

Hovering Between the Sexes



Abby Rhodes



An "Adult Tv" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

This story (including all images) is a work of fiction. Any similarity to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental. All situations and events herein presented are fictional, and intended only for the enjoyment of the reader. Neither the author nor the publisher advocate engaging in or attempting to imitate any of the activities or behaviors portrayed.

Persons seeking gender reassignment surgery, hormone therapy or any other medical and/or body-altering process should seek the counsel of a qualified therapist who follows the Benjamin Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder. This material is intended for persons over the age of 18 only.



Copyright © 2015

Published by Reluctant Press
in association with Mags, Inc.
All Rights Reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotes contained within a critical review.

For information address
Reluctant Press
P.O. Box 5829
Sherman Oaks, CA 91413
USA

Call toll free (800) 359-2116

www.reluctantpress.com

Hovering Between the Sexes

By Abby Rhodes

I put my head up and just as quickly put it down. Tom was still standing by my car and looking around, fortunately not in my direction just then. How long was he prepared to wait? Surely he couldn't stand there *all* night? I was starting to get cold and uncomfortable lying on my front in the damp grass. I wondered if I just went to sleep I could wake up and everything would be okay, Tom gone and me feeling better for the nap.

The good news is that my eyes were well and truly accustomed to the dark by now and I reassessed my location. There were some trees over to my right but no cover between me and them unless I went on my belly all the way but I wasn't prepared to get my dress covered in grass stains and dirt. God knows it was going to be dirty enough without that. To my left there was a short bank leading down to the back of

the car-park and behind me there was an eight-foot drop into a stream. Maybe getting dirty was the best option.

What was wrong with this guy? How many ways are there to say no? Which one would he understand? It wasn't that I didn't like him; I just wasn't interested, but he was determined to win me over and make me his girlfriend.

I suppose I was flattered, up to a point, but I was still a guy and marriage to another guy wasn't what I had in mind. What would we tell the children?

I decided to give Tom 15 more minutes to leave and then ruin the dress.

Damn it, it was two in the morning and a girl needs her beauty sleep.

On top of all that, Tom had one of my shoes.

I suppose this highlights (again) the problems we cross-dressers have when it comes to relationships. Mostly we don't go for guys - we want girlfriends who won't mind if our lingerie is nicer than theirs and accept that we spend more time on primping and maintenance than they do.

No, in case you were wondering, giving up cross-dressing isn't an option.

The evening started well enough. I'd made arrangements to meet up with my girlfriends at the dance they hold downtown every week. The local Jive Club celebrates the birth of Rock and Roll every Friday from 7 p.m. to 1 a.m.; a group of us girls who live the petticoat dream always turn up to entrance the crowd with dresses inspired by the 50s and petticoats to burn.

I had this great vintage dress I'd bought at a yard sale. It was a reddish grape colour with black polka dots scattered across it. It had a big skirt and needed a bunch of petticoats to hold it up and out. It was strapless but not cut too low. (That's why I didn't want to damage it. It was sort of irreplaceable.)

There are four of us - Briar, Madelaine, Scarlett and me, Charlotte. I stumbled across Madelaine, literally, in a changing room in a big store. She was coming out of a cubicle and I was in one of those excited moods where I couldn't wait to try on the dress I'd just found so I was moving at speed. I knocked the poor girl down and to my surprise she turned out to be not what she seemed as she flew backwards and her full skirt was flung back over her head. Not only was I presented with some very pretty panties with suspicious contents, her auburn wig was slightly askew as well.

There was no one else around so I introduced myself to a furiously blushing Madelaine. She was relieved to find I wasn't all I seemed to be either.

Straight off I saw she was taking being a girl seriously. She was wearing a black crinkle skirt cut in layers and a pink silk camisole top. I'd seen the top the week before and at that very moment I was carrying a duplicate in a pale green to try on. It says a lot for both of us that we were game to try on stuff in public changing rooms.

I tried the top on and found it was perfect for me. By then Madelaine had finished her own transaction and we went off to the coffee shop to talk. We hit it off straight away and three nights later I was introduced to Briar, an old friend of Madelaine's. Briar was extra feminine and the funniest person I'd ever met. The combination of good looks and a fine wit made for a hell of a girl.

I have to say that Briar was also the best dresser I've ever met. She was fond of figure-hugging and often semi-transparent things that I wouldn't have dared to wear without a seriously firm gaff of some sort, yet, when we asked, she claimed she didn't wear one, ever. I never saw the slightest hint of a bulge so she may have preferred to conceal everything inside. I do that once in a while and I find it uncomfortable, but Briar wears tight jeans. I think I'm a little envious. Although we all wear jewellery, Briar has terrific taste, owning gold necklaces, bracelets, rings and earrings.

Scarlett, that transvestite warrior, sometimes veers toward the eccentric. The first time I saw her she was at a party dressed in an authentic Xena costume and I had no idea she was a guy. I should point out that it wasn't a costume party. Scarlett was clever enough to figure out I wasn't a girl and introduced herself. She was still trying to find a name she really liked and had been Trudy, Anna, Fliss, Jana, Betty, Audrey, Rowan, and that night she was Xena.

She settled on Scarlett a couple of weeks later and declared war on drabness. Her other specialty is costumes of the cosplay variety, although she does a very good latex nurse as well. During the day she's a librarian, currently on her last warning for telling library users to shut the fuck up because people were trying to read.

That's our little group. We see each other a lot and we don't hold ourselves back. We eat out and drink out and go to the movies, TGIF and the Jive Club. We get hit on all the time, especially Briar, and Scarlett keeps getting approaches from weird guys who seem to view her as a fellow freak, sometimes justifiably.

For the record, we live in northern New Mexico, about a two-hour drive from Albuquerque.

The drab side of me, known widely as Anthony, works as a commission salesman selling CDs for a second tier music company. I make more than enough to keep myself in panties and I get a steady supply of music as a bonus. I stick with my natural hair colour, which is brunette. Madelaine, as I mentioned earlier, goes for auburn although she's a natural brunette too. Briar is a blonde and the colour, which is her natural colour, is terrific. She chooses clothes that complement her blonde hair. Scarlett has a mass of reddish ringlets she's been growing for years. The ringlets threaten to get out of control (I've heard the words 'birds nest' mentioned) and she has a series of devices that fail to control the mass of hair. Again, I'm jealous because I'd love my own hair to be that thick. Not that it's thin, but it just doesn't seem to grow as fast. I keep hoping I'll eventually have enough hair to ditch the wigs but that's probably still three months off. In the meantime, I brush my hair back as far as it will go for my day job.

Briar of course, given that everything else about her is so good, gets her hair styled by Jasbinder down at the Hollywood Hair 'n' Nails Salon every second Saturday morning. Jasbinder is a genius and I intended to visit her as soon as I was ready, physically and mentally. Briar has a ponytail, something I always wanted, but since she works as a computer person and doesn't have much contact with the world during the day it doesn't matter if her boss looks at the ponytail and wonders. I see her quite often as Jason and Jason is starting to look decidedly feminine. We asked if she was going to become a real girl sooner or later, but she says no. She is, on the other hand, likely to tell her boss that she won't be coming to work as Jason for much longer. Her ponytail will be perky instead of lying flat along her neck.

I confess that Debbie Reynolds' ponytail has always attracted me. Debbie is one of my heroines.

Madelaine can't decide what to do. She wants to have her own long hair but she lives with her Mom, who's not well, and is as conservative as mothers come. Madelaine works for an even more conservative accountant who thinks army haircuts are best, even for girls. I'm not sure if Madelaine will stay in that job or not. Sometimes she has a little cry because it all seems so unfair. Even so, she's a stylish dresser and has a couple of good wigs, so she should get by for now. Her style is, as they say, being cramped. She intends to go back to college one day and finish her degree, her favourite subject being art. She was only half-way through when she had to go home to care for her mother.

I've been Charlotte for a long time. It's easy because I have my own place and I don't have to answer to anyone about my cross-dressing urges. Believe me, the cross-dressing imperative certainly lives at my place. I slip into something comfortable when I get back from a sales trip, depending on what kind of girl I want to be that evening. I love separates but I also love a dress. I don't tend to do make-up or wigs at home unless I'm expecting a visitor, but visitors are usually one or more of my three similarly-minded friends. The rule, which applies to all four of us, is to ring before you visit so we can make ourselves gorgeous.

My closets are crowded and I wear panties all the time except for visits to the doctor. I read Scandinavian crime thrillers, I like fifties music and collect early vinyl, I follow trends in modern art and often cook my signature dish, sweet and sour pork. I follow trends in local archaeology and I collect 50's nightgown and peignoir sets. I left college with a degree in Ancient History. I tell you that so you know I'm more than just a cross-dresser.

The dance, as I was saying, started well. We met up, as we usually did on a Friday, at the local TGIF a couple of doors down past the Jive Club to have a few drinks and admire each other. We tried for the spirit of Rock and Roll and generally we succeeded. I've described my dress already. I have a collection of authentic 50s petticoats and I vary them every Friday. I have eight square dance pettis too and I love those, especially the big softies.

Scarlett never does costume by halves so she was wearing a red proper poodle skirt with a poodle on it, a real pointy bra under a tight white cardigan top, a scarf, and ankle socks with flat shoes. Her hair was in a sort of exploding ponytail. I don't know how many petticoats she had on, but there were a lot.

Briar was a little more ladylike. Her skirt was full, made out of black cotton with rows of pink ribbon sown around the hem and she had at least three petticoats underneath but her heels were high and her cardigan wasn't quite as tight as Scarlett's. Like I said, more ladylike.

Madelaine was, like me, wearing an actual dress in a dark green made from taffeta and not that different from something Julianne Moore might have worn in *Far From Heaven*. It was fabulous, just below knee length. She'd found a pair of dark green pumps to match and she'd contrasted the green of the dress with a swathe of pink petticoats. She'd done her make-up in a 1950s way and it was like she was a movie star.

The crowd at the Jive Club knew us well by now. They were a dedicated pack of members who went to dance, man, and have a good time. There weren't any wallflowers and we girls enjoyed the dancing and the attention we got. If one of the guys got too personal we reverted to dancing with each other but mostly

the guys just wanted to rock and roll. I think it's another tribute to our credibility that we could go out and dance as girls, not that rock and roll has all that many girl's moves, and not get read, ever. One reason is that we dressed to avoid detection by wearing firm, non-transparent panties so that flying skirts, almost inevitable when dancing rock and roll, revealed nothing.

Which brings me back to Tom. Tom certainly never picked me up as a guy until the trouble started, and it might have saved some trouble if he did. Apparently he'd been checking me out for a while but I hadn't noticed. To say I was surprised when he approached me during a break from dancing and declared that he wanted me to be *his* girl, understates my feelings by a huge amount. Let me say straight off that Tom is a very good-looking guy and I know a couple of real girls who would climb all over him if they got a chance.

I'd danced with him a couple of times but that's all it was, just dancing.

Standing in front of me now and making his declaration, he had a dopey look on his face that made my stomach sink. This was going to be a problem.

I told him, as politely as possible, that I wasn't looking at any kind of relationship right now and thanked him for his interest. I must have sounded like someone rejecting a telephone offer of roof paint. He looked worried for a moment and then the dopey look returned. He hadn't got the message.

"Tom, listen carefully." I raised my voice. "I have no interest in you as a person. I like dancing with you because you move well, but I have no intention of ever being your girlfriend. End of story."

“But Charlotte, I’m happy to wait.” This was said with a sincere look. “I don’t need an answer tonight. Get to know me a little better. Let me prove I can be a really nice, interesting guy. I think we have a lot in common, Charlotte. I think we would make a great couple.”

“I’m trying to be polite, Tom, but please accept ‘no’ as the answer. I do not, repeat, not, wish to get to know you better or find out how nice you are. Please just forget you mentioned this and so will I.”

“I’m sorry, Charlotte, it’s not that easy. I’ve been thinking about this for a while now and my therapist insists that I deal with rejection in a positive manner. I’m unable to accept your suggestion that I forget this, because I really, really know I’d be good for you. Just take a look at yourself, Charlotte. You’re really pretty, you have great taste in clothes and you’re intelligent and friendly.”

Therapist?

“Tom,” I said. “Fuck off.”

He looked crestfallen. Had I got through to him? Did he take the hint? Is ‘fuck off’ a hint? Surely it must be.

I did a sharp about-turn on my high heels and walked off to rejoin the girls.

“Well, that looked awkward,” said Briar. “What did Tom want?”

“Me,” I said.

“Wow. Are you engaged?”

“Shut up, Briar, this is serious. He wants us to be a double act and, get this, he has a therapist who is handling his rejection problems.”

Scarlett offered to help. “Hey, I can put on the Xena outfit and see him off, Charlotte. That sword is quite sharp.”

“Thank you, Scarlett. Possibly a little early for that but I’ll certainly keep it in mind.”

‘Great Balls of Fire’ exploded from the bandstand and Greg Wyatt appeared next to me and asked me to dance. I accepted his offer because Greg is:

Married

A great dancer

Menacing was suddenly important. Greg is a big pussycat but looks like a pro boxer with a quiff. He reminds me of one of those guys in Grease who drove cars and came off all aggressive for no particular reason and I thought he would keep Tom away from me. Sure enough, he did. I enjoyed myself and twenty minutes later I went back to our table to find Tom sitting in my seat and Scarlett offering to disembowel him if he didn’t leave me alone.

“Tom,” I said, “what part of fuck off didn’t you understand?”

“Well, I don’t understand you at all, Charlotte. I mean, why are you treating me like this?”

“Cut them off, Scarlett,” I said. “Maybe a testiclectomy will do the trick.”

Tom turned pale and withdrew into the back of the chair. Scarlett opened her purse and said, “I have a

scalpel in here somewhere,” and started to rummage around. There was a metallic sort of a clink from inside the purse and Tom leapt out of my chair and disappeared across the room.

“Nice one, Scarlett,” said Madelaine. “Who would think a nice girl like you would carry a scalpel for emergencies?”

Scarlett held up a lipstick and a metal barrelled pen. “Clinked together,” she said.

I was starting to worry. I wasn’t convinced Tom had given up on me.

My worries proved to be far from groundless when I went to leave. My car was parked quite close to the club and I almost had the door handle in my grasp when Tom grabbed my arm and started to beg for some attention. I lost my temper then and told him to leave me alone or I would punch him in the nose and report him to the police for persecution, assault and stalking. He looked at me with one of those looks that some people would call withering but which I would call contemptuous so I let him have it in the nose. He howled with pain and came back at me with wild eyes and blood streaming down his face.

So I kicked him in the balls, losing my shoe in the process.

Tom doubled over with pain and I took the opportunity to get in my car and take off. Tom was almost immediately driving too close behind me and I decided to take evasive action. If I went home he’d know where I lived, although he possibly did already, and that would make the situation worse. Thinking about it though, if he’d been stalking me he would know that Charlotte and Anthony lived at the same place and drove the same car.

That meant that he must have only decided to-night to make a move on me. If I could elude him I could get back to my place undetected. So I cut to the right and sharply to the left and then right again and left as I headed home. Tom was still there but not driving quite as fast and dropping back a little. I went left again and there was a row of striped barriers blocking the street. I veered right just before I ran into them and there I was in the car-park that serviced a group of shops across the road. They were all closed at this hour of the night.

I dived out of the car, slammed it shut and hit the security button on my key-ring as I went up the bank. I went low and thank God there was a bit of a low bank between me and the carpark. I was now around fifty yards from my car and waiting to see whether Tom would find it. As you know, he did.

Fifteen minutes passed and he hadn't moved. Then I remembered there was an alarm button on my car's lock pad. There were a few houses nearby and some small apartment blocks and this was a reasonably nice part of town. I put my hand over the low rise and pressed the 'Alarm' pad. Nothing. I pulled out the little aerial fitted to it and tried again.

