

LISA & THE CASTING COUCH

By Susan Hulbert



ILLUSTRATED BY CHAS

A 'HER TV' NOVEL

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LISA AND THE CASTING COUCH

By Susan Hulbert

“But I've always been in a band,” Janet protested. “Ever since I got my first guitar, you remember the half size one, I've been in some sort of music. When I first got on stage, it felt like I was in heaven.”

“And you've always had a real feel for the music,” Wendy replied, soothing her friend's frustration.

Janet thought back to those early days. Here was music at her touch, and it was wonderful. With the small children living around her, she organized her first group with herself on the guitar and vocals. The others were organized where she wanted them: drums, bass, backing vocals. With Janet around, they had no choice but to be organized.

“I remember you organizing me into that first kids group,” Wendy said gently, after Janet had been silent for too long.

“The groups got better as we got older, didn't they,” she said. “It was most fun when everyone was as interested in the music as I was. When we started playing in the youth clubs, then for the school dances, I thought we were really taking off.”

“We got better, that's for sure,” Wendy encouraged her now that she was talking again. “Remember the contests and the free concerts in the park?”

“We stayed together a long time, for school kids,” Janet mused.

“We really did have a good time,” Wendy laughed. “You were always in charge, though. You never let us off if you thought we weren't practicing hard enough or taking things seriously.”

“Sure I did,” Janet replied. “But the boys just wanted someone to look good out front. It was fine as long as I was their rock chick, doing what they wanted, but it was never what I wanted.”

“Why didn't you try another all girl group?” Wendy asked.

“I did, but it wasn't a success,” Janet said. “I tried, but they weren't serious. I had to struggle to get them to practice, but there were all kinds of complaints, you know, college work falling behind, dates missed. We improved, but nothing special.”

“Don't worry,” Wendy said, always the optimist of the group. “We've got that offer to make some demos.”

It was when they were making the demonstration recordings that Janet began to see the answer to her problems. The producer's assistant was Fred, who almost ran

the studio single-handedly. He set up the microphones, arranged the track orders, did some of the mixing, and played keyboards and steel guitar like no one she had ever heard before. With this talent he could have gone anywhere, and joined lots of groups.

She soon discovered he was a great songwriter, too. In short, he was all that she needed to take the Casting Couch, her group, into the big time. They talked a lot over the three days that the recording took. The session was not to show off the Casting Couch but to demonstrate the songs which different writers had submitted to an agency.

The finished recordings would be sent around to established acts, to see if they would record them for release to the public. Each writer had ideas as to how the finished product should sound, and so the group had to be very flexible in their performances. It was Fred who saw to it that their performances matched the writers' concepts, and fitted the style of the singer to whom the song was intended.

"It's been a wonderful experience working with you," she told Fred one evening, as the last tracks were laid down. "You play so beautifully. The way you improvised around my voice on the ballads made it sound really special."

"It's easy," Fred confessed. "I just play what I hear in my head."

"I'd love for you to join the Casting Couch as a regular member," Janet offered. "We're going to be big one day, and you could have a share."

"Sure I could," he agreed. "There's just a couple of problems."

"Such as?"

"Well, number one is that I'm terrified of being on stage. I just seize up, play bum notes everywhere," he said. "I don't know what it is. I've always gone to pieces in front of an audience, even in music school, where I was expected to win all kinds of prizes. I was just too frightened. I was an embarrassment to everyone, I never won a thing."

"So you can get over stage fright now." Janet wasn't going to take a negative answer.

Fred laughed. "Even if I could, there's a fundamental problem with your offer."

"I give up, what is it?"

"You're an all girl group, remember?" he said.

"Sure, and I always intended it to stay that way, but..."

"No buts about it," Fred smiled. "It's what you always wanted. Don't change it now, the others would never forgive you."

The sessions over, the group packed up and prepared to move on. Janet went to seek out Fred; she did not know why, but she felt unable to leave him behind. She knew his was the sound the group lacked, and that with him their songwriting would take off. For the moment they would have to do without him. They had bookings to play for the next couple of weeks, and then they would be back. Fred stood in the yard as they closed the doors of their van with all the equipment inside, and remained

standing there, waving, as they drove away. That night after the show, Janet exchanged confidences with the rest of the group.

“That was a great session today,” she said, as they listened again to the rough cuts of the recordings they had made. “I wish we could get someone like Fred to join us. It would make us much more flexible, and let us do those songs all the time.”

They racked their brains to think of anyone with similar talents. A couple of names came up, but they were quickly dismissed for being too aggressive, too fat, too domineering, or just too unpredictable as performers. They were agreed that the Casting Couch was an all girl band. If they changed that, they felt, the rot would set in, and eventually men would take over. That was not going to happen.

Janet got on the phone to Fred. “Can we do these new songs on our tour?” Janet asked. “I think they're beautiful.”

“Sure,” Fred agreed. “But remember, they're just demos at the moment. I'll try and get someone to take them and release them. I'll get you a contract if I can.”

“Thank you,” Janet said. “These songs make us sound quite good, but without you playing with us, we'd be ordinary. It's better than we've ever sounded before.”

