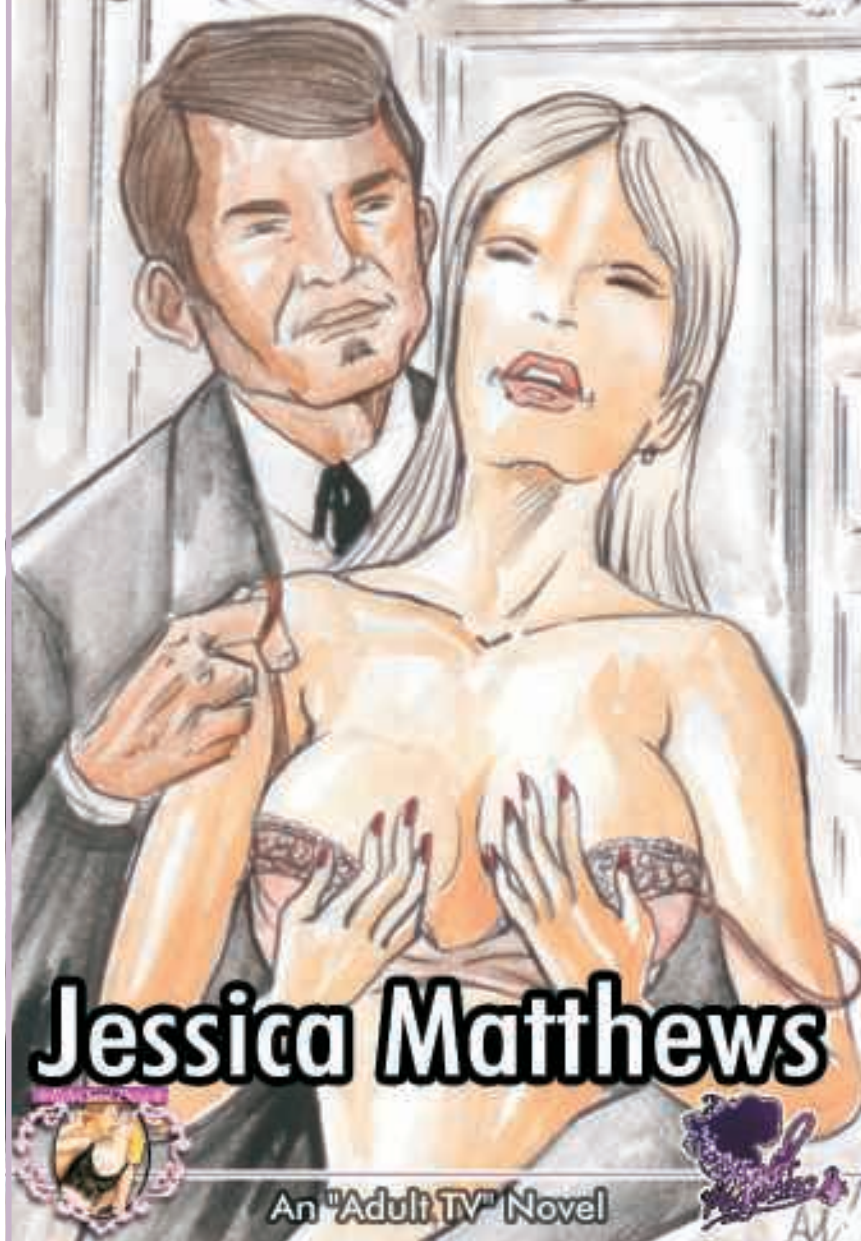


# High Kicks in High Heels



**Jessica Matthews**

An "Adult TV" Novel

## **Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers**

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# High Kicks in High Heels

**By Jessica Matthews**

The band played as they danced across the stage, linking arms and turning as one. Lace-trimmed shoulder straps emphasised their movement as they shook to the rhythm. They danced forwards, lifting their can-can skirts; shaking the hems high over their heads.

Big earrings dangled and rings flashed. Bangles caught the light and glittered, emphasising the movement and the sheer femininity of it all. A glimpse of ruffled panties and garter belts holding up fishnet stockings was all that was allowed as the girls danced. If there was an unsightly bulge, it was only glimpsed for a brief moment.

They moved back and reformed into a line of high kicks. The line split into two sections and they turned again on their axis and came together once more. The drums rolled and then one by one they stopped the

high kicks and dropped into the splits. The audience cheered, roared and whistled.

"It was worth all the pain of ballet class to hear an audience like this." Carl gasped for breath as they high kicked their way off the stage.

"I think you're getting used to being a sex object," Matthew said, his hand casually stroking Carl's panty-clad behind as his dress caught on a protruding stool.

"Don't get any ideas," Carl retorted as they took their seats in the dressing room. "I told you that I only took this job to save for a bigger adventure."

"What bigger adventure could a girl have than to be seduced by someone as beautiful as me?" Matthew pouted. "I know you'd enjoy it if you tried."

"I'm not gay," Carl replied. "I know you wish I was, but it's not going to happen. I'm here because I'm a dancer."

"But you suit the girls roles," Matthew said. "You could make yourself a star here."

"But I'm not going to," Carl replied. "I'm leaving at the end of the week."

"You can't."

"I have to," Carl replied. "I've been dancing here as a girl for too long. I'm forgetting who I should be."

"You should always be yourself," Matthew said.

"But I'm not." Carl pulled off his false eyelashes and began to cream off his heavy stage makeup. "That's better; I do like to feel clean and fresh after the show."

"But we always have fun here. You're the life and soul of the party every time."

"I may be, but it's getting too much." Carl started his makeup again; softer and subtler this time so

that he could go and mingle with the audience as usual.

"Look at me." Carl turned to Matthew. "This is my normal look."

"You're beautiful."

"I don't mean it like that," Carl snapped back. "I look, act, and dress as a girl more than I do as myself. I'm losing sight of the real me."

"Maybe this *is* the real you." Matthew took his hand.

"I don't know." Carl shook his hand off and concentrated on his eyeliner. "Some days when I'm not working here, it's easier to stay as a girl. I put on tight jeans and a little kohl around my eyes. I dress in a feminine top and some sandals and spend the day like that. I shop, have lunch, and do it all as a girl because it's too much trouble to clean off all the makeup, tie my hair back and hide it under a cap, to pretend that I look like a normal boy again."

"But looking like a boy is so boring," Matthew said, preening again in the mirror. "You're such a pretty girl and since you went blonde, the guys all stare at you."

"I know. I got carried away and thought blondes have more fun."

"It's sometimes true." Matthew was a brunette always.

"I was dared to do it, and I did. It does make me feel a little more frivolous and flighty. I'm a terrible flirt now, which I never was before I was a blonde."

"So where's the problem? Find a rich boyfriend and the world can be yours."

"Stop it," Carl teased. "I'm not gay and I don't want to be playing with another cock."

"Who's playing?" Matthew licked his lips. "I suck and blow. If I'm lucky, it goes into me too."

"I'm not like you; how many more times do I have to say it?" Carl pretended to be angry.

"You could change," Matthew replied. "It's fun letting someone else do all the work, and they're so grateful when they come."

"Ugh, I don't know how you can stand cleaning up afterwards."

"It's the price one pays for being desired."

"Seriously though, it's easier to buy clothes to fit in with the audience and be a hostess when I'm dressed as a girl." Carl sprayed his hair as it fell to his shoulders, tucking and primping a little with his fingers to make it slightly messy.

"So what's wrong with staying as a girl all the time?" Matthew put on another coat of lip gloss and pouted into the mirror again.

"That's the problem," Carl said. "I'm too much a girl to get a girl of my own. When I meet my friends, they're mainly the people I work with. They expect me to look like this. I socialise as a girl all the time."

"So do I, darling." Matthew fluffed out his chestnut waves and adjusted his neckline a little lower.

"But you're happy having sex as a girl." Carl replied.

"Not quite as a girl, I use a different entrance." Matthew concentrated on more mascara, and turned to smile at Carl conspiratorially.

"Okay, you know what I mean," Carl smiled back, touching up his eye makeup before deciding it was perfect. "But I'm not gay. I want something else."

"But leaving can't really be the answer. What am I to do without you to keep me out of trouble?" Matthew asked.

"You enjoy getting into trouble," Carl replied. "I've never known how you can string along so many suitors at once."

"It's a skill, darling." Matthew inspected himself a final time, turned in the mirror to inspect the sides and decided he was ready. "You can't really be leaving?"

"Yes, it's all planned. I've a job on a yacht, and I'm going with her to the Mediterranean for the summer," Carl said. "I told you that's what I intended. This was only a job to fill in a few weeks."

"But you'll miss the glamour," Matthew protested. "It's getting into your blood with each show. You're getting more into being a girl with every moment here."

Carl pulled a face. "And your point is?"

"You love it all. I've never seen you without earrings and you were the one who encouraged us all to get our belly buttons pierced."

"You were all too squeamish until I made you jealous."

"I still can't believe we all did that."

"Maybe that's why I'm going." Carl ran his fingers through his stiffly lacquered hair. "It's hard work being beautiful. I want a simpler life."

"You'll miss this life Matthew said. "I know I'm going to miss you."

"I've spent more time in makeup and heels that I care to remember. It's almost as if I'm forgetting that I'm a boy. I look at dresses and hairdos. I swoon over diamonds, and I love manicures," Carl admitted. "That's why I'm going, before some guy wants to marry me."

"But think of all you've invested in becoming who you are. The laser treatment to get rid of your beard can't have been cheap, not to mention the nose job."

"It was all done on silly impulses when I had the money," Carl replied. "I didn't know who I wanted to be."

"And you do now?"

"Maybe not but I've got to try something else, or I'll be an old drag queen before I know it," Carl said.

"But I'm really going to miss you. Please don't go," Matthew begged.

"You'll get over it," Carl shrugged. "I leave in the morning. My friend Melissa has arranged a berth on a private yacht for me. I think I'm going to be at the bottom of the pecking order, but you have to start somewhere."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Scylla Four" she was called. He'd flown down to the Cote d'Azur and after a pleasant night in a small hotel, he took a bus to the port.

Carl stood to admire the sleek lines as she rode against the marina berth. He'd almost cut his hair, but then decided to dye it nearer to his natural light brown. He wasn't sure that it really covered the blonde, but he was determined to act male for a change, and tied it back in a low ponytail.

"I'll have to get used to being macho," he told himself, then remembered to put his sunglasses on in an attempt to hide his thinly arched brows.

He checked himself to make sure he was walking like a man again as he walked along the harbour.

She was a sailing yacht; the sort that the rich folk have for a weekend around the keys, or sailing through the Greek isles, and she was beautiful. You've seen the pictures. A girl in a bikini sips an exotic cocktail reclining in the sun. The rear swim deck is lowered to allow the guests to have fun in the wa-

ter. Dinner is served in the evening on the rear deck as the sun slides towards the horizon.

Now, she lay lifeless at the quayside, waiting to take to the waves and feel the salt spray in her face, riding elegantly before the wind. The slap of water against the hull as she floated stern to the marina was the only sound other than the insistent cries of the gulls circling above.

"Hey you must be Carl, you look so different. Come aboard," Melissa shouted from somewhere below. "I'm glad you found us." She came bustling from below and crossed the gangplank to hug him. "I didn't know if you'd take the offer seriously."

"I didn't know either," Carl replied. "But then, high school's over and I've a year free to wander the world. I might as well start here."

"I thought you had a job. You were in a show?"

"I was getting in a rut. It stopped being fun, and turned into a drag." Carl didn't explain the pun.

"Being my assistant steward and general hand on this yacht could be fun." Melissa took his arm and half pulled him aboard. "Don't expect to be Richard Dana and return to write *Two Years before the Mast* or anything like it when you get back. We're only sailing in the safer waters of the Mediterranean."

"I loved reading *Dana*," Carl replied. "How did you know?"

"Just a guess," Melissa laughed. "Your face told a story all of its own when I was telling stories about sea passages on the internet. I knew you'd be right when you said you'd be interested in working with me."

"I know it can't all be glamour and serving the paying clients," Carl said. "It must get boring when you have to watch them in San Tropez and Cannes, but the voyages between when you're taking the yacht to their destinations must be the greatest fun."

"They're certainly easier when there's no spoiled movie star waiting to be served," Melissa admitted. "But even though the crew is smaller, the paying punters still have to be fed and the boat has to be maintained ready for the next charter at any time."

"I'm not afraid of hard work," Carl replied. "I do want to sail though. One day, I'll have one of these yachts myself."

"Are you sure you can spare a gap year to sail?" Melissa asked. "You should be studying hard to get on the career ladder first."

"I have to have a break." Carl looked serious. "I need to know exactly what I'm working for." He was pleased with himself for inventing the gap year as an excuse to sail.

"I'll show you where to stow your gear, then we'll walk through the boat," Melissa told him. "There are usually four in the crew, including you, and we have to keep as separate from the guests as possible. The captain and mate do the sailing, I do the cooking and the housekeeping, and you're the steward, relief watch keeper and everything else."

"That sounds simple enough," Carl agreed.

\* \* \* \* \*

The captain came on board mid-way through the next morning. Carl soon learned to keep out of the way as fuel and fresh water were taken on board, instruments were checked and a long list of tasks were ticked off in preparation for sea.

At four in the afternoon, "Scylla" slipped her moorings and, under power of her twin engines, crossed the harbour and entered the channel to the open sea. It was a sea trial as they prepared for the first paying customers.

"Don't fall off and don't get hit by the boom when we're under sail," Captain Douglas gave the safety

briefing over the intercom. "You wear your lifebelt and lifeline when I tell you. Don't get in my way, and don't assume you know anything about the sea." It was short and sweet.

Carl wasn't as prepared as he thought he would be. "It's good sailing weather," Melissa told him. "See how the sail pulls and we seem to skim along."

"It's not so good for those of us who haven't found our sea legs." Carl reached for a bucket. "I need to lie down."

"You'll be fine tomorrow," Melissa replied. "You'll get used to the motion once we're in the open sea."

He learned later that they were under sail, tacking close to the wind, against a current pushing them laterally. It gave the deck a corkscrewing motion until the motion changed as the vessel turned to ride with the wind on the second leg of their course.

This time, the hull seemed to sing as it skimmed the waves, surging forwards with a more predictable motion. Finally, when the electric motors hummed to haul in the sails and the engines started once more, they returned to harbour and berthed as the light was fading.

Once in calmer waters, Carl felt immediately better. The sea air seemed to have given him an appetite. When Melissa's dinner was ready, Carl served his crew mates for the first time.

"What are you doing here?" Captain Douglas grabbed Carl's wrist as he placed the platter in front of him.

"I'm the steward's assistant, and deck hand," Carl stammered in shock at the rough hold. "I was hired for the season."

"You're supposed to be a girl," the Captain replied. "I asked for a girl and they said they were sending me Carla something-or-other."

"There must be some mistake," Carl replied. "I'm Carl, not Carla. It was probably a typo."

"You can't typo the wrong sex," the captain grunted angrily. "I read the papers they sent. They told me that someone was coming from a girlie show. It raised my expectations no end."

"I was in a girlie show." Carl didn't elaborate. "But there were all boys in the show. It was a nightclub revue."

"Oh, great," Captain Douglas sighed. "It's probably too late to dump you overboard now. We sail tomorrow or we'll be late for the charter."

"Surely no one will mind Carl being the steward," Melissa interrupted. "Steward, stewardess; where's the problem?"

"I mind, and it's my decision," the Captain snapped back. "He can dress up and play along. The customers expect to be mothered, and that's what we give them."

