt the muscles contract once again. It was past the point of no return. He couldn't clench his muscles now to keep her out. She was in and gently pushing further inside him with each rocking motion of her hips.

Rowan's eyes opened in disbelief or realization of what was happening. At that moment he knew he'd never be the same again. He looked into Dottie's eyes. She smiled at him, reassuring him that she knew what she was doing and telling him that she was in charge. He was under her, and she was going to have her way.

He moaned and turned his head from side to side. He wriggled a little, impaling himself a little further. Dottie felt the slight motion, but held still. She was going to control this, and make sure he knew it.

Dottie pushed further and harder now. She was inside the boy and no resistance could change that. She waited for a slight relaxation, shifting his legs higher on her shoulders and then she started to push and push again. She felt her ball sac touching the skin on his thighs and relaxed, allowing him to get his breath.

His eyes looked into hers now, pleading or wanting more. He pushed himself further against her and then she took over. Showing no mercy, she began to thrust and withdraw slightly, then thrust again. Over and over again, she did it. His head was turning from side to side, with soft moans escaping from his lips at each breath. His eyes were open but unfocussed as still she thrust.

She intended it to go on longer, but the climax, when it came, hit her in a rush. She could feel the thickening and the extra stiffening. She pushed as far in as she could and waited for the ecstasy and the triumphs of exerting her will over his, making her into his woman whether he intended to allow it or not. He could feel himself pulsing and pumping inside.

Rowan moaned again, a long low drawn-out gasp of pleasure, and sticky liquid spurted from his own penis across his taut stomach. They linked hands as Rowan seemed to come out of the trance into which he had slipped. Dottie could feel his muscles rejecting her penis as she shrank, and slipped away and out.

They linked hands and remained in position for a few minutes, looking at each other wordlessly, but their eyes were saying all that needed to be said.

* * * * *

"I guess it's now or never," Casey thought as he approached the bar.

He'd tried to dress and act as much like a girl as he could. He knew it was clumsy, and he'd had to run away fast when a group of teenage boys shouted at him and started throwing rocks.

"If I can keep my nerve, maybe they'll take me on." He travelled less in the day and more at night.

Some truckers were genial and kind. Occasionally he got to eat in the truck stops, or the drivers would

give him their leftover sandwiches or pizza. He'd gotten used to paying in blow jobs, holding his breath and spitting out onto the roadway.

He knew he didn't smell good and had no clothes to change into; only the determination to get away burned in his psyche. He kept going.

He learned to look in dumpsters along the way. Usually it was awful, stinking and fetid, but occasionally there were clothes he could use. Sometimes there were things he could sell to the junk shops along the highway. If he couldn't sell stuff, he could barter for a shower.

"If I lose much more weight, I'll be a skeleton." He looked in the mirror after showering on a mobile home camp. The warden's wife had taken pity on him when she found him sheltering under a vehicle as the rain fell. She fed him for a few days while the warden was away.

"I thought I saw some kid hanging around the camp. He'd better be gone before I catch him." Casey heard his words, harsh and threatening as he left the shower block.

He gathered his rucksack, with clean clothes thanks to the warden's wife, who'd treated him kindly and asked no questions, even when his makeup was obviously amateur. That was before he learned to stick with mascara and eyeliner pencils only.

As the days passed, his destination came closer. He didn't know what he was going to say when he got to the Review bar. He practised his speech over and over, changing it each time.

He wondered how many blow jobs it took to be a real girl.

* * * * *

"There's only one bed," Harper stated the obvious as they entered their room.

"And why do you think that is?" Gretchen took him by the hand. "I want to find out if this relationship is going to work."

"But we've only known each other for a few weeks." Harper pulled away. "It's not even as if we were dating."

"You're such an insensitive pig when you're a boy," Gretchen replied. "I much prefer it when you're female. It seems to bring out the best in you."

"But I'm only pretending," he complained.

"And you were doing very well. If your tip jar hadn't filled so easily, we couldn't have afforded this trip."

"It's a really nice place." Harper changed the subject.

"And we're going to enjoy it," Gretchen replied. "What better way is there for girlfriends to spend a couple of days?"

"Girlfriends?" Harper caught the word.