Janet told the other girls Fred was trying to help them. After the sessions and this good news, they all felt good. The recordings had been made easily, and the new songs sounded better than they had imagined. They sat silently listening to a copy tape in their van as they drove to their next date. It was as they drove away that night, that the subject of Fred and the group was discussed again.

“Have you asked him if he'll consider playing with us?” asked Sharon.

They fell silent, all thinking about the problem. Then they all started to speak at once.

“Can we do that?” Sharon asked.

“Do we want to do it?” Wendy added.

The meeting which took place on their rehearsal day was strangely subdued. Janet, sensing that they had all given the matter more than casual thought, decided to take it with deadly seriousness rather than being light hearted. She called for silence and posed some questions to the group.

“Well,” she asked, “do you want Fred to become a member of Casting Couch?”

“Yes,” the reply came from the others. It was simple and unanimous.

“Right,” said Janet. “That's agreed. But we're girls, remember. Do you really want him to be the first non female member of the group?”

“No,” came the answer, again simple and clear.

“Well, if that's your answer, are you prepared to do whatever it takes to change him?” Janet spoke slowly, looking at each of her friends. “Are you ready to do whatever is necessary, to change him into a girl, at least in appearance, to bring him into the group?”

“Why don't we just ask him to join us?” asked Wendy. “Maybe it's what he's always wanted but wouldn't ask.”

“I've had that conversation with him already,” Janet confessed. “I don't think he's going to agree. We're just going to have to present him with a decision already made. Make him think it's his choice.”

They laughed at this, breaking the tension, but it was agreed that they would start to spend all their spare time with Fred, and gradually to take whatever opportunity they could to implement their plan. They would meet again in a week to discuss their progress.

A week passed, but no one had any clear idea of where they were going. They all agreed that they wanted to continue, but none of the girls had a plan. Janet was beginning to get something, and started to work it out, talking as she separated the steps in her head.

“There's a house for sale in the country, about an hour's drive away,” Janet told the girls. “It's quite secluded, and we can rent it until it's sold. There's plenty of space for us all to live there. No one will be able to see what we're doing. But who's going to know anyway? There's already a studio there, and it's almost as good as the one we've been using. Shall we go see it?”

The girls got Fred out to the house by telling him they wanted to cut another demo. It was when they were planning the sessions that Janet spilled, or rather deliberately poured, a big jug of red wine over Fred. This was a signal.

“Oh, I'm sorry,” she said, reaching for a cloth to wipe his shirt.

“That's no good,” Sharon chipped in. “We'll have to wash it quickly or it'll stain.”

“But it's on my trousers as well,” moaned Fred.

“Stop staring at it and get those clothes off quickly, I'll get them in the washer,” Wendy commanded. She bundled them all up together and got them out of sight quickly.

After a few awkward minutes sitting at the table in his underwear, Fred finally spoke.

“Do you think my clothes will be ready yet?”

“Not yet,” Wendy said. “Those jeans will take a long time to dry... Why don't you stay over? There's a bed in one of the rooms we're not using.”

“I think that would be a good idea,” Janet pressed him. “After all, you've drunk a bit too much to drive all the way back tonight.”

“I don't want to stay,” he began to protest.

“Nonsense,” Janet replied. “It wasn't an invitation, it was an order. Come on, I'll show you up.”

Fred followed hesitantly. He knew he wasn't good with girls, outside of music, and wondered just where this was leading. Janet showed him into a room which was all pink and flowery. It was the most feminine room in the house, intimidating for any male. That was why they chose it for him.

"We've got this night dress for you... it's the best we could do," Janet said, handing him a soft, peach-colored, silk night dress.

"I think I'd rather sleep without anything," he said.

"Nonsense," Janet almost shouted. "I need that robe, and we can't have you wandering about naked in the middle of the night. What if you need the bathroom, you'd have to wear something then."

"All right," Fred capitulated. "I'll wear it, I still think it's far too pretty for me to borrow. Turn your back, and I'll pass you the robe."

He slipped it over his head and felt the silk float effortlessly down over his shoulders. The thin straps were weightless on his shoulders as the hem fell down below his knees. It was a delicious feeling, he thought as the silk brushed his body. It was not worth another protest, even if it was a girl's night dress; it was just for one night after all. He looked down, once more taking in the fall of the material, the contrast of the silk and the lace trims which seemed to make it fussy and delicate.

"Good night," Janet said, turning to close the door. "Don't get lost in feminine dreams."

He did not hear the door being locked behind him, and fell into bed to sleep.

Next morning the girls were awake early. Janet was naturally appointed as their spokesman.

"What do I say when he asks for his clothes back?" she asked in vain. "We've decided he's going to get them back today, but when?"

"You should have let me put them on the remains of the barbecue last night," Alison said. "That way you wouldn't be having this conversation now."

"But we don't want to scare him off altogether," Wendy said thoughtfully. "We want to entice him into our lair, not try to clap him in irons."

While they were all in this together now, it was falling to Janet to be in charge. If that was the way the others wanted it to be, she would do it. "Look, we're not ready to try and keep him female just yet. We need time to work on him so that he accepts it naturally when the time comes."

'Look out, here's a new meaning of the word 'natural' for us all to note," Alison said sarcastically.