"But I really want this job," Carl stuttered, wondering what to say or do.

"It's simple." The Captain grabbed Carl's arm. "Get into a little girl suit, Carla, or get off this ship."

"I don't have a little girl suit."

"Yes you do, it's in the crew uniform locker," the Captain shouted. "Get into it now and don't let me see you improperly dressed again."

"Don't you think you're being a little harsh?" Melissa heard the shouting. "It's not his fault if the shipping line managed to select the wrong person."

"Not at all." Douglas turned to her. "I asked for a girl and Carla is either the girl I asked for or we're sailing without her." He glared at Melissa and then back at Carl. "What's it to be?"



"I'll come as Carla." Carl didn't want to miss the opportunity to sail. He saw Melissa's glance. "It's all right. No one's going to know while we're at sea."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that." Captain Douglas leered at him. "Get him below. I don't want to see you looking anything like a cabin boy for the rest of this charter."

Carl looked him in the eye, then stepped aside where Melissa was beckoning him to come away.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Carl?" Melissa knocked on the cabin door.

"It's okay, you can come in," he replied.

She slipped round the door and stopped. Sitting at the mirror was a slim girl with curves in the right places. Her hair was mousey brown, but it shone and fell to her shoulders. She was leaning into the mirror, a brush in her hand, drawing somewhere on her eyelid.

"Is that really you?"

"Who else could it be?" he said, turning to face her.

"Wow, you scrub up beautifully."

"I know." Carl replied. "I came here to get away from this."

"You'd better explain."

"I spent the last year in a drag revue," Carl sighed. "I virtually lived as a girl for most of the time. They paid us to be as authentic as possible and it was fun."

"So why leave?"

"I'm not gay," Carl said. "I was living as a girl most of the time. It was easier than changing back and

forth. I thought I'd better get out before I couldn't be a boy again."

"Why would you want to, when you can look like that?"

"That's what they said when I was leaving." Carl flicked his hair, earrings glistening in the light. "I thought I was getting in too deep and now here am, back again in drag."

"You're stunning."

"That's part of the problem," Carl admitted. "I know I look stunning. You should see me as a blonde."

"You *are* blonde."

"Not like this." Carl ran fingers through his hair. "I mean as a too-blonde type of blonde. I can vamp it up with the best."

"You've got to do that," Melissa gasped. "I'd love to see it."

"I'm not sure that I want to go there again. I'm thinking of jumping ship."

"I can believe it." Melissa took his hand. "You could get any man to pay attention and there'll be some pretty wealthy ones on board soon."

"That's another part of the problem," Carl admitted. "I know what I can do and I did it unmercifully in the club where I was paid to do it, but I never was attracted to any of them. I'm not gay."

"How can you say that?" Melissa challenged him. "If you can look so good and act so girly, why not exploit it? I don't believe you're not gay. Or not a little bit gay, whatever you say."

"That's why I had to get away." Carl said. "I was starting to feel that I wanted to do things that girls do."

"That means you were getting turned on by some of the men," Melissa replied. "You need to admit it and then you'll be able to have some fun."

"But what if I like it that way?" Carl blushed.

"Then you do it that way." Melissa looked him in the eye. "If you both want it, there's nothing wrong in having fun where you find it. You may even fall in love."

"Don't be silly." Carl pulled his hand away. "It's not what I want at all."

\* \* \* \* \*

"It's not what I want," Carl said to Melissa. "I'm jumping ship when we get to Cannes."

"But I thought you were happy sailing with us," Melissa pleaded. "Please don't go."

"I've got to," Carl replied. "I wanted to get away from being a girl, and look at me." He stood and pirouetted in the cabin. "I'm made up to kill, earrings, bangles, the lot, padded bra, short skirt, and if it wasn't for the motion of the sea, they'd have me in heels all the time."

"But you're here, in the sun. What's not to like?"

"Me; that's what not to like," Carl sighed. "I thought it could be so different. Anyway, I've decided. I'm going to hang around the Riviera for a week or two and then I'm flying out."

"Where will you go?"

"Maybe back home for a while, maybe to the West Coast. I haven't planned where. I've enough saved to last a few months so I'm going to take a bit of a time out."

"It's your life, but I'm really going to miss you."

\*\*\*\*\*

The Riviera was fun. The sun shone every day and hanging around between beach and bar alone felt good.

"I seem to have left all my worries behind," Carl told himself as he walked the alleys of the old town in Nice.

He stopped to listen to a couple of buskers, one with a guitar singing Dylan in a French accent, the next with an accordion playing what sounded like the traditional music of France. He meandered through the flower market, stopping to wonder as the bouquets were built from a few blooms into a cascade of colour to grace some extravagant home. From market, it was a short walk to the port. A voice called his name.

"You stayed." Melissa kissed him on both cheeks, French style, like old friends do. "We docked last night. Captain Douglas hasn't stopped cursing since you left. Your replacement is a lazy pig, and that's being kind. Is there any room in your lifeboat?"

"You're thinking of jumping ship too?" Carl asked.

"I already did, but don't tell anyone."

She took his arm and they wandered towards the old castle. They got coffees, short and strong, from the bar, then sat on the grass in the sun.

"I can feel the midges biting." Melissa hit her forearm and scratched.

"Elegance, dear," Carl joked. "Where's your stuff?"

"It's in a locker in a flea pit of a hotel near the port, not that I've got much. Where are you staying?"

"I've rented a room for the month; I've only a few days left and then it's time to move on or pay for another month," Carl replied. "I'm sure they'd let you stay with me if you'd like. It'll give you time to think what to do next."

"Sounds good, thanks." Melissa hugged him again. "I promise not to snore."

"Don't make promises you can't keep. I heard you on the boat every night."

"Liar!" Melissa hit his arm, then saw his face. "Okay, joke. You can get me back later."

Melissa collected her rucksack and together they walked back, past the port and into the market area which had cleared for the afternoon. Weaving their way through the narrow streets of the old town, they came to the building where his rented room was.

"It's up four flights of stairs," he said, keying the combination into the door's security lock. There's a tiny shower room with uncertain bursts of warm water, but it's been okay."

"I'm so grateful." Melissa followed him into the vestibule and started on the stairs. "These are steep. Is there oxygen for the last flight of stairs?"

"No but there's a great view at sunset. I have a tiny balcony. You can watch and get your breath back."

"After that, we'll go for dinner," Melissa gasped. "My treat."

"I know the perfect place," Carl said. "It's a short walk along the promenade, and then it's tucked away near the town hall."

"How's your French?" Carl asked. "It might be useful. I have about five words and they don't always understand those."

"I did it at school," Melissa replied. "I can usually get by, but it's not really been tested outside of restaurants and bars."

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"Seriously, what are you going to do next?" Melissa took his arm as they walked back from the restaurant a few days later.

"We could buy our own boat and take small charters."

"We can dream of it, but where's the money?"

"Let's keep it on the back burner," Melissa replied. "It's something for when we're rich."

"It would be great to stay here but the money's going to run out soon," Carl said.

"We'll have to earn some then."

"We?" Carl asked.

"Sure, I've nothing calling me, nowhere to go, and I'd love to hang around with you," Melissa replied. "Don't tell me that you want me to leave without you."

"No, I guess not but we're going to have to hassle to get jobs here. I looked at the rules and the bureaucracy is crazily complicated. Even if I spoke French, which I don't, I'd find it daunting."

"We'll have to look for something off the books then."

"Do you think they have that here?"

"They have it everywhere." Melissa pulled him across the road. "Look at these small ads in the window. I bet they aren't for long term secure employment."

"Probably not." Carl looked. "Most of them seem to be for ladies of horizontal refreshment."

"For what?"

"Personal services," Carl replied. "And they want to be paid for providing them."

"Oh, I was being stupid." Melissa laughed. "There must be others though."

"Maybe not in this shop window, we're too near the port." Carl looked them up and down again. "Perhaps in a more central area, there may be job ads."

"What are we waiting for?" Melissa pulled his arm and they set off towards the city centre.

"This hairdresser wants models." Melissa pointed to a handwritten sign in the window.

Carl scrutinised it. "They want people to be models for their trainees to practise on," he translated. "It's not a paying job."

"What about this one? It's in English as well as French. "Bar staff, waiters and dancers wanted."

"Maybe not." Carl pointed to the sign above the entrance. "It's called La Femme Exotique and that might suggest something that we're not looking for."

"You could dance, you're trained."

"But maybe I'm the wrong sex for what they want."

"Okay, you got me there." Melissa pulled him along the street.

"What about here? 'La Garçon Femme' wants exotic dancers." Melissa laughed. "You said you used to do that sort of thing?"

"And I ran away to sea to get away from doing that sort of thing."

"But we're running out of money." Melissa held up her purse. "I've only got enough for today and maybe tomorrow."

"I can pay the rent this week, but then I'm cleaned out too. I haven't kept enough for the air fare home," Carl admitted.

"So any port in a storm," Melissa said, pulling him into the front of "La Garçon Femme." Melissa noted the number on the advert in the window as Carl shook his head and feigned resistance.

"I guess there's not much else we can do." Carl shrugged his shoulders in defeat.

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"I thought I'd sailed away from doing drag." Carl was sitting on their tiny balcony, as the sun fell over the Cote d'Azur. "I don't want to go back there."

"It might be exciting to try for a job here. We could stay for the season and then maybe move on?"

"Only for this season, right?" Carl said. "I've run away from drag once before."

"It may be better here," Melissa replied. "We need to see how the money goes before we can plan anything."

"I guess you're right," Carl sighed. "We're out of funds in a couple of days. I wonder if they'll advance me the money to transform myself again."

"I'll persuade them."

"But you don't speak French."

"No, but there's probably someone there who speaks English," Melissa said. "Are there any photos or video on the web of you in action?"

"Maybe. People took pictures on their smartphones all the time. We gave up trying to stop it."

"So if I find that, I can convince them to hire you."

"What are you, my agent all of a sudden?"

"Thank you for appointing me as your agent," Melissa said rather formally. "I'm going to take you to superstardom. The world needs another drag star; one who embraces everything that a girl can do, and does it better."

"And what makes you think I can do it better?"

"You have me to manage you, darling," Melissa smiled. "Before I've finished transforming you, wait and see."

"But you're not listening to me; I don't want to do this anymore."

"What you want isn't important," Melissa said. "I want to stay here for a while; it's France; it's beautiful. If all I have to do is turn you into the most perfect drag star, then I'll do it."

"But I'll be the one making the money."

"Maybe, but I'm the one directing your career." Melissa took a deep breath. "I'm your agent, never forget it."

"So who appointed you?"

"You did," she shouted. "You do what you're told, if you know what's good for you."

"And if I don't?" Carl asked.

"I can find the guys who can take you for a swim with the fishes."

"Really?"

"Well, maybe not, but it's a good threat."

"I don't get you," Carl said softly, sitting at her feet. "Am I something to you or am I being used?"

"Both," Melissa said. "We're going to have a good life together, but you're going to have to realise where you stand. You do what I tell you, all the time, and we'll be okay."

"And does this involve me being a female impersonator again?"

"I think it's inevitable," Melissa said. "We have no other way of making enough money to stay here, so when the choice is obvious, there are no other choices."

“What do you mean?”

“Get your boobs prepared. They”re going to make our fortune.”

It wasn’t the first time, and it wouldn’t be the last, but their lovemaking that evening floated them away on a raft of hopeless contentment.

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“Ask me how I did it, given that my French is so poor.” Melissa came back to the apartment, a beaming smile on her face.

“How you did what?”

“Got you an interview,” she replied, heaving a heavy bag onto the table. “Not only that, I got a food parcel.”

“Go on. Tell me what you’ve got me into.”

“How about baguettes, cheese, tomatoes, ham, butter, and even a bottle of wine.”

“Stop being silly.” Carl broke off a piece of the baguette.

“Okay, I took a risk and went to see La Femme Garcon as soon as the doors opened. You have to go see Marcel, or Marcella depending upon what time we get there. It sounds promising, so I decided we might as well eat first.”

“You’ve spent all we had left?” Carl asked.

“Not quite,” Melissa replied. “I think I’ve got four Euro left.”

“So if I don’t get a job, and don’t get paid, we’re on the streets as soon as the landlord finds out we can’t pay the rent.”

“Probably, yes.”

“Not much of a risk then?”

"I have faith in you."

They ate frugally that evening, washing it down with half the bottle of local red wine, which was far from the best. When he could put it off no longer, Carl reluctantly stood.

"I don't know why we're doing this," he sighed, "Let's go and see what Marcel, or Marcella, has to offer."

La Femme Garçon was dimly lit and a long way from the theatres and clubs which Carl had been used to. The audience was about twenty-five people, mainly men, but with a scattering of women.

The stage area was small, the bar at the side of the room was just as tiny, but busy. A smallish guy in garish makeup and an ill-fitting dress with disproportionate padding was serving. On the tiny stage, another guy in drag was miming and gyrating to something upbeat in French.

"Marcel?" Melissa asked the guy behind the bar.

"Marcella." He said something incomprehensible and pointed to the stage. The meaning was obvious.

"It seems the proprietor is also the main act." Melissa and Carl took a seat at one of the rear tables.

"She's not too bad." Carl watched the act. "A bit on the heavy side and the makeup could do with being updated, but she can manage those heels."

"Are heels one of the main skills?" Melissa asked flippantly.

"Essential," Carl replied. "It's not only tits and ass; it's the heels, the makeup and the hair. That's the difference between a drag queen and a female impersonator."

"Which were you?"

"I was a female impersonator." Carl replied. "I couldn't settle to be anything else. I always thought it

was better to do it perfectly, rather than sending it up.”

Marcella finished her number, half bowed and blew kisses to the audience before bustling off stage. She came round to the bar. After a short conversation and a glass of wine, she came across to Melissa and Carl with a bottle and glasses which she placed on the table and poured.

“So you’re looking for a job here?” she asked without any preliminary chat, in heavily accented English. “I can’t tell if you’d be any good. You should have dressed.”

“I don’t have any of my stage costumes with me,” Carl said.

Marcella didn’t seem to understand. Melissa took over with a mixture of fractured French and gestures. Carl had no idea what was being conveyed or how they understood each other. There was a lot of head shaking from Marcella, coupled with a few shrugs and some laughter.

Melissa looked supremely confident as she continued, holding up five fingers, to which Marcella held up three. Some more fast words, gestures, and diverse facial expressions followed.

An unmistakable gesture from Marcella seemed to bring the discussion to a head. His hands described the unmistakable hourglass figure, and pointed at Carl. Hands were held in a “maybe” gesture, then four fingers and a nod.

Melissa held up her glass and gestured for Carl to do the same. They touched glasses with Marcella who smiled and nodded vigorously. He stood. They stood and in that uniquely French way, kissed each other on both cheeks and then he was gone; onto the stage for a second performance.

“What was all that about?” Carl asked, shouting to be heard above the noise of the sound system.

"You get an audition in costume. If you pass, you get four hundred Euros a week. I have to work the bar as well for that."

"When's the audition?"

"Tomorrow afternoon."

You're joking. I haven't got anything to wear," Carl replied. "I haven't time to prepare."

"For four hundred a week, you've got all the time you need," Melissa said. "You can raid the dressing rooms here and use whatever you need."

"Looking at Marcella's costume and what the bar maid is wearing, I don't think my kind of clothes will be here."

"Maybe not, but you'll have to improvise," Melissa said. "You can get in through the back door at eleven in the morning."