The alarm was brilliantly loud on the still night air. I raised my head and saw Tom had leapt back from the car and was looking around to see if anyone was paying attention. A couple of lights came on in the apartment block and an old guy appeared in a doorway. Tom saw him too and jumped in his car and took off. I stood up and took off my one shoe and walked back to the car. The old man had been joined at the entrance to the car-park by a younger guy and as I got to my car and turned off the alarm they asked if I was okay.

I told them I was and thanked them for checking out my alarm. I said I'd been followed by a guy who had been pestering me and wouldn't take no for an answer. The old guy gave me a little piece of paper with Tom's plate number written on it so I could lay a complaint if I wanted.

I waved as I drove off and was home five minutes later, but I was still upset.

I needed to get this sorted out, and fast.

The next day I went out to work as usual, disguised as a man, and spent a hard but profitable ten hours persuading music stores to stock a few new releases. By the time I got home around six I was surprised to see Tom's car parked across the road from my place.

I was really pissed and I stopped and strode across the road towards Tom, who was sitting in the driver's seat staring at me. I peered in the passenger window and shouted, "Did you want something, Tom? I hear you've been hassling my girlfriend and I warn you now that if you don't stop as of *right this minute* I'll be dealing with you. If you ever come within two feet of her I'll knock you across the street. Clear?"

Tom had his mouth open. "Ant? But I've never seen you with her. I didn't know you two were an item."

Let me make it clear that Tom knows me reasonably well. We went through school together, mostly in the same class. We didn't mix socially at school or after school but that was because Tom always seemed a bit weird and our unwritten rules indicated he had to be marginalised, a fate suffered by weirdos everywhere. It wasn't that we disliked him, he just couldn't be bothered doing something about his weirdness,

making a thing out of it and being generally obnoxious. It was probably shyness, now that I look back.

“Trust me, Tom, we are. Now fuck off out of here or I’ll start kicking the side of this car in just before I start kicking the side of *you* in. Just a minute, Weirdo, she said you have one of her shoes. Where is it?”

He reached into the back seat and passed it over.

“Good. Now beat it!!”

“I don’t believe it,” I heard him say as he departed at speed.

I felt a lot better after our little talk and I assumed that was the end of it.

The next Friday we met again at TGIF and admired each other. My purple dress was still at the cleaners to get grass stains removed and get a tear in the hem sewn up. I’d tried for a replacement at the local charity shop but they had nothing suitable. However, I owned several circle skirts so I picked out a black favourite that did the trick when I added a few white petticoats and pulled on my sleeveless red satin blouse with the stand-up collar. A faux-pearl necklace later I was ready to go.

We had something to celebrate that Friday. Briar had told her boss that on Monday she’d be working as usual but she would want to be called Briar. I ordered champagne and we toasted her quite a few times. We talked about it for hours, well after the time we would normally be at the Jive Club, because none of us knew anyone who took that step before unless they were transitioning towards girlhood, but Briar was adamant she had no intention of becoming a girl.

It made me wonder if I could do the same. With my job I never went into the office, which was over a hundred miles away. I phoned or emailed orders in and because my customers tended to be laid back, maybe it was possible. I could go back into drab if I got called in to see my boss and never even mention skirts and tops to him.

Briar looked as gorgeous as ever. She'd found a really cool and full green satin skirt that was just a little short (in rock and roll terms) and only just came to knee level. There was a whole bunch of yellow petticoats underneath - it was that kind of attention to detail that made her so exceptional. Madelaine and Scarlett were dressed to kill in skirts and petticoats with suitable blouses. Scarlett had a yellow skirt on with a mass of white pettis and Madelaine was in black with black. It's good to be a girl.

We drank the first bottle of champagne and Briar bought a second, then Scarlett bought a round of daiquiris and Madelaine paid for a round of champagne cocktails. Whoo-ee!

We decided it was probably time to move on to the Jive Club. In fact, there was only an hour of Jive Club left by then. I think it's fair to say we *floated* down the street.

The music was hotting up and a bunch of guys impersonating Ritchie Valens and his group were giving La Bamba the treatment. One of the things I loved about the Jive Club was their willingness to hire good local bands and any tribute bands who were passing through. We'd gradually become part of a state-wide circuit and we got some great music.

Within seconds we were on the floor dancing with guys we'd danced with before. I'd forgotten about Tom until I saw him standing off in a corner, looking

gloomy but watching me. I ignored him. I pretended he didn't exist.

The hour passed quickly and we filed out into the fresh air. We drifted back to TGIF for refreshing cold beers and more talk. The news about Briar was so exciting that I was starting to obsess about myself.

Our cosy talk was interrupted by Tom coming right up to me and before I could even acknowledge his presence he said, "Charlotte, I want to apologise for my behaviour. I didn't know you had a boyfriend and I wouldn't have made a move on you if I was aware of him. I'd just like to take one photograph of you and I'll never bother you again."

I didn't get a chance to open my mouth before he had a camera aimed and the flash blinded me. He walked out before I could say 'No, you can't'.

"Well, that was strange," said Scarlett. "I suspect you'll be pinned up on his wall by breakfast. Did you know he's something of a genius with photographs? Apparently he has all the gear and programs like Photoshop, stuff you need to manipulate and alter pictures to your own requirements. I wouldn't be surprised to see you posted on the web with a poem composed in your honour by Sunday."

I shuddered. Little did I know it would be much worse than that.

The weekend proceeded normally. I saw Briar and Scarlett on Saturday, Madelaine and Briar on Saturday night and Scarlett and Madelaine on Sunday morning. Then on Sunday night we all gathered at Briar's place to talk about Monday morning.

“What did your boss say when you told him?” I asked. “Was he surprised? Stunned? Interested? Vaguely amused?”

“I think he wasn’t all that surprised,” was her reply. “Let’s face it, even dressed as a guy I haven’t looked macho in my entire life. Come Monday I’ll seem just the same to him except I’ll have face paint and my hair probably won’t be in a ponytail. Actually I think I might keep the ponytail for a couple of days and dress like I usually do. I’ll break him in slowly, starting with the paint.”

“And he’s going to call you Briar?”

“He said he would. It’s wait and see on that one. If he has trouble I’ll ditch the ponytail immediately. I can’t be too hard on him, though. He’s supportive and I think that’s great.”

“I’ve been thinking about doing it too,” I said. “I’d love to dress all the time. I can’t see my boss agreeing, but then again I haven’t seen my boss face-to-face for two years. I just sell and send in orders and he tells me how I’m doing once in a while. Mostly by phone or email, sometimes by letter. I could look like Granny from the Beverly Hillbillies and he wouldn’t know any different. I’m going to think very hard about it.”

“Go for it, girl,” said Scarlett. “Be a transgender warrior. Tell your customers there’s a cute girl replacing you and she’s at least as clever as you are.”

It took me two weeks and a lot of encouragement from the girls for me to make a decision. It helped that Briar’s transformation was a complete success. Her boss treated her like she’d never been known as Jason and called her Briar from day one. After a week she threw out every single item of male clothing she

owned and let her hair down. We never again saw her in male attire.

That more or less clinched it for me. A week later I started telling my clients that I was being replaced by a girl; a cute, intelligent, knowledgeable and efficient girl who was probably cleverer than I was. I was almost offended that most of my clients took it in their stride and said something like, 'see ya'. Only one was really upset for me, but he was gay and I knew he fancied me, because he'd invited me around to his place fifteen times or more.

The day came, five weeks after Briar threw off her shackles and her inhibitions, when I put on my best panties and bra and a skirt and blouse and made the first shop visit on my regular call cycle.

Zeke was a laid-back sort of a character who owned a small music outlet in the next town. When I walked in and announced myself as Anthony's replacement, Charlotte, he leapt to his feet and offered me his chair. I almost creamed my panties because it was so neat, so exciting. Zeke had no idea I was the former Anthony and gave me an order for twice as much as he would have given the old me.

I'd prepared myself for my new business persona by buying new clothes, mainly skirts and tops but a few dresses as well. It's kind of hot out our way and it's nice to have the cool breeze wafting up under a dress. I'd bought fresh make up and some good business-like shoes (nothing over four inches) and a wig that I intended to discard in about eight weeks when my own hair would be ready for anything. I'd already made an appointment with Jاسبinder at Hollywood Hair 'n' Nails. Briar made the appointment for me, referring to me as an old friend coming to live in town. Of course, I bought new lingerie and lots of sheer hosiery.



My performance worked well on Zeke and then on all my other clients. My sales skyrocketed, fuelled by sheer hosiery and careful makeup. After my first full call cycle my sales were up forty percent and my boss sent a congratulatory email, indicating I was getting a small pay increase and a bonus.

Life was great. Madelaine and Scarlett were supportive but envious, Briar thought it was quite natural. We went to the bar and on to the Jive Club every Friday and danced our butts off. I used my bonus to get a couple of major new petticoats.

Tom? He didn't come to the dances anymore. I didn't know why and I didn't really care. I sort of wrote him off as a nincompoop with social shortcomings but, as I said earlier, I had no idea just what levels he could sink to.

His revenge started when I took a folded sheet of paper out of my mailbox one Saturday morning. On it were two photographs, one of Charlotte and one of Anthony. The Charlotte picture was the one he'd taken at the Jive Club and he must have been stalking me between taking that picture and my becoming Charlotte full time, because I had no memory of him snapping the Anthony picture. I suspect it was taken from a distance because it wasn't quite as sharp as the picture at the Club.

The pictures were taken from exactly the same angle and I was flattered that Charlotte looked pretty good and very feminine, but comparing the two pictures would leave no one in any doubt that it was the same person. Shit.

I never doubted for a second that this was a gift from Tom. No one else could be that vindictive and I even had to admire his handiwork. If I wanted some professional portrait work done, he'd be the guy to

see. I was starting to freak out at the possibilities of this picture and wondering what I would do, when the telephone rang.

“Hello, Charlotte, this is Tom. I saw you take my little artwork out of your mailbox. Do you like it? I think it’s the best thing I’ve ever done. I can’t wait to send a copy to your employer and pin copies up in the bathrooms at the bar and club. There’s only one thing stopping me from doing that right now.

“As you know, I was always attracted to you and I tried to get your attention but you always blew me off in front of everyone whenever I spoke to you. You were a real bitch to me and I see that you’ve now become a full-time bitch and believe it or not you look even better than you did when you were mainly a guy.”

I tried to get a word in and failed.

“My reservations? A few people saw me and heard me when I talked with you and tried to get you to go out with me. If they find out I was trying to get a date with a guy I’m going to be the butt of a lot of jokes. People will think I’m stupid, if not perverted. They’ll forget they thought you were a female, just like I did.”

I finally got a word in. “So what do you want, you snivelling prick?” I asked.

“Easy on the names, bitch. (*He* should talk.) As I said, you’re looking beautiful, better than you ever did. You can put off public humiliation by doing this; I’m going to my sister’s wedding in three weeks time and I need a girl to go with me. I can’t get anyone else to accompany me and I’ve let my parents believe that not only do I have a wonderful, pretty girl, but I’m practically engaged. Will you do that for me?”

I started to tell Tom to go fuck himself, but I checked my words, biting back the most abusive vitriol I could come up with. Maybe I didn't have a choice. Maybe I was stuck with this. What a creep! What a piece of shit! Not just a sociopath, but a blackmailer as well.

“Fuck you, Tom. Let me think about this. Call me back in a half hour.”

I slammed the receiver down and hoped I hurt his ears.

By the time he rang back I'd gone from despair to gritty determination to bloodthirsty revenge dreams, then back to some sort of calm.

“Tell me more,” I said. “I don't want to help you but maybe I have to.”

“I'm sure you're right, Charlotte, you have no choice at all. I've given you the date. I'll arrange accommodation. It's a formal evening wedding, by the way and you'll need a very sexy long gown. The bridesmaids are wearing pale blue, so don't pick anything in that colour. I've got to go. I'll call you again next weekend.” He hung up abruptly.

I called the other girls and we gathered at Madelaine's place, where everyone expressed outrage at Tom's behaviour. They told me not to go, but couldn't give me a good alternative by way of a plan to stop him, and until someone had a good idea, other than threats of physical violence, (I had visions of a handgun, which I didn't own, but I suspected Scarlett might know where I could get one), I was between a rock and a hard place. Also, I estimated the time between the violence and the police getting copies of the pictures was a maximum of thirty minutes. I was trapped.

Once I gave in, I started to gather things for the wedding. I started by making a date with Jasbinder to get my hair done the day before. Since I started going to her my hair was looking great. She was truly a genius and although I wasn't ready for much of a ponytail yet, I was getting there quite fast.

While I waited for the Fateful Friday I searched out long dresses and finally found a gorgeous confection in dark red satin with a black chiffon overlay that suited me exactly. It was cut straight across my chest so my lack of cleavage wasn't going to be on display. I found a darling pair of high-heeled black sandals and gathered some gold jewellery and a beaded purse. I borrowed that off Briar. If I was stuck with the wedding I was at least going to look like a million bucks.

The Friday came and Jasbinder weaved her spell with some curls and a small piece of real hair she wove in to give me some bulk. By Saturday morning I was in a blue funk. I'd gone to TGIF on the Friday night but I wasn't brave enough to go to the Jive Club as well. The girls were wonderful and kept buying me drinks and admiring my hair. So by one o'clock on Saturday I still had a dry mouth as well as a blue funk.

The trip was something of a two and a half-hour nightmare. I wore a denim skirt and a plain red tee for the trip. When we arrived I found Tom had booked a room at a motel with just a double bed, and my heart sank. I hung up my clothes feeling a little desperate but at least there were only a couple of hours until we were due at the church. I was sure I could cope until then.

At half past three I slid into the bathroom, a spacious place where two one year olds could easily have fitted in at the same time, with a bit of planning, and sluiced myself down. It felt good to get the sweat off,

even if I had to more or less shower with my head outside the door.

When I came out of the bathroom Tom was sitting on the bed. I had a towel wrapped around me and I asked him if he'd mind going outside while I changed or at least into the bathroom. He refused. I tried to get back into the bathroom but he stood up and put his arm across the doorway so I couldn't get in.

“Just get changed, Charlotte. I want to watch you. I want to see what you do. Take the towel off and get on with it.”

I swore loudly and profusely but he just laughed and said to hurry up. I again had little choice, other than running out into the car park, so I took the towel off, threw it at him and quickly hauled on the black lace panties I'd bought, closely followed by the black satin and lace corset that would see the dress shown off to full advantage.

I pretended there was no one else in the room and I put on black stockings and did my face. I put the long gown on and put on the bracelet, earrings and necklace. I picked up my purse and said I was ready to go.

Despite myself, I was showing off to Tom, letting him see just how beautiful I was.

Tom stood up, his mouth open and I was dismayed to see that his trousers were being distorted by a large hard-on. What was up with this guy? God, this was a girl's worst nightmare. Worse, he took off his jeans and boxers and showed me the goods before he went for his shower. It was big all right.

“You like it?” he asked.

“You’re disgusting, Tom. You’re a sick puppy. Just get showered and changed or I’ll go out there and climb into your car, drive home and the hell with the consequences.”

He immediately disappeared and thirty minutes later he was dressed in a tux and looking very appealing. If it wasn’t for his personality, that is.

We arrived at the church ten minutes ahead of kick-off. I was immediately surprised by Tom’s relatives, who all seemed quite normal and often quite charming. Even Tom seemed to relax. It never occurred to me he might be tense, but that’s what you get when you tell lies about being practically engaged. I was glad I’d splurged on my outfit because there were some serious gowns being displayed as we made our way into the church. I felt sexy as hell and I could feel myself being closely inspected as we were led to our pew.