"Yes, we're booked in as two girls. We're having the same treatments, and when you leave here, I don't want you to ever think of being a boy again," she told him.

"I didn't sign up for this."

"No, maybe you didn't," Gretchen said. "But I'm going to manage your career, and you're going to do what you're told."

"I haven't got a career."

"Wrong. You didn't. Now you do. You're a female impersonator, musician and entertainer," Gretchen

replied. "It's an opportunity that's too good to throw away. If the Review accepts you, it's steady work. We can build a future on that."

"A future?"

"Do you have to parrot everything I say?" Gretchen scolded. "Yes, a future together. I'm looking forward to it. Now let me do your makeup and we'll go for dinner."

"Do I have any choices?" Harper asked.

"Sure you do. You can leave here as a strawberry blonde, or an ash blonde. I don't think platinum would suit you."

"What am I going to be for dinner?"

"You choose," Gretchen said. "I fancy being seduced by a mysterious brunette when we come back to our room."

"I thought you said blonde?"

"That's for when we're leaving. For now, we have wigs."

* * * * *

"He's changed," Daniel said. "See the way he's moving" Something's happened."

"Could it be because he moved in with Dottie?" Kate asked innocently.

Daniel looked at Rowan and turned to Kate. "I guess he's discovered what a girl really does. Now let's see if we can make him move like that onstage."

"What are you going to ask him to do?"

"I thought we'd start him off with lip syncing," Daniel replied. "He can do the ensemble bit at the front of the show, then come back at intervals with

changes of wig and dress to do simple mimes. When he gets good and confident, we'll move him up."

"Okay, so what about Gerald?" Kate asked.

"That's a difficult one." Daniel rubbed his chin. "Physically, he's perfect. He has the breasts, the legs, and the figure. He can walk in the highest of heels and make them look elegant."

"So he's got a lot going for him," Kate said.

"Yes. He can do his own makeup and hair and there's never anything out of place, but he never really looks as if he's enjoying it, or playing a role. Every good actor is a player, that's why they were called that in the olden days. I wish he'd loosen up."

"Do you want me to speak to Diane about it?"

"Would you please?" Daniel asked. "He's too beautiful to lose, but there's not much I can do with him except leave him still to look beautiful."

"Don't look now," Kate whispered. "Here comes a problem."

Lavinia walked across the floor, looking as perfect as ever. "Daniel, I wanted to discuss Dottie's part. I don't think she's featured as much as she should be."

"I'll leave you to talk." Kate exited quickly.

* * * * *

"Well, we're here at last." Gretchen pulled into the lot behind the bar and turned off the engine. "Let's look inside and then we'll find somewhere to stay."

"Do I look okay?" Harper asked. "I wish I hadn't let you talk me into this ash blonde hair. I feel as if everyone's staring at me."

"If they are, it's because you're really attractive," Gretchen replied. "Guys like girls that look like you do."

“But I couldn’t pass as myself with this hair.”

“But you are yourself all the time,” Gretchen replied. “You’re female now and this is how you look.”

“I still feel so self-conscious.” Harper held a mirror up and patted his hair into place.

“Don’t worry, even if your hair looked messy, it would still be a signal to every red-blooded male, and you’d still get noticed. Ignore it or take it as a compliment. Try waving and smiling if you get a wolf whistle.”

They locked the car and tried the door. It was locked, so Gretchen rang the bell. There was no answer, so she leaned on it, and held it. “There must be someone here. The lights are on and I can hear music.”

“Maybe they’re not hiring,” Harper said as the door opened and a very pretty girl stood there.

“Hi, we’ve come about the job,” Gretchen said.

“You’d better come and see Kate. I’m Rowan and I just work here.”

“And are you in the show?” Gretchen asked.

“Sure, it’s my first one.” He blushed under his makeup.

“It could be mine too,” Harper said.

“Really, but you look so classy.” Rowan took them through to the main room where Daniel was putting Gerald and Lavinia through some moves.

She introduced them and left to watch from the side of the stage.

“What you need is some music,” Gretchen told Kate after a few preliminaries. “Here I have Harper who’s able to play anything with keys, and when he sings, he sounds like he was born female.”