"And the audition time?"

"You're working tomorrow evening."

"But I don't speak French at all."

"You can mime," Melissa said. "And where you can't, wave your arms and improvise."

"This is a fine mess you've got me into."

"We're in one anyway. I'm trying to get us out."

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"Goodness." Carl looked round the dressing room. "It looks like an explosion in a fabric warehouse."

"Is that bad?" Melissa asked.

"Bad doesn't even begin to describe it." Carl thumbed through the dresses on the rack. "This is all tat; old-fashioned, and tawdry."

"That good?" Melissa tried to lighten his disappointment.

"And look at these shoes." Carl picked one up and looked at it in disgust. "There's supposed to be some magic in this business, but walking in these clogs could never be elegant."

"It can't all be that bad," Melissa said.

"It can be that bad and it is. No wonder the audience was small." Carl continued. "If they can't do glamour what's the point? You saw Marcella. He wasn't going to be Pinup of the Year, was he?"

"Well, no, but maybe there's something you can use?"

"The makeup has dried out; most of its crap quality anyway." Carl opened a cabinet. "And look at these wigs. If beehives ever come back, they'll be decent, and what about these 1980s perms? It's awful. I can't work with this lot."

"But there's no choice," Melissa said soothingly. "We've no money. If you don't earn some, you've no money to improve, and no money to show them what they should be doing."

"Okay, but don't expect anything exciting." Carl looked again through the clothes. "Maybe we could look through the charity shops when we get paid?"

"Please do your best," Melissa asked. "I've never seen you in drag and I'm really looking forward to it."

"I'll do it, but on condition that as soon as we get some money, you'll let me do it properly."

"I promise."

"So what are you waiting for?"

"I thought I could watch you transform."

"Maybe some time, but not now." Carl pointed to the door. "Some things have to be done in private."

Why don't you go and learn the bar with Marcel and keep him out of my way. I'll see what I can do."

Melissa closed the door behind her and heard the lock as she went towards the bar.

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Two hours later, Carl emerged. Melissa blinked. It wasn't Carl as she remembered him.

Marcel whistled and clapped. His smile said that Carl had impressed him.

He stood at the entrance and posed for effect, looking left and right. He walked, or rather seemed to glide across the floor, noiselessly, in the highest of stiletto heels. His hair was a messy blonde up do, piled high, but looking like it was going to tumble free at any moment.

He was wearing a black flapper dress, with tassels and fringes which moved as he walked, swaying from the hips as if he'd been taking lessons in swaying from the hips. He made it look elegant and effortless. The dress didn't give away too much of his waist, but the bust was padded out, and the sway shouted that he had hips and knew how to use them.

He came closer and Melissa marvelled at the makeup. If there was anything male under it all, she couldn't see it, even though she knew Carl so well.

His eyes were lined with heavy black kohl and false lashes sticky with mascara. They almost looked too heavy to blink. His lips were deep red and looked far larger than she remembered. Then close up she saw how he'd lined his lips far outside his normal lip line. He turned to her and she could see dangling earrings, quite long and swaying with black stones matching the dress and shoes.

"This is the best I could do." he said. "Please tell Marcel that I need better quality everything or I'm not doing this."

Melissa turned to Marcel and started a stream of French accompanied by hand gestures and looks at Carl. She pointed to his shoes and to the wig. She pulled a face and from the volume, it was clear that she was trying to explain disapproval.

Marcel was equally voluble, and louder. Many Gallic shrugs of the shoulder followed, with openhanded gestures. He pulled out his pockets to show that were empty. Melissa opened the till, rattled coins and held up a handful of notes.

Suddenly they were quiet. Marcel nodded and stretched out his arms. Melissa returned the gesture and they hugged. He poured three glasses and handed one each to Carl and Melissa. Whatever it was, some agreement had been reached.

Carl looked from one to the other. He didn't understand anything. To make it worse, the patrons were beginning to come in, exchanging handshakes with Marcel, air kisses with Melissa who stood behind the bar, and strange looks at Carl who couldn't understand much of what was going on.

"Go to the dressing room," Melissa said. "I'll come and tell you what you're doing."

"But what was all that about?"

"I'll tell you later," Melissa replied. "I think you've got a good deal."

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"How could you do that to me?" Carl walked up and down, towering over Melissa in his heels. "I hate making a spectacle of myself."

"Said the guy dressed like a blowsy blonde," Melissa replied. "Calm down and I'll tell you the deal."

"I can't believe I did it," Carl fumed.

"Will you shut up and let me tell you the deal?" Melissa shouted. "I've done the best I could and if you don't like it, I'm leaving."

"You can't," Carl shouted back. "You haven't got any money."

"Neither have you."

They looked at each other; angry faces. They stared, eye-to-eye. Carl broke first.

"Are you going to let me tell you the deal?" Melissa asked.

"Okay, I've calmed down now." Carl touched her arm in a very feminine, yet very theatrical gesture. "You can tell me the worst first."

"Worst is that there's no money for any new costumes."

"Second worst?"

"There's no money for new wigs."

"Third worst?"

"There isn't a third worst yet."

"And the good news?"

"Marcel thinks you're fabulous, sexy and exactly what this place needs to liven it up." Marcel smiled and nodded at the mention of his name.

"Thank you, Marcel." Carl stood, walked to him, threw his arms round his neck and kissed him briefly but hard on the lips.

"He wants you to stay on and do four nights a week at four hundred Euros a week. You dance and mime twice, you hang around the bar, and you serve some tables, and look pretty."

"I guess I can do that," Carl replied. "But isn't that what we were getting anyway?"

"I get paid two hundred on top," Melissa said.

"So we can pay the rent, eat and stay in the sunshine."

"Exactly, but you want to hear the good part?"

"There's a good part?" Carl asked.

"If trade goes up, you and I get a percentage," Melissa replied. "Marcel will pay towards your costumes, wigs, and whatever you need."

"I think it's the best offer we're going to get this week, so let's do it."

Carl walked over to Marcel again and took his hands. Marcel leant back and smiled at him, then flung himself forwards, kissing him again, briefly but hard, and then turned to kiss Melissa too.

"Steady, darling," Melissa whispered loudly. "I think you're giving him ideas."

Marcel reached for his special bottle tucked away on a high shelf, poured three measures and toasted their agreement, whatever it was. He kept smiling as if he understood Carl's English and Melissa's fractured French.

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Four weeks later, Carl was beginning to relax and enjoy his role in the bar. He'd picked up a few words of French and under Melissa's guidance; he'd developed an easy style. Once over the resentment at having to serve in the bar and engage with the patrons, he slipped into the role, flirting and teasing; playing up to one regular one night and one of their friends the next. It turned into a game which they all enjoyed.

They were able to enjoy the town and the Riviera life. Melissa was sometimes recognised but out of

drag no one seemed to notice Carl, and thus time passed easily.

"How much have we saved?" Carl asked Melissa one evening as they strolled homewards.

"Why?" Melissa asked.

"You know that I used to do drag before we met," Carl replied.

"Of course. I think I saw you once. You were in a revue bar."

"I bet you didn't know which one was me," Carl teased.

"No, I couldn't tell, but then I didn't really know you then."

"Do you think you could have picked me out, now that you know me?" Carl struck a pose in front of her.

"Honestly, I couldn't. You were all so convincing."

"Convincing," Carl repeated. "That's the word. If I'm going to do this any longer, I need to change my image."

"But you look good," Melissa replied. "Marcel can hardly stop watching you. I've seen his eyes following you across the room."

"That's what I mean," Carl replied. "They watch me, knowing that they can easily guess that there's a boy underneath the wig and the dress."

"So? You're paid to be a female impersonator."

"Maybe, but I'm not."

"Not what?"

"A female impersonator," Carl replied. "I'm a boy in drag. How about if I spend some of our money and take it up a few notches?"

"How would you do that?"

"Just watch me." Carl smiled enigmatically.

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Another couple of weeks went by. The bar was measurably busier and Marcel's attitude improved. He even exchanged a few words in English with Carl and chatted more freely with Melissa.

Melissa took on more work, cleaning and re-arranging the bar, changing the stage lighting and generally brightening up the place. Carl spent more time chatting to the patrons, especially now that there were more women coming to see the show.

"I'm taking next week off," Carl announced at the end of his last show before a few days off. "I have a few things to do."

"What things?" Melissa asked.

"Things to brighten up the show. I'm bored with doing the same few things and bored with never looking as good as I know I should."

"You're not going to leave me here all on my own?" Melissa was suddenly scared.

"No, nothing like that," Carl replied. "I've been asking around and arranged a few things. I'm going to have a few days away and I'll be back for Saturday evening. Marcella will have to take over."

"I don't know how he's going to take it."

"Don't ask. Tell him that's what I'm doing. Sometimes a girl has to do what a girl has to do."

"But you're not a girl."

"I know, and they all know too," Carl replied. "And if I don't do something about it, the novelty will wear off and the audience will drift away."

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"Have you seen Carl?" Melissa asked Marcel when she went back to work after her days off. "I haven't seen or heard from him since we finished here last week."

"Is not here?" Marcel's heavily accented English was clear.

"I have no idea where he is."

"He not here?" Marcel said. "Then I have to act on the stage. I go get ready."

The show, such as it was, proceeded with a few catcalls and shouts from the audience, clearly disappointed to be seeing Marcella again after Carl's more exuberant performances. By the end of the week, the audiences had noticeably thinned and the bar was less busy.

Melissa had no idea where Carl had gone. True, he'd said that he'd arranged a few things and that he wasn't leaving, but that didn't make up for not knowing where he was. As the next week's work approached, she was getting more and more anxious.

"He said that he'd be back for Saturday," Melissa said when Marcel asked about him. Not only Marcel, but some of the patrons were asking.

Saturday morning came, then the clock ticked past noon and then towards five. Melissa was getting worried and went to look up and down the street, but there was still no sign of Carl.

She saw an elegant blonde coming towards her. The blonde hair was glowing in the sunlight, and quite obviously left to hang loosely around the girl's shoulders to draw attention. Her dress was an off-the-shoulder red creation with a wide pleated skirt, short enough to show a lot of thigh, yet soft enough to move as she walked on high strappy sandals, her red shoulder bag held loosely by her hip,



held by a hand with matching coloured and long nails.

"Aren't you pleased to see me?"

"Carl? Is that you?"

"Who else were you expecting?"

"You've changed." Melissa regained her composure. "That dress is beautiful, and I don't know how you dare with that neckline. Are those real?" She asked looking down the front of the dress.

"No; it's all done with shading and padding. I'm still a female impersonator, but I'm Carla now."

"But the hair."

"A good bleach and extensions sewn in," Carla said.

"You had me fooled," Melissa said as she kissed him on both cheeks. "What happened? Silly question; I can see what happened, but why?"

"I got fed up," Carla replied. "I hate being a third rate drag queen, so I decided that I had to either run away altogether or go back to being a female impersonator."

"But you can't hide that hair and those nails." Melissa held his hand and touched his hair."

"I don't intend to," Carla said. "I learned a long time ago that it was easier to stay in character than it was to change from boy to girl and back again each day."

"So has my boyfriend gone for good?" Melissa asked.

"It's all in working order under this dress, if that's what you mean," Carla laughed. "I can't wait to see Marcel's face when he thinks I've deserted him and then when he realises that I haven't."

"He'll take some convincing." Melissa stood back and looked him over once more. "Even I have trouble recognising anything under that dress."

Melisa went back into the bar and waited. Some moments later, Carla came in and sat at one of the tables, trying to attract as little attention as possibly. A few customers stared, more likely wondering who she was and who she was meeting there.

"You've no need to get dressed," Melissa said to Marcel as they worked the bar together. "Carl's going to do tonight's show."

"But he's not arrived yet." Marcel looked round the bar. "The customers expect... They'll throw things at me, maybe wreck the place."

Carla walked over and put her arm around him, then kissed his cheek. "Hello, Marcel," she purred. "Were you getting worried about me?"

He turned to look at her, taking in the full picture. "But you are a woman."

"Maybe some of the guys wish I was," Carla replied. "They'd soon have a surprise if they saw what was between my legs."

"C'est magnifique." Marcel shook his head in disbelief.

"So shall we get on with the show?" Carla walked towards the stage.

She set up her music and waited for the moment. When it came, she started to dance and lip-sync. She chattered in fractured French between numbers and gyrated sensuously, ending with a flourish in which she pulled up her skirt, showing stocking tops and garters. She walked off to cheers and whoops.

"I think I got away with it," Carla said to Melissa as she turned to wave at the crowd.

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Everything went fine for the next few weeks as summer turned to fall and then to winter. The small bar prospered, the prices went up, and Marcel smiled a lot more.

Carla's income increased, as did her wardrobe and sense of style. There was no use pretending that she could dress as a boy any more, even when she took a week off. Melissa got used to them going around as two girls, and for Carla to get the attention.

Carla seemed to revel in her new rediscovered femininity. She used it recklessly. She bought rings and earrings, necklaces, bangles and bracelets. Her nails were never less than perfect and never less than noticeably long. She spent ages making sure that her makeup was precise and as up-to-date as possible, usually with heavy false lashes. There was never a glimpse of the boy beneath it all.

Carl fell into a routine of hair salon and manicure, becoming a regular and welcome client at both. He shopped in the little boutiques for daywear and prowled the vintage shops and flea markets for anything redolent of glamour for the show.

It was not as if they socialised away from work in places where they were known. They took the express train to Paris and to Strasburg, Brussels and bravely to Berlin in the coldest week of the year, staying always in a good hotel near the centre of town.

Melissa thought that Carla looked amazing in over-the-knee boots with daring heels, a fur coat with a huge collar, topped by a fur hat with a blonde ponytail hanging halfway down her back.

They'd never really been lovers in all their time together. They were girlfriends in all the best ways. That relationship was changing as they fell into each other's arms with more ease and delight.

Now they were a cross between best friends and sisters, lovers and an established couple, delighting in each other's happiness, flirting with others, but never more. If anyone suspected Carla's true gender, none ever showed it. Carla seemed to become more feminine in walk, gesture and mannerisms. Her speech was carefully modulated, with a girl's delighted expressions rather than a male speech pattern. Melissa watched in admiration.

"If you ever had to give all this up, you'd be mistaken for a girl in boy's clothes," Melissa told her.

"Not much chance of that." Carla smiled at the thought. "This is far more fun."

"I thought you ran away to sea to get away from it all."

"That was a silly thing to do," Carla admitted, "But it was good to be away from the chorus line that I was in. I was stifled by having to be one of the girls there. Now I can be whoever I want to be."

"And methinks you're enjoying every minute."

"Of course."

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It was between shows on a cold Saturday night as winter was turning to spring. There had been a different feel to the audience that evening. There were some men in a group they hadn't seen before, drinking heavily and ignoring the floor show. They left half-way through, leaving just one of their number who seemed to be paying attention to the show, if not actually enjoying it.

The jokes worked, and the ad libs weren't too outrageous. It was simply something in the air that made Marcel look at Melissa and Melissa look at Carla with a questioning look. Then something happened.

"Mr. Fantoni wants to see you," a dark and heavy man announced to Carla as she was sitting at the side of the stage.

"Err, okay." Carla looked at the man, who stood as if he expected her to understand exactly what the summons meant.

"Mr Fantoni wants to see you," he repeated.

"I heard you the first time," Carla replied, looking him up and down and finding nothing to like about his demeanour.

"He expects that you come right away," the man insisted.

"I don't know who you're talking about," Carla replied.