They heard stirrings from Fred's room about ten. Janet gathered her courage, poured a mug of black coffee, and started up the stairs. The others watched her go, saying nothing, listening as they heard her unlock and open the door to his room. She was back a few moments later.

“He'll be down in a few moments,” she announced. “I'm going to sit here at the kitchen table to talk to him when he comes down.”

“I guess I'd better check on those tapes,” Sharon said.

“I'll come with you,” Alison chipped in.

When there were noises on the stairs, the last of them, Wendy, picked up her bag and fled for the garden, leaving Janet alone to greet him. Fred walked hesitantly into the kitchen, dressed only in the night dress, with fluffy mules on his feet. He grinned sheepishly at her.

“I guess my clothes must be about dry,” he said hopefully. “Janet, I'm not a performer, I'm not able to go up on stage. I told you that, and anyway you said the Casting Couch was going to stay a girl group. How would you explain me?”

“We wouldn't— well, that is, we wouldn't have to. You'd have stage clothes just like ours.”

“Oh, I see, and I'd have a bag over my head to keep my identity secret too, would I?” Fred asked.

“No, you'd have make up and a wig, and I guarantee that you wouldn't even recognize yourself. It wouldn't be you on stage, you could pretend to be anybody else, someone who likes being on stage. I bet you could play wonderfully if you weren't so self-conscious,” said Janet. “Have you never wanted to try for yourself, if not for anyone else?”

“And what would I do for money, I rely on the studio for that. I've got some things I have to attend to as well, you know. Car payments, rent...”

“Well, you could live here for free, and still fit the studio in between. Please give it a thought, give it more than a thought, give it a try, please. We'll make sure no one recognizes you, and if it's too bad, then it's Casting Couch who get the criticism, not you. Please.” Janet pleaded.

It wasn't what she had intended to say, but she decided to be honest with Fred. He would play better if he were willing, she thought, so why not tell the truth? Fred turned as if to think about it. Janet took his hand and shook it vigorously, and then gave him back the bundle of clothes which had been washed and dried in their machine. She waited until he had gone upstairs, then called for the other girls and explained briefly what they had agreed on.

“What do we do now?” Sharon asked. “We've got some dates we can't afford to miss. There's the High School, the Country Fair, and the big fund raiser in the park. We need the exposure, but what about our newest member?”

“We'll have to let him off these dates,” Janet said. “We're nearly ready to make our move on him, we'll just have to hope that nothing goes wrong in the meantime.”

The dates went fine and received good reviews. They traveled back happily to go in search of their quarry. The van turned into the studio complex, and the girls spotted

Fred's car in the lot. Still not knowing what sort of greeting she would get, Janet wandered through the editing suites looking for him. She eventually found him hard at work, recording with a new group sent by one of the major record labels. They were a young group, highly fashionable, but totally incompetent.

Fred saw her and waved her over. "Look, can you do me a favor?" he asked. "This lot can't play anything. Do you think the Casting Couch would come in and do a couple of sessions for me? I can dub their vocals over and at least I've earned something out of this mess."

"I'm sure I can persuade them," Janet said. "Just don't let them or their record company know, or we'll be in trouble."

"They should do," Fred sighed. "I'm exhausted, that was one of the worst groups I've ever had to work with. No wonder their big name producer sent them to me."

Seizing her advantage, Janet prepared carefully what she was going to say. "Why don't you just pack a bag and come and stay with us for a few days. The Casting Couch have been attempting to record some of your new songs, but we need you to help us fill them out. You can arrange and engineer them like nobody else. After all, they're your songs."

"We promise not to work you too hard," Wendy said, suddenly appearing in the doorway. "Think of it as a musical holiday, you do as much or as little as you want."

"Right, I will. I'm exhausted with all this, I'm going to take a break anyway, I might as well come with you. I've been wanting to finish those songs, and to record them properly. We were writing really well," replied Fred.

"I agree," Janet said. "Whatever else happens, there's some good music as a result."

"I'm sure we're on our way," Wendy said excitedly. "I can see it now, our name in lights outside some stadium or other."

"I'll just settle for the fortune bit," Alison added. "You know, if you had to choose - between fame and fortune, that is - well, I reckon you could spend fame pretty quickly, but fortune sounds like it could last."

Choosing her moment, Janet reminded Fred about the half extracted promise he had made before.

"You agreed to try out with the band," she said. "Well, we're doing so well with your songs, I think the audition will be a formality. But why don't we do it tonight. We've everything ready right now, come with me."

"Now then," said Janet, "take a good look in the mirror, because you're going to disappear." Fred just looked at her and grinned, as if in disbelief.

Janet set to work. He was seated in a chair in front of a big mirror with lights all around it when the transformation began. Luckily he had only a thin and light set of whiskers, quite fair in color. Unlike a lot of musicians, he was fastidious, and shaved

closely and carefully each day, and sometimes in the evening as well. As she stroked his face with a moisturizer, Janet was grateful that his face was so smooth.

Carefully wiping off the excess, she took up a sponge which she dampened in a bowl of water. Squeezing out the excess, she began to apply a creamy foundation to Fred's face, smoothing it carefully into an even finish. Working carefully and quickly, she shaded this with a second, darker foundation, and applied a blusher to his cheekbones, thinning and shaping his face with a subtle use of shadowing. This done, she brushed translucent powder across the whole of his face, to fix the foundation. She paused, looking from the mirror to his face.