"That could be something we might use," Kate replied, beckoning for Daniel to join them. "Are you sure he's not female? Sorry, that sounded silly."

"He wasn't female when we were in bed last night," Gretchen replied. "We stayed at a Spa and Hydro for the treatments as we drove out here. He wanted to look his best."

Daniel laughed at the conversation as he stood beside them. "I think you're right. Some live music could liven up the whole thing. I guess we'd better hear what you've got to offer, if that's okay with the management."

"I'm happy," Kate replied, "but we don't have a piano or anything."

"We have a keyboard in the car. It could plug into your sound system maybe?" Harper spoke for the first time.

"I'll send Daniel and Gary to get it," Kate said. "I love your nails and I'd hate for them to be broken carrying it."

"Gretchen said I had to have them," Harper replied. "She expects me to be perfect. She's pretty scary when she gets an idea into her head. I'm really glad she doesn't expect me to date boys."

"Not much fear of that." Gretchen was in earshot. "You're too precious."

The keyboard was set up and plugged in. A few notes through the loudspeakers said it was working, then a microphone on a stand was produced.

"You'll need to mix the voice," Harper said to Gary who stood behind the control desk. "A bit of reverb, maybe trim the mid-range, and see how it sounds."

Harper played a few scales and then ran them into an improvisation of jazz chords, turning into 'Every Time You Say Goodbye' and 'Dancing in the Dark' before hitting everything hard with 'Thunder Road' and

finally a boogie piece straight out of the Scott Joplin songbook.

"You're hired." Shona arrived backstage. "I don't care what you want for a fee; you're not leaving without a contract."

"I guess you're hired." Daniel shook his hand. "We were going to get Rowan to do some lip-synch stuff. If she could learn the words, could you play the modern stuff as well?"

"I can play most things, but some of the pop hits are impossible on a piano," Harper replied. "If you want all the effects, I can't do it."

"Okay, but could you play most of the power ballads and anthems?" Daniel asked.

"I guess I could sit here and play background for your whole show, then sing a few numbers myself." Harper felt suddenly confident in this company.

"I think we can work with that." Daniel shook his hand again.

To the side, Harper noticed Shona and Gretchen deep in conversation.

"I'm the new wardrobe mistress," Gretchen told him later. "I'm in charge of costumes, hair, makeup and anything else, or maybe I just have to do a bit of everything else. It doesn't matter, we're here, we're together and it's going to be fun. We're not in Kansas anymore, Toto."

"Kansas?" he asked.

"You never saw The Wizard Of Oz, did you?"

* * * * *

"I found him in the alcove where we keep the cans." Gerald stood over Casey who was shivering and looked feverish. "I don't know who he is, but he needs help."

"I wonder if he's been there all night," Gary asked, and together they helped him to stand and half walked, half carried him inside.

They took him into one of the old storerooms and made him as comfortable and warm as they could. Kate was summoned to look at him as soon as she arrived that morning.

"Please don't send me back," Casey said over and over as Kate tried to get some sense out of him.

"I think he's cold and exhausted more than anything," Kate said. "He's scared of being sent back, but I don't know where to. I think we should keep him warm and feed him when he can eat. Maybe then he can tell us what he's frightened of."

"Okay, you know best," Gary replied. "I wouldn't want him to die on us."

"I don't think that's likely," Kate replied. "There's something else about him that struck me. He's wearing traces of makeup, and the clothes in his pack are all female."

"Do you think he was heading for here?" Gary asked.

"Could be," Kate replied. "We got a good bit of publicity, it's possible that he thought he'd be safe here. It can't be easy being a boy in girl's clothes wherever he came from."

"Schools can be really cruel if you don't fit in," Gary agreed. "I wonder if he's running away from something awful."

"I have no doubt he'll tell us in a few days," Kate said. "I'll ask everyone to keep an eye on him."

"How are you feeling?" Kate called back to see him a couple of hours later.

"Better, thanks," he replied. "I'm so tired, but it was worth it all to get here."

"You'd better tell me a little," Kate said gently. "We have to decide what to do with you."

"Okay, here goes." He took a deep breath. "I'm Casey and I'm going to be the best girl you have here. I know it sounds wrong, but I had to get here."