At this moment, Marcel came up to them, sweating a little, looking conciliatory. "Is there anything I can do to help?" he asked.

"I tell her Mr, Fantoni wants to see her," the man repeated once again. "She does not understand."

Marcel looked more than a little ruffled by this revelation. "I think you should go and see Mr, Fantoni," he stammered.

"I don't know this guy." Carla slipped off her bar stool. "Anyway, I want to change before my last slot. Whoever he is, he can come by afterwards."

"I don't think you understand," Marcel whispered. "Mr, Fantoni runs this town. He wants you so you'd better go and see him, never mind about the last show. Maybe there'll be no last show if you don't."

"Is he the mafia round here?" Carla started at the messenger.

"You do not say that." Marcel turned red. "I'll get your coat."

He hustled back and returned with Carla's new leather jacket with the fur collar, helped her into it,

and almost pushed her towards the door. The man took her arm with a grip far firmer than was friendly, and guided her to a black sedan parked at the end of the street. He pushed her roughly into the back seat, slammed the door, and the car was moving before she could sit upright in her seat.

The driver was behind a glass screen. "Where are you taking me?" Carla shouted. "Stop this car."

It was no use. She tried to open the door when the car slowed at a junction but it was firmly locked. Although she banged on the screen and shouted, no notice was taken as the car sped through the streets and out of town into the hills behind. Eventually, it turned into a drive and waited as the electric gates opened, then they were off again, round a curving drive before pulling up in front of a brightly-lit doorway under a canopy and behind ornate stone columns.

The double doors opened and a uniformed man servant stood there. The driver got out and opened the door for Carla to get out. She made no move until he reached in as if to pull her out manually.

Wrapping her jacket tightly round her, she moved to the side of the car, held out her hand, and accepted the driver's assistance to stand. She bowed slightly as if the curtesy had been intended and then turned to the house.

She paused, looking up and down, then across the front of the building. Sensing no alternative, she walked into the house.

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The servant stood to the side and made a slight bow as she entered and walked past him, heading for a room to the rear where she could hear music playing. She entered a large room, softly illuminated, with huge picture windows looking over the town and down to the bay.

Hearing her enter, a grey-haired man stood languorously, and gestured for her to come and sit near him on a separate couch with the same magnificent view. It was hard to guess his age, certainly over fifty, but elegant and patrician in bearing. He was slim and dressed in clothes which looked as if they had been tailored to fit him like a glove.

The servant appeared with glasses and a bottle on a tray. He offered the label for inspection, and at a nod, opened the cork with a sharp "plop" and poured sparkling wine into two glasses. He offered the first to Carla, who took it, watching the man take the second. He raised the glass as if in a toast and sipped.

"I'm Mike Fantoni and I'm pleased that you came." He took her hand and kissed it formally. Their glasses touched. "To our future association," he said.

"I didn't know we had one," Carla countered.

"I just bought your contract from Marcel," he announced. "You're working for me now."

"I'm not, and you didn't," Carla scoffed. "I have no contract with Marcel."

"It matters not." He smiled. "You're working for me now."

"What if I don't want to work for you?"

"I didn't say I was asking, or even offering you a job." His smile turned to a stare. "You're just the person I need to do a job, and you're going to do it."

"And if I refuse?"

"You'd be most unwise," he replied. "You'd be physically unable to carry on working, and your friends would have nowhere for you to work anyway."

"Is that a threat?" Carla could feel her strength and resolution slipping.

"It's a promise."

Carla gulped and tried to look cool and in control. "So what would I have to do, assuming I decided to accept your offer?"

"Well, skipping the bit where I told you that this was an offer you couldn't refuse, it's a very simple job." He smiled. It could have been a genuine smile, but the tone of voice said otherwise.

"Go on." Carla sipped again and crossed her legs in front of him.

"I need you to shadow my accountant." he said. "I want to know where he is every second of the day. I need to know who he speaks to, who he meets, I need his letters and emails, his telephone calls, and every bit of information I can get."

"So you don't need me at all." Carla shook her head, allowing her hair to swing across her face. "You need a detective."

"No I don't, I need you."

"Why me?"

"You have special qualities that make you the most ideal person to do this for me."

"But I have no skills." Carla was puzzled.

"You don't need any." Mike walked to the window and looked out. "I need all the information you can get. You can send it any way possible, electronically or on paper, it doesn't matter. It doesn't have to be complete."

"But you said qualities?" Carla asked. "What qualities."

"You're a boy with a bit extra," Mike replied. "He's always gone for that, especially when you have the breasts to match."

"These aren't real." Carla touched her breast automatically. "It's padding and contouring with makeup."

"I didn't know. I assumed they were real." Mike looked at them and then up at her. "It's a small matter which can easily be fixed."

"Wait a minute." Carla stood. "This is my body. You don't make decisions like that for me."

"I already have," Mike said with quiet authority as if there was nothing more to discuss.

"Carla sat again, shocked and feeling powerless and lost. "Can't you tell me what this is about before you tell me what I have to do?"

"Okay, firstly let me say that you'll be well paid, and I do not expect that you'll be in any danger."

"Is that supposed to be reassuring?"

"You'll be unharmed," Mike said. "I've heard he can get a little rough in bed, but I guess you can handle that."

"In bed?" Carla gasped. "I'm not some kind of common prostitute."

"Which begs the question of which kind of prostitute are you?"

"I'm not."

"Come on, a boy who dresses and acts as beautifully as you can't be doing it just for fun."

"I'm an entertainer," Carla replied. "It's what I do to make a living."

"So you'll be entertaining for me this time." Mike refilled his glass. "Only I'm the director and you'll be following my script."

"I'm not gay," Carla stammered. "I'm not into boys."

"You're an actor or an actress; you take whatever direction I tell you."

"My head is spinning." Carla took a deep breath and tried to relax, feeling she'd lost control of the situation completely.

"Okay, here's the deal," Mike started. "My accountant is my oldest friend. He's also my cousin; this is a family business after all. I think he's skimming; diverting some income streams."

"So maybe you need someone to check the books?" Carla tried.

"Don't be stupid. This isn't a business where we keep books, and if we did, he's the accountant anyway."

"So where do I come in?"

"I need you to cling to him like a limpet," Mike replied. "It won't be hard, he'll want you to be with him all the time when we've fixed you up. His current squeeze is going to disappear when I'm ready to have you step into her place."

"Disappear? How?" Carla gasped.

"I'm not having her bumped off, if that's what you're thinking," Mike replied. "She's going to work for friends elsewhere. She'll be safe and happier than being here."

"Why not use her... or him?"

"She's too stupid," Mike answered. "She acts like she looks all the time."

"I'm trapped into this, aren't I?"

"Yes." Mike smiled. "You'd better make the best of it. I need to know everything possible; where he goes; who he meets; everything. If I'm right, he gets to retire, you get paid off, and we all live happily ever after. Maybe one of us won't be too happy with his retirement plan, but that's another story."

"So where do I come in?" Carla asked. "If I agree to do this for you."

"I told you, you're already working for me," Mike replied.

"Let's not argue about that one." Carla could see she was caught in whatever madness this was going to become.

"Don't worry; I'll make sure that I know where you are every second of the day." Mike said. "You'll be completely safe."

"So what do I have to do?"

"Lucio, that's his name, has always had a thing for boys with breasts," Mike said. "They have to look like they're really glamorous and feminine girls, so he can pretend and put on a show. He wants them to talk, walk and behave like they're brainless bimbos, primping and preening just so they can have sex with him whenever he wants. And he wants it a lot."

"I don't know if I can do that," Carla said. "I don't do sex with men."

"I'm sure you can, but first you have to get fixed up, and the sooner we do that, the sooner we can get started."

"And how long will I be working for you?"

"As long as it takes or until I have to think of something else," Mike replied. "I need evidence for the family meeting before I can get Lucio out, and you're the best means I have of gathering it all."

"Thank you for explaining all that to me." Carla stood. "Please have your driver take me back. I'll let you know about the offer you've made when I have decided."

"You don't get it," Mike replied. "You're working for me now. I'll have someone show you to your room."

"But what about my friends?" Carla asked. "They'll be expecting me."

"I'll send a message," Mike replied. "Now get some sleep, you've got a busy day tomorrow."

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Morning came early, with the sun highlighting the patterns on the curtains which tried to keep the daylight out. Carla tried the door. It was just as secure as it had been when she had tried it the night before. She'd been shown politely to the room and hardly heard the click of the lock, but it was there all the same.

Her room was spacious and well-equipped. She had a range of cosmetics and cleansers arranged on a dressing table, with hairbrush, accessories and a fashionable nightgown on the bed. She was effectively a prisoner, but a reasonably comfortable one.

"It's no use sitting here," Carla thought after a fitful night's rest, as she waited for something to happen in the morning. "I might as well use the facilities."

She chose the shower rather than the bath and luxuriated as the hot water soothed her jangling nerves. Wrapped in the softest of robes, she checked her hair extensions were firm and carefully dried her hair in front of the vanity. Satisfied, she dressed, using the underwear she found in the wardrobe.

"These are too big," she noticed as she settled her breast forms into the bra cups. "Bigger than I'm used to."

A waves of panic shuddered through her. "I hope they don't intend to make me have breasts this size. It would be awful." She discarded the bra and fastened her own, settled the forms in the cups and tried to soothe the panic in her heart.

In front of the dressing table, she carefully did her makeup, making sure that she used only the best of the cosmetics provided. The eyelashes she glued on were the fullest she ever used.

"I wonder why I never tried these before," she asked herself as she rechecked the finished look.

She was fastening the straps of her nude heels when there was a knock at the door. "Don't come in. I'm not dressed."

She reached for a nude-coloured shift dress which hung in the wardrobe as if she was meant to choose it. In her haste, she struggled with the back zip.

She opened the door and immediately stepped back and turned.

"Zip me up, please," she asked, presenting a back view to whoever entered.

"A pleasure," came Mike's voice. "I was hoping you'd join me for breakfast. I think we got off on the wrong foot last night, and I'd like to convince you that working for me might not be so bad."

"You told me I had no choice."

"Apart from that."

"I have no choice, and so..." Carla paused and turned to face him. "I must accept graciously."

He led her down through a kitchen and onto a sunny terrace, sheltered from the wind, where the late season sun was comfortably warm. They ate; croissants and fruit, coffee and orange juice.

"Perhaps we could start with what you have planned for me." Carla broke the silence.

"You'll be seeing my surgeon this afternoon," Mike replied. "It's a complication, but the sooner the better."

"A complication," Carla snorted. "You kidnap me, force me to work for you and tell me that there's a complication. That's rich."

"I was informed that you'd had your breasts done," Mike replied. "My informant was wrong, and it needs to be corrected."

"Do I have a choice?"

"No. It's necessary."

Carla suppressed another wave of panic. It was fine to appear confident. After all, what was there to lose, but the thought of being so completely in the power of this man was scary. She knew he was powerful and surmised that he could get away with most things with most people. She had no power whatever.

"Please tell me that you're not going to have someone make me into a freak," she said quickly.

"Of course not." Mike smiled. "You'll have the most perfect and beautiful breasts. They'll look and feel entirely natural."

"And what size?"

"They'll be proportionate," Mike assured her. "You'll not be a freak. They may be on the big size for your height and frame, but they'll not be outsize melons or anything like that."

"Gee, thanks for nothing," Carla replied.

"The surgery's restricted by your skin envelope anyway," Mike said. "The doctors will know what can be done, and more importantly, they'll know what can't be done."

"And will your Lucio go for that?" Carla asked sarcastically.

"I know what I need you to do," Mike said. "I know how you need to look. You have to be Lucio's ideal; therefore you have to be believable to everyone."

"I don't know how that works," Carla said.

"It works because he wants to show off his girlfriend," Mike replied. "The emphasis is on girlfriend. You'll be a bit exotic perhaps, but entirely believable and passable as a girl. He doesn't want people to know he's gay, and we all pretend we don't."

"I don't get it." Carla looked directly at him. "Why do you need me in all this?"

"I explained last night," Mike said slowly. "I need to know where he goes, who he sees, who he talks to, everything, and you're going to pass it to me day by day until I have evidence, one way or another."

"And how do I do that without him killing me when he finds out?"

"He won't find out," Mike replied. "You'll have a cell phone and a laptop. Both will connect to my office whenever they're used. I'll give you a memory stick. It's going to look like a lipstick. All you have to do is put it into Lucio's computer for ten seconds and it'll do its job."

"It all sounds so simple." Carla shook her head. "I'm not a female James Bond."

"You don't have to be. I have the technology."

"Okay, so how do I fake all the sex stuff?" Carla blushed as she said it. "I told you, I've never done any of it. I'm not into boys." A thought struck her. "I'm not into greasy old men either. You haven't told me anything about Lucio."

"I'm relying on your acting skills," Mike said. "I'm sure you can fake it."

"Not with his cock stuck inside my bum," Carla snapped back.

"Don't worry. He'll think it's endearing that he has so much to teach you."

"I wish I could believe that."

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Precisely at noon, Carla was ushered into a limousine once again. This time, Mike accompanied her and the bruiser from last night was up front with the

driver. They threaded through the city streets and through guarded gates into a private estate.

"We get out here," Mike said, holding the door open and taking a firm grip on her upper arm.

"There's no need to grip so tight." Carla tried to push his hand away. "There's nowhere I can run to and I'm sure that your goon in the car is quite capable of stopping me."

His grip released as they entered through automatic doors. They stood in a vestibule whilst they waited for more automatic doors to open. As they did so, a smiling woman in a white coat awaited them.

She and Mike spoke in rapid French. Carla had acquired some of the language, but not enough to follow what was being said. The only obvious thing was that they knew each other and what was going on.

Carla was ushered into a sparsely furnished room where another lady whom she presumed to be a nurse indicated that she should strip and put on a loose gown. She took everything off, reddening as she removed the breast forms from her bra, before unfastening the clasp. Once dressed, she was taken through to a more equipped consulting room where the first lady and Mike were sitting.

"The doctor is going to examine you," Mike said. "She has no English, so I'm here to translate."

The doctor opened the gown and felt her ribs. Carla looked straight ahead, feigning indifference as she was pinched and prodded, measured and photographed. She flinched as the doctor drew lines on her chest and lay down when she was told to do so. More measurements followed and then more lines appeared on her chest.

The conversation rattled back and forth. Carla ignored it, trying to shut her mind. She saw the gestures pass between them and knew they were talking about size. The doctor shook her head; Mike nodded. Clear packages appeared on the desk containing oval

shapes, which they passed between them. Carla knew what they were.

Carla felt a panic rising. Her breath quickened and she heard herself gasping for each mouthful of air. Mike held her down and stopped her flailing her arms as the doctor approached with a syringe.

A prick in her arm, a warm feeling spread through her body and then she seemed to go into a fugue state. There were voices around her, but she wasn't hearing them. It all floated away. Another prick, this time in the back of her hand, and she floated away.

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It was a bed; there were curtains at the window and a burning thirst in her throat. Carla's head was aching and she felt too weak to move.

Her chest was bandaged with tight strips and a heavy pressure weighed as she breathed. A white-coated nurse came into view with a glass and a straw for her to suck some water. It all came back. She knew it had been done.

She tried to turn onto her side away from the light, but it was too sore to move. She lay back, closed her eyes, and drifted into sleep once more.

The room was almost dark with only a faded light seeping through the blinds which had been drawn closed. Carla felt her senses returning. The pain across her chest was shrieking, screaming loudly. The light came on and nurse entered.