Tom’s sister Gaby, the bride, looked adorable. She was a white blonde with big baby blues and full sensuous lips. I’d loved to have crawled into that white confection of silk, satin and lace. She had a tight top and a big skirt, and a short veil held in place by a sparkling diamante hairpiece. There must have been a million miles of tulle under that skirt. I could see a diamond as big as Arkansas on her right hand that she would later switch to her ring finger.

I confess that, despite my anxiety, I wondered what she was wearing under the gown. A tiny white thong that barely covered anything? Full briefs? Bikini panties? French knickers maybe? Lace? Silk? Stretch satin? A white satin or silk corset? White stockings? Nothing? Hmm. I got just a little excited; it was fun to speculate.

The groom? Totally average, looked like an accountant for a car hire firm or a minor photo shop. Nice guy named Bruce who struck me as quite boring when I talked to him later on.

The ceremony over, we were ferried by bus to a marquee in a local private park where we were plied with champagne and canapés. Attached to the marquee was an even larger marquee set for a large number of people to eat and I could see a stage and some musical instruments at the far end. Hooray, a band.

Tom's parents were lovely, too. Tom's father especially took a shine to me and took me by the arm and introduced me to everyone. 'Tom's girl' 'Tom's young lady' 'Tom's lady friend'. They were brilliant people, charming being the word that occurred to me most. They were also funny, intelligent and universally cheerful. The few times I saw Tom he beamed at me and gave me the thumbs up. He looked quite different from his earlier self. He seemed to be one of a larger group of similar people, if you know what I mean, like he'd come back to his social group, which of course he had.

Tom and I talked as we ate the sumptuous five course dinner, interrupted by speeches, some of which weren't planned, and I found myself seeing a different Tom. Not a sociopathic idiot and black-mailer but a witty, urbane and handsome guy. Who'd have thought? The fact that he told me I looked absolutely stunning at one point and later that I was the belle of the ball helped his case enormously.

Then they cleared some of the tables away and the dancing started. Oh, how we danced. I eventually found myself in the arms of most of the male guests and I'm afraid they suffered most because I'd never done any formal dancing, let alone in the female role, and they suffered for my lack of ballroom skills. I re-

membered my sandals had pointed heels and I'm sure some arches were bleeding as I punctured them during the evening. When we got down to Rock and Roll later on I was on safer ground and I was surprised by how many men could handle the R 'n' R dance variations.

I sat for a break and talked to Gaby, Tom's mother and his two other sisters. Tom's mother's name is Jessica. She was and is a darling and so were the other girls, one older and one younger than Tom, called Emma and Piper. For the record, all the women in the family were wearing gowns that would have cost more than two thousand dollars. Jessica told me what a joy it was to see Tom hanging around with a lovely girl.

Of course it all had to end, but there were more toasts, a few more speeches and many hugs and kisses. We arrived back at the motel at two in the morning and I was glad to get my heels off.

I'd been nervous about this part of the evening because of the double bed and I'd contemplated sleeping in the car. I'd bought along a long black nightgown and robe set, just silky polyester satin, and I slipped them on while Tom washed his face. When he emerged from the bathroom he was grinning and I knew that grin had something to do with me. But what? He slipped on a t-shirt and slid into bed and spoke.

"Charlotte, you were wonderful. I can't thank you enough for doing this. I appreciate it more than you can imagine and I'm really glad you came. My family is in love with you as well."

He slid down the bed and lay back on the pillows.

“It’s like something out of a dream, me in bed with a beautiful girl. I have a confession, Charlotte. I’m really attracted to you. I’m not totally sure why, because you’re a guy, but you don’t look remotely like a guy; you’re a gorgeous girl. I want to apologise for blackmailing you, it was a mean and spiteful thing to do, but I was desperate and I hope that you enjoyed yourself.”

He turned toward me and said, “I won’t touch you, Charlotte, you’re perfectly safe here tonight. The pictures and everything will be burned the moment we get back to town.”

I was stunned. In an impromptu move I leaned over and kissed him and next thing I knew it was all on. We were kissing passionately and our hands were touching each other in places neither of us had been to before. Holy shit!

It seemed quite natural somehow, really nice and natural, and as I found my hand bumping against Tom’s fierce erection it seemed natural again to grip it and caress it, just as he found my hard-on and gripped it. We didn’t stop kissing as we stimulated each other and Tom came in a massive release just as I did myself, and we kissed some more. Holy shit again.

We lay back on the pillows, now just holding hands.

“That was amazing,” was Tom’s comment. “I can’t remember being that turned on before and it’s because of you, Charlotte. You’re just so beautiful.”

Then he surprised me again by bursting into tears.

“I’m sorry, Charlotte, but I’ve been an asshole and I don’t think I deserve you.”

I ran my hand down his chest and touched his penis and said “Tom, shut up.”

That led to further mutual investigations and we finally went to sleep about five in the morning.

We woke late and because we’d been invited for breakfast with Tom’s parents, we showered (and I shaved, much to Tom’s amusement. Back then I didn’t have heavy facial hair; in fact it was quite light, but I still had to get rid of it daily) and raced out of the motel in record time. We were more sober but I still felt good about the previous night. I wore my reserve skirt because it was more stylish than the denim skirt, and a fresh top, but I wished now I’d brought something along that was just a little smarter.

I didn’t have much time to think during the fast trip; that would come on the way home.

Tom’s parents were as charming as they had been the night before and I was greeted with hugs and kisses. I watched Tom and he was as gentle and pleasant as he could be and I was impressed. His sister, Grace, took me on a tour of the house and told me she thought Tom and I were a good match. She wanted to know if we had any plans long-term. I said we were just friends at the moment.

On the way home, Tom brought up the question I suppose had been hanging in the air for a while.

“How do you see the future, Charlotte? I mean, you’re a beautiful girl (flatterer!) and you present to me as a girl in every respect except that one item in your panties.”

“My butt?” I asked.

“That’s right, your butt, Charlotte. You *know* what I’m talking about. That lovely thing down there hiding between your legs. Tell me how you think about yourself, sexually speaking. Let me say right off that I’d never have thought I’d be in bed with a guy, beautiful or not. It isn’t how I was brought up or how I oriented myself, but with you it just seemed so natural. It wasn’t a question of what you are or what you look like, it was a question of a moment when I just wanted to kiss you. Among other things.”

The same sort of questions had been running around inside my head too.

“It took me by surprise too, Tom. I regard myself as purely heterosexual. I’ve dated girls and I thought that one day I might meet a girl who could cope with my need to be a girl on a regular basis. Around our town I don’t think there are many girls who could. Cross-dressing is still regarded by most people as a perversion of some sort and a source of humour.

“I believe that when you put on a dress, sorry, when *one* puts on a dress, one tends to think like a girl and adopt some of the traits of a girl, including occasionally eyeing guys up, not necessarily with lust in mind, just to check them out.

“Yesterday, leaving aside the early part of the day, I felt completely feminine, more feminine than I’ve ever been before because of that fabulous dress and the fact that I got so much praise from your family for my looks and manners. But when I kissed you and put my hand on your cock I was transformed into an actual woman. That sounds weird, but something took me over and I wanted you and I wanted to make love to you. Which I did and which I want to do again.”

I reached over and put my hand over tom’s crotch and felt the hardness down there.



“I see, or rather feel, you want to do it again too, Tom, and we will. I can’t wait to do it again.”

His erection doubled.

“You’ve never thought about a sex change, or whatever they call it these days?”

“No. I enjoy dressing up and my cock is a part of that scenario. Sometimes I get hard when I put on some particularly nice lingerie or when I get compliments on my looks. I suspect there’s a bit of fetish that attracts many cross-dressers. There’s something about petticoats, silk and nylon brushing across my cock that’s very stimulating. I confess that I’ve sometimes wondered what it would be like to have breasts, but my cock is sacred.”

“It’s very attractive as well, Charlotte. If neither of us is gay, what are we? Don’t we fit the description?”

“I think we’re two attractive people who have a thing going. A long as I look like Charlotte no one will ever accuse you of being gay and I intend to be Charlotte forever if I can.”

“Sounds good to me. Can you stop doing that, Charlotte? I’m going to go off the road if you don’t.”

I stopped caressing Tom’s cock and just let my hand rest there. It wasn’t far from my place and I was bursting to tell the girls about my weekend. Before I left for the wedding I’d called a meeting at Briar’s place at eight, but by the time I’d been dropped off by Tom I had a date with him for Tuesday night.

The girls were astounded and Scarlett was aghast, not just because I’d been in bed with a guy, but because the guy was Tom.

“I know exactly where you’re coming from,” said Briar. “Me going out with a girl would be weird. I’ve only ever considered going out with guys and I already have a few times. Now that I’m full-time I intend to go into a partnership if I can find Mr. Right. Going out with a girl wouldn’t seem right at all.”

Madelaine agreed, but Scarlett wasn’t having any part of it.

“How can you call yourself heterosexual and go out with a guy for chrissakes? It doesn’t gel with me. I’d rather try and find the girl who can put up with me.”

I said, “The funny thing, Scarlett, is that on Saturday morning I would have agreed with you, but yesterday I capitulated. It was essential that Tom showed me he was much more than just a sociopath, but he turned out to be something special. It took being surrounded by his own family to show what he really was. My body was suddenly inhabited by a girl who really wanted to act like a girl with a guy and it was spontaneous and beautiful. I got taken over by someone who looked like Charlotte but had fewer inhibitions.”

Tom picked me up on Tuesday night and I was looking forward to seeing him again. I was interested, but not surprised, that when I kissed him in my driveway I was already hard. Mmmm. I’d have to look at panties that took a firmer grip on me.

He took me to a restaurant, nothing fancy but with good food. We talked over dinner about many things and I could see from the look in his eyes that he wasn’t just interested in me, he was in love. I’m not sure I was in love with him just yet, but I wanted to find out more about him and I wanted to explore my boundaries and his. I noticed Tom was having trouble with

the front of his trousers and I intended to help him out later.

I'd dressed in a mid-length dress I wore on the job. It had a fairly big skirt and was very feminine. I'd gone for pure girl again and I enjoyed having someone to dress up for. Maybe I was keener on Tom than I admitted to myself.

I invited him back to my place and we made love slowly and wonderfully as we explored some interesting places. I had always intended to give him a blowjob that night but he surprised me by taking my erection in his mouth and giving me the orgasm of my life up until then. I screamed and when he finished (he took everything down) I returned the favour. I'd imagined what it might be like to do this, to take his organ and caress it, lick it to get it as big as I could and then gently suck him until he came. I intended to do what he did, swallow the lot.

I inspected it, long and visibly throbbing and leaking with excitement. It was a mighty fine cock and I put my tongue out and licked the glans gently. I realised he was already on the verge of coming and I took the head into my mouth. I didn't mind if I had to do it again; I had all night if necessary.

Tom exploded. I swallowed and I knew I'd have some running down my chin because there was so much of it. I had no idea a man could have that much juice inside him as he came and came. I loved it, and again I felt like a real girl, one who'd just given her man a supreme blowjob. It was sort of empowering in a strange way. I wanted to open the window and shout 'I'm a girl, a real girl,' but I suspect I would have sounded like Pinocchio.

We pleased each other three times that night and I was exhausted by the time Tom went home.

That night set the pattern for the next few months. We'd go out and do something and later we'd go to one of our places and indulge ourselves in reciprocal sex.

Early on, I started the hair removal process. It took many sessions with the laser but after two months I was declared hair-free.

I thought about the idea of allowing Tom to take me anally. I wasn't sure if I was ready or not but it seemed a logical next step in our sex life. For sure I enjoyed what we did and people were commenting on how radiantly happy I looked, but it seemed to me that a man needs a receptacle for his cock. I didn't have a pussy and neither did Tom but we both had a back passage that was suitable for inserting things. Note that – we *both* did. I was secretly wanting to try it out as well, but I'd let Tom have the first pleasure from it, effectively taking my virginity. Tom had never mentioned it; it was my decision finally to let him do it. When I made the suggestion one night over a drink at TGIF, his eyes lit up.

And as soon as I mentioned it, I wanted to do it, right then, on the floor in the restaurant. I could trust Tom to always say the right thing, and what he said was, "I love you, Charlotte."

"And I love you, Tom. I love you and I want to feel that big cock filling me up, but later I want to try it too. We both have holes to be filled, but you're going to go first. You're going to grease up your cock and slide it in to me and I'm going to come from the sheer pleasure of it. You're going to take my virginity, Tom."

Tom advised that he was in grave danger of coming right then in his trousers so we went back to my place and we undressed each other. I'd had some condoms ready for the event for a little while in case I

decided spontaneously to invite him in, as it were, and I never had it in mind not to use a condom.

As I usually did, I kept some female clothing on to declare my role in the relationship. In this case it was a red silk camisole that I loved. We were overexcited and both hard as rocks with anticipation. I slid the condom on to Tom and applied a good amount of lubricant to his cock, the biggest I'd ever seen it, and my little hole as well. I positioned myself on the bed on my hands and knees.

Tom gripped my hips and parted my cheeks and I felt his cock touch my anus.

“Ready?” he asked.

“Yes, yes,” I said. “Stick it in me, Tom. Fuck me, fuck me, fuck me. Ram it in all the way. Put that lovely cock inside me and make me a woman. Oh fuck, that’s so good. I love you, baby. Fuck meeee!”

Tom obliged and he slowly slid inside me. It felt strange but comfortable with him inside me and then he touched my prostate and my solid erection just gave up and let my load shoot across the pillows. I screamed with the sheer pleasure of it and Tom gave it up as well.

This act was a biggie for me. I felt like I'd given Tom the final offering I had to give as far as my body was concerned and as he withdrew he was making funny sounds. I looked around to see he was crying.

“You’re wonderful, Charlotte. God, you’re wonderful. What a gift that was. I want to marry you, honey. I love you and I want to make you mine forever. What do you think? Will you marry me?”

“I think I will, Tom. In fact I’d love to.” We were both kneeling on the bed and kissing. Next thing we were lying down and kissing and the next thing after that Tom was sliding a condom on to me and inviting me to use his backside for ‘a really good fuck’. I scooped up some of the jism lying on the pillows and greased the condom and gently spread some on Tom’s donut. He said it was nice just having that done to him. As Tom kneeled I caressed his cheeks and kissed them, then moved my cock towards its ultimate goal.

It slid in far more quickly than I thought it would. I expected a little resistance but once I had my glans inside it went in quickly as far as it could go. My own cock is just a little smaller than Tom’s, close to six inches, and the feeling of snugness around my shaft was incredible. I kept still, enjoying the sensation, and it was Tom who eventually started rocking so I started the traditional in-and-out movement the world associates with sex. I found it so stimulating I came about a minute later. Phew.

We performed some oral acts that night when we recovered and it was real love-making, slow and sensual. Tom had asked me to marry him and I’d agreed. To me that was the ultimate compliment, the ultimate acknowledgement that I was a girl.

For an hour or two we whispered to each other about love, stopping to kiss mouths or nipples or cock-heads. I started to have visions of a white wedding dress, much like Tom’s sister’s, with a big skirt and silk underwear. I started to have visions of a honeymoon in Hawai’i. I had visions of Tom’s parents. Eek.

I must have gone quiet, because Tom asked me if something was wrong. No, I said, just some logistical problems to do with identity and legality and guys

marrying guys, no matter how pretty one of them looked.

Strangely enough I hadn't considered my own Mom.

A thought occurred to me. "What was that about a therapist? Do you really see a therapist?"

Tom blushed. "No, it was just a ploy to get a little sympathy, persuade you that I needed attention."

My Mom lives in California, just out of Carmel on the edge of a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. It's a big house, really big, and sometimes tourists turned up at the gate wanting to book a room, thinking it was a hotel.