"It sounds like you had to get away from something," Kate said.

"I'm not telling where I'm from, so you can't send me back." He wiped away a tear. "It's been awful being me. The boys hated me and made me do things; my stepfather was trying the same thing, so I ran."

"What did your mother say?" Kate asked innocently.

"Mom's dead." He burst into tears. "She understood me, but since she's been gone, I've had no one. It got too much. I ran. Please let me stay. I'll do anything."

"Okay, but you have to tell me that you're old enough and the police aren't looking for you for anything criminal."

"I'm old enough all right," he sobbed. "You should have seen what they made me do. And I'm not a criminal."

Kate hugged him as he sobbed. "It's okay," she said softly. "You can stay. Don't worry, we'll find something for you to do."

"I mean it. I'll be your best girl." He tried to smile, but the sobs came thick and fast.

Kate held his hand until he relaxed. She stroked his hair and, eventually, he seemed to sleep.

"Rowan, would you sit with him, please" Be gentle. He seems to have had as bad a time as anyone." Kate went to find Gary, to tell him that they had acquired another member of their little band.

The next days were full of activity. The bar had to open soon and everyone was seized with a new sense of urgency.

* * * * *

"I'm so grateful for all the care you've given me." Casey had recovered fast. "I feel so much easier now that I'm here and I can be myself."

They were dressed identically. Gretchen had been asked to make them look 'like moppets' with curly blonde wigs, spiky eyelashes, with exaggerated black eye makeup and red lips. They were all in white, short dresses and heels, for a duo piece on the stage.

"Have you forgotten that we're showgirls?" Rowan laughed. "We have to play a part on the stage otherwise Daniel's time will have been wasted and the audience won't come."

"Yes, but I'm a girl now," Rowan replied.

"As much as I am," Rowan teased.

"Yes, it's makeup, padding and wigs, but I don't care. I feel good about it all." Casey pirouetted in the way that Daniel had been teaching.

"Come here," Rowan said, catching Casey's eye as she stopped.

As if attracted by magnets, they came closer. Casey's eyes said the same things as Rowan's eyes were saying, as if to give permission. They kissed softly, then as if shocked by what they had done, broke apart, but their arms were still around each other.

They held each other's gaze, wordlessly, then came together again, lips to lips, tongues exploring each other as if in a mock contest. They paused briefly for breath, then couldn't wait to kiss again.

"Come to my room," Casey whispered.

"It's complicated." Rowan looked over his shoulder.

"For goodness sake, go," Craig's voice came from the shadows. "Dottie won't mind."

With a glance back, Rowan allowed Casey to lead him from the bar.

Once alone, the magnetism exerted itself once more. They tumbled together onto the makeshift bed which Casey had been using, hands exploring, tongues playing, in an avalanche of lust.

As if choreographed, each found a hand grasping the other's penis. Massaging gently on the immediate growth. Rowan broke the kiss first to take Casey in his mouth. Casey followed so that they were entwined together. They licked and sucked, together.

"I don't know what to do next," Casey whispered. "But I want more."

"I want to be careful," Rowan replied.

"I don't care." Casey sucked his penis harder. "It won't be the first time, so I know what to expect. Please understand. It's the first time I've really wanted it to happen. Please don't refuse."

Casey turned over so that his bottom was presented to Rowan, his knees taut, and his head resting low on his elbows.

"Do it," he said. "I don't care how much it hurts. I want you to do it. Take away all the bad memories I've had to live with. I've dreamed of it being with someone I wanted."

Rowan knew what to do, even though he had played the submissive role before. He touched and stroked. He used saliva to lubricate his fingers and found an unresisting response as he explored Casey's offered promise.

As he moved one hand in and out, expanding from one finger to two and then three, he gathered more

saliva and used his other hand to spread it over his penis and around where his fingers were working.

He touched the tip to Casey, who moaned and pushed back. Rowan felt resistance and allowed himself to be pushed back so as not to hurt.

He added more lubrication and then pushed forward again. Casey seemed to dissolve into an animal response as he pushed back again. The resistance was tight. Almost by instinct, Rowan slapped Casey hard on the buttocks. The shock worked. He relaxed and Rowan felt himself slipping inside. It was tight, but he was inside.