Carla realised that the screams were coming from her. Her hand was held and turned. She felt some pressure and felt grateful as welcome warmth soothed her to sleep once more.

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"How are you feeling today?" Mike entered with the doctor who smiled and nodded before letting forth in a stream of incomprehensible French.

"I feel about as good as if you dropped a couple of car tires across my chest," Carla replied. "I'm fed up of lying here, but I've been too sore to move."

"Nurse is going to help you sit up, and then doctor will remove your dressings and examine how well you're healing," Mike said. "It's going to be uncomfortable but I'm told that the pain level will reduce quickly from now on."

"How long have I been out?"

"Four days," Mike replied. "Leaving you sedated was easier according to the doctor. Your healing is well advanced by now."

"So they won't fall out if I sit up?"

"Don't ask stupid questions. I paid for the best and you'd better learn to love them and use them," he said. "It was a trans-axillary incision, and they can't fall out sideways anyway."

"I don't know what that means."

"The incision was under your arms. It should fade to invisible in a few weeks."

Carla was helped up and watched as the dressings were cut away. Drains were on both sides of her chest now and hurt as the doctor examined them and looked at her sutures, almost invisible under each arm. The discolouration and bruising was mottled all over her chest.

"She says you have to keep them supported for the next six weeks," Mike translated the stream of French from the doctor. "Don't lift or strain. If it causes pain, don't do it."

"Can I feel?"

"Go ahead."

"Carla's fingers touched lightly at first, then more firmly. "It's so hard and swollen," she said. "I thought you promised no melons."

"It's one of the things doctor said. They'll feel that way for ten days or so. There's a lot of swelling and bruising to reduce." Mike walked across the room and spoke to the doctor. "She said to tell you that you have the best profile implants and she expects them to look perfect."

"Will my nipples look right?" Carla felt them and flinched at the touch. "I'd hate it if they were stuck in the wrong place."

"They'll fall into place. Gravity and a good bra will see to that," Mike said. "It's going to take time. Believe me, if I could hurry this up, I'd do it. I didn't expect you hadn't had them done before I found you, or I'd have held back a few things."

"You've done this before with someone else," Carla's realisation hit her suddenly.

"I've had girlfriends, if that's what you're asking," Mike said. "None died and all enjoyed the results."

"But they started off as girls," Carla replied, a tear forming in her eye. "I don't know how I'm going to cope."

"You'll be fine. I'll get someone to look after you."

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Three weeks later, Carla was sitting beside the pool at Mike's villa. The sun was warm and soothing. The huge support bra had been exchanged for a bikini with a supportive top. Only the bulge in the briefs gave anything away.

"I never thought he'd get you to come and look after me," Carla said. "I'd never have gotten through this without you."

"You certainly couldn't have held the hair drier up long enough." Melissa gestured the movements. "You're so vain about looking good. You're worse than anyone I know."

"You don't have to tell me; my roots are showing and my nails look like they haven't seen the manicurist for ages. I must look a mess," Carla said. "Do you think maybe Mike will decide it's all too much and let me go?"

"Not with all the money he's spent so far," Melissa replied. "Maybe it won't be so bad."

"It's my fault. I chose the first steps along this route at Marcel's. I never expected it to go this far though."

"I'm amazed," Melissa replied. "I know you had no choices, but you seem to have adapted easily. You have the walk, the gestures, the voice and speech patterns, you send signals when you play with your hair. You seem born to be this girl."

"I've had no choices," Carla replied. "You've kept me from hurting myself and helped me through all the exercises. I don't know how I'd have coped without you."

"I wonder how Marcel is coping without me," Melissa replied. "I'm sure he'll have thought of something but you realise I'm only here for your recovery."

"It may take some time." Carla put her hands under her breasts. "I never realised how restricting these things can be. They jiggle all over the place."

"Welcome to my world." Melissa laughed. "You must have known what would happen. You wore falsies after all."

"But I could take them off."

"So now you can't. Be careful what you wish for."

"Who said I wished for these?"

"I think you were always heading that way, sooner or later." Melissa walked round and hugged Carla, then fondled her breasts playfully.

"How much has Mike told you?"

"Nothing; only that you're here to do a job for him."

"I daren't tell you," Carla replied. "I hope I can get back to you soon. Maybe we'll get that yacht of our own."

"Girl, with your boobs and my cooking, we'd be sure to attract the paying customers."

"It's a dream," Carla sighed. "Maybe when this nightmare ends..."

Two weeks later, the doctor had signed Carla off, with instructions on long term care. It seemed to be about massage.

"No doubt Lucio will be doing that," Carla thought with a grimace.

And Melissa went back to work with Marcel.

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"It's time you started earning your keep," Mike announced. "I've arranged for a stylist to work with you. She's flying in later. You'll do whatever she tells you."

"Don't I have choices?"

"I've sent her pictures of Lucio's type of girl. Her job is to make sure you tick all the right boxes, so he'll choose you," Mike announced coldly. "He's been alone too long now and he's already on the prowl. I can't wait any longer or I might lose the opportunity to get you into place."

"When do I get to meet him?" Carla asked. "I may hate him at first sight."

"If you've any sense, you will, but you're being paid to do a job."

"You never mentioned pay before." Carla's ears pricked up. "How much do I get?"

"If this goes as I expect, you'll be well rewarded."

"And will I be free to live my life afterwards?"

"Yes, I'll promise you that," Mike agreed. "I'm sorry if this seems rough, but it's necessary."

"Maybe not to me." Carla paused. "But if it means I can walk away with a good reward, I'll do what you want. How about showing me a bit about Lucio?"

"I'll get some pictures." Mike opened a drawer and pulled out an album. "Look through these. He's the balding guy with the suit that looks as if it was made for someone a size slimmer."

"And are these his previous girlfriends?" Carla flipped through the pages.

"Most of the blondes, and always the one he has an arm round in the group photos."

"Maybe he was afraid the camera would steal them," Carla joked. "He looks the possessive type."

"Possessive, jealous, grumpy, bad tempered; that's my cousin all over. The good thing is that he's never been violent," Mike said. "You'll wrap him around your little finger easily."

"How do you know that I won't fall for him and tell him all about your plans?"

"You're not going to be that stupid," Mike said. "After all, you've a lot to lose if it all goes wrong."

"Maybe he's not doing anything wrong?" Carla asked.

"I know he is," Mike said. "I haven't got enough evidence, and that's what you" going to get for me."

The stylist arrived. She was an elegant lady called Rosemary with a very British accent. She was straight down to business. She and Carla were driven to a salon in the centre of the city. They pulled up at a back entrance and were ushered upstairs to a private area, where Carla was the only client.

Rosemary's French was rapid and seemingly perfect. Within moments she was giving instruction. Carla was quickly into a hairdresser's chair where her extensions were removed and the process of bleaching and colouring her hair began.

With her hair wrapped, Carla moved to the manicurist's desk, where her nails were cleaned and filed before the process of applying new acrylics began. Rosemary rattled off instructions at every stage. Carla sat and watched as her nails became longer and finely formed in pink shading to white tips. The length was elegant, shorter than her usual choice, and the colour much more muted.

"Do I get any choices in this?" she asked when Rosemary took time from the telephone to talk to her.

"Of course," Rosemary replied. "You can like it all or complain to Mike afterwards. I'm here to do a job, and I've got quite strict instructions."

"That sounds harsh."

"I don't mean to be unfriendly." Rosemary softened her tone. "It's doing what I'm told that gets me paid."

"I understand, I think," Carla said. "I'll have to get used to being an object."

"Not an object," Rosemary replied. "You're a model and a beautiful one at that."

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Some hours later, they were in the car and heading back.

"I do hope Mike thinks you're what he wanted," Rosemary said as she approached the door. "I think I've eliminated every trace of female impersonator about you."

"What's not to like?" Carla asked. "I feel very feminine and elegant. Your decisions about things seem perfect."

"Wait until you see the wardrobe I've purchased for you," Rosemary replied. "It's been unpacked into the suite at your hotel."

"My hotel? I didn't know I was moving out of here."

"I'll let Mike tell you what's planned. All I know is that I'm supposed to see you whenever I'm asked."

"Do you think he'll like me?" Carla asked. "I mean, I look so classy now. I'd never have chosen this tawny shade of blonde. I guess I was always the obvious one."

The car came to a halt and the doors opened. Carla took a deep breath and walked as elegantly as she could into the house.

"Rosemary, you are a genius," Mike applauded as Carla came into his view. "She's perfect."

"I knew she would be easy when you sent me the photographs," Rosemary replied. "If you're satisfied, I'll get back to the airport for an earlier flight than I expected. Call when you need me."

With that, they were alone.

"You've got a suite in the Hotel Bristol." Mike handed her some keys. "It's the best in town. Your cover story is simple. You're taking a break, after separating from your girlfriend. You're confused about

your sexuality and deciding if you want a full sex change. Keep it vague and talk about your appearances as a female impersonator.”

“When do I meet Lucio?”

“He’ll find you soon enough,” Mike replied. “Go to the restaurant in the hotel; take the waiter’s recommendations about where to go afterwards. He’ll be there.”

“Won’t he ask how I can afford a suite?”

“Maybe he will, but he’s not going to ask difficult questions.” Mike replied. “He’ll be more interested in what’s in your panties than what’s in your past.”

“You haven’t told me how to be your super spy.”

“There’s your laptop waiting in your room. It’s set up to act as you’d expect a laptop to work, with your favourites and a history. It’s all in character so use it.”

“But how do I use it to communicate?” Carla asked. “Anyone looking through it would find messages in an instant.”

“Not with this one. Set up a daily diary and write all your thoughts there. It will look as if it’s your personal diary, but when you hit ‘save’ it will come to me. Do it every day and more than once if you can.”

“What do you want to know?”

“Tell your diary everything; fill the pages with everything you can think of, where you go, who you meet, anything and everything.”

“How do I know what’s relevant or interesting?”

“I’ll sort it out. You only have to do it. And look at other sites in your favourites list as well. Order things, clothes, shoes, makeup; make it look like you’re addicted to the internet, but wipe your history carefully.”

“Is that it?” Carla asked. It all seems baffling.”

"Here's the final bit. This lipstick is a USB. Get it into any computer you can. It needs five seconds to do what it needs to do."

"What does it need to do?"

"You don't need to know. Remember you're the dumb blonde, get into role as soon as you can. Here's a cell phone. Put it into your bag. It's programmed with your hairdresser, makeup artist and manicurist. They're all real and top class. Use them every day if you need to; their accounts will be paid automatically."

"I don't have a hairdresser and the rest."

"You do now," Mike said. "You have to look perfect all the time to keep his interest."

"Anything else I need to know?"

"How did you guess? Calling Lucio will put something into his phone or any phone he calls you from. The only other thing you need to remember, is to cling to him closely; don't let him out of your sight for longer than you have to."

"It all sounds so complicated," Carla replied. "I'm not sure I can get away with it all."

"You will," Mike said. "And I'll know where you are all the time."

"You can't. That's not possible."

"It's possible." Mike smiled. "You've got a tracker in your left breast."

"You bastard!" Carla's hand flew to her left breast. "You set me up. I'll not last for more than a few minutes."

"You can't feel it. No one can. Don't worry; it's top secret military quality and his people aren't good enough to spot it anyway."

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The car delivered Carla to the hotel that evening. She checked in and was escorted to her suite. It was a revelation, with a lounge and balcony overlooking the bay, a large bedroom with a dressing room and bathroom, and even a small kitchen area.

"I never knew what it would feel like to be in a place like this," Carla said to herself as she wandered through, looking at everything.

She inspected the wardrobes and drawers. "Rosemary's choices; she seems to know me better than I know myself." The thought amused her. "What do I know? I've only been this person for a few weeks. I don't know much about myself anymore."

She changed into a red dress with matching heels, ran a brush through her hair and patted it into place, then re-did her lipstick and mascara. She took a matching bag, pushed a few cosmetics and her phone into the clutch and she was ready.

Remembering her instructions, she went to the restaurant and asked about where to go for nightlife. Following the instructions, she walked through the precinct and to the doors of Pigalle. The doormen held the door for her to enter as if recognising a regular patron. She took a deep breath, scanned the room, and took a stool at the end of the bar.

She ordered white wine and sat once again, scanning the room. The floor show started a few moments later. Carla realised at once that this was a female impersonator show of a higher order than the ones she had seen before.

"Maybe that's why I got in so easily," she thought. "There must be something about me that signals to their radar that I'm one of them."

Instinctively, she smoothed her dress as an excuse for checking that there was no tell-tale bulge at the front. She sat feeling a little conspicuous and for the

sake of something to do, she took a small mirror from her bag, re-applied her lipstick and fluffed out her hair. She closed her bag and sat. She still felt really self-conscious, wishing she'd stayed in the hotel.

She gave her attention to the performance. The girl was good. She was tall and slim, with prominent breast implants which appeared far too large for her frame. She slipped off her cape and shimmied down before stomping around the stage area as music blared and she lip synced to a torch ballad.

She strutted to the centre stage and in one movement, flipped off her dress, revealing a basque and panties. The audience clapped as she paraded round again. She came to the centre once more as the song came to a crescendo. The basque was removed, revealing a spangled bra top, covering little, but holding everything forward and out. The lights dimmed and she disappeared through the darkness out of view, to clapping, whistles, and cheers.

Someone was talking to her; fast French which she couldn't understand yet could tell that it was well-modulated and gentle, even seductive, rather than demanding.

"I'm sorry, I don't speak enough French." She turned to find Lucio at her elbow.

"In that case, I shall speak English." He smiled and leaned a little closer. "I think you enjoyed our star performer."

"She was really good. Such confidence in front of everyone is amazing. I could never imagine doing anything like that."

"And yet here you are." Lucio turned on the charm. "I think you are performing more bravely than she."

"I don't think so." Carla turned on her bar stool, putting her knees between them.

"He placed his hand on her knee. "You are being modest. You are performing at a higher level."

"I'm not sure what you mean." Carla remembered she was supposed to go along with this. "I'm here for a break and drifted in here quite by chance."

"But you and our star have something in common." Lucio's touch became firmer. "He flaunts his masculinity under all his finery. You hide it so well."

"What makes you think that?"

"I have an instinct." Lucio took his hand from Carla's knee and moved closer so that they were almost side-by-side, with shoulders touching.

Carla could smell the fragrance he was wearing, citrus and woody with drier registers. "Maybe your instinct is wrong."

"I don't think so." He leaned closer, and whispered. "I saw you walking to the bar. Then when I saw how you checked your dress, I was certain."

"So having made a deduction, why might that interest you?" Carla remembered her instructions. She also thought that he was making it too easy.

"You are a precious one." He leaned in and kissed her lightly on the cheek. "I am always attracted to girls who have a mystery about them."

"Does that mean girls who might be hiding a little extra?"

"Why you know me too well already." He held out a hand for her to shake. "I am Lucio, some say 'Lucky Lucio' and that's how I feel tonight. I have been so lonely for the company of a girl like you."

"You're too kind." Carla took his hand and shook it formally. He held on and pressed it to his lips. "I'm Carla."

"And you are alone, so I am doubly lucky tonight."

"So why hit on me?" Carla asked. "The girl on stage has more charms on display and she's probably able to speak better French."

"She's too obvious." Lucio shook his head. "If I take her anywhere, everyone will guess that she's only dressing up, despite the breasts. With you, no one would guess unless, like me, they are an absolute connoisseur of the good things in life."