As I'm sure you know, it's traditional for the bride's family to arrange and pay for the wedding. Pop died ten years ago so it was just Mom. I don't have any siblings. It was a fact that she could easily pay for quite a lavish wedding. She's only fifty-one and fit and healthy, and as good-looking as her son, almost. Pop left her well provided for by way of real estate and an incredible number of bank accounts and insurance policies. One of the houses was the one I lived in.

I rehearsed the conversation.

"Mom? Anthony. Mom, I'm getting married."

"Oh, this is a surprise. Do I know the girl?"

"It's not a girl, Mom, it's a guy. His name's Tom."

"Oh dear. Have you become gay?"

"No, I've become a girl, Mom. I changed my name to Charlotte and I'm marrying Tom."

“Oh. Did this happen recently?”

“A while back, Mom. I haven’t lived as Anthony for a long time. I wear only girl’s clothing. I’m beautiful, Mom. You’d be proud of me.”

“Does this mean you’ve had an operation?”

“Not quite. I’m a girl *and* a guy.”

“Is that legal?”

“As far as I know.”

You can see the problems and probably imagine a whole lot more, but darn it, I was going to wear a big, white wedding dress, end of story.

I did ring Mom. I hadn’t seen her for about three years. We always got on well; I just kept forgetting to go visit her once in a while. The conversation went pretty much as above and she told me to visit her, real soon, and bring this Tom along for inspection. Tom thought the sooner the better, and we headed off to Carmel two weeks later.

I have to mention that I had three bridesmaids lined up. One of them had been warned that a Xena costume would look out of place. All three were very excited.

The girls had taken a while to get used to having Tom around, and he had to do some work to win them over, but win them over he did. One of his ploys to impress them, and me, was to buy me a diamond ring, two carats in the main stone and smaller diamonds surrounding it. It looked spectacular.

Once the girls relaxed, they got excited about being bridesmaids and had a few thousand suggestions about what they should wear.

As we pulled the hired car into Mom's driveway I was just about ready to turn around and run for my life. Tom calmed me down and we drove through the big electric gates and pulled up at the front door.

I'd sweated about what to wear. It was cooler in northern California than New Mexico and I'd opted for a top and skirt, but a very expensive top and skirt in grey wool that looked as impressive as their price. I was careful to get a pair of good heels that matched the outfit to perfection and I had the requisite sheer black hosiery and a little jewellery to make as good a picture as I was then capable of making.

Mom came down the steps and greeted us, looking a little puzzled.

"I presume you're Tom, and if you're Tom this must be my son. Jesus Christ, look at you. Okay, Charlotte you are and Charlotte you will remain. There, that was easy, wasn't it?"

She kissed and hugged me and did the same to Tom.

Maybe it was the result of having plenty of time to do things, but Mom looked fabulous. Her hair was still blonde and immaculate and she was still about a size 8 maximum. Her clothes were at least as good as mine, a roll-neck beige cashmere top and a matching skirt. She seemed to be dripping gold.

"Come on in and tell me about it. I can't believe this, Charlotte. You still look sort of like Anthony, but a totally feminine version. Look at those clothes, look at that hair and make-up. And check the shoes. Not



just a girl, but a serious girl. And look at that ring! It's just gorgeous. I feel envious."

She took my hand and looked at the stones closely and I got the impression she was also checking my hands and nails for maintenance. My mother's standards are quite high.

As we went in the front door we were greeted by someone's idea of the perfect pool boy. He looked maybe thirty, maybe thirty-five

"This is my assistant, Roger. Roger, these are my daughter Charlotte and her fiancé, Tom."

"Daughter?" Roger looked puzzled. "I thought you had only a son, Sonja."

He turned to us. "I'm delighted to meet both of you. May I say, Charlotte, that you're absolutely beautiful?" He took my hand and kissed it.

Yay!

"May we have some drinks please, Roger? What would you two like?"

Tom opted for a beer and I hesitated until Roger suggested a daiquiri. I agreed. Mom asked for her usual, which I presumed was still a gin. I stared after Roger as he left the room.

"Actually, his name is Raoul, but I named him Roger because that's what he does," said Mom.

I choked. "Really?"

"Really. Your father's been dead for ten years, Charlotte, but I'm still alive."

Tom laughed, but I was a bit put out. The thought of my mother employing an in-house sex god hadn't occurred to me. After all, she was my mother and mothers cook and sew. Or they used to.

"I'm dying to hear everything, Charlotte, but nothing about sex and gender in front of Roger. He doesn't need to know family business. So when are you planning on getting married, assuming it's possible and legal?"

"There are one or two things to be ironed out, Mrs Hanson."

"For heavens' sake, Tom, call me Sonja."

"Thank you, Sonja. We're aiming for April. Charlotte wants to be a spring bride."

"How lovely. Can I just clarify a few things right at the outset? If you're getting married I want the wedding to take place right here and it's on me. Over the years I've thought sometimes that it would have been nice to have a girl to pamper and spoil and suddenly I have." I felt tears starting to form and I leaned over and hugged her.

"Ah, here's Roger."

Drinks were distributed and Roger sat down next to Mom.

"What have I missed?" he asked. "When are you two getting married?"

"April probably," I said. "Mom's offered to host the wedding here. I'm just speechless."

"Your mother is a wonderful woman, Charlotte." Roger kissed her on the cheek.

“What do you do, Tom?” asked Roger.

“I’m an architect. Right now I’m looking at a new development in town and then there’s talk of a minor skyscraper going up. I’m commercial rather than domestic, although I started out doing houses.”

The talk turned to many things about what we’d been doing and what Roger and Mom had been doing, other than in the bedroom. Roger was a great conversationalist and he brought out the charmer in Tom as well. I could see Mom regarded him with genuine affection.

“Charlotte,” Mom interrupted. “Let’s take a walk around the edge of the cliff. Don’t get up, boys; let me talk to my little girl for a while.”

Mom led the way. The cliff edge has spectacular views but it also has private places with seats. Mom led me to one and sat down.

“That’s a nice guy you’ve got there, Charlotte. He seems intelligent and has a ton of personality. He adores you: I can see it in his eyes when he looks at you. Tell me about the problems.”

I took a deep breath.

“You’ve fixed the biggest problem by offering to let us get married here. Tom’s folks are really nice and I just love them. Problems? Mainly that I’m a guy under these clothes and I intend to remain a guy. That creates problems with identity and legality.”

“I don’t quite understand the male/male thing. I was going to ask you if either of you were gay, but looking at you it seems like a silly question. Can you get married?”

“Legally yes, personally no. California allows same-sex marriage but Tom could never stand up in front of his family and get married to another man. I’ve been wondering if we should just fake the whole wedding and live like a married couple. Maybe later we could come back to California and have a ceremony to get formally married where families weren’t involved.”

“Hmm. Interesting idea, although if you take the marriage step I’d be seriously pissed off if I wasn’t invited, even if I was the only one there. A bogus wedding? That could work, in fact, it’s brilliant! When did you last go up to the person performing a wedding ceremony and demand to see their credentials? If I’ve got this right, all you need is someone who sounds authentic to go through a ceremony and pronounce you man and wife. That could be a bartender or even the golf pro. Have you ever heard of Stan Freeman?”

He sounded vaguely familiar, but I couldn’t place him. Mom enlightened me.

“He used to be an actor. Pretty much B-grade, verging on C. Retired many years ago. He lives in the town you passed through and owes me a favour. He’s very distinguished looking and could pass for whatever you wanted him to be. Any religion or calling. He has a brilliant speaking voice. What say I talk to him about the possibility of impersonating a judge? He’d love that. In fact, we’ll go and see him tomorrow. How big is Tom’s family?”

“Enormous. Sisters and uncles and aunts all over the place.”

“Have you asked anyone to be a bridesmaid?”

“There’re three. I suppose I should mention that none of them are actual girls, although you wouldn’t know it.”

Mom laughed. “That’s wonderful. Look, I don’t want Roger to know about your true sex. I’ll leave him out of any loops that might circle around the issue.”

“Have you known Roger for very long?” I asked.

“Long enough to know that he’s long enough, if you’ll pardon the expression. I rather like Roger. He has qualities other than sexual ones that make him a very good assistant. I’ll probably keep him for a while yet. Have you decided what you’re going to wear?”

“White. Big. Frothy.”

“Surprise, surprise. I presume you know it’s traditional for the bride to pay for her own dress?”

“I do. I’m paying for the bridesmaid’s dresses as well.”

Mom looked me over again from head to toe.

“I can’t pretend I’m not surprised, Charlotte. You’ve never shown a sign, one that I’ve picked up anyway, of being anything other than my son Anthony. That I can call you Charlotte without a second thought is a testament to how feminine you appear. I’d like to know, just for the sake of knowing, how you went from one to the other.”

“It’s quite a long story, with a lot of nuances and a lot of trial and error. Can we put that story off until tonight? Why don’t I visit your bedroom tonight at say, eleven, and I’ll take you through the whole saga. Right now I need another drink.”

“Eleven is good; the bedroom isn’t, because Roger will be in it. Make it the upstairs study. I’ll bring champagne. I’m looking forward to this story, Charlotte. Where did you get that skirt and top? They’re gorgeous.”

We stood up. “The department store in our local mall has a good designer room. I’ve been shopping there for a long time and they even hold stuff for me now.”

We moved back to the house to find Tom and Roger laughing very loudly. Both stood up when we entered the room.

“Sonja! Charlotte! We were just going to bring you more drinks. Can I get another round?” Roger was certainly a great host.

“Yes, please,” said Mom and I at the same time.

We talked some more and at seven a small oriental man announced that dinner was served. I knew Mom employed a chef as well as a groundsman but for some reason I was surprised that the chef was Asian. I was also pleased, because I love Asian food.

We enjoyed seven wonderful courses over three hours. Wine was flowing freely and at ten-thirty we broke up. Tom and I headed for our room and for the first time since we arrived we had enough privacy for a long passionate kiss.

“Your Mom is wonderful,” Tom said. “She’s fantastic looking and so interesting. So is Roger. What a neat guy. Are you ready to hit the sack?”

“Not quite. I promised Mom I’d tell her my life story tonight and she’s bringing champagne. Go to sleep without me, honey, ‘cause I could be a little while.”

His face fell. “Okay, but I might want some loving in the morning.”

I changed into a black nightgown and robe I’d bought from a well-known purveyor of lingerie designed for titillation. It wasn’t too overtly sexy but it had feathers around the edge of the robe, which was sheer chiffon, but the nightgown was a layer of sheer chiffon over a soft satin lining. Quite suitable for telling your mother why you were now a girl, I thought.

I opened the door of the study and found Mom sitting on the leather couch waiting for me. There was an ice bucket with a bottle of Moet in it and a full glass of the fizzing bubbly on the table. I sat down next to her and picked up the glass and clinked it against hers.

“Cheers, darling,” she said.

Mom was wearing a white robe and gown in chiffon and lace and looked fantastic. No wonder Roger stayed around. I had to ask where she got it from.

There was music playing softly in the background. Something innocuous that didn’t need to be closely listened to. The lighting was low and I could see Mom had put some thought into creating an ambience conducive to confessing everything. Actually, I didn’t see it as a confession; it was just how things happened. Confessions somehow imply guilt and I didn’t have any of that.

The champagne slid down smoothly, as it always does, and I got started, because I was hoping to be asleep before one in the morning and it was quite a

long story. It had also been a long day, starting early in the morning at the airport.

“Do you remember Maggie Simpson?”

“Nice intelligent girl? Yellow? Spiky hair? Plays the saxophone?”

“No, that’s Lisa Simpson. I’m talking about the Maggie Simpson who used to live just down the street from us when I was a kid. Her father was the veterinarian and her mother had a salon in the main street. His name was Walt and I can’t remember the mother’s name.”

“Mandy?”

“That’s her. Maggie, as you might remember, was about six months older than me and I used to go over to her house sometimes to watch TV or just hang out.”

“I remember Maggie, but I don’t recall you going to her place, except maybe twice.”

“I may have indicated some other destination when I left the house. The shops, the movies, the park, other guy’s houses. In fact, I went over to Maggie’s three or four times a week. Maggie was kind of bossy, although I wouldn’t have called her bossy at the time. That’s just a hindsight thing. Precocious was the word for Maggie. She fascinated me because she knew everything and I was just a suggestible eight-year-old, a vessel waiting to be filled, and Maggie filled me all right. Bear in mind that her father was out working or drinking most nights and her mother never got home before seven. Today she’d probably be arrested for child neglect, but the effect it had on Maggie was to make her resourceful and creative.

“Since her mother was a beautician and hairdresser, Maggie wanted to follow in her footsteps and she constantly practised on me. She didn’t just do my hair; she did my nails and make-up. She was authoritative enough for me to accept that what she was doing was quite natural, but eventually it wasn’t enough. She started to get me to wear her clothes, and it was a short step from there to wearing her underwear as well. I’m not quite sure why I allowed all this to happen, but I think I just went with the tide. Maggie and I were about the same size, so her clothes all fit me.

“The game changed one day, I suppose I would have been nine by then, when I decided I didn’t want to wear what Maggie had in mind for me. I insisted that I would wear what *I* wanted. Maggie was taken by surprise because I’d been compliant for so long. She sat down and looked at me, like I’d grown horns or something. The conversation went roughly like this. I use the word conversation but it was more of a protracted soliloquy. It seems my bid for independence touched something inside Maggie.

“She said, as I recall: ‘So my little friend wants to choose her own dresses and panties. She wants to decide for herself how she’s going to look. Well, that means we can no longer be friends. It means you will have to be my *sister* from now on. From right now your name will be ... will be ... Susan. No! Tania. You will be Tania. I want you to do your own hair and make-up from now on, Tania. I’ll be pleased to help out and give advice, but as my sister you have to be responsible for yourself. Okay? Of course it’s okay. I always wanted a sister anyway. Well, we might as well get started on being sisters. Pick what you like out of my drawers and closets, but don’t embarrass me by wearing things that don’t match or would be unsuitable for being seen in. You realise, don’t you, that sisters do things like going to the park and going

to the shops for ice creams and sodas? Now that we're *sisters* the sky's the limit. I wasn't going to let my *friend* go outside the house, but now things are different.'

"Wow," said Mom. "So did you ...?"

"I'm getting to that. I chose an outfit and it was just a denim skirt and a singlet-type top. Neither of us had breasts so that wasn't an issue. Neither were our genitals. We were nude or partly so a lot of the time and we inspected each other quite closely out of curiosity. By this time I might have been even more naïve than I had been when I met Maggie. My social life was mainly taking place in her bedroom.

"Maggie had already made me up that day. She had an outstanding talent for makeup. Since you don't remember her, you probably haven't noticed her name in the credits for some major movies over the years. She was in *Vogue* a couple of months ago, a feature article no less, because she's now got her own cosmetics line and is famous. Hey, I wonder if she'd like to do my makeup for the wedding. Sorry, I was saying that I was already made up. Even then Maggie was subtle in the way she applied powder and paint and I looked like a girl facially and sartorially. Only my hair needed attention. Maggie watched me fiddle with it and finally said, 'Let me do it.' She created some spikes with gel and said I passed.

"I think you're ready to go out Tania. Let's go get some ice-cream,' she said.

I was kind of freaked but when I checked in the mirror to see if I could get away with it (I was fairly sure that if I balked, Maggie would have physically dragged me outside) I didn't look much like Anthony. More like a Tania in fact.

Nevertheless, it was really exciting and I got caught up in the game, and so did Maggie. She was quite proud of what she'd achieved with me. We met Wanda, a friend of Maggie's, and I was introduced as her cousin Tania visiting from Philadelphia and Wanda joined us on our hunt for ice-creams. We met some of my classmates, that is, boys, who didn't recognise me, and that was the turning point for me on this particular outing. I relaxed and turned myself into Tania. I *became* Tania.