He felt his sac against Casey's flesh, and held still, feeling as if he were held there, being sucked further in. Casey's breath was coming in gasps; the sound one of pleasure rather than pain.

Rowan felt a surge of energy and began to move, gently at first, back and forward, feeling his sac bump into Casey. Then he was moving faster and faster, strongly, the animal taking over from the rational.

Casey groaned in pleasure again, they both felt the stiffening as Rowan held himself rigid, then began pumping and pumping, shooting himself deep inside.

"You're shrinking," Casey giggled as he collected his breath after a few moments of panting uncontrollably. "I think we should do that again. I really need to make sure it was as good as it felt then."

* * * * *

"I think you've just lost a boyfriend," Daniel said to Craig.

"Maybe I have," Craig replied. "But maybe it doesn't matter. I think you need to wait around a while and see what happens."

"Maybe I will." Daniel ambled back to a table in front of the stage where he had been working on his notes and directions for the show. He rubbed his forehead and settled to a list of scenes rehearsed and scenes yet to be incorporated in the show.

He noted ideas for the future too; it was no use having a static show in such a small venue. It had to change constantly to keep the audience coming back for more.

"I think you've done enough work for today." Lavinia sat beside him and took the pen from his hand. "You need someone to help you relax."

Lavinia slipped into the chair beside him and pulled it close. Her makeup was flawless and overstated. The eyes were dark and fringed with thick lashes. The lips pouted lasciviously, the tongue flicking across her lips as if hungry to touch something more.

"And are you the girl to help me?" Daniel knew what was happening.

"I am," Lavinia replied. "I need a man like you to help me too." Her eyelashes flashed again, telegraphing their own signal.

She moved closer. "They are children. I need a man." "

Her perfume filled his senses and he knew that there was inevitability in her intentions.

"I think we'd better go to dinner." He took her hand. "There's no need to rush this."

"I'd rather you took me slowly," Lavinia replied.

"Sounds good." He leaned towards her and gently touched lips to lips.

"I figured you need me, rather than Dottie," she whispered. "Dottie may be better for the show, but I'm better in bed."

“And do you think I’m man enough for you?”

“Darling, I know you’re the man for me,” she purred.

After dinner, they walked unsteadily through the streets.

“I think I’ve had a little too much to drink to go back to my place,” Lavinia said.

“Don’t you mean that you’ve told Rowan and Casey that you won’t be back tonight?”

“Darling, you can always see right through me.” Lavinia pulled him closer and kissed him. “Maybe I need you to give me a little time to be myself as well. And I want to be seduced tonight.”

“Really?” Daniel asked.

“Don’t be an ass, dear.” Lavinia kissed him again. “Don’t pretend you don’t know what I want, and don’t pretend you don’t know what to do.”

“I can work it out.”

“Just in case there’s any doubt, I want it slow, long, hard and messy.” Lavinia put his hand against her faux breast. “And I want to be treated like a really special lady.”

* * * * *

“Have you thought what we’re going to do about bar staff?” Gary asked.

“I’ve been giving it a lot of thought,” Kate replied. “I’m putting it on Facebook tomorrow. I hope we’ll get a response.”

“I’m sure we will,” Gary replied. “But have we thought about how it’s going to fit with the style we’re trying to create?”

"Gretchen has said that she'll supervise the bar," Kate replied. "I want our waitresses to be female impersonators too; no drag queens, and nothing outrageous. I'll set up auditions for the most likely and ask them to come as if ready to work, so we can see what they're like."

"That sounds sensible," Gary replied. "No Two Ton Tessie from Albuquerque."

"Yes, I've heard that name before," Kate laughed. "We'll be giving them uniforms to wait on the tables anyway. I thought all black, short skirts, tight tops, heels. Let's give the customers what they expect."

"I don't think we can lose money by doing that," Gary said. "They want what they expect. We can't raise the tine, and I don't think we should try."

"We're in this market," Kate agreed. "We've got to fit into our niche."

"Harper told me about his previous experiences," Gary replied. "He survived with little more than a bit of groping. How do we deal with that?"

"I think we have to accept that we're not in a politically correct environment," Kate replied. "Much as I would like to say that our staff won't get anything like that, I can't."