"Am I a good thing?"

"To me you are already special," Lucio continued, moving even closer. "I think we could have a good thing going. Let's swap numbers and I'll call you tomorrow."

"Aren't you going too fast?" Carla tried to look dumb, but knew she was failing.

"Time is precious." Lucio pulled out his phone and waited for Carla to do the same.

They swapped numbers. Mission One accomplished, Carla thought as she struggled to get the keys right with her nails getting in the way of an unfamiliar keypad. She called his number to make sure it was right and was rewarded by the ringtone.

"Aren't you going to answer that?" she asked.

"Of course." Lucio pressed the connection. "I mean what I said. I'll call you tomorrow," he said into the phone.

Carla feigned a yawn. "I'm sorry. It's not you. I've had a long day travelling; maybe I shouldn't have come out tonight."

"I'm so pleased that you did. May I escort you anywhere?"

"My hotel's across the way. I'm at the Bristol."

"Then I insist that I walk you to your door." He took her arm and when they got into the street, his arm slipped around her and they walked in step. "I feel so comfortable with you already," he said.

"You don't even know me," Carla replied as they reached the door of the hotel. "I may not be concealing anything that could hold your interest."

"I shall enjoy finding out." Lucio pulled her close, kissed her hard on the lips and as suddenly walked away, turning to blow a kiss as she entered the doors.

She took the elevator to her suite where she stood on the balcony for a few moments, taking in all that had happened. She stepped back in, drew the blinds and switched on her laptop.

"Dear diary..." she started to write. The words flowed easily as she recalled every word and gesture.

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"I could get used to this." Carla thought as she lay in bed the next morning.

She threw back the quilt and stood, feeling her long nightdress falling around her ankles. The curtains opened at the press of a button, letting the sun shine through. Impulsively, she stood on the balcony, breathing in the warm air as the sounds of the street carried on below.

Throwing off her nightdress, she went into the shower and stood, luxuriating in the caress of the water. Turning off the shower, she wrapped a towel gently round her hair and then after she had wiped the condensation away, she looked at her body in the mirror.

She raised her arms, looking at the fading scars from her surgery. She dropped her arms and saw that they were invisible unless she searched for them. She saw the fall of her breasts as they lay over her chest, pert and profiled, with the nipples standing as they should in an anatomically correct position.

She placed a hand under each breast and lifted them gently, as if offering them to the girl in the mir-



ror. She pouted and posed again, then laughed with the sudden joy of the moment.

She looked at her face closely in the mirror. "I should have cleansed my makeup off better last night," she thought, reaching for a cleansing tissue.

"How strange I look without makeup." Carla wrapped a large towel round her, fastening it under her shoulders, above her breasts, and then unwound the towel from her hair.

"It's a mess."

She ran her fingers through the strands, then a wide comb straightened it. A nail fell off her middle finger as she did so.

"No big deal." She reached for her telephone and quickly arranged for makeup artist, manicurist and hairdresser to come and do their magic.

She dressed in bra and panties, pulled up "hold-up" stockings and slipped her feet into fluffy mules, then chose a robe to cover them until the professionals had finished. As morning turned into afternoon, Carla was ready to face the day. Her nails were now crimson fading to pink, and longer by a fraction. Her hair was in the cutest French pleat, with daytime makeup that seemed to make her eyes sparkle.

She put heavy gold hoops into her ears and attached a single thin necklace, with a small diamond pendant. Two bracelets on her left wrist and a couple of rings on each hand and she was ready to dress.

Exploring the wardrobes and drawers which held the clothes selected for her, she chose a cream sundress with an off-the-shoulder neckline, with fine frills which would move with her walk or with the breeze. White strappy sandals with heels completed her outfit. Picking up a large white leather shoulder bag, she took a final look in the mirror and decided it was time to go out.

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"Why do I always feel so awkward going out alone?" she asked herself as she turned towards the promenade.

She caught a few glances her way. "If anyone's looking, it's because I'm a pretty girl, and this is the south of France."

She eased into her stride and raised her chin, trying to walk with that animal grace which French girls seem to think their right. "No one can tell that I'm not a real girl under this dress."

"Carla, why do you keep me waiting all this time?" Lucio was suddenly at her side.

"I never saw you," Carla said with surprise. "Did you have someone staking out the hotel?"

"Why have someone staking it out? It's easier to tip the receptionist." He smiled again and took her arm. "I know exactly the place to show you my town."

He began to lead her along the pavement towards an open space. His telephone rang. He answered and spoke quickly in French with gestures and grimaces accompanying breaks when he listened. His anger was palpable in places.

He ended the call and turned to her. "I have to go and take care of some business. I do not expect it will take long, just some signatures and exchanges, you understand. May I call you later?"

"Yes, but if it won't take long, I might as well come with you, and then we don't waste any time." Carla was thinking fast. This could be information for Mike.

"I like that." Lucio stood into the road and gestured. A taxi did a U-turn and pulled up beside them.

He almost pushed Carla across the back seat in his haste, shouted at the driver and they were off

through a maze of back streets, pulling into the courtyard of a rundown block.

"I will not be long," he said, then instructed the driver to wait for him.

Carla looked round, making sure she looked casual rather than curious. She noted the street name and the numbers on the doors. Then, noticing the driver looking at her; she settled back in her seat and took out her mirror.

"Repairing my makeup is a good way of doing something and doing nothing at the same time," she thought, shifting the mirror more to gather extra information.

Lucio ran back to the car, shouting over his shoulder to someone who was shouting back. Their gestures were far from friendly.

"I'm sorry," he said as he got back in the car. "I have to make another call. It seems deliveries have not been made on time."

He instructed the driver and they were off again through the back streets, twisting and turning, scraping through the narrowest of gaps, and finally into a space beside the pavement. It did not seem any car could fit, but it did, and Lucio was off and entering into a grey door with the number 127 on the plinth beside it. Carla did her makeup routine again, making sure that the driver was watching her as she adjusted her neckline.

"If only he knew," she smiled to herself.

"So sorry." Lucio got back in the cab. "This is embarrassing. I have to do business things and it's going to take longer than I thought."

"I'm so sorry," Carla replied, reaching out to take his hand. "I was so looking forward to this afternoon."

She looked at him, making her eyes as big as she could and flicking her tongue across her lips.

"So was I." Lucio really looked disappointed. "I'll send you back in the cab and I'll call you. I'll take you out tonight and really show you the town."

"Will you?" Carla pouted. "You seem like you really could understand a girl like me."

"I'll call you," he said, then gave instructions to the driver.

As the car sped away, Carla turned to see him talking agitatedly to two other men, and together they got into a back van. It didn't look a friendly meeting.

Carla started her laptop as soon as she got to the Bristol and opened her diary. "Dear diary..." she wrote and recorded as many of the afternoon's observations as she could, typing as fast as her nails would allow.

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"Little black dress time," Carla said to herself as she sat in front of the mirror as afternoon turned to evening. "I've got no idea where he's going to take me, but I'll look right wherever we go."

She darkened her eye makeup and checked the ever present false lashes that had been applied that morning were still secure. Satisfied, she wafted the mascara wand across them, then ran a lipstick over her lips.

She struggled with the back zipper but got it to the top and settled the dress comfortably across her breasts and over her hips. Black stiletto heels and a black clutch bag and she was ready. The USB stick went in the bag beside another lipstick.

"It may get cooler later," she thought.

She tried a black leather jacket, then a soft pink pashmina, which shed fibres over her dress. Brushing herself off, she tried a denim jacket and turned up the collar.

"Edgy maybe, but not a good look." She rejected it and tried on the leather jacket again, before deciding to take it.

It was boring to be in the suite waiting for Lucio to arrive. Carla was too edgy to relax. She'd hadn't felt entirely comfortable with him but her job wasn't to like him. She was the superspy in this scenario, and had to provide information. She took her bag, wrapped the jacket loosely over her shoulder, and went out into the street.

She sat at a bar and ordered coffee as she watched the crowds, some rushing, some dawdling, and others content to watch the world go by. Her phone rang.

"Where are you?" Lucio's voice. "I'm at the hotel but they said you'd gone out. I'm sorry I was late to pick you up."

"I'm at a bar near the flower market," Carla said. "It's the last one before the big market square."

"Stay there, I'm on my way."

Carla drained her cup and placed a note under the saucer, leaving a generous tip. When the black Mercedes turned into the narrow gates, she guessed it would be him. He emerged from the passenger door and looked round; seeing her, he waved and walked over.

He was dressed so elegantly; a mid-blue linen suit, crisp and clearly tailored to emphasise his shoulders and minimise his waist; a white shirt, open too far down the chest and black loafers.

"Please forgive me." He bent to kiss her on both cheeks.

A deep woody scent again surrounded him. He took her hand and half helped and half pulled her up and into his arms. He held her tightly and ran his fingers through her hair possessively.

Carla wasn't sure if she liked his touch. A warning tingle ran down her spine, but she suppressed it, re-

mind herself of her purpose, and put her hands to his face and kissed him. She pushed her tongue forwards and he seemed surprised at the touch. His mouth opened and the kiss turned from light into something with a promise implied.

They broke apart as if surprised by what they had done. "We will have dinner by the harbour, then I will show you places you never imagined." Lucio motioned towards the waiting car.

"First a security thing." He reached for her bag. "I have to turn off your telephone in case it gives away secrets."

"How could it do that?" Carla asked. "It's only a cell phone like everyone else has."

"But phones tell tales as they pass from one antenna to another," Lucio replied. "There are people who would wish to know where I live."

"Is it a secret?" Carla asked. "Are you a double nought spy, licensed to..."

"Do whatever I wish, with luck tonight," Lucio finished the sentence with a laugh and a smile. His intention was clear.

They twisted through the streets and when the car stopped, they walked through narrow passages to the waterside where people were eating and drinking in the open air. At Lucio's appearance, a waiter bustled over and led the way to one of the best positioned tables with a view over the small port.

Lucio must have ordered ahead. Delicious seafood so fresh that it could have been waiting for them in the sea itself appeared before them, with chilled white wine, and everything that could go with it.

Small talk was interrupted by Lucio's phone. His tone of voice told her that he wasn't pleased, either at the interruption or the message her received. A second call some minutes later seemed to blacken his mood so that he appeared distracted as a second bot-

tle of wine replaced the one he had almost drunk by himself.

"I'd love to show you the views from my home," he said after a few moments' silence when he appeared deep in thought.

"That sounds like a wonderful invitation." Carla thought it a variation of an invitation to see his etchings, but one which would give her an opportunity to use her USB drive on his computers. "You have to get me home by midnight or I turn into an old witch."

"I cannot believe that you'd be so cruel."

"What, to be home by midnight or turn into a witch?" She sipped her wine and smiled as enthusiastically as she could.

"We can have coffee and brandy when we get there," he declared and stood, holding out his hand for her to take.

"Thank you, that's really kind." Carla took his hand and allowed him to lead her through the port's passages to the waiting car.

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"This is the finest Armagnac, fifty years old and from my private cellar." Lucio announced.

As he was handing her a generous measure, his phone rang again and at the same time, the ringing of another telephone somewhere in a different room sounded equally insistent.

"Excuse me," Lucio said. "If that phone's ringing, it must be important."

"I'll excuse you," Carla replied, "But do you have a computer I could use? I need to check an email. I'd forgotten the urgency. I was having such a good time."



He smiled and gestured. "There's one in there," he said indicating a door at the rear of the room.

"Thanks, I'll enjoy this brandy and then I'll go and do it."

Lucio left the room and she could hear him talking angrily through the closed door. She took her glass and quickly went into the room which was like a small office. The computer came to life as soon as she touched the mouse.

Thinking she might be under observation (where did that thought come from?she wondered), she logged on to an email address. While she waited, she took her mirror from her bag. Using the USB lipstick, she went through the motions of freshening it. Quickly she slipped the USB into the port on the computer, counted to ten for luck, then pulled it out and put it back into her bag.

She wrote an email to Melissa, saying nothing of consequence, but being delighted with her gift and how much she was looking forward to seeing her. That done, she logged out, picked up her glass, and returned to the main room. She walked round, looking at the pictures on the walls, then kicked off her shoes and sat on the luxuriously padded couch.

"I'm so sorry." Lucio returned about ten minutes later. "So many interruptions when I most want to give all my attention to you."

He poured another measure for them both, and came to sit beside her where she had her legs tucked up under her in a feminine way. He put his hand on her knee and moved towards her, telegraphing his intention to kiss her again.

Carla willed herself to respond as if she wanted this. She felt his hand creeping towards her breasts and wriggled appreciatively as he cupped one through her dress.

He kissed her again, this time harder with his tongue creeping towards her lips. Carla felt his other

hand slipping round her back as he pulled her closer. As she opened her lips to allow the intrusion, she heard and then felt the zipper being pulled down.

"Your breast feels so perfect," he whispered, "I'd like to kiss and suck it ever so gently."

"It feels like you're on your way there already." Carla emptied her glass, put it down, and ignored it falling to the floor.

She put her arms around his neck and he groped clumsily to remove her dress. She allowed him to slip her arms out and then stood to let it fall to the floor. She turned to face him, hands shyly across her chest. He stood and came to her and, kissing her again, reached behind to slip the clasp of her bra loose. The straps fell from her shoulders, leaving her hands alone holding it up.

"Aren't we going too fast?" Carla whispered as if not meaning the words as she spoke them.

As if to answer, his hands dropped and began pushing her panties down to her thighs. Carla felt her penis rising strongly, even though she was willing it not to do so, then his hand was wrapped around the shaft, massaging it. Carla gasped. The feelings were overtaking any other thought. Carla felt herself moving with each stroke of his hand.

She took a deep breath and reached down to remove his hand before it was too late. Her bra fell to the floor and almost immediately his hands were under them, lifting and feeling their weight. His thumb stroked across the nipple. New and deeply erotic feelings flooded through her.

It was as if thought ended and feelings took over. Carla's hand felt Lucio's erection through his clothes. She pulled and unfastened the zipper so that his pants fell to the floor around his ankles.

"If I run away now..." The thought flickered through her mind, before another told her that the last thing she wanted was to flee.

His penis stood out, her bra fell and hung from his outstretched member until she reached down and pulled it away.

“What do I do next?” Another thought came into her mind. “I’m out of my depth here.”

He started to move his penis in her hand, back and forth, whilst his hand went to her shoulder, then to both shoulders. He was pushing her downwards, hands on the back of her head so that she was looking at it and approaching it at the same time.

She gave way and dropped to her knees, naked now and feeling vulnerable as the penis approached her lips. She took hold of it with both hands. It was so much bigger than hers. Tentatively, she ran her fingernails along the shaft, from base to tip, where a drop glistened.

Still he held her head, directing her closer and closer until the tip was almost touching her lips. An animal scent came to her nose and suddenly she wanted to try... well, anything, to keep the excitement rising in waves of pure lust. She put out her tongue and licked the tip. Then suddenly it was as if her tongue was fastened to it.

She licked it up and down, side to side. She took the shaft into her hand and beat the tip onto her tongue, then wrapped her tongue around the tip. Lucio thrust forwards, taking her by surprise again as the shaft slipped into her mouth and touched the back of her throat. She gagged and pulled back, only to feel his hands holding her head firmly where it was, as he thrust forward again.

Carla shut her mind as he thrust and pulled back. Suddenly he was still, then with a shock, she felt him squirting something to the back of her throat. She tried to gag again, but couldn’t and it was trickling down her throat. She did the only thing she could and swallowed again and again to clear her throat. Then he withdrew.