Fred spoke for the first time in minutes. "I never realized what a change you could make with just a little effort," he said. "I wouldn't have believed my face could look so different already."

"I've hardly started yet," laughed Janet, relieved that the tension she had been feeling was broken. "I'm going to give you the full works, get you ready to go on the stage with the Casting Couch. Then we're going to have a short rehearsal to see how you feel."

Fred nodded, turning his head from side to side to look in the mirror at the effect she had created. Janet, sensing that she had gotten him intrigued, prepared slowly for the next step. She was happy to let him watch, and allowed him to get used to the feel of the make up on his face as it built up. She wanted him to get used to the scent of the cosmetics, and to like the touch of the makeup artist as she worked upon him. The more comfortable it was, she reasoned, the more pleasurable he would find the experience.

Fred's hair was long and thick, very long for a man. Even being kind, its color could best be described as light mouse, but it had the sort of heavy texture which many women would envy. Janet looked at it carefully as she worked out her next step. She thought at first that she could leave it and arrange it in a more feminine style, but then she realized that was not enough if she wanted his identity to disappear. There would be a time to do something with his own hair later. Taking an elastic cap, she combed his hair back, out of the way, and pulled the cap over his head, capturing all the stray hair and concealing it so that it lay like a skull cap, stark and pale on his head.

"I think the skull image has been done before," Fred said. "I didn't think it was attractive even then. I hope you're not planning on using it. This is supposed to be an all girl band, remember."

"Just shut up and wait," Janet said in mock seriousness. "I can't concentrate and talk at the same time."

Janet took a palette of eye shadows and began to shape his eye lids, carefully building up the colors, darkening the shades nearer to the eye. She worked highlights up to his eyebrows, mentally making a note to do something about them next time: they were far too thick. She continually looked back and forth, from his face to its reflection in the mirror, as she worked, willing the reflection to impress Fred as she built up the effect.

She shaded a little under the eyes, and then, using a fine brush, drew a thin black line around both of his eyes, carefully adding to their emphasis. Working silently, leaving Fred to his own thoughts, she turned to the table behind her to look for the false eye lashes they had bought for him. She found them after some moments shuffling through the bags.

“I thought we'd go for the full works straight away.” Janet showed Fred the lashes in their boxes. He looked at them with interest, as if he had never seen them close up before.

“Will I still be able to see out from behind those things?” he asked. “I know I get stage fright, but making me hide behind those might not be the best cure.”

“Just wait, you'll soon be wearing them so easily, it will seem like you're naked without them. You have to keep very still whilst I do these,” she explained, lifting them from their packing. “I have to glue the edges, then I leave them a few moments for the glue to hold. It's easier to put a little glue around your eye, so that there's something for it to hold on to.”

“That hurts,” he complained.

“If you'll shut up and keep still, it wouldn't hurt at all,” Janet snapped back.

Taking the bottom lashes from the box, she applied a thin strip of glue to the base. She put them on the counter in front of Fred, and repeated the process with the top lashes. When this was completed, she took some tweezers, picked up the first of the bottom lashes and began to fit it under his right eye. This done, she repeated the process with the left eye. Fred watched as much as he could in the mirror but could not see much until she was finished. With the bottom lashes fitted, he looked wrong. But the difference was there.

“I'm disappearing,” Fred mused aloud. “When I look in the mirror, there's someone I don't recognize looking back at me.”

“That's the general idea,” Janet said softly.

She was working hard to make sure that he did disappear. Whatever the result, and this was her first attempt on his face, she was intent upon making anything that was familiar to him as different as possible. Pausing only to allow Fred to take in the changes so far, she took the top lashes, and fitted first the right one and then the left. She knew these would produce a striking effect, for they were thick lashes, quite long, and very dark. They were in complete contrast to his own rather thin and fair lashes.

She paused after the lashes were fitted, standing back to look in the mirror, to allow Fred time to absorb the changes once again. She realized that he had been silent for a long time. So had she; she had been concentrating hard as she worked.

“See what's happened? I told you that you could be someone else, quite easily. Just wait until we've finished.”

She took her time as she drew, knowing that she was stopping him from speaking. As she worked, she was figuring out how she could keep up the momentum of feminizing him through the next few hours. She had promised herself that he would be al-

lowed no going back once she got him to be female. Well, she was doing that now. The next problem was going to be keeping him there.

“Now, you can choose,” she said, “which color will go best with your make up.”

She showed him two lipsticks, and held each against his lip, carefully playing out the effect she was having. She knew which she was going to use all along, whichever he decided upon. Fortunately he indicated the right one.

Taking a thin brush, she began to work it back and forth across the tip, and then to apply it to his lips. Fred felt the gentle brushing first, then began to sense a new, unfamiliar taste as the lipstick was built up into an even coating.

Obediently, he closed his lips on a piece of tissue and saw, as Janet withdrew it, he had left an impression across the fold. Janet had not finished the lips yet, she applied a coat of something smooth and when he looked into the mirror, Fred could see an additional sheen across his newly painted lips. It was an effect for which he was not prepared, and he sat back silently, taking in all the changes in just a short space of time. He tried to think of something to say, but found his excitement making him stutter nervously. All his attention was given over to taking in the image that had transformed, replaced, his familiar features.