"I guess we have to know where our boundaries are as an organization," Gary said thoughtfully.

"I think that we should rely on our staff to tell us when and if something's getting out of hand."

"We'll probably need a couple of bouncers on the staff for security," Gary said. "Are they to be female impersonators too?"

"I can't think of any reason why not," Kate replied. "I'll add that to the post."

"It was only a thought," Gary called after her.

* * * * *

"I can't believe how they're shaping up," Daniel said a couple of days later. "When you consider that they've never met before they came here, and they haven't been to stage school. It's amazing."

"Okay, give us the run down," Gary replied.

"First, the music. Harper can play anything, and he can sing too and when there's nothing happening on stage, he can improvise. He looks good too. I've made sure that we set the stage out so that the audience get a good look at him as well."

"Okay, so the difficult bits," Kate said. "What about Gerald?"

"I don't know what you said to Diane, but he's loosened up and opened up to the rest of the girls," Daniel replied. "He's never going to be as natural as I'd like, but he's learning how to act the part. I'm happy with that. I might use him more as a mistress of ceremonies. I think he could handle hecklers, given the opportunity and a free hand to be rude to them."

"Rowan and Dottie seem to have changed," Kate said. "I thought they were joined at the hip, but Rowan and Casey seem closer"

"I think you're being tactful here." If Daniel was capable of blushing, he would have blushed in the pause in the conversation.

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

"Okay." Daniel shrugged. "I think we have their parts well underway."

"Oh no; you don't get away without explaining that remark," Kate insisted. "What have I missed?"

Daniel took a deep breath. "Rowan and Casey seem to be in a good place. They're inseparable, and they support each other. Their places are well-rehearsed and ready for an audience."



“And Dottie?” Kate asked.

“Dottie knows her lines and her songs,” Daniel said.

“There’s got to be more.” Kate pressed for an answer.

“Okay, Lavinia and I have an understanding.”

“You have an understanding?” Kate asked “As in sex together?”

“You may ask,” Daniel smiled, “but I couldn’t possibly answer. It may embarrass a lady.”

“Okay, so you haven’t answered.” Kate winked. “So when do we open?”

“Give me a few days and I’ll be able to answer,” Daniel replied. “I don’t want to bomb if we open too soon.”

“If we don’t start getting money in, we won’t be opening any time at all,” Gary said angrily, then apologised. “We need to have some money coming in; otherwise we’re all going to be back on the streets.”

* * * * *

“Good evening, girls.” Kate was at the audition for the waitress and bouncer jobs. “We’ll see the waitresses first. Casey and Rowan are going to come on stage in the uniform which we’ll expect you to wear at all times when you’re working here.”

The stage curtain opened, soft music played, and the girls entered from separate sides. Kate did a double take. They were like bookends, one brunette, and the other blonde. Their tops were different; one was high neck, the other cut low. Rowan had a short ‘A line’ skirt, Casey wore tight shorts. Both wore black stilettos.

They crossed and turned, then did a short two step together. They twirled, bowed, then the curtain closed again. There was a ripple of applause.

"Is the black uniform compulsory?" one hopeful asked.

"Yes, but individual variation will be allowed," Kate replied. "It has to be all black but a small decoration is allowed, as long as black is the main color."

"Are trousers allowed?"

"No, but you may wear shorts, as long as they're plain black," Kate replied. "And the heels have to be real heels, not flats on wedge soles. We'll allow boots as long as they have heels."

"What about hair and makeup?"

"Hair or wig has to be believable, properly feminine; long or short. Remember you have to work in it for eight hours or more," Kate replied. "Same goes for jewellery. You can wear anything as long as it's tasteful and doesn't get in the way as you're working."

There was a buzz of questions. "We'll tell you if you're wearing something wrong," Kate waved for silence. "Remember the basic rule is feminine, not shocking."

"Okay girls, take a seat, we'll call you one at a time," Gary said.

Gary, Gretchen and Kate interviewed the bar staff. Daniel and Shona took the door staff. They met later to compare notes.

"I think we did well," Kate said "We have two in particular who look great and have done the job before. A couple of others are willing to be on call if we need extra."