“Lick it,” he demanded.

She was so confused and spellbound at the same time. She did as he asked and she felt his strength slip away slowly and his grip on her head release. She looked up to see a look somewhere between delight and contempt across his face.

"I've never done that before," she whispered, telling herself to stay in character. "Did I do it right?"

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They sat on the couch; she tangled across his lap, as they drank more brandy. Carla played absent mindedly with his penis as they drank. They drank too much, and lay back giggling. Then his penis started to grow again, slowly at first, then hardening to such a size as it must have been before. It looked bigger in her hand than it did when her lips were close to it.

His hand dropped from her breast to her behind. From stroking, it slowly and carefully edged until a finger was creeping into her hole. She clenched at first and the finger stayed still. He spilled more brandy into her glass and then his finger moved further forward until it was inside.

He tipped her glass to her lip and she drank more as his finger moved relentlessly inwards and upwards. Clenching did no good; it was there and it wasn't going to be displaced like that.

Carla tried to mov, but her alcohol befuddled mind didn't get her in the direction she intended and the finger ended further and further inside. She clenched and felt it stuck there and suddenly the urge to giggle hit her.

She giggled out loud and squirmed, pushing against the finger. Suddenly she realised there wasn't only one finger there. The way they were moving, there were two or three working their way inside her.

She was too drunk. The thought was the only clear one in her mind. She tried to speak coherently, but

giggled more. She tried to ease her way out of his grasp, and to move so that his fingers came out. It didn't work.

The feeling wasn't too bad. A rogue thought came into her mind, "Might as well let him get on with it," she thought, then she realised that she hadn't any clear idea of what the "it" was that he intended to do.

These thoughts were immediately dispelled as she felt herself being raised over the arm of the couch so that her bottom was presented to him. Kneeling, he came behind her and she felt the first tip of something trying to enter.

"You can't," she mumbled drunkenly. "Too tight." She giggled again and tried to move back, but flopped forwards again.

She felt something cold on her behind and being eased into the entrance. She felt the fingers again, working in and out. She tried to protest but the drink made her floppy and co-operative and he thrust forward again. She clenched against him, and he held still. He reached forwards and held something in front of her nose; his other hand clamped her mouth.

She inhaled and felt a rush of heat throughout her body. Her heart raced and although she knew what was happening, her muscles relaxed and she felt Lucio's penis slip inside her, past the muscles which held him back. He pushed as hard as he could as she took another breath.

More heat coursed through her body. His hands gripped her round the thighs and pulled her back into him. She could feel his ball sac hitting her bottom as he moved backwards and forwards, grunting and panting with the exertion.

"Did I want this?" The idea briefly entered her mind, to vanish as her body reacted to the drink and inhalation.

All she could think of was gone. Animal reaction took over. He knew what was coming and she worked

hard to make it happen. Surprisingly, she understood that she wanted it to happen. And then it did. He was squirting again, deep inside her.

She felt her own erection swelling, then it was pumping too, but into the air and onto the furniture. He seemed to be going faster and harder; wave after wave pulsed into her, then he was shrinking away again.

Carla sighed, slumped back, and threw up against the side of the couch. Then oblivion took over.

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Morning hurt. The light on the curtains hurt. Moving her head hurt. She tried to turn over and sleep again, but her head hurt more. An uncomfortable stickiness around her bottom made her nightdress cling to her skin. She screwed her eyes tight and remembered bits of the previous night.

"I don't remember coming back here," she said to herself and then saw her dress and shoes crumpled up by the door, with shoes, bra and knickers close by. Her bag was scattered over the floor. "Maybe I did; I must have."

She tried to sit up and fell back again, head aching more and more; waves of pain throbbed through her head. Carla tried to think. She remembered drinking too much, then images flooded back of Lucio's penis at her lips, then having sex with her.

"Did I really do that?" Carla asked herself, and then she knew. "Yes, all of it."

She lay there until the telephone rang. "It's Melissa. I have news. Can I come up?"

"Where are you?"

"I'm in the lobby," she replied. "There's a 'Do Not Disturb' notice on your door but I have news."

Carla crawled to the door and unlocked it, as Melissa came in. She took one look and helped Carla up and pushed her into the shower, nightdress and all. The shower pulsed, hot water and then cold water. The soggy nightdress fell onto the tiles where it remained, water and goodness knew what else running from it into the central drain in the bathroom.

She began to feel better and turned off the shower, grateful for the silence after the noise of the running water. Wrapping a towel into a turban round her head and another over her breasts, she came back into the living room and almost fell onto the couch there, head resting against the backrest.

"I guess you had a heavy night," Melissa said.

"You don't want to know."

"I can guess. You had hot sex with Lucio."

"You could call it that," Carla mumbled. "I never knew I could do such things."

"I didn't know you could do them either."

"I think it was the drink," Carla said. "And of course, I needed an excuse to do what Mike told me I had to do."

"That's why I've come. He said to tell you that all the things you did have been working so well. The tracking details you gave to him showed that Lucio was going to places he never suspected and obviously seeing the wrong people."

"That's good." Carla tried to sound enthusiastic.

"I don't understand how he was tracking you though," Melissa asked. "Your phone is switched off."

"Promise not to tell," Carla said.

"I promise." Melissa watched as Carla dropped her towel and stood naked in front of her.

Carla took her hand and pressed it to her left breast. "Can you feel anything?" she asked.

"It's a beautiful breast. I think I could come to love it. You are going to keep them what this is over. Promise me that you will."

"Okay, I promise, but can't you feel anything else?" Carla pressed Melissa's hand more firmly against the breast. "Try again; are you sure you can't feel anything?"

"No, should I?"

"Not really, I can't feel it either, but Mike said that there's a GPS tracker in there somewhere."

"It's still beautiful." Melissa stroked the nipple. "We could have fun with these when you finish this job, as long as your other bits are still working."

Melissa stroked her penis as she touched her lips to Carla's nipple. Carla responded and grew to her touch. Sliding her skirt up to her waist, Melissa straddled Carla and guided her inside her. She moved gently and rode her; taking her time and making her wait when she threatened to try and take over and end it too soon.

The climax when it came surprised them both. It was as if they were floating together, breathing and moving as one. He tried so hard not to let his erection subside but it was inevitable and he slid out, with blobs of fluid dripping onto him before Melissa eased back and stood again.

"We'll have to do that more often," Melissa declared. "I like you with breasts; it seems to make you gentler and more submissive."

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Carla and Melissa spent a lot of the next two days together. They shopped and walked in the sun. They lazed on the beach and had languid afternoon sessions making love in the big bed. They knew that they might be under observation, and so never spent a night together. Carla was always alone when she

called her hairdresser and makeup artist each morning to get her perfect for the day.

Lucio's call came on the afternoon of their third day together. After some small talk, he came to the point.

"I'd like to take you to see the opera," he said. "I have a box and we shall have dinner before the gala performance. It's to be in costume, both for the cast and the audience. It's "Tosca," my favourite and I hope it is yours too."

"That's really generous but I've never been to an opera before. I'd love to go but I don't have anything to wear to the opera, let alone a gala costume dinner," Carla said. "Maybe you'd better take someone else who has all the right things to wear. I wouldn't want to let you down."

"Nonsense, it is all good," he insisted. "Here we can hire a dress suitable for a queen or an empress, so I'll send a costumier to your suite tomorrow morning. We will be going on Saturday night. They will arrange everything for you. I'm sure that you'll be the belle of the ball."

"But don't tell them what you found in my panties," Carla reminded him.

"I never give away a lady's secrets," he replied. "I hope you recovered well after our last meeting. I'm sorry we drank too much. It was my fault. I wanted you so badly and the day had been so difficult with my businesses."

"I don't remember coming back here."

"I hired a service I know to gently transport you back to your own bed," Lucio replied. "I hope they were kind and got you into bed comfortably."

"They did and I'm so grateful," Carla replied. "I'm not sure that my head has recovered properly yet."

"I will call for you about four on Saturday. I am sure you will look amazing and that everyone will admire you." He ended the call.

"Melissa, did you hear that?" Carla asked. "He said he hired a service to bring me home the other night."

"And they got you home safely," Melissa replied.

"But don't you realise..." Carla looked aghast. "It means that they saw me. They saw me naked, dripping from my arse end. They saw me in all the worst ways."

"But if Lucio arranged it, surely that means they're discreet."

"That's not the point." Carla wept. "Why did I let Mike get me into this mess?"

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By the next day, Carla was sufficiently calmer about the whole thing and even began to see the funny side.

"I wonder if they're used to this sort of job," she asked Melissa. "Can you imagine what might make someone want to do that work?"

Their laughter as the jokes got more and more crude was interrupted by the costumier's arrival

"Patrice Delancourt at your service." The dapper little man handed her a card with a flamboyant gesture and a deep bow.

He adjusted his floppy bow tie, straightened his jacket, and checked himself in the mirror before turning his attention to Carla.

"First, I have to take the measurements," he lisped a little as he spoke in heavily accented English and took out a notebook and pencil on which he began to sketch her.

He rattled off question after question; bra size, waist hips, bust, shoes, height, and so on, before measuring lesser known areas. He recorded shoulder to elbow, width of back, chin to waist, and so on, until Carla was quite bemused by all the figures.

"Are all these necessary?" she asked.

"Why yes, of course," Patrice assured her. "You are to be dressed at our best service. You will fit like a glove into our finest creation."

Carla didn't bother to correct him, as he pulled out a book of suggestions ranging from Renaissance court dress to courtesans, to Hollywood's glamour era and beyond.

"I always liked early 1930's glamour," Carla confessed and the pages flipped along to that era.

"My darling, a favourite of mine also." Patrice clasped his hands to his heart in delight. "Raw silk and perhaps trousers, each leg as wide as a skirt, with a nipped high waist and a simple low-cut bodice; shoulder pads to emphasise your tiny waist, and sleeves long and flowing like the trousers. I can see it now."

"I'd like to see it," Melissa chimed in.

"Can you do that in time?" Carla asked.

"My silkworms will be given orders as soon as I go to the workshop."

"Why can't *I* get service like this?" Melissa asked.

"Madam, I do not work cheap." Patrice seemed to draw himself up to his full height and dignity. "I need a beautiful woman as a challenge to make her more beautiful."

"I don't know what you're saying here." Melissa looked offended.

"Take no notice," Carla laughed. "She's winding you up."

"Winding me up?" Patrice looked puzzled. "I do not have this expression. I wind cotton, not me."

"Never mind," Carla laughed again at his confusion. "I'll need your help to sort out the hair and make up to go with it. Do you know anyone?"

"It is part of the service," he said. "Patrice; he provide everything of the best. You look absolute."

He held out his hand. Carla took it to shake but in a theatrical gesture, he raised it to his lips and kissed it.

"I have everything ready for Saturday lunch. I come with hair and everything, girls. We make you ready like nowhere else."

He bowed again and was gone.

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"I wonder if he's as good as he talks?" Melissa and Carla were waiting in her suite. "It's almost noon."

"I wonder why he said it would take him so long to get me ready." Carla looked out of the window to the street below to see a commotion.

Patrice was calling instructions to two girls who were carrying a dress carefully from a long estate car. A third girl was carrying a substantial case in each hand as they entered the hotel.

"Don't look now, but I think this is where the show starts." Carla opened the door and stood back. The elevator arrived and Patrice entered, followed by his assistants.

"We are ready to make you beautiful," he announced. "We have the costume, the dresser for the hair and the cosmetic."

His assistants bowed as if on cue, as he set forth a torrent of instructions in French. He glared at Melissa.

"I'm the chaperone," she announced. "That's French for I'm staying to watch."

Patrice turned up his nose and proceeded to direct his assistants. The girls took Carla into the bedroom as he fussed around with the dress and then took various undergarments from one of the cases. He gestured for Melissa to look.

"They're all the same quality of silk." She ran her hands gently across the fabrics, and smiled her approval. "They're beautiful."

He handed the underwear to one of the assistants, who disappeared into the bedroom. An hour later, Carla emerged in her underwear with a silk robe belted and flowing down to her ankles.. Her hair had been sprayed and teased into a long platinum bob, with sides which could swing like curtains as she shook her head.

Her eyes were most striking with long lashes and high, thin eyebrows in a modern style but one which really recalled the Thirties' shape and depth. Her lashes were long and sweeping, with subtle soft shades on the upper eye and thin eyeliner top and bottom. Most striking of all were the lips, a deeper shade of radiant red than Carla had ever used, with a sharply defined top lip, not a Twenties cupid's bow but wider, with the bottom lip proportionately enlarged.

"I look like I should have a cigarette holder and fifteen gentlemen in tail coats rushing to light the cigarette, then I could look at them all with contempt. I could choose one and allow him to light it. I'd blow smoke in his face, look at him and say, "Have him washed and sent to my room."

"You're cruel," Melissa laughed. "I do like the idea though."

"He won't let me dress until the last minute," Carla said as Patrice fussed around her. "He says it might crease the fabric too much."

"I can't blame him." Melissa took her hand and saw the nails, long and matching her lips. "It's absolutely gorgeous. "I'd be afraid to wear anything that pure and delicate."

"Would you help me with my earrings?" Carla asked. "I can't decide between the red ones and the black ones."

Melissa looked at them both, long and equally extravagant, glittering in the boxes. "It has to be the red," she announced. "Everything's pale, from your hair to your shoes. The red will shout against it and be so striking."

Carla turned her head so that Melissa could get the posts through her pierced ears and fix them firmly in place.

"There's nothing worse than walking around with one earring when you should have two. I hate it when I lose one." Melissa fussed, checking the hold.

Patrice's telephone rang, and he exchanged a few sentences in rapid French with the caller. "Lucio will be here in ten minutes," he announced. "It is time for the dress."

The assistants sprang into action when he clapped and they held the fabric for Carly to slip one leg, then the other, into the trousers. They pulled up the fabric to her waist. The concealed zipper followed, making it sit very tightly and closely from the top of her hips to just under her breasts.

There the fabric opened so that she could slip her arms into the sleeves, which came full and long over her wrists. With her arms by her sides, they trailed downwards towards her knees and swirled as she moved. A concealed fastener held the dress below her bust, opening onto a generous view of her cleavage, which the silk bra held up tightly, making her breasts look bigger than they already were.

The shoulder pads were eased into place and with the pull of the fabric and a concealed fastener around

her bra strap, the whole creation looked as if it were a second skin around her body, with the fabric so loose and generous flowing around her arms and legs. It fit like a gorgeously expensive gown should fit.

Patrice examined her minutely from the side, the back, the other side and the front. He pinched and adjusted the fabric minutely, as if he could alter the fit at this stage. He clapped and an assistant brought his case. He selected a bracelet for her left wrist, heavy but plain, with a red stone, and a matching ring which he placed on the ring finger of her left hand.

"Perfect," he announced after walking round her again. "Perfect for her debut at the opera and for people to say Patrice is a triumph again."

The doorbell rang, and Lucio was admitted. "Be double careful," Melissa hissed as they walked through the door to his waiting limousine.

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"You will be the belle of the ball this evening." Lucio presented her with a huge bunch of red roses. "We will be talked about for years. You look ravishing."

"Let's hope the talk doesn't begin with "Do you remember the boy in the silk dress/" I'd hate to be read as a boy by anyone," Carla said and then she remembered something. "But I will be read, won't I? People know who your partners have been."

"Maybe, but let them wonder." Lucio smiled. "Tonight is the night when they will think I have changed."