"I think that's the crucial part of good cross-dressing. Unless you actually *become* your female persona, you're always going to be just that little bit less convincing. I went out with Maggie for two years, on and off, until I was eleven and her folks moved to Denver.

"That was a terrible day. I cried and cried and so did she. It may have been for the best, because we were just on the edge of the puberty cliff and God knows what might have happened if we'd fallen off. That's a hindsight thing as well, because at the time I was devastated to lose my best friend, my sister Maggie."

"You poor darling. Let me refill your glass."

"Thanks, Mom." I was tearing up.

"I'm still amazed that I had no idea this was going on. I can't remember ever seeing you with a hint of nail polish or make-up. Was I that unobservant?"

"No, I just had a teacher who was as immaculate at getting everything off as she was at putting it on. I'm sure it will be a surprise to hear that we passed you a couple of times when we were out at the shops. The first time I froze up but after that I just smiled when I saw you."

“And Maggie’s parents never suspected or noticed anything?”

“In fact, they saw me quite often, but Maggie told them I was Tania, a girl from school. I even ate there a couple of times as Tania.”

“I like the idea of inviting Maggie to the wedding. I’m sure she’d be surprised. Think about it, Charlotte and carry on with the story.”

“Maggie gave me a pile of clothes and make-up when she left and I wore them and used them in my room when you guys were both out. That was cool, but when I fell off the aforementioned puberty cliff, things got confused for me. I was around twelve and it wasn’t long after Maggie left that I had my first wet dream. Are you comfortable with this level of detail?”

“Fascinated. Keep going.”

“I hung around with guys at school, and always had up to a point, and I soon learned about wet dreams and girls and what kind of wet dreams *they* might have. The usual total crap. I watched the mating rituals without participating in them much, although I had a few girls actually approach me. With my usual lack of awareness I failed to capitalise on their advances, apart from a three-month dalliance with Olga Kazinski. Olga was really neat but once more fate took a hand and she moved with her folks to Florida.

“The mating rituals, or lack of them, continued through high school and when I trotted off to college I had some hopes of a liaison with a nubile and willing co-ed. By this time I’d outgrown Maggie’s clothes by a substantial margin and the makeup had all gone. The only memento I had from her was a note I found under the powder container in a refillable compact.

I'd used up all the powder and taken the liner out to throw away when I saw it. It said, 'For Tania, my sister. Please don't forget me. Love, Maggie.' That caused a few tears, I can tell you."

Mom quietly topped up my glass.

"I enjoyed college. Of course you and Pop moved away to California while I was still in college, and Pop died not long afterwards. You might recall I had a part-time job at a bookstore for the whole time and along with the scholarship and the money you sent from home, I had some extra cash. Some of it I wasted on food, beer and textbooks but I started to gather up some female clothes. Just lingerie to start with and then a few tops and skirts. I started to buy makeup and I let my hair grow out. I moved off campus and got my own place and suddenly Tania was back. Except I didn't want to use Tania as a name, mainly because of it's associations with Maggie. So I became Charlotte, reserving the Tania name in Maggie's memory. I know, it's maudlin and over-sentimental, but that's how I was then.

"I know that this isn't all news to you, but I need to keep some sort of timeline sorted out, so bear with me, Mom. Charlotte started going out to movies and clubs and became an addict - to Rock and Roll. Maggie had taught me well and I had no trouble passing as a girl. There was a rock and roll club near the college that met twice a week for free dance lessons with dancing to follow.

"The people were nice and helpful to a girl learning to dance and it became my home away from home. The fact that I learned to dance the girl's role from the start meant I didn't have to unlearn the male role. I graduated to wide skirts and big petticoats and I was in heaven.

“That’s nearly the end of the story. Back home I dance every Friday with the other girls, my bridesmaids, where we’re sort of an institution. I had my first confrontation with Tom at that club and our relationship developed soon afterwards.”

“Confrontation?”

“It didn’t start out well but, as you see, it finished well. We went to his sister’s wedding with me as his partner and it blossomed from there.”

“Did he know you were a guy from the start?”

“No. He figured it out and his first communications after that were, shall we say, clumsy. Nevertheless, we’re engaged and I love him.”

Mom drained the last of the bottle into my glass.

“A strange journey, as Richard O’Brien once said. I presume that somewhere along the journey you had sex with girls?”

“Oh yes. Quite a few. I even had a few four- or five-month relationships that didn’t go anywhere. I suppose that meant I never had to explain myself to a potential partner. I believe that most girls are not attracted to cross-dressers, no matter what the cross-dressers look like or do the rest of the time. I’ve been lucky enough to be a girl all the time recently. Most don’t get that opportunity.”

“I’m fascinated by this. I’m also tired. One last question, Charlotte. I see you as hovering between the sexes, not quite one gender or the other. Is that how you see yourself?”

“Hovering between the sexes. I love that. It describes me exactly. I must write that down.”

As promised, we went to see the retired actor the next afternoon. Stan was a delight. He'd obviously been drinking for a while and he greeted Mom like his oldest friend in the world, which perhaps she was. He kissed me on both cheeks and offered glasses of wine. He might have called them glasses but I would have called them buckets.

We started by identifying who I was and what I wanted. Mom never mentioned that I wasn't a girl, but Stan thought it was a huge joke.

"This could be my most enjoyable role ever," he said. "I played a priest once but I got eaten by a demon before I even got to say anything. Will there be alcohol, Sonja?"

"Rivers of it, Stan. Your liver will be at risk. Tell you what; let me hire some clothes for you. Don't forget you're a judge, not the Pope, so we have to be conservative. Once the wedding's over you can play up as much as you like."

"Wonderful. Do you have a date?"

"April," I said. "The exact date has yet to be set."

We settled in for a few more buckets of wine. At five we staggered home to find Roger and Tom playing pool.

"Darlings!" cried Roger. "We were just wondering where you'd got to. Can I get drinks?"

"Coffee would be best, Roger. Stan has no idea that other people might be more affected by alcohol than he is."

We stayed up talking until one in the morning because Tom and I were leaving the next day. I would be

sorry to leave because Mom and Roger were great hosts. The meal was wonderful again and we managed to force down a few more drinks. When we were finally alone I told Tom what the plan was, about Stan and everything else. I told him that if he wasn't happy with it we wouldn't do it, but Tom thought it was an excellent solution. It would satisfy his family and Mom's friends. I have a few uncles and aunts who wouldn't be invited because they knew Anthony was an only child.

We could live in sin and keep society happy. Like I cared deeply about society. However, we did care enough to see that Tom's family were satisfied with the form and protocol of it all.

We were so happy. We made long passionate love to celebrate.

Back home, I called the girls to a summit meeting. When I told them where and when and how we were going to pull it off, they got excited. Let's face it; most girls don't get the chance to be a bridesmaid. I had some ideas about how I wanted them to look but I was prepared to compromise.

The girls came armed to the teeth with bridal magazines and pictures they'd been tearing out of magazines. Some pictures were for me, photos of wedding gowns they thought would suit me. I was touched by their kind thoughts but I couldn't see anything that was, quite frankly, big enough. Sheath? No. Meringue? Very Likely. A sheath with a huge tulle overskirt? Sounding better all the time.

I thought about notifying the tulle mines that their productivity needed to be stepped up, but I remembered just in time that tulle was made from trees or something like that. Silk tulle is a natural fibre, of

course, but I suspected my tulle budget would never stretch to silk.

I suppose brainstorming is the best way to describe the meeting. I got and gave a lot of opinions and the girls started to reach a consensus on the bridesmaid's outfits.

1 They might not get the chance to be bridesmaids again.

2 They wanted the dresses to be as feminine and pretty as possible.

That coincided roughly with how I saw it. I pulled out a picture, torn from a recent Vogue that showed a style that I thought would suit them. They all had a good look and said 'Aah' at the same time. I knew I was on to a winner.

The dress was a bit more than knee-length, definitely less than mid-calf. It consisted of a satin dress with a very wide skirt that showed a whole lot of petticoat. That is, the skirt wasn't intended to cover the whole petticoat and the picture I was holding was a plum satin dress with white petticoats that could be modified to suit each girl according to their own colour preferences. In short, it was a rock and roll dress.

"Green with a yellow petticoat," said Scarlett.

"Sky blue with a pink petticoat," said Madeleine.

"Red with a black petticoat," said Briar.

It was that easy.

From there it was a case of getting everything made and fitted and ready according to the timetable. To avoid complications we found a dressmaker in a

town about thirty miles away. Although we had no fears of being discovered (assuming we were modest and careful) we felt it better to be in the hands of a stranger. There were people in our town who could do the job very well, but even if there was a remote chance of being discovered, thirty miles somehow seemed to be a good buffer zone.

We went over as a group and talked to Trudy, whom we'd heard good things about. She'd done the bridal party for a close friend from school a couple of months before and had rave reviews. She was helpful and charming. She took measurements and wrote down the colours for the girls and discussed the fabrics and style for me.

I'd thought long and hard about what I really wanted because I'd probably only get one shot at it. I'd come down in favour of my original idea, which was a satin sheath with a huge removable tulle overskirt. That was until I saw the real dress of my dreams in a picture on the wall above Trudy's cutting table. Briar saw me staring at it and came over to see what had grabbed my attention.

I heard her say 'Wow!' and that was how I felt too. This was major. This was me. Strangely enough, it wasn't taken out of a bridal magazine, it was a dress Trudy had designed for a close relative about five years ago.

"Do you like it?" asked Trudy from behind me. "I made it for my niece Sharona. It's more English than American. I seem to remember I saw something like it in a British bridal magazine and fell in love with it. I think it's designed around a traditional English riding outfit. The tight fitted jacket and the flaring skirt are reminiscent of the outfits women riders wore when they rode side-saddle before they were allowed,

God forbid, to sit astride their horses. The top hat is also traditional.”

And that was how the dress looked. A tight fitted jacket that was cinched in at the waist and had a peplum slightly longer than you'd expect, over a very full skirt that hit the ground. It was done in white satin and had beautiful clean lines. It wasn't fussy or frilly but it was absolutely feminine and fabulous.

“Would that suit me, Trudy? Would you be prepared to make it again?”

“Yes and yes, Charlotte. You have enough height to carry it off. On a short girl it would look quite strange. I think it's one of the best things I ever made.”

“Cost estimate?” I asked.

Trudy quoted a figure that would have funded the UN for several years.

I took a deep breath. “I'll do it,” I said.

“Wonderful. Let me measure you up and you can all come back in two weeks for a first fitting.”

Being measured for a bridal gown! To call me excited was a gross understatement. The other three girls watched and I saw Scarlett had a little tear in her eye.

“Don't cry, honey,” I said. “Just be happy and one day we'll help you get a gown too.”

“Maybe, maybe not,” was her reply. “The way things are I'm not sure if I'll ever get the chance. I'm crying for me but mainly I'm crying for you, Charlotte. By that I mean happy tears. It's just so thrilling

watching you but I have this terrible feeling it won't happen for me."

Trudy was looking aghast. "Don't worry, my sweet. I'm sure it will be all right. Let me ask you this, Charlotte. Were you expecting to be getting fitted out for a wedding dress right here, right now? Looking back a year, did you see this coming?"

"No, I didn't," I said. "I never thought for a second a year ago that I'd be here with a bunch of wonderful girls, discussing fabrics and designs and feeling just about as fabulous as I ever have."

"And that's the secret. You can't plan ahead with any certainty because fate often sneaks up behind you and sets fire to your panties without any warning. Set fire to your panties? Where on earth did that come from? Anyway, girls, don't call it quits just yet. When you're old maids of seventy, come and see me and I'll apologise."

"Fair enough," said Scarlett.

We got home late and excited. We had to drop Madelaine off because she had stuff to do at home, but the rest of us headed off to TGIF, where I'd arranged via cell phone for Tom to meet us. The bar wasn't crowded yet but that would change.

I gave Tom a big kiss when I saw him. God, he's gorgeous. I told him all about my wedding dress, apart from what it looked like and what kind of fabric it would be made from and we turned our thoughts to the next step – telling Tom's family. In fairness, he'd wanted to tell them straight away, but we decided to hold back until we sorted the logistics of getting married at all.

“Are you ready, Tom? Can you handle this? Do you want *me* to call them?”

“Let’s have a couple more beers, honey, and we’ll go home and call them. I don’t really need any Dutch courage; I just like beer, and I feel like celebrating. Wow. My mother will go right over the top. She’s going to thank you for making an honest man out of me. Once we get married she can concentrate on finding good husbands for the rest of my sisters.”

“Well, the drinks are on me,” I said. I got a round and brought them to the table and toasted Trudy. “God bless her and all who sail in her.”

I looked up the number for Maggie Simpson on the net. I couldn’t get a home number for her anywhere so I called her office and asked to speak to her. I had some trouble getting her assistants to put me through but eventually I heard the words, “Maggie Simpson.”

“Maggie, this is the person you once knew as Anthony and sometimes as Tania when we were eight years old. Do you remember me?”

“Anthony? Of course I remember you. You were my first model, or possibly my first victim. How are you?”

“I’m exceedingly well, Maggie. Listen carefully, because this is kind of outrageous. It’s probably your fault that I’m now known as Charlotte and I’m getting married to a nice guy in April. So, two things. Firstly I want you to come to the wedding and secondly, I’d love it if you could do my make-up on the big day.”

“Wow. I’m speechless. I wouldn’t miss the wedding for anything and I’d be honoured to do the make-up. One proviso – if you look spectacular could I use your picture for publicity? No names, just good looks.”

“Of course.”

We talked for another twenty minutes and I said I’d call her back when we had a definite date. I also said I’d send her a recent photograph, just so she knew I didn’t look like a freak. I sent the picture to her private email address and was gratified to get a response within minutes that just said, ‘Wow again. I’ll see you at the wedding.’

Later, Tom picked up the phone and called home. He was lying about not being nervous. I could tell from the way he was sweating and making silly jokes that he was nervous, but excited too.

He dialled and said, “Mom? Is that you, Mom? It’s me, Tom, Mom.”

Tom Mom? He got the giggles. “Sorry, Mom. I’m over-excited. Look, I asked Charlotte to marry me and she said she would. Mom? Mom?”

Six feet away I heard the scream come through the earpiece. Tom flinched and listened.

“Yes. Yes. Yes. That’s right. We figure April. Charlotte’s mother has offered to host at her place in California. No, we don’t want religion. Stop right there, Mom. Yes, hang on a moment.”

He put his hand over the mouthpiece. “Just as I expected, totally over the top. Here, she wants to talk to you.”

He grinned and passed the handset over. He may have been grinning but his forehead was beaded with sweat.

“Hello? Jessica?”

“Yes, Charlotte. I’m speechless, darling. This is such good news. I remember speaking to Eric after Grace’s wedding and I was saying what a lovely girl you were. Eric, of course, already thought you were adorable, and I thought, well, if Eric is that smitten by a girl she’s got to have something going for her, although there was that girl from his club with the legs that went on forever, and then that waitress who thought he was Sean Connery, and that ... I’m rambling, Charlotte. Can you come and see us? Can we have a party? What about this weekend? Oh. I’m thrilled. Did he buy you a ring, darling?”

“Yes, Jessica. It’s a beauty.”

“ERIC! ERIC! TOM AND CHARLOTTE ARE ENGAGED.”

Obviously, Eric wasn’t in the same room.

There was a click on the line. “Charlotte? Eric here. What wonderful news. I’m so pleased. When’s the happy day?”

“In April, Eric. My Mom is going to host the wedding at her place in California.”

“Are you coming up here? We must have a party to celebrate. Jessica? What have you arranged?”

“Nothing so far, Eric. I’ve suggested Saturday next weekend. Charlotte?”

“Hang on, Jessica.”