"We got two door staff," Shona said. "They really chose themselves. Both looked good, not at all masculine, and better, both had some martial arts qualifications. I'd bet the smaller one could stop an ox."

"We did agree that we would think about varying their dress if it seemed impractical for work," Daniel added.

"Okay," Gary said. "Now all we need to do is open."

* * * * *

"Okay everyone, listen up," Kate shouted to get their attention. "I've asked you all to be here now because I want to lay down some ground rules. We open the day after tomorrow. The press are invited, although I don't know if any will come. I need to be sure we all know our responsibilities."

They were all there. Casey clung to Rowan. They'd taken to dressing as alike as they could all the time. Their hair was the same colour and as far as possible, their makeup was done to make them as identical as practical. They had become inseparable.

Lavinia and Daniel stood to the side. Lavinia wasn't part of the show, although her alter ego Dottie was in several scenes. Since she took up with Daniel, the more dominant Lavinia was Craig's usual identity when he was off stage.

Harper and Gretchen sat together at a table in front of Kate with Shona who was listening intently. Diana and Gerald sat at a table beside them.

"First, the ground rules," Kate announced. "You never ever give any indication that you're not real girls. Is that understood?"

There was a murmur and some nods as they listened.

"That means, hair, makeup, and dress at all times," Kate continued. "Gerald, I know you can't appear without breasts, but for the rest of you, that means you wear falsies at all times, without exception, unless you follow Gerald and get your own pair."

"I'd like that," Casey interrupted. "Any chance of a loan to get them?"

“See me afterwards,” Kate continued. “You can’t ever appear out of character. Let them speculate, but always remain feminine and girly.”

“What about me?” Gretchen spoke up, provoking laughter.

“Let me clarify,” Kate nodded at Gretchen. “You’re all expected to maintain a feminine hair color and style. It doesn’t matter if you’re wearing wigs on stage. It’s the total effect we’re concerned about and the effect when you’re off stage.”

“Okay, I give up,” Gretchen said to more laughter.

“You’ll all pay attention to the little things that go with being girls,” Kate said. “That means heels, jewellery, earrings in particular, and nails. I have arranged for a nail technician to see you all every Friday. You’ll all have the same style and they’ll change week by week.”

“I love having my nails done,” Casey said loudly.

“I need to be able to play the keyboard.” Harper held up his hands.

“Well, make sure you can play before the technician goes, but you’re not exempt,” Kate replied.

“There’s a contract starting to keep our wigs styled and fresh each week. They’ll take your instructions if you have any problems. Daniel will have the final say as to what goes.”

“That’s going to be fun,” Rowan said to Casey. “I have plans for you.”

“Oooh, lovely!” Casey giggled and looked conspiratorially at him.

“And hairdressing is compulsory every week,” Kate continued. “You’ll have some choice, but whatever Daniel tells you is compulsory, if the show demands it.”

"We're opening Thursday week, then onwards, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings, from six to three initially. We'll see how it goes and decide if we need to change or if we can open more. It depends on the takings."

"Is that it?" Gerald asked.

"No. I think I've got to say that the success and reputation of this place depends upon everyone, from the door to the floor show. We don't need a sleazy reputation; we need one for entertainment, safety and fun. We're always on show in a place like this, so let's make it good."

"Well said." Gerald again. "Is that it this time?"

"Yes, it's everything I can think of right now," Kate replied. "The success of this show bar rests on us all, and I know you've all worked so hard to get us to this point. We're opening at last. Let's make it a great opening."

* * * * *

"I think you need to read this." Gretchen held out her tablet computer to Harper.

He took it gingerly, and read. He looked up at her and then read it again.

"Is this for real?' He asked"

"I think so," Gretchen replied. "It's where I sent the recording."

"What recording?" Harper's eyes opened really wide.

"Your song," Gretchen replied. "I plugged my pad into the output from the sound system when you played your song. I emailed it to a girl who was at college with me, and she loved it. She knew somebody, who knew somebody, and I guess that's how it ended up there."

"They're a big publisher," Harper said. "And they want my song."

"And they want to pay you."

"I guess I need an agent to handle this."

"That's where my friend comes in." Gretchen took her tablet and flipped through a few screens. "Read this one."