“I’d better go and get you something to wear,” she said, and turned to look round.

She left the room, leaving him sitting in front of the mirror, fully made up, dressed in only a robe with a hairless cap on the top of his head. Exciting as the makeup was, the image which he took in now was far from perfect; he knew there were more stages to complete. He sat silently, looking again and again at the reflection before him, not-



ing and remembering, then trying to understand the strong feelings of excitement and newness which were running through his brain.

Janet returned carrying a bundle of pale fibers. He could not make out what it was, but then he watched her shaking it out. When she held it open in front of him, he realized it was a wig.

"Hey, that's really something! I don't know if I dare let you wear this," she said. "It's full and blonde, a California blonde, fully styled." "he read from the label which had fallen on the floor, "With fashionable waves from crown to tip."

He shuddered with excitement, willing it to be fitted, but Janet did no more than hold it close to him, as if satisfying herself with the color. Then she placed it carefully out of the way. She went to the door again and called downstairs. "You guys better come up and watch this bit, or you'll never believe me," she shouted.

He heard them coming up, then Wendy, Alison, and Sharon were all in the room with him. They looked and giggled. They all chatted at once, Fred as well; they were all as excited as he was. There was no embarrassment, just pleasure at what had been achieved so far. As if by some organized signal, bags began to appear and clothes were laid out on the chairs at the rear of the room. He was almost excluded as the girls argued with each other, selecting his clothes for his first hour in a new, completely female identity.

Fred was told to stand, and the girls gathered around him. He lifted one foot, then the other, held out his arms and stepped aside as they urged him all together to do different things. He felt unfamiliar things as new clothes were fastened to him, nylon stockings unrolled over his feet and up his legs. Then he was standing once more in front of the mirror, wearing a brassiere, suspender belt, stockings and panties, all in black, contrasting with his pale skin.

The girls looked too, then Alison stepped towards him.

"Here's something we can't forget," she said and pushed two pads into his empty brassiere, filling the cups and making his shape less male than before. Sharon and Wendy held a broad belt around his waist and fastened it at the front. He felt his waist being constricted as they pulled from behind.

"Hey, that hurts," he complained.

"You should have been slimmer," Wendy replied, "then we wouldn't have to do this. You want a decent figure, don't you?"

Janet fastened a couple of gold chains around his neck, then some bracelets and a couple of rings on his fingers. To complete the outfit, she clipped some gold earrings onto his ear lobes. They looked extravagantly large against his hairless head. He felt them pinching uncomfortably, but he sat down as he was ordered without a complaint. Janet carefully placed the wig on his head and pulled it down firmly into place.

Fred found that he wanted to close his eyes as she worked on the wig, and felt the slight prickling sensation of the false eye lashes as he did so. He wanted to see this tumbling blonde hair on his head for the first time when she was finished and he was

complete. He didn't want to watch it being pushed and pulled, lopsided, then slipping away. He just wanted to see the end result.

“Why have you closed your eyes?” asked Janet, thinking that she had hurt him.

He tried a few steps forwards and felt a little more secure, then turned to look again in the mirror, to make sure the reflection had not been lying. It had not, this was real. This was Fred. He raised his hand towards his face and saw the reflection do the same. He was about to step forwards when a voice squealed.

“Sit down, sit down! We've forgotten the finger nails!”

It was Sharon. She placed a cloth under his hand on the wide arm of the chair and began to work. Fred did not watch, but continued to gaze at the incredible reflection coming back from the mirror. He felt her working on his left hand, then the right, but deliberately did not look until she was finished. When Sharon moved away he was really finished. When he next raised his hand, he saw it had changed, too. It was a purely feminine hand, with long dark finger nails, sublimely feminine, totally impractical, and undoubtedly his own.

Fred was allowed no time to settle into his new appearance. The girls surrounded him, talking excitedly, looking at his makeup, and commenting on how they would have done it differently.

“Okay, so you're all experts,” Janet said as they argued. “Let's agree we can each take a turn in making him up, then we'll see how he looks best.”

The girls took up their positions in the rehearsal room, and the music surrounded them. They knew he was good, but they had never heard him playing so well, so magically. It was as if his new appearance had released something which had been hidden inside him. He was playing with a new confidence and dexterity. He realized what he was doing, and could not understand it either. Suddenly, notes were flying off the keys. It was so new, he could play without thinking. He knew the feminine identity had released something within him as he played. He stopped thinking and just enjoyed the music.

They let him finish, and then at once began to play their favorite of the new songs they had recorded. Together they were all affected, all able to play with more inspiration and feeling. Each knew they were on their way, and the girls were reinforced in their determination to keep their new girl in the group.

The session lasted into the evening, and then into the night. They wrote no new songs, but revised the ones they knew and added old favorites. Their new togetherness was understood, but each was afraid to mention it, afraid to break the spell. Exhilarated and satisfied, they adjourned to the kitchen for drinks and relaxation.

Janet spoke first. “That was amazing. We've already enough to play a full concert on our own, never mind our usual second string, support role. Fred, you've really changed more than your appearance. You've changed everything about our performance. You're coming with us on our next dates, I'm not giving you any choice.”