I put my hand over the mouthpiece and passed Tom the phone. “Your turn again, Tom. They want a

party next Saturday night. I'm game. Ask them if the bridesmaids can come."

"Mom? It's me again. Hi, Dad. Yes, next Saturday is fine. Is that enough time to arrange everything? Okay then. Charlotte wants to know if her bridesmaids can come too. Yes? Great. Grace? Hi. Yes, it's true. I'm engaged. She is, isn't she? I'm excited too. Hang on."

"Grace," he said as he passed me the phone.

"Grace? Hi, it's Charlotte here."

"Congratulations, Charlotte, this is so wonderful. My brother finally tied down. Wow. Did I hear something about a party?"

"You did, Grace. Listen, what should I wear?" There was a brief pause.

"Mom says casual but dressy. Knowing her, she'll have half the town here, that is if she hasn't hired the town hall, and they love to dress up. Not formal, but not casual. Dresses can perhaps be only knee or calf length, but something casually formal to the ankle wouldn't be out of place. Maybe as the guest of honour, make it close to formal. Okay? I'll see you next week, Charlotte. I love you. Here's Mom."

This conversation went on for a long time. I have to say that at the end of it I felt exhausted but loved. I appreciated Jessica's excitement and the obvious love the family had for Tom, which they were prepared to share with me. It was enough to make a girl have a little cry.

The bridesmaids were rapt and, shortly afterwards, desperate for something to wear. I was worried about Madelaine because she had family com-

mitments the rest of us didn't but she arranged her life carefully so she could come. By Friday we all had something we felt comfortable with. We spent hours in the mall looking for dresses and we each came up with a gem that suited us. By coincidence, every dress was between knee and calf and all of us went and bought shoes to match. Don't you just love evening sandals?

I was comforted that my mother had sent me a check on Monday as a gift toward wedding expenses because I was going to be the star of the evening and a good show was required. What I didn't know was that Mom had been invited as well, although I should have foreseen that. Tom had passed on her address and telephone number and Jessica, Eric and Mom had had a long talk about my future. The Ellis' insisted that Roger come as well, of course.

The dress I picked out was a recent arrival at the store, a simple pale pink satin number with a flared skirt that came to just below knee level. It gave me good coverage up top and looked as sexy as hell. The matching pink evening sandals made me look like a pale pink goddess. That's not very modest, but it's true. Scarlett found a red dress that was a knee-length satin sheath. It suited her beautifully. Madelaine came up with a pale green charmeuse dress with pleats and tucks and Briar came up with ... well, Briar came up with a black silk, calf-length wisp of a dress that would almost certainly cause a riot at the party. She looked stupendous.

We booked the girls into the motel Tom and I had got started at, a room each. Tom and I were expected to stay at the house. That seemed reasonable, we were the guests of honour after all.

Come Saturday, at four in the afternoon, we rolled into town in a two-car convoy and we led the girls to

the motel and left them with instructions to get to the house by taxi. The party was down for kick-off at seven.

Grace had warned us in advance. She told Tom that there were caterers coming in and that the marquee was going to be set up on the back lawn, a band had been hired, and only the cost had stopped them from getting a champagne fountain installed. I knew that this was going to be Eric and Jessica's contribution to our future because their contribution to the wedding would be limited. This was their chance to splash out.

Tom and I showered and then made love and then showered again and we went downstairs to meet and greet. It was still only six and Jessica was in full Commander mode, ordering everyone around. She stopped directing to admire my outfit, and Eric looked me over like I was a piece of Turkish delight, ready to be consumed.

Now this was stupid of me. It never occurred to me for a second that people would bring presents. When we got downstairs there were finely gift-wrapped parcels sitting on a table in the hallway and I wondered out loud what they were. Jessica looked at me like I'd failed to add two and two, which I had, and explained they were engagement presents. For me and Tom. I must have blushed and I got another 'are you for real' look.

I had no idea what protocol was. Did I open them now or later? I knew I would have to write 'thank-you' notes but the correct time to open them was an unknown quantity. Fortunately, Grace arrived and told me to just leave them on the table, thank anyone who handed me a gift and be charming. I could handle that.

Around half past six it started to get chaotic. Family and guests started to arrive early and then, just on seven, the bridesmaids arrived. I thought Eric was going to pop a valve when he met Briar, and not without good cause. She looked as pretty as I've ever seen her, and from seven until they went back to the motel, she was surrounded by men. Scarlett and Madelaine did alright too. The trouble was that there was no way either of them, or me for that matter, could ever be as gorgeous as Briar.

And then Mom and Roger walked in the door. Mom looked utterly beautiful, dressed in a long blush-pink silk gown that showed off her bosom and a lot of her left thigh. I air-kissed them both and, wonder of wonders, there was Eric standing next to me asking to be introduced. The man was a piece of iron and good-looking women were magnets that just drew him in. Having made the introductions, I took Mom and Roger over to where the bridesmaids were poking at a wrapped gift, trying to decide what was inside.

"Girls, this is my Mom and Roger. Mom, Roger, these are Madelaine, Scarlett and Briar; my bridesmaids."

"Hi, Mom," said the girls.

"For God's sake call me Sonja. My word, you're an attractive group. Charlotte told me all about you. I was startled when I saw Charlotte recently for the first time in an age, but seeing all four of you together just astounds me. I'm going to have to reassess my conditioning even more than I have already. Hello, Tom."

"It's wonderful to see you again, Sonja. Welcome to my place. Have you met my mother yet? I haven't seen her – oh, there she is. Mom." Tom had appeared by my side to kiss Sonja gently on the cheek and

shake hands with Roger. He waved in Jessica's direction and she came over.

I made the introductions. "Mom, this is Jessica, Tom's mother. Jessica, this is my mother Sonja and Roger is her good friend."

They all said 'Delighted to meet you' at the same time. Jessica took Mom and Roger, one in each hand, and took them away to fill them with champagne.

People kept pouring in, many of whom I'd met at Grace's wedding, and I was impressed by the outpouring of respect everyone had for Tom. Tom just lapped it up, but he was proud of me and let everyone know it. Eric kept coming by to see that we had everything we needed, and that included a fresh glass of champagne every time we saw him. Many of those times he had his arm through Briar's. He gave the clear impression he'd been smitten with her, and I saw Jessica taking Briar away to introduce her to other guests on a regular basis. Smart woman.

The evening was a blast, and the bridesmaids and I kept meeting in corners in pairs or threes to talk about the guests. I was pleased to hear that Scarlett had met someone she really liked and Madelaine was just enjoying getting away from it all. I expected Briar to announce that she'd met Donald Trump, become engaged, and disappear into the night. It seems that a stockbroker had become besotted with her after only a few minute's conversation and wanted her to move in with him. A man who claimed he was Bill Clinton's brother offered her a condo in Miami and an apartment in New York if she would marry him.

The finger food was fabulous and at nine the band hit the opening chords of 'Louie, Louie'. Fabulous,

fabulous, was my response and Tom and I danced all night to a really good band that knew all the classics. Of course I didn't dance quite all night. I took time out to talk to Tom's relatives and my bridesmaids.

At three in the morning we called it quits. The girls headed for the motel in a taxi and Tom and I headed upstairs, but only after Eric had toasted us some more and wondered where Briar had got to. (That man is a worry.) We'd made arrangements for the bridesmaids to meet us at Tom's house for brunch at noon the next day.

So, it was an unconditional success. I expected something in the way of some loving but I hit the sheets as my eyes were closing and next thing I knew it was eleven-thirty and Tom was suggesting I needed to get out of bed and shift my pretty ass to the bathroom. I can still take well-intentioned direction and I made it downstairs just after twelve to find the girls waiting for me, along with half the guests from the previous night. I was wearing a flowing white skirt and a white chiffon top along with white two-inch strappy sandals. I should have known better than to be all in white, but I got a great rendition of 'Here Comes the Bride' from the assembly. I blushed.

It's a wonderful feeling to be that welcomed and be the centre of attention. These people liked me, several of them loved me. I cried then, just a little, but reflecting later on I cried a lot.

It was time to make a speech and I did it right there, told them how great it was, how great they were and how much it meant to me. I thanked Jessica and Eric and then Mom and Roger and gave Tom a huge and loving thank-you. Damn it, by the time I finished there were people crying everywhere, including me. I think that was for the sincerity rather than the content. I'm not a great public speaker.

After I calmed myself down I noticed Eric had seated himself to one side of Briar. Jessica was glaring at him from across the table and I sensed some tension. Not from Eric, of course. The alleged stockbroker (I had no proof) was sitting on Briar's other side and she was paying more attention to him than Eric. Once again, I thought 'smart girl, Briar'.

Scarlett and Madelaine were looking gorgeous and seemed to be attracting their own fans. Scarlett was talking to the guy she'd been attracted to the night before and she was looking pink and pleased, probably as feminine as I'd ever seen her. I wondered if her ideas about relationships between men and women had shifted a little. For some reason, even her explosion of red hair seemed calmer.

Despite Madelaine's ingrained conservatism and difficult home life she seemed to have blossomed on this trip. She's a good-looking girl but quite shy, and the mere act of getting out of the house, away from her home environment for the first time in ages was for her the start of a long, slow progression. I had a feeling she was going to have to start balancing out her personal needs and her family obligations quite soon. The guy she was talking to, who was looking into her eyes like he was hypnotised, was a bit of a hunk. Even if they didn't get together, this would boost her confidence, I thought. As I was thinking this thought, the hunk suddenly hooted with laughter and put his hand over Madelaine's. Watch this space.

Mom and Roger were having a good time too. When I got a chance to talk to her privately she told me she couldn't wait for the wedding. Our bogus Judge was calling her a couple of times a week to discuss wordings and possibilities, many of which were way over the top. She was confident he'd fulfil his latest and possibly last acting role on the day as long as he did-

n't start drinking until after the ceremony. Roger had already been told that would be his only job on the day. Stop Stan drinking until he'd done his bit. If that meant going over to his place at eight in the morning, well, so be it.

Briar, Scarlett and Madelaine all brought their new friends over to introduce us. Briar's stockbroker actually had a business card that proved he really was a stockbroker. I have to say he was very attractive, but anyone less than very attractive probably wouldn't stay on Briar's radar for very long. Marc was a friend of Tom's from New York. They'd been in college together and Marc had decided early on in life that he wanted to be rich, so he moved to New York and worked hard. The clothes he was wearing today said he had made the grade and very probably a lot of money. His shirt alone I'd seen in a magazine recently and I seemed to remember a price tag over \$500.00. He looked like he'd been groomed by professionals from head to foot (I was guessing about the feet) and my first deep thought about him was that he was gay. I asked Tom later and it was significant that after initially dismissing the idea, he started to have second thoughts. Hmmm.

By contrast, Madelaine's new friend was still a hunk when he got up close, but more of an athletic-looking hunk. He was a nice guy and well-spoken in a way that made me think he might have spent time in England, which turned out to be the case. Todd had been at Oxford University where he ended up with a Masters degree in some obscure branch of philosophy. In any case, he was interesting to talk to and certainly knew a lot about many things. He was a friend of Tom's sister, Grace, and I got the impression they'd had a thing going for a while, and even though they were no longer an item they were still good friends. Todd was dressed similarly to Marc but at

about a quarter the price. When I asked Todd if he worked out he seemed puzzled by the idea.

And Scarlett's friend? Strangely enough, she'd once again managed to attract someone who was just left of completely normal. His name was Brad and he was Tom's cousin. Brad was an aspiring writer who, in his head, was just short of starving in a garret while he perfected his art. In fact he was living at home but had plans to move to a big city, any big city, as soon as he could afford to. That was so he could 'experience life, see real people' that didn't exist in his home town. Wait 'til you see what's under Scarlett's dress, I thought, that'll be an experience you won't forget in a hurry. And her latex nurse costume – he'd enjoy that as well.

I think (God, I was doing a lot of thinking) he had tried to present himself as an artist and was wearing an old black suit on, the only suit there that morning, which was a little too tight with all three buttons done up, winkle-picker shoes and a white shirt and string tie. He wouldn't have looked too far out of place at the rock and roll club. His glasses were quite thick and he looked ... earnest? ... that's probably the best word. He seemed intense and I was well aware that Scarlett liked intense, artistic people. For some reason I had no doubt that Scarlett would be living with Brad either in his parent's house or Scarlett's place, probably within a month. I liked Brad and I liked Todd and Marc too. I guess it was the romantic in me that wanted to see my best friends having as good a time as I was.

The brunch ended at four and we had to head home. Eric had finally got Briar's unspoken message and was sitting next to Jessica again, but every time he saw Briar a light came on in his eyes and he got a dopey look on his dial. Not quite over her for sure. We stuffed all the presents in the car and met the girls at

the motel so we could go home in a minor convoy. When we got to the motel there were three guys kissing three girls goodbye and promising to see each other 'real soon'. Wow, what a swell party that was.

Autumn turned to winter and the group dynamic changed. It had altered when I took up with Tom, but, as I predicted, Brad turned up on Scarlett's doorstep only a month after the party, claiming he'd fallen in love with her. There had been two or three thousand telephone calls in the meantime of course.

Scarlett was the only girl among us who'd been unhappy with the idea of guys dressed as girls going out with other guys. I'd been surprised at that because she was naturally eccentric and I wouldn't have thought it was too long a shot for her to be involved with either sex. She'd wanted to meet a girl who understood cross-dressers, but in this town that was highly unlikely. Funny how the right guy can unsettle old convictions. It had worked for me as well.

Scarlett told us about the night she finally had to be intimate with Brad or call it quits. She put it off as long as she could while she got her head around the idea but by then she was madly in love. As ever, she was terrified he would reject her on the spot, but Brad was in love with her and saw the fact that she was a guy with a functioning penis as some sort of quirk instead of a major setback. It was simply destiny, she said. Brad and she made love in strange ways and strange places with passion and intensity and when she wore her latex nurse's outfit for him, he declared he didn't need to move to a big city anymore.

There was some bad news. Sadly, Madelaine's mother passed away, which left Madelaine bereft but finally having some lifestyle choices. It was an untidy estate, legally speaking, but once it was sorted out

Madelaine found she had her own house and quite a lot of money. She gave some thought to getting some kind of work she could enjoy, wondering about a change of career or starting a business or going back to school. Things came to a head when her boss told her that he thought her hair was looking a bit long (it was about an inch long all over) and she told him in a four-minute speech that he could stick his job up his backside and she offered to ram the framed accounting certificates hanging in the reception area down his throat.

Mr. Threadgold was not used to this sort of behaviour and raced into his office, slammed the door behind him, and called the police. The officer who attended the crime scene found Madelaine in her drab persona sitting quietly at her desk working. When questioned, she said that Mr. Threadgold had suddenly started screaming about being attacked by aliens and locked himself in his office. She thought he seemed stressed lately and that perhaps he had trouble at home. The cop was unable to get anything coherent out of Threadgold and elected to ask if he wanted to go to the hospital, which made Threadgold even more overexcited.

Madelaine finally stood up and told the cop she had to go, but please get in touch if she could help. The cop was sympathetic to Madelaine, the poor guy having to work for such a strange man, and said he was sure he could handle it. The receptionist, who didn't particularly like Threadgold anyway, thought she would join Madelaine and resigned immediately, putting the final seal on Threadgold's alleged mental condition, which was becoming more real with every second.

Madelaine went home and changed into a white shirt and a dark pin-striped pencil skirt along with black stockings and black pumps with four-inch

heels. She went out the back of the house and burned every item of male clothing she owned, crying with the relief of freedom after all those years of Threadgold but also with the sadness of getting her dearest wishes at the cost of her mother passing away.

It was cathartic, to say the least. The next time we saw Madelaine, about an hour and half after the bonfire, she looked steely-eyed and determined. That is, until she got a call from Todd on her cell phone and her expression changed from steely to misty, just like that. They'd been talking regularly about all sorts of things but, inevitably, Todd wanted to see Madelaine again.