The car drew up outside the opera house; a grand old building, glittering with lights and flowers. A commissionaire opened the door, and handed Carla out, with her still holding the bunch of roses. A page arrived at her elbow, indicating that he would take

them for her, and the photographers clicked and flashed as they made their way into the foyer.

"I'm amazed." Carla looked round as they walked towards the dining room where a string orchestra was playing. "I never knew things like this were real. I always thought they were only for the movies."

"Maybe you're in a movie of your own." Lucio took her hand and placed it formally on top of his arm as they walked. "I am sad that there is no princess to whom I could present you, only the wife of the chairman of the opera committee."

Carla thought to curtsy as she arrived at the front of the imposing lady greeting everyone as they entered. She nodded at whatever was said to her and muttered a quick "Enchante," hoping it was sufficiently polite. The lady smiled and inclined her head, so she assumed it to be okay.

She was too nervous to eat more than a few nibbles at her food in the dining room. She didn't want to stain her dress either, and sipped sparingly at her wine. Much of the talk, in rapid French, passed her by, although Lucio translated a few sentences.

The meal ended and their host rang a bell as a signal that they should take their seats. Lucio escorted her to his box, angled to the stage so that they could be seen by the audience as much as they could see the stage. Perhaps that was the function of a box in the theatre, Carla thought, so that people could show themselves to those not fortunate enough to have a box of their own.

The overture started, then the action. Big ladies with commanding voices, baritones with deeper notes, and then the soprano, all mixing in beautiful music. The action was a little slow, but with such melody floating all around them, it didn't seem to matter.

The interval brought them into the salon at the rear of the theatre. Champagne and nibbles again,

this time served by uniformed waitresses, each as pretty as the next.

"They don't let the plain ones serve in this area," Lucio explained as she caught him stroking the rear of one of the girls who blushed and hurried away.

The second and third acts followed, just as musical and magical. Carla lost track of who wanted to do what with whom and when. It seemed a little unlikely with some of these huge divas, she thought.

It all came to an end with ovations and flowers presented, and encores sung. They made their way to the front of the theatre. Carla thought she caught a glimpse of Mike and quickly looked away in case Lucio noted any recognition between them.

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The car dropped them at Lucio's front door. He went through the security regime and then they were in. He wasted no time at all. Within a second of the door closing, he was pulling Carla to him and running his hands from her backside to her breasts.

He kissed her and Carla, remembering her role, kissed him back and felt the front of his trousers. A rewarding bulge was there already. He picked her up, kissing her again as he carried her up the staircase to his huge bedroom where he dropped her onto his bed.

Carla's acting instincts took over. She sat up and grabbed for his belt. He made a show of reluctance, but only for a second or two, then came to her and allowed her to open the belt. His trousers fell to his ankles. He kicked off his shoes and pants and raised his erect penis to her face.

Carla turned over and lay on her back, her head falling back over the edge, so that she looked at the underside of his penis and sac. She fondled it, letting him feel her nails gently scratching each side of the sac and then along the underside of his erection.

Somehow Carla's clothes were removed. First the wonderful silk dress seemed to slip off far more easily than it had been put on. The bra clasp must have been easy too because it fell open at a touch, and the panties simply fell away once released from her waist.

Lucio stepped to the side and waved a brandy bottle questioningly at her. She nodded and accepted a glass from him. She drank, feeling the amber liquid burn its way down her throat. He played with her breasts, licking and sucking each in turn. She knew that the GPS device was well hidden, but the thought that he might feel it rippled through her consciousness.

He moved forward. She tilted her head slightly sideways so that she could run her lips along the penis from base to tip and back. Again. She did it once more, slower this time, allowing him to feel her tongue licking and flicking along the length, up and down.

He held her head and forced his penis into her mouth. It didn't fit as well upside down as it had when she had been facing him. He seemed to realise and withdrew, before turning her over and entering her mouth again. He played with her, in and out, pushing and teasing alternately, until he seemed to get rougher and pushed harder and harder into her gag reflex.

Carla bobbed her head faster and faster, willing him to come and then he'd shrink for a while and maybe be gentler. She sucked, eased off, and sucked again. His hands went to the back of her head, pulling and controlling her movements. Then it was coming. She felt the swelling and the tension, screwing up her eyes, knowing what was next.

He was pulsing and pumping into the back of her throat again; grunting like an animal as he tried to prolong the moment when he was really spent. He subsided and held his penis against her mouth. She knew he meant for her to lick it clean.

More drink followed. Carla knew she was being careless with the amount she was drinking. Her head wasn't strong at the best of times but she reasoned that drink may be her easiest way of getting through the rest of the evening. She knew Lucio was resting, waiting until he could grow again. She knew that when it happened, her rear was inevitably his target.

She drank some more, feeling her head get a little lighter and her movements a little more remote. She was having trouble co-ordinating her movements. Everything seemed spacey and clumsy. For no reason she started to giggle.

She tried to speak, but words wouldn't form. She heard herself as if from somewhere remote, trying to say something. It was important she knew, but when the words failed to form, she let it go. She screwed her eyes to focus. Lucio seemed to have two penises now, both the same size and both coming closer. She reached for one, but it wasn't there. She touched the other one and held on, pulling it closer. She kissed the tip and heard Lucio saying something.

He rolled her over and raised her knees so that she was kneeling on the bed. He held her tightly and then that feeling again of something pushing at her rear. It seemed easier now. She knew what he wanted and it was all floating away as she pushed back, harder and harder with each push. It was hurting a little now and she tried to protest.

He pushed harder again. She felt her muscles clenching tight. He put his hand over her mouth and held that bottle under her nose again. She tried to hold her breath but it was not much use; she had to breathe. A hit ran through her as a hot flush ran from end to end. She relaxed and he pushed again. She could feel his sac against her, and stopped thinking to picture it, despite Lucio's continual thrusting.

He was pumping now. Carla could feel the spasms of his throbbing member. It seemed larger than before and to go on longer. Then it was easing and shrinking out. Carla fell forward onto her front as he pulled out and then oblivion took over.

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Daylight again and she was back in her own bed in a nightdress. She felt behind and knew it would be wet from her leaking anus. She rolled over and blinked her eyes against the light, then slipped away again.

She woke later, still with a banging headache and a reluctance to get out of bed, even though her bladder was demanding that she did so. She slowly rolled over and then stood. Holding onto the wall, she felt her way to the bathroom and collapsed onto the basin.

Something felt wrong. It wasn't only the sticky goo running down her thighs. It wasn't the room spinning around her. It was something else. It didn't feel right. She let a stream fall into the basin and slipped her shoulders out of the nightgown. She stood and it fell to the floor.

Something still didn't feel right. There was a weight where there should not have been any. She looked down and saw something metal. She reached with both hands and felt something metal. It was around her penis and under her ball sac. The metal was like a series of joined hoops, holding her penis inside its cage.

She pulled. It wouldn't come off. There was more metal fastened to the rear of her sac. She took a deep breath. This must be a bad dream, she thought and walked towards the mirror. She looked closely, screwing her addled eyes to make them focus.

The cage was still there, still fastened tightly round her penis and fastened so that there was no visible way of getting free. There was no keyhole and no padlock. It felt entirely smooth. She looked again and her penis started to grow within the cage. It hurt. It was trying to grow but the confines were too small.

"Damn Lucio," she said quietly and then again loudly, with full vehemence. "How dare he?"

She went to get her phone and called his number. It rang and rang until it went to voicemail. "Call me back," she spouted.

Another call. "Melissa, can you get here quickly?" She almost cried in pain and frustration when she was answered.

She washed and brushed out her hair. Her breasts were sore from Lucio's too rough handling last night so she put on a soft bra and a long robe, tied at the waist. She took a deep breath to calm herself and looked in the mirror. Almost by instinct, she did her makeup, feeling better as her face took on its normal appearance.

"I ran away to sea to escape makeup," Carla said to herself. "Now I can't imagine a day without it."

"Maybe it's his idea of a joke?" Melissa said calmly after examining Carla's plight. "I can't see any way of opening it, without a special key. There seems to be a barrel of some sort which would accept a round type of key."

"Oh great," Carla replied. "He's not answering his phone and I've got no idea where he is. He's usually glued to the thing. It's a bit strange he hasn't answered or called back."

"If it's a joke, I don't think it's funny," Melissa said and then paused as if a thought was being processed. "It could be interesting though. You'll have to work hard to satisfy me until we figure some way of releasing you."

Carla looked at her. She saw the great big grin on her face and suddenly saw the funny side of it. "It could be fun, but don't try making me grow. It hurts too much."

"I wonder if he'd sell me the key." Melissa reached for the cage again. "I like the idea of having you helpless and under my control."

"It's not funny," Carla said again. "It may be fun if there was a way of getting out of the cage, but right now I can't think of anything other than getting out."

"I'll call Lucio again." Melissa took Carla's cell phone and set it to the loudspeaker. Again there was no reply.

They called every half-hour through the day and into the evening. The next day and the one after got them no further. Carla calmed down, but couldn't bring herself to dress; not with that unsightly bulge under her clothes. She paced the suite in robe and mules, as if distracted, but always perfectly made-up.

"I'll have to go and find him," Melissa said. "Someone must know where he is or how to contact him."

"Don't go telling people why," Carla said. "I don't want the world to know about this. It's horrible."

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"I think I have some news." Melissa was back a couple of hours later. "I'm not sure that you're going to like it though."

"How bad can it be?" Carla replied. "When I think of my life this last few months, what could possibly go wrong that hasn't gone wrong already?"

"Lucio has disappeared," Melissa said. "Marcel told me that much. It seems that he's been found out. He stole unbelievable amounts from... well, from whoever he was supposed to be working for."

"So Mike was right about that," Carla replied.

"So it's not bad news," Melissa said. "You're off the hook. No more sex with Lucio."

"And no more sex with anyone unless I can get this contraption off." Carla's hands went to her groin.

"You can have sex with me," Melissa said softly. "It would take your mind off other things. I'd enjoy it and you might learn something useful."

"You witch." Carla laughed and grabbed her arm.

She pulled her into a kiss and then another. Melissa's hand grabbed the cage and Carla could feel her fingernails through the gaps.

"I said don't do that." Carla pulled the hand away. "It hurts."

"So let me take you to bed," Melissa said, taking her hand and pulling her along. "It feels fun to be the dominant one for a change."

Melissa undressed and gently undressed Carla so that they fell into bed together. With tongues and fingers, they explored each other, breasts to breasts, then lips to lips. Sometimes it was Carla's lips to pleasure Melissa in the way that a girl can pleasure another. Carla almost got used to the discomfort of her imprisonment in the metal cage.

They lay there in the declining light of another day. "I wonder what we're supposed to do now," Carla said as Melissa held her closely.

"Something will turn up tomorrow," Melissa said brightly.

"I know; we'll be evicted."

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It wasn't an eviction notice that came to their door the next morning.

"I think you deserve an explanation," Mike said, sitting down and accepting coffee from Melissa. "I know that I forced you into helping me. I'm sorry, but it was necessary."

"But why me?" Carla asked.

"You had the looks, the skills and you were available," Mike replied.

"You made me act like a common prostitute," Carla replied. "You took me over, made me get breast implants and forced me to live as a girl all the time. I was having sex with Lucio because you told me that I had to. I had no choices."

"So sue me," Mike said. "You make a damn hot girl anyway, so where's the problem?"

"It wasn't what I intended," Carla snapped. "I never asked for any of this."

"Never mind. Let me tell you what's happened," Mike continued. "Lucio's gone; we think to Turkey where we can't get our hands on him, but he's left his money behind, and we've got our hands on that."

"So you didn't need me after all," Carla said. "Thanks so much."

"Oh but we did need you," Mike replied. "It worked like a dream. You bugged his phone and his computer. We'd never have gotten anywhere near those without you. He took you places. Your GPS traced them for us and again, we couldn't have put his associates together without that information."

"So what's in it for us?" Carla asked. "I've never been so used or so scared in my life. He drugged me, had sex with me, and dumped me here in a mess. I had to pretend to like him which was really hard work."

"I think that given the sums recovered, I can persuade my associates to be generous," Mike replied. "Lucio paid for you to stay here for the rest of the year anyway and his deposit for your accommodation package will last a few months more."

"How generous?" Melissa interrupted.

"I've suggested ten percent of all we recover. My associates agreed. I think they'll stick to it when the rest of the recovery is complete. It's far more than we

ever thought. I can't say how much. But it's a life changing sum for you both."

"Is that for real?" Carla's eyes were wide open in shock.

"Of course. We have a strict code of honour," Mike nodded. "That's why it was so important to deal with Lucio. He broke the code."

"I think you'd better tell him about your little problem." Melissa changed the subject.

Carla blushed as Mike and Melissa exchanged glances. Carla stood and turned her back to them. She opened her robe and turned round. Mike gasped when he saw the cage around her penis.

"It's locked on, and wherever Lucio is, I suppose he's got the key to this device," she said.

"May I?" Mike took hold of the metal and tried to turn it over.

"Careful," Carla said. "That's really me in there."

"I'll take some photos. Mike took out his phone. "If my guys can get into Lucio's safe, then someone can get through this little baby."

"Is it really so little?" Melissa asked mischievously. "He told me it was above average when we used to sleep together."

Suddenly it was funny again.

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It wasn't funny waiting for someone to appear to remove the cage. A week went by and then another. Carla remained stoical now.

The first fruits of their life-altering fortune were being paid and Melissa was putting them safely away, leaving them with a generous sum for living expenses.

"I'm confused," Carla confessed one evening as they were sitting on the balcony, sipping wine in the late sunshine.

"Why so?" Melissa replied. "It all seems to have turned out well in the end."

"Maybe we're okay financially, but I'm not sure who I am."

"You're with me," Melissa replied. "No problem there."

"Maybe not, but have you noticed what I'm doing lately?" Carla said. "I've had my nails done, and my hair coloured again. It's gone to a more obvious bleached blonde job."

"I like it. It's a real girly colour," Melissa replied. "I wish I was as pretty and that I could get away with it."

"Okay and I've been reading fashion magazines too." Carla shook her head. "I should have been enquiring about removing these babies." She held up her breasts. "But I don't really want to; I love having them. I don't want to lose them. I don't want to leave this girl behind and go back to being what I was." A tear slipped from the corner of her eye. "Im sorry."

"There's no need to be sorry." Melissa took her hands. "I didn't say anything but I was hoping you'd want to stay female after all this. It's the female version of you that brought us together, and I think it's going to keep us together."

"That's reassuring." Carla relaxed.

"You've probably had enough surgery anyway, or you will have when they cut your penis off to get rid of that cage." Melissa again.

Carla looked shocked and then laughed. "I think I heard that story about a cow that got its head stuck through a fence. They cut off the cow's head to get it out."

"Maybe we'd better hope for a happier ending," Melissa said.

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It was embarrassing when the locksmith came. He was a little man with a moustache, waxed in an older Italian style. He had a cigarette which never left the corner of his mouth when he talked or worked. It left it briefly only when he accepted a cup of coffee.

He had no English and his apology when he took hold of the offending cage and its contents was clearly understood without language. His chortle was equally understood when he first saw it.

He opened his case and selected a tool. A twist a tug and there were two pieces falling to the floor and a released Carla was hanging out and growing by the moment.

She wrapped her gown around to hide it as the man made his exit.

"I think we'd better do something about that." Melissa took Carla's hand as she placed her other hand around the growing erection. "Then we'll get dressed and I can take my beautiful girlfriend for dinner."

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