She had spoken for them all. Fred was overwhelmed by their approval. He knew he had found something within himself which he had not known was there, and that he had found new music. He wanted to be there, but still had lingering doubts about going on stage, and said so.

“No, no Fred anymore,” said Sharon. “I can't see him anywhere.”

“Who do you think this is?” asked Janet. “We have a new member of the Casting Couch with no name. We can't have a member with no name, what would the PR girl do with that when we make it big?”

“Wait,” said Wendy, waving her arms for silence. “Let's ask our new girl. She used to be Fred, but who she is now, she'll have to get a new name to go with her new identity.”

Fred answered uncertainly. “How about... Lisa?”

They talked into the night, losing track of time. No one was thinking about bed, when one yawned, and suddenly, as if it were contagious, they were all yawning, stretching, and aware of their tiredness. Janet stood, said her goodnights to the group, and asked Lisa to come with her, being careful to use her new name all the time. They went upstairs, into Janet's room, where she stripped to her under wear.

“I think I'd better go to my room,” Fred said, admiring the night dress in the mirror once more. He turned, feeling the soft material cling as he moved, then went back to his own room, to lie down and think through all that was in his mind. In truth, he knew Lisa had taken over for the night, but he had to decide if he wanted Lisa to be there tomorrow.

Janet went down quietly to speak to the other girls. Seriously, though tired, they planned their next moves.

“Lisa will stay Lisa,” Janet announced, “whatever he wants.”

All Fred's clothes had been removed as a precaution, but they did not intend that he should do anything more than notice that in passing. They had a busy schedule worked out for Lisa, and he was not going to have time to think about the past at all. While he was falling asleep, they were making sure everything was in place for Lisa's second day.

It seemed that they had no sooner gone to bed than it was day again. They awoke to the sound of the keyboard playing from the studio. It was playing things they half recognized, then something familiar, then something completely new, all in the style of the Casting Couch but more immediate and musical than they had heard before. Janet heard it, and hurried to the studio, worried about what change she may have to contend with.

When she arrived there, she found Fred alone, the tape spooling as he played, committing it to electronic memory for later work. At a glance, she guessed that this was still Lisa, not Fred returning, for he was dressed still in the flowing nightdress. He had not changed and was sitting there happily playing. She knew they were making some

progress, but now was the important time: they had to keep him changing from male to female, and not permit any time for him to consider going back.

He was wearing no makeup and had no wig. His own hair was long, almost touching his shoulders, but it was not styled. It had just grown. Janet saw all these things and knew where her plan for the day was to go. She took up her guitar, and began to play along with him. Taking their cue from her, the other girls came into the studio and began to play, improvising where they felt he was breaking new ground, but keeping playing whatever happened. Sometimes they felt inadequate to keep up with him, other times it seemed to fit so well together.

When he slowed and sat silently at the keyboard, Janet went to him. Silently she hugged him, and the others gathered around, again taking their cue from her, and they began to hug him too. They whispered how good the music had been, calling him Lisa, over and over again. There was no mention of Fred. Fred had gone, disappeared; Lisa was with them. They went into the kitchen for coffee, and, sitting around the table, it was as five girls they spoke. Janet noted almost every word, and marveled at just how the other girls were able to fall in with the plan, and just how Lisa was emerging as a personality in her own right.

The break over, Janet decided it was time to take charge again. She had formed her plans last night, and all the others knew what was intended, but from watching in the music room, she knew that things would have to be done differently. There were priorities, she felt, which were more apparent now than they had been last night, and the most important was to change him as much as possible, and as fast as possible today, before Fred had a chance to return.

“Lisa, if you'll dress quickly, you've an appointment at the beauty parlor as soon as you can get there. Alison will help you dress, and then I'll drive you there,” Janet said. “There's no need to feel embarrassed, they've been doing new looks for groups like us for years, and I've explained it's just an experiment for you. You'll enjoy it.”

Before he had time for any questions, Lisa was being taken to the makeup room where Alison and the others fussed around him, making so much noise and conversation that he was allowed no time to voice any doubts. Within a few minutes, his face was made up simply, and his hair was braided back into an intricately woven shape. It looked so neat and complicated, but he had sat there and watched Sharon's hands flicking back and forth as she did it. It was very feminine, and he felt terribly self-conscious. He tried to say this, but deliberately the girls kept changing the subject.

Then he was ready to leave, dressed in a full denim skirt, with tan tights and matching high heeled cowboy boots. He had a paler denim shirt, worn open, with an ivory sun top underneath. As he got into the car, he wondered if he could escape, but knew as soon as Wendy got in the car with Janet and they set off, that he had no chance but to go along with them. He didn't want to escape from Lisa.

They drove through the town and turned into a small private parking lot at the rear of one of the town's most exclusive dress shops. He felt frozen in the car, unable to move.

“Oh, now come on,” urged Janet, laughing with her eyes as she saw through his discomfiture. “We talked it through last night, we've only a couple of weeks before

Casting Couch is on the road again. If we're going to give it our best shot, we've no time to waste."

Reluctantly allowing himself to be propelled forward by the girls, he entered the shop. As they were riding up in the elevator towards the beauty salon, he thought hard. Nothing like this had been discussed, he only thought he had agreed to a try out. How on earth had things changed so fast, and what could he do about it?