He'd asked her several times if he could fly out to visit her but she put him off because her mother was terminal and then she died. Todd had been supportive on the phone, but visiting would have meant seeing Madelaine in male clothing and she wasn't up for that, because relations and friends would be at the funeral, but that would be her last major performance in drab, ever.

Now she didn't have to make excuses to avoid him and she was prepared for a face-to-face. Or even a lip-to-lip. On the other hand she was highly nervous, wondering what to say to him, how and what she should tell him and how he might react.

It was a few days before Christmas that Todd appeared at her door, making a stopover on the way to visit his parents for Christmas. According to him they lived in a shack in Orange County but that wasn't quite true.

Madelaine was pleased to see him, no doubt about that. She told us she got hard just thinking about him and you have to say that's a sure sign of attrac-

tion at least. After the hellos and an exchange of news they went out and got stuck into food and wine, after which they came to TGIF where the rest of us just happened to be, speculating and wondering how they would get on and what would happen between them.

It became a late night. Tom, Brad and Todd knew each other and all of us girls, so it really was an old friends' reunion. Briar didn't have a special friend of her own but she sat there and cracked jokes and drank beers, breaking us all up with laughter. As she told us the one about the pickled herring, I became aware there was someone standing next to me. I thought it was Tom but he was still across the table. Then he looked up and shouted 'Marc' at the top of his voice.

Briar swivelled at a hundred miles an hour to see Marc grinning at her a yard away. In a second she'd moved into his arms and was kissing him passionately. We hadn't heard anything from Briar about Marc and what with my wedding plans, Madelaine's mother and Scarlett's involvement with Brad I suppose we forgot to ask, but here he was and Briar obviously didn't know he was coming.

She told us later that she'd talked to him quite often and they were still clearly attracted to each other but were having difficulty working out a visit because she was working on installing some new program and Marc simply had to be at work because they were short-handed at the firm. Briar had told Marc about Madelaine's mother and how she had to be there in support and that had complicated matters too.

Briar ordered champagne immediately, then Todd ordered another bottle. When those ran out, Tom bought one and I'm glad Brad was broke that week because I couldn't have coped with any more champagne. We drank and talked and broke up around

eleven to go to our various homes. I whispered 'good luck' to Briar and Madelaine and Tom took me home where we made drunk love for an hour.

I couldn't wait to find out how Briar and Madelaine fared. I feared that one or both would get rejected and we'd have to go into damage control. I'd been lucky and so had Scarlett but it seemed like too much to hope for that all four of us could find partners who really didn't care about our true gender. I don't believe that there are all that many people, girls or guys, who see cross-dressers as suitable partners. Being completely feminine in appearance helps enormously but it's an uphill battle.

The next morning was very strange. Briar and Marc arrived at my place around noon and they were holding hands. Briar had a grin as wide as the Grand Canyon and Marc was looking very pleased with himself.

"Guys," he said, "I think I'm in love."

"Me too," said Briar.

"Well, what a coincidence. This is sudden," I said.

"Not really," said Briar. "We've been talking together constantly since your engagement party and we see eye to eye on many things. I'm thinking of moving to New York to be with Marc, maybe after your wedding, but probably not before."

"That's wonderful," Tom chimed in. "We're so happy for you." He shook Marc by the hand and kissed Briar. "Can we celebrate? I was thinking of a big party, starting at any moment."

"Honey," I said, "Can we hold on until we hear from Madelaine?"

Tom hesitated. “Yes, we should, you’re quite right, babe. Marc? Briar? Do you mind if we wait until later for the big party? In the meantime I’ll get drinks poured, but I think it’s important we hear from Madelaine.”

Briar understood why we wanted to wait. “I’m dying to hear how she got through last night,” she said. “I hope it worked out for them.”

The wait came to an end right then as Madelaine appeared at the door. She looked a little flushed but she was smiling.

“Well?” asked three voices.

“Todd will be here in a minute. He went to buy champagne.”

“Yay. Yee hah.” There was cheering and clapping.

“Would you gentlemen amuse yourselves for a moment?” I said. “We girls have got to talk.” I pulled the girls into the next room and shut the door firmly.

“Okay, give. Who’s first?”

“I’ll go first,” said Briar. “You won’t believe this. Marc claims he’s bisexual but I think he means gay. He sees me as the answer to his prayers, a beautiful woman who will look fabulous on his arm and satisfy his family’s demands that he settle down with a nice girl. For the record, he’s a fabulous lover, kind and considerate, just like I hoped the person I ended up with would be. I couldn’t be happier. He didn’t even seem surprised when I showed him what was in my panties. Maybe he suspected something.”

“Me now,” said Madelaine. “I want to cry but I’m incredibly happy at the same time. I told Todd, and it

wasn't easy, but it turned out he has a brother who had a complete sexual reassignment last year. He supported her through the operation and afterwards and thinks that I'm a gorgeous girl. Having said that, he wants to take it slow but he wants to keep seeing me. What was it your Mom said, Charlotte? Hovering between the sexes? That's what he called it too but he wants to get used to the idea before we consummate the relationship. That suits me fine because I need to take it slow too. He wants to sort out in his head the difference between a transsexual, a transgender and a transvestite."

As promised, she started to cry quietly.

"Holy shit," I said. "What are the odds?"

"Probably astronomical," said Briar. "Four girls hovering and four guys ready to take away their pilot's licences? That's karma or something."

"I agree," I said. "Madelaine, I'm so pleased. After such a tough few months it's wonderful that you might make it with Todd. Even if it doesn't work out, and I think it will, it will convince you that you're just as desirable as any of us. Now let's get champagned."

We went back to the living room to find Scarlett arriving with Brad. I took her into the next room to tell her the news and she was rapt.

Then the drinking started. Pizzas arrived at some point and I was delighted to see Todd kissing Madelaine in the corner, looking tender and caring. I felt misty all over again.

It was obvious that our group was going to be breaking up but I was determined it wouldn't happen until after my wedding. By the time we'd got through

Christmas it was only about eighteen weeks to the big day.

Tom and I spent Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with Tom's family. That was mainly because his family was easier to get to than mine. Madelaine flew out to join Todd and his family and Briar did the same with Marc. Scarlett and Brad invited Brad's folks to join them and twelve people turned up. In her smallish place that was too many so they moved the whole event to the Standish Hotel where Scarlett was toasted and feted and many people fell over as midnight approached. She said it was the best Christmas she'd ever had.

Briar reported back on her visit to New York and we were all envious by the time she'd finished. Not only did she go to every major store in the city and get a fortune spent on her, she stayed at the Plaza. The Plaza. Marc's family turned out to own a huge triplex penthouse on Park Avenue. They welcomed Briar with open arms and thought she was just the most beautiful girl they'd ever seen.

Nothing had been set in stone but she thought she and Marc would probably make it. Living together would make or break the partnership and she'd know by the end of the next year. Marc's mother wanted her to go and live with the family, but that involved risks for girls who were really guys and since Marc had his own place on the Upper East Side she'd go and live with him.

So we planned the wedding bits and pieces and had fittings for the dresses and everything went smoothly. Madeleine and Todd got closer and closer and it looked like they'd make it too. We all had pizza parties and Briar and Madelaine spent a fortune on long-distance calls. Both visited their boys for the

odd weekend and by the date of the wedding we were all as happy as pigs in muck.

We elected to drive to California. There was so much luggage we chipped in and hired a big van for the four of us and the dresses and stuff. On the Wednesday before the wedding we set off early in the morning and headed west. It was a little too far for one day so we'd planned to break the trip in Palm Springs and at five we headed for the hotel rooms we'd booked in advance. We cleaned the van out and we were glad we did because the van disappeared in the night and we were stranded in Palm Springs for several hours while we talked to the police and sorted the car rental company. We finally got a replacement and headed up the California coast towards Mom's place, getting there just as the sun started to go down.

Mom was worried because we were later than we expected. To compensate for the late start, Roger started the Margaritas coming and as soon as we had our stuff hung in the closets we were downstairs and ready to relax. Roger, as you know by now, is a doll. He's funny, considerate and cheerful, knows twenty-seven ways to mix gin and somehow stays sober through it all despite testing every drink before he lets it out of his hands.

Before we hit the hay, Mom announced that the next day, the Friday, she'd invited a whole lot of people over for a big party and that included all the guests who had made it so far (about half of them), the bogus judge, and some local friends who would not be coming to wedding but felt like a drink or two. Brad, Tom, Marc and Todd were all due at various times the next day and to say we were an excited group of girls understates our mood.

It had been a long day, but we weren't particularly tired. We sat around my bedroom, which I was sharing with Briar, and eventually we moved on to the subject of sex and gender.

The conversation was intense and wasn't too dissimilar from some earlier conversations we'd had on the subject. The difference was that we'd all changed in the last few months and our attitudes had changed as well. You could say that some of us had matured, as having a permanent partner seems to be a factor in growing up, but it was Scarlett who raised the issue and I think she still had that doubt somewhere away down the back of her mind.

"So are we all gay?" she asked. That could only be described as a confrontational question.

Madeleine threw a well-aimed pillow at her head and said, "I'm not gay. Are you gay? Briar, Charlotte? Are you gay?"

"No, but I'm very cheerful," I said. "I've made peace with myself over this issue and I'm happy to be what I am. Whatever that is."

"Seriously," said Scarlett. "I still have this little niggling doubt about what I really am. I think it's a reflection of how I was brought up - those attitudes we bring with us from our parents and peers."

"Scarlett, listen to me," said Briar. "You're sitting with three girls who are really guys and you're wearing satin pyjamas with little red hearts all over them. Your hair is long and styled, if a little untamed despite the styling, and you seem to be wearing makeup, if my eyes aren't failing me. Looking at you from here I could be wrong, but you look like a girl. A good-looking girl who is bound to attract attention from guys."

“If you present yourself as a girl, live as one and don’t consider for a moment that you’re really a guy, what should your attitude to other people be? You can’t possibly pretend that you aren’t enjoying being a girl, but in relationships it’s just not as straightforward as you’d like it to be. Yes, I think we’re all heterosexual, but if you’re, sorry, if *one* is a heterosexual who presents full-time as a girl, doesn’t that make your opposite number a guy? Don’t you want to be part of a partnership where there’s one guy and one gal? It seems to me that’s natural. On the other hand, I suppose we perform what you would call gay acts. Mutual masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, picking out wallpaper together and line dancing. But - wait a moment - if you love a guy and you think you’re really a girl, what’s wrong with that? Wouldn’t you look strange kissing another girl? For my part I feel quite comfortable kissing Marc. I’m happy to take his cock in my hand or mouth and happy to let him put it inside the only other place I have available for putting into. He lets me put my cock inside him as well and that’s the point. It’s mutual and I love it. It’s a joyous celebration of mutual love and trust. Fuck, I sound like a commercial.”

During this speech my head nodded as I agreed with Briar.

“I’d like to add my two cents,” I said. “I’m sure I’m not just a transvestite any more. I think I’ve moved beyond that and I think I probably fit the description of transsexual now. I’m not a male really in any respect, other than hanging on to my cock. Stop smirking, Scarlett, you know what I mean. It comes down to this for me - how would I feel about a sex change? If someone came up to me today and said ‘I’ll remove that cock and replace it with a vagina’, what would I say?”

“I’d give it serious thought, just as I already sometimes wonder if I should start taking hormones as a prelude to crossing over at some unspecified date in the future. The fact that I’d seriously consider SRS tells me I’m beyond just wearing women’s clothes because I like the sensual feel of silk on my cock. I have no idea what might happen, but it’s something that looms in the future. And not in a threatening way either.”

Scarlett was frowning. “Putting it like that makes my question about being gay seem silly. Consider that I haven’t worn male clothing for ... da de da ... ten years ... and the answer is obvious. I’m confused.”

“You’re gay,” said Madelaine.

“Then so are you, girlfriend. Seriously, how would you answer the ‘what if I offered you a vagina’ question?”

“I don’t know right now. I consider myself a girl, but SRS is so final. I need to live as a girl for a while, because I haven’t been able to until recently. I finally have a choice of what I put on in the morning and I don’t have to answer to anyone else’s idea of what a guy should do or be and it’s a refreshing but life-changing idea. Conforming to a parent’s idea of normality is inhibiting.”

“I agree, honey. Maybe Todd will take away my fears eventually. Despite my doubts I think you’re quite right, just as I think Briar and Charlotte are right. I just have to overcome my conditioning. I’ll admit that Todd and I have indulged in a little anal experimentation and despite my misgivings I enjoyed it. No, I loved it. It seemed to somehow seal the deal between Todd and me. After that we changed our rela-

tionship and he went from boyfriend to lover and potential long-term partner.”

“So what was your question again, Scarlett?”

“Does anyone have the lottery numbers for this week?” she asked.

“I think Roger probably does,” I said.

“Thanks, Charlotte. I want to thank you all for your answers to this problem, that might just have gone away,” said Scarlett. “Obviously I was worried, but it makes sense that a girl needs a guy, mostly. I confess that I’ve never really felt like I was a lesbian, and I think that is what a transsexual who hangs around with girls might be. Only *might* be. I’m still considering my options, but Todd and I are so close mentally I think I’m in love. It’s not just about sex, it’s about a total connection. I can’t wait to see him tomorrow.”

“Amen,” said Briar. “Or should that be, Ah, men.”

“Amen to that,” I said. “Would all those girls not sleeping in this room mind going? I’m the bride and I need my beauty sleep.”

“Don’t we all,” said Madelaine. “Come on, Scarlett, let’s leave these philosophers to their business.”

I didn’t find out until much later that Madelaine asked Scarlett to give her some tips on making love that night. Her inexperience was bothering her. I understand that Scarlett made a very good job of demonstrating moves that would stand Madelaine in good stead when she finally broke the sexual ice with Todd. I also understand that the relationship between Madelaine and Scarlett changed that night, and not for worse.

So, we went to bed, Briar and me. Briar wasn't the Maid of Honour or anything like that. The girls were too close to me to be singled out for special titles like that. I dug around in my case and found the nightgown I wanted to wear. I had a fabulous silk and lace set for my wedding night but I felt I wanted to spend Thursday and Friday nights in something special.

It was a pale green baby-doll with a matching robe and panties. The chiffon fabric of the gown was pleated and came to barely a few inches below my bikini line. The robe was made from the same material and the panties would only just hold my penis and balls. I thought it was fabulous and it was. Then Briar appeared from the bathroom.

I don't know how she does it but as I've already noted she always seems to put everyone else in the shade. Like many blondes she knows that white always suits her and the nightgown she was wearing was blinding white silk satin. It was cut on the cross and hugged her figure like a very lucky nightgown. The front was low-cut and revealed her swelling breasts.

Swelling breasts? Whoa! Back up the truck.

"Briar! You've got breasts." I stated the obvious.

"I have? Oh my God, so I have. What happened to me? Am I turning into a woman? Hopefully?"

"You've been taking those pills, haven't you? The ones that turn you from a boy into a girl? Spill the beans, baby. Tell Aunty Charlotte all about it."

"Aunty Charlotte?" Briar hooted with laughter.

"This weekend marks a whole lot of new beginnings, Briar. This is another one and I think it's fabu-

lous that you've decided to cross over. You were a fabulous girl already but now you're, er ... fabulouser."

"Thanks, Charlotte. It's your fault of course. You getting married set a whole lot of things in motion. I predict that Madelaine will also transition and I'll bet \$23.40 that one day, probably quite soon, you'll do the same."

I frowned. "You could be right, Briar. I have given it some serious thought and I'll see how marriage goes but I do enjoy having a cock and a whole lot of silk underwear to put it in."