"If it's for real," Harper started slowly, "and I don't need to pinch myself to see if I'm really awake, it's amazing. Your friend seems to have appointed herself as my agent; she's sold the song already. I keep copyright, and she gets a share of royalties if the song gets recorded."

"Is that good?" Gretchen asked. "You're not mad?"

"Not at all." Harper shook his head to clear his mind.

"Then you'd better read this one." Gretchen took the tablet again and flipped through some more screens.

"She's sold it already," Harper said. "And it's going into a movie."

"Does this mean you're rich?" Gretchen asked, then frowned. "Will you still love me when you're rich and famous?"

"I don't think I'm going to be famous," Harper replied. "It's the song they want, not me singing it."

"But what if someone famous sings it?"

"Then it will sell more than if I sang it," Harper replied. "I hope I can write more."

"All we have to do is wait and see what happens," Gretchen said.

"Meanwhile, we got a show to do here."

“And that song has to be in there,” Gretchen mimicked, pretending to hold a cigar. “You may be unknown today, but you’re gonna be a star tomorrow!”

* * * * *

“Okay everyone,” Kate said. “Gather ‘round. We’re opening in a few minutes. I want to thank you all for your hard work. Let’s make it a good one.”

“They all look good,” Gary said to Kate as they walked back to the door to welcome their first audience. “If I didn’t know myself, I’d say we have a cast of good-looking young women here.”

“I think they’re great,” Kate replied. “I wouldn’t be surprised if we get accused of using real girls, instead of these boys.”

“I hope all the advertising worked,” Gary said.

“I got the Facebook kids on the job, and sent out some flyers,” Kate replied. “I put a coupon offer on the page too.”

“Good luck, guys,” Gretchen hugged them both and went back to the bar where her waitresses waited.

“Are we all ready, Daniel?” Gary called as their director came from backstage.

“Ready to roll,” he replied.

The lights went down and soft jazz played through the speakers. The atmosphere would be fine when there were people there filling the place. It was like holding a party and waiting to see if anyone came.

They almost held their breath, then the first customers arrived. They could hear the girls at the door greeting them, then came into the bar. A waitress appeared with glasses of sparkling wine for the first few. Those first few were followed steadily until the bar was looking good, with plenty of people. The wait-

resses ran between bar and tables. It was looking good.

The curtains opened, and there was Harper at the piano. He looked gorgeous in a long black dress with long dangling earring which Gretchen had given him for luck. One-by-one the girls came on, each getting applause.

"It's looking good." Diane put her arms 'round their shoulders and then whooped loudly as Gerald appeared, taller than the rest and moving elegantly into a soft shoe shuffle.

"You've packed a lot into our tiny stage," Gary said to Daniel when the halfway intermission came.

"Maybe too much," Daniel admitted. "I should have held some material back for the next one."

"What next one?" Kate had been listening.

"I intend to have half of it changing each week," Daniel replied. "Lavinia's been writing with me."

"In between other things?" Gary asked.

"You could say that." Daniel blushed a little. "We seem to have hit it off and there's good material there."

"I hope we can hold the team together," Kate said. "Gretchen's been telling me about Harper's song getting published."

"I heard that," Gretchen butted in. "If he makes money, we'll still be here. This is where he got the inspiration."

"And I'm still your silent investor." Shona joined them. "You seem to have been running a dating agency here as well as a show bar. Everyone seems to have paired up. Maybe you can fix this lonely old widow up as well."

"I'm sure we can," Kate hugged her tightly.

* * * * *

Sunday was Party Day for the cast and staff. They gathered in the bar for drinks, and nibbles. There were perfumes and handbags, party dresses and higher heels.

"I think we're outnumbered, boss," Daniel whispered to Gary.

"Don't get any ideas." Dottie watched Daniel enjoying the spectacle. "Lavinia's got something planned for you later."

Then there were speeches and flowers, streamers and toys. Harper played his song, then a couple of others he'd written.

They played games, voting for the leggiest, the biggest scene stealer, the longest eyelashes, the highest heels, the best revealed breasts, so that everyone won something, or didn't care if they hadn't.

And they all toasted the success of 'The Go Girl, No Girl Review'.

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