But then the feelings of excitement returned. If he were to be female, he would enjoy it. Last night the transformation had been fun. Today he was going to be transformed by professionals, and he wondered how much more they could do. He was excited by the prospect, but, at the same time, his confidence to go through with it was falling as he drew nearer to the shop.

They stood in the entrance to the beauty parlor for a few moments. He felt so self-conscious, he wanted to fall through the floor. He was sure that all the eyes in the place were focused on him, seeing him for what he really was and laughing. He looked down as much as possible, trying to look small and insignificant, not to attract attention from anyone. Then there were voices around him. Janet and Wendy were talking to the woman who had come to meet them. She was smiling at him and nodding as they spoke. He was too confused to take any of it in.

"We've booked the senior stylist for you," he was told as he was introduced.

He gasped as he saw her. She was a beautiful woman, with nothing natural showing. She was a living advertisement for what the salon could do, from the tips of her pale, silvery blonde hair, to her crimson toenails peeping out of gold, open-toed pumps. Normally he would have been excited just to be talking to a woman as different as this, but now he felt a little apprehensive all over again. She tried to put him at ease, but there were butterflies in his stomach as he mumbled some replies to her. In truth, he had no idea what he was saying, or if he was making sense. It didn't seem to matter, everything was happening around him anyway.

"Come and sit in my chair," he was instructed. "I'll just loosen your braid, so that I can see what we have to work with."

The woman took him to a chair in front of a big mirror at the end of the salon. She undid his braid and allowed his hair to fall loose. It was heavy as she combed it, and it fell just over his shoulders. She combed it forwards and backwards, not talking, but looking closely at his hair, then in the mirror watching it fall. He saw how it shone, for he always kept it in good condition, and saw too the dull, mousy color, which was thrown into prominence because of the bright lights all around.

"This is going to be just great," the stylist assured him. "You'll never believe how beautiful you'll be when I've finished."

Her voice was enthusiastic and encouraging. She gave him back some of the confidence that had been seeping away earlier. She took him to an area of the salon where there were sinks, and soon he found himself leaning backwards while his hair was washed. The girl washing it was just as much a beautiful creation as the stylist. He could not hear her talking because of the water, but, looking at her, he guessed that someone must have set a theme and ordered all the girls working there to follow it.

She had the same silvery blonde hair and beautiful nails, and again, nothing natural was showing about her.

He began to relax as she washed and rinsed his hair. The rhythm of her hands, massaging and stroking his head, was soothing; he felt some of his tension slipping away. After all, he told himself, he was here now. Whatever was to be done to him was being done, and it wouldn't be so bad.

When his hair was washed, the stylist returned and combed his wet hair. She looked at it again and turned and tilted his head several times. She pinned up the hair on the crown of his head, leaving the bottom pieces trailing. Then, taking some tiny scissors, began to comb, hold, and cut small sections at a time. She worked her way around his head slowly and methodically, then released some hair from his crown and started again, matching section to section, until she had released it all. As she worked, she sprayed it to prevent it from drying, so that when she was finished, it hung wet and limp around his face, and down onto the gown which covered his clothes.

"That will look absolutely fabulous when I've finished," she said, smiling at him. "I love the Casting Couch, and I think it's really great that you're joining them. I'd hate to think they were selling out. It's being all girls that makes them so knock out." It was as if there was a conspiracy which they were sharing.

As his hair was rinsed and toweled, she combed it back and forwards again, as if inspecting it. He was facing away from the mirror, and he could only see the bits of his wet hair as they flicked quickly in and out of his vision. Then she was combing it again and applying more thick liquid. This time she used a brush and four separate bowls, brushing the different liquids along separate sections of hair until she had worked all around his head.

He was covered with plastic again and taken back to a different drier. This time he was not left alone, but joined by another blonde girl in a white coat. While he sat under the drier, she took his hands and cleaned off his finger nails, pushing back the cuticles. When he was clean, he saw that she measured and shaped some acrylic nails. He knew what they were and felt a surge of excitement all over again. They were much longer than the ones she had removed, and he trembled at the thought of having such long nails fitted to his hands.

"Be careful," he urged. "I have to be able to play, you know."

"If you could play with those I took off, you'll play better with these. Just think how they'll look, dancing over the keys. They'll be inspirational, nothing less."

Before she had time to complete these nails, the drier finished its cycle and a buzzer rang. The stylist came back and again his hair was washed and rinsed off, and some more cream, a wax conditioner, was massaged in. With a warm towel wrapped around his head, he was taken again to the drying area, but instead of sitting under one, he sat at a desk where the false nails were glued over his own. They were deep crimson, impossible to hide, and fitted perfectly. He lifted his hand to his face after she had finished, and felt the nails against his lips and teeth. They were real. They were secure, and they were now his nails.

He had two reactions when he gathered his thoughts, after looking in the mirror that first time after the hair was finished.

It was as if the girls were able to read his thoughts. “Hey, on Lisa that style's wonderful!” he was told. “It's full and feminine, an exciting color, and I love the way it shimmers and moves. It's incredibly sexy.”

Lisa wasn't quite sure if he was ready for “incredibly sexy” just yet. He'd only been a girl for a few hours.

They were not done with him, however. He was taken from the drying chair to the other side of the salon, where he was seated in a chair which turned and tilted. It could be raised and lowered, like a dentists chair, while the beautician sat on a stool to the side.

The beautician was an extravagantly beautiful lady, with the same blonde hair that seemed to be the theme of the salon. She was so carefully made up that her complexion appeared flawless. Her eyes were made up in a doe-like style, so precise and attractive, with long false lashes and heavy mascara. He found himself staring with fascination into her face.

“I'm going to make you into something special,” she said. “I love it when someone tells me to do whatever I feel like with a face. Your hair is so feminine, I can do so much. And if it's for the Casting Couch, then it's got to be special. They'll be really big soon, I'm sure.”

She looked at him for what seemed like a long time, then began to tilt the chair. She sat at her stool and began on his eyebrows. She was using tweezers— “just to give them a little shape,” she said— but it hurt, and it seemed to go on for ages, as she plucked and compared, left with right, over and over again. She did not tilt his chair forwards, so he could not see what she had done; soon she was sponging foundation cream across his face. For the next forty minutes he lay there, still and compliant, as she worked with different bottles, brushes, and palettes.

Then he was done. The cover was removed from his clothes and the chair was raised to vertical. For the first time he could see what they had done to Lisa. This was Lisa looking back from the mirror, he knew that. Fred had gone and was no where to be seen. Lisa had come to take charge, and she was beautiful.

Lisa looked at his new reflection in the mirror and wondered how he had been able to be anyone else before. It struck him that this was a strange thought, as Lisa had only existed for about twenty four hours. Lisa was there now, however, firmly in control of the body which had appeared to be totally male, until Janet had demanded otherwise.

Janet came into his vision, and then Wendy followed. He saw them smiling and thanking the salon staff, then they were out on the street, walking among all the pedestrians.

“They're all looking at me, they can tell I'm not for real,” he thought.

Then he thought again, as he caught a glimpse of the reflection in the window of the shops they were walking past. He could only see the reflection of three pretty girls, nothing out of the ordinary. If people were looking, then that was what they were seeing. They were not looking at Fred in a dress. They were looking at Wendy, Janet, and Lisa. The three wound up in a shop nearby.

“It’s just one of those things,” Janet said. “My sister was too afraid, but now I’ve finally persuaded her. She’s decided to wear three sets all at once.”

Lisa listened in disbelief, but too shocked to say anything. His ears were going to be pierced, but not only that, he was going to wear three sets of earrings. How could she do this to him?

“I don’t think they’ll have all that time to heal,” he said when they were outside again. “After all, I don’t think I’m going to do this as a way of life. It’s just...,” he didn’t know how to end the sentence.

“Sure,” Janet helped him, “it’s just to help us along. If you feel a bit feminine, then the sound we’ll produce will feel feminine.”

“Okay,” Lisa said, happy to accept the rationalization.

Together they walked back towards the parking lot. He was able to walk more slowly now, and felt able to look around, whereas before he had been keeping his eyes down. He had seen his reflection in the beauty salon as he had left, but it was only upon seeing Lisa in the mirror at the jewelers that he felt a real shift inside his person-



ality. He could see the picture in his mind's eye. He raised his hands to pull the new blonde hair across his ears. The triple gold of his earrings, contrasted with the blonde hair and the deep scarlet finger nails, presented such a feminine picture that he could hardly suppress a great surge of enjoyment. They drove home, not in silence, but with Wendy and Janet making conversation while he remained deep in thought, allowing his emotions to catch up with his new appearance. At home, Alison and Sharon were waiting for them, and they inspected him minutely.

"You look wonderful," they agreed, showering him with complements.

"The makeup is just fabulous, and the hair... wow! I'd never have believed it could be so beautiful," Alison said.

"Love the earrings," Sharon whispered in his ear after inspecting them gently.

It had happened so fast Lisa could hardly make out just where and when he had agreed to it all. He was hardly sure he had agreed to anything, but decisions had been made around him. Now he was totally feminine in appearance. There was no chance that he could take off the makeup and the dress, put on Fred's clothes, and be taken for male again. There had been too many changes.

It had been his own choice to be called Lisa, and now, with his new appearance, it would have been stupid to have called him anything less feminine. He sighed. Whatever he had agreed to, he knew what had happened. He didn't feel bad, in fact he was quite excited, so when they discussed rehearsal that evening, he found himself full of ideas and keen to become the newest member of the Casting Couch.

"We'll have to play it in a minor key for a reprise," he instructed the other band members, after a rousing version of their new ballad had been tried. Janet took lead vocal, and the others sang an intricate harmony. "And try the harmony line slowly, let Janet make the responses," he directed.

The evening rehearsal went on late into the night. They developed the basis of their stage show, using several of the group's old songs rearranged to fit in with the keyboards as well as guitars. Onto this they added some more of the new songs that Fred had been writing with Janet. They had been roughly finished, but now Lisa was going to rewrite them with Janet and give them a truly female sound, more in keeping with the Casting Couch image. The tape recordings held some of the better ideas they had developed in previous sessions; now they felt they were on their way.

At the end of the rehearsal jobs were allocated towards their first appearance. Alison