"I know what you mean, but all of a sudden I wanted to change over. I think I've been more girl than guy for a long time, possibly forever."

Briar sat down on the bed next to me.

"Charlotte, can I ask you a question?"

"Shoot," I said.

"Well, that's sort of what I had in mind. I'd like to make love to you, Charlotte, for me and for you. I might not get another chance and I know you've had more experience than I have. Do you think we could do that? Would you find it offensive?"

What was there to say? This gorgeous blonde with deliciously new breasts wanted to make love to me? I hesitated. For a microsecond.

"Briar, I'd love to make love to you. I can't imagine anything nicer in the world." I kissed her on the lips and next thing we were lying down next to each other and our tongues seemed to be connected with an electric charge. Her hand crept down to my cock and

lifted it out and above the waistband of the tiny panties. The panties gave up the fight because the elastic wasn't built for erections. I reciprocated by reaching under Briar's gorgeous nightgown and was not surprised to find I was holding a delicate and pretty cock, beautifully pale pink and as hard as a rock.

"Oh, Charlotte. That feels good. So does your cock. It's bigger than mine and I'd like you to put it inside me. I'd like you to see how well it fits into my little pink hole. Then I'd like to put mine inside yours and come inside you a hundred times. I want to fuck and be fucked."

She stood up and shed her nightgown, then took mine off and lowered her lips around my glans and commenced little sucking motions while her tongue slid around the head. She started to take more of it into her mouth and I was close to coming almost immediately. She raised her head and said, "Let it go, Charlotte. I want to drink a lot of come tonight. I want to be full of it at both ends. Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is emissions." She put her lips around my cockhead again and, sure enough, I came within a few seconds. Briar swallowed everything down.

It was time to return the favour and I took Briar's lovely little cock inside my mouth and licked it to a staggering orgasm. She started to scream and I put my hand over her mouth. I didn't need visitors right now. I was amazed at how much ejaculate I swallowed but the night was just getting started.

I was hard again and Briar begged me to take her from behind. I did as she asked and her little rosebud was as good as anything I've ever felt. It was astonishing how fast I came and shortly afterwards I felt her slide into my anus. I was used to Tom's bigger cock and it wasn't an imposition, but it felt nice.

Four hours later we collapsed in each others arms and fell instantly asleep. My last thought was, I hope nobody wakes me unnecessarily. They didn't wake me unnecessarily, but when I opened my eyes I found Scarlett and Madelaine sitting watching us.

“Hello?” I said.

“Hello yourself,” said Scarlett. “In almost the words of Shakespeare, is that a titty that I see before me?”

She was talking about Briar and I had no answer. It was Briar's choice about who knew what, not mine. I shook her gently but she snored on. I extracted myself from underneath her.

I was still blinking. I hadn't been asleep all that long and I had a feeling I'd be wanting a nap later in the day, but the guys were all due in and I wanted to see Tom very badly. The night with Briar had just whetted my appetite for some serious sex with the guy I loved.

“Er, talk to Briar,” I said, but there was no doubt in anyone's mind that Briar had a nice pair of nascent breasts that were quite exposed as she lay on her side snoring. Nonetheless, it wasn't my responsibility to explain Briar's change of heart about a change of sex.

I got through breakfast okay and so did Briar when she finally woke up around noon. The other girls had every reason to think Briar and I had been exploring each other but didn't say anything. Mom did. She told me that if I got the chance I should get some rest in the afternoon because it would be a late night. A crowd was coming and she expected me to play the part of the excited bride. I told her that it would be a piece of cake because I *was* an excited bride.



Roger was marvellous. He organised and controlled the whole day and, later on, the evening and night. I finally asked Mom why she didn't marry him. Surely he was too good to lose?

“An interesting question, darling,” she said. “I'm very fond of Roger but you may recall I had a difficult time when your father died. Heartbreak and misery were the words for the day. I decided many years ago that I wasn't going to marry again but I have no intention of losing Roger just yet. Don't forget, he's only been with me a year and, in relationships, especially at my age, that isn't very long. I'm not in a hurry.”

People started to arrive just after noon. It wasn't an official wedding dinner, just a big party, although most of today's guests were invited to the actual wedding the next day. There were a couple of exceptions, like people who had unbreakable appointments; in one case, for example, a court hearing.

I'd sorted out two outfits for that day. In the afternoon, I would dress in a white gauze blouse and a very full, just below knee-length, grey satin skirt. It had a dark pink taffeta and tulle petticoat and with a pair of medium heels in the same grey colour I looked good and I could keep standing longer.

I planned on wearing a full-length dress that evening. It was a ball gown I'd found in a small boutique that specialised in evening wear. It was a deep red with petticoats galore under it and I'd got excited just trying it on. Talk about sexy.

The afternoon outfit was sexy as well and as people came to kiss and hug me I found myself revelling in the swishy skirts. Did I mention stockings and the black lace corset? God, I love corsets. So hugging, so intimate. I had to get some more later on after the wedding.

I watched the amount I drank. If I overdid it I'd never last through the rest of the day and night. I can take a fair amount of champagne but I didn't expect to get to bed before the early hours of the morning.

Tom's family arrived just before lunch in *two* limos. They looked wonderful. They piled out of the cars and the drivers unloaded suitcase after suitcase. It was great to see them all again: Jessica, Eric, Gaby and Bruce, Emma, Piper and two guys I hadn't met, Paul and Jeffrey, who turned out to be Emma's and Piper's new heartthrobs.

Roger was there in a flash, introducing himself and instructing some of the temporary help about who went where. Then Tom came out and there were loud shouts. Gaby whispered to me that there had been a lot of alcohol consumed on the trip.

The mob descended the stairs after refreshing themselves and changing. Eric immediately attached himself to Briar, worried that she might need something. When Marc appeared and claimed his girlfriend, Eric was disappointed. I felt kind of sorry for him but I had this vision of a long queue of men being disappointed by Briar over the next fifty years.

Lunch took three hours. People kept coming in, some of whom I didn't know, and then Maggie Simpson arrived. There was a collective gasp as she stood in the doorway dressed in a figure-hugging red dress which came to just below her knees, something that was straight out of a picture in *Vogue*. She was stunning, the only word I can think of that suits. I didn't recognise her at first. It had, after all, been a long time since I saw her. The penny dropped and I leapt to my feet and screamed, 'Maggie'. I hugged and air-kissed her. Her makeup was extraordinary and I didn't want to disturb it.

“Charlotte! Well, look at you. You’re gorgeous.”

“*I’m* gorgeous? Maggie, you’re beautiful. Come and meet everyone. I have a room reserved for you next to mine.” A sweating member of the temporary staff appeared carrying three large suitcases. I told him where to deliver the cases and then started introductions.

My mother looked her over carefully.

“I’m pleased to meet you, Maggie. Charlotte has told me a lot about you.”

“Good things?” asked Maggie.

“Look at her, Maggie. She’s radiant, and tomorrow she’s going to marry the guy she loves. Yes, good things. Interesting things.”

I detached Maggie from Mom and took her to meet Tom, who had his mouth hanging open a little too far, but so did every other male in the room.

Predictably, Eric appeared at her shoulder to be introduced and to offer help finding anything, up to and including the Holy Grail. Roger arrived to detach her from Eric and show her where she’d be sleeping. Ten minutes later she reappeared without her purse and the wide black hat trimmed with black silk flowers. Eric and Roger fought to offer her champagne and Roger decided he had enough people to look after and left her to Eric. He perceived Maggie, correctly, as a big girl who could look after herself. Ten minutes after that I saw her in a corner in deep conversation with Briar.

The other star of tomorrow’s event was Stan Freeman, who thrived on the attention he was getting. He was wearing an outfit more suitable for the beach

than a party but he never slowed down the entire evening, telling stories, singing songs both popular and ribald and flirting with guests. I'd describe him as a bit of a ham, which was, of course, his former profession.

I finally remembered I was supposed to change and I slipped upstairs to do so. Maggie followed me into the room and told me her story while I changed. No current boyfriend, two ex-husbands, company flourishing, becoming famous, needed a night of good sex. I sympathised because I had a similar need.

By midnight I was starting to get tired and a bit drunk. I excused myself with a speech that thanked everyone and promised them a great wedding the next day. Some moved towards the door but many stayed on to drink some more. I climbed the stairs and went into my room, took off my clothes and put the green babydoll on. Shortly afterwards Briar appeared and stripped herself down, getting into a short, black nightgown smothered in lace and ribbons.

Did I mention there was only one bed in this room, albeit a bed that was maybe a super-big emperor-sized special? There was room for six people to sleep in it without touching, unless you wanted to touch of course. I went to sleep almost immediately after just a kiss from Briar.

I was woken at eight in the morning by Madelaine and Scarlett standing by the side of the bed looking bemused and poking me with a forefinger or two. I surfaced and found Briar I were the pieces of bread in a Maggie Simpson sandwich. I had no memory of Maggie coming to bed with us but there was a certain stickiness here and there that said someone had been having a good time. I didn't think it was me but I

wasn't sure. Maggie and Briar were still asleep. The naked Maggie looked scrumptious.

"It's your wedding day, Charlotte," said Madelaine. "The church bells are warming up and the chef has made you a wedding cake I don't believe. Rise and shine, get your butt downstairs."

An hour later I was eating toast with some jam I found in the pantry. Water, lots of it, and a fresh orange and I felt better. Definitely a headache hovering somewhere but I thought I could beat it by not drinking.

There was a big space where we could fit everybody in on the edge of the cliff just past the rose garden and that was where we would have the ceremony. I wandered down with the bridesmaids and inspected the location for my big performance. Chairs wrapped in white and decorated with white roses and green leaves had been laid out for the elderly and infirm. It looked bridal already. The final head count was a hundred and ten, mostly related to Tom or friends of Mom's. Bear in mind that no relatives who knew Anthony existed were invited.

We pronounced ourselves satisfied with arrangements and wandered back to the house. The ceremony was down for five and we still had seven hours before then. I was excited, getting more so with every hour that passed. We had a honeymoon in New York booked and paid for and time with Tom had been in short supply recently. I couldn't wait to get him alone. Just thinking about what I'd do with him made me hard.

At two I got jumpy. At two-thirty I wanted to call the whole thing off. At three, Maggie Simpson opened the door. She made the bridesmaids up first and they went to change while Maggie attended to me. At four

she was finished and at four-oh-ten I was stripped down to nothing and getting dressed for my wedding. *For my wedding.*

It's traditional for the bridesmaids to be involved in this process and my three friends (and Maggie) did a great job of lacing up my brand new white satin corset, attaching white stockings and choosing panties for me. My bridal shoes were white, strappy sandals with silver sequins here and there, with a four-inch heel of course. Briar recovered my dress from its plastic bag in the wardrobe and I stepped into it. It stood up by itself, there was so much tulle underneath. Once zipped in I felt beautiful. The top was cut high on my chest to avoid exposure and the hem of the skirt just touched the floor. Madelaine held the jacket for me and I slipped it on and closed it, loving the feeling as it fitted snugly around my waist.

The finishing touch was the top hat which had a short veil attached that reached only to my chin. A pearl necklace and matching bracelet and pearl earrings finished the job and I was good to go.

Except I burst into tears as soon as I looked in the mirror. I stood there with my bridesmaids around me dressed in their satin rock and roll skirts and petticoats looking fabulous and I blubbered like a baby. Maggie quickly had tissues under my eyes and was panicking about my wedding paint. "Hold them back," she said. "I can fix it but you can't cry again until the judge says 'I pronounce you, etcetera etcetera.' Okay? I'll be there to assist."

There was a knock at the door and Grace told me it was time. I made my way carefully down the staircase. At the bottom there was the sound of clapping and Johnny Cho, Mom's chef was applauding me.

Man, those tears were close again. I waved to him in appreciation.

We made our way down to the cliff path and the girls preceded me to the space where the huge crowd was gathered. Cameras fired and Roger met me to lead me down the aisle/path. I'd asked him to do it (with Mom's approval) and he was teary-eyed when he said he'd be honoured.

He was tearing up right now as he handed me over to Tom who was waiting with the judge, accompanied my Marc, Todd and Brad, his groomsmen and they were wearing white tuxedos. I nearly swooned when I saw Tom, he was that gorgeous.

I took a look at Stan. I had no idea where he got his outfit from but I couldn't help smiling. He was a cross between a judge and a priest of who knows what religion. Maybe there was a bit of Pope in there too. He smiled back at me as I took Tom's hand and we all waited for the ceremony to start.

"We are gathered," he boomed, "to see this wonderful couple say their vows and join together as one." So far, so good. Stan licked his lips and I thought the enforced sobriety might be affecting him. "If anyone feels they have a case for objecting to the marriage, please keep it to yourself. We're not interested." The crowd laughed.

"Tom and Charlotte wish to be married because they love each other and want to make this commitment for their future. The service goes like this - I read out lines, you repeat them, and when it's all over we'll do the deed. Okay?"

There were giggles coming from both sides of the bridal party. "So, Tom, do you promise ..." Shortly afterwards it was Charlotte, do you promise ..." All

standard stuff. But then it wasn't standard any more. Stan asked Tom if he had the ring and Marc passed him his and my rings, a matched pair of gold bands which were thick and heavy. We did the placing of the rings on our fingers and I lost the plot again. So did Tom and the bridesmaids. Is there a greater moment? Yes there is. Stan drew himself up to his full height and said the magic words – “I now pronounce you husband and wife. Tom, you may kiss your bride.”

That was the tenderest kiss in history. Gentle, loving, intimate, all those things. I swear I almost came in my panties. I moved my engagement ring from my right hand to my left. We turned and faced the crowd as Scarlett went ‘Wee-hah’ at the top of her lungs.

The crowd clapped and cheered and our parents came forward to kiss and hug and congratulate us. A day earlier, I thought I might feel like a fraud at this point but all I felt was joy. The bridesmaids and the groomsmen paired off and a team of waitresses and waiters started to pass around glasses of champagne. I watched as Stan swallowed his first glass in a fraction of a second and went to look for another, but as he turned he gave me a huge wink and a grin that split his face in two.

It took me two glasses of cold champagne to collect myself. I was so attached to Tom's arm that no one could have separated us without a lever of some sort. Likewise, the rest of the wedding party were moving in pairs. Mom caught me and looked me over. She hadn't seen the dress until now and I don't think it was what she expected. Nevertheless she congratulated me on my good taste and subtly appraised my wedding ring.

As I looked over her shoulder towards the sea I saw whales moving down the coast. It was like a sign of

some sort and an amazing sight. I pointed them out to Tom and suddenly everyone was watching.

The reception was a champagne-fuelled affair that went on until midnight or perhaps much longer. The wedding cake was the size of a small building and delicious – chocolate cake and lemon flavoured icing. The decoration was a work of art and I kissed Johnny Cho, who had exceeded himself. A band played and people danced, people ate and people drank. I climbed the stairs and threw a small bouquet into the crowd. Briar caught it. Tom and I moved to our room and very nearly had it off on the floor. We grabbed our suitcases and headed downstairs when Grace told us the taxi was waiting. We'd booked the taxi for midnight and a suite at a good hotel in Carmel for the night and we were flying to New York the next day.

Once we reached the hotel suite and everything was quiet we didn't immediately rip off our clothes. No, we sat and held hands and thought about the day, our wedding day, and occasionally laughed together as we told each other stories about guests who had unfortunate accidents. There were broken glasses, a fainting and Stan had tripped and started to fall over the cliff towards the ocean until Paul and Jeffrey grabbed a hand each and pulled him back up. Tom's sister Gaby said she'd never heard such language from a judge. When I finished the story I stopped and we promised each other that one day in the near future we would come back to California and get properly married, which we did, but that's another story.

Later we undressed each other and lay down to consummate our marriage, falling asleep instantly with no consummation, just a loving kiss.

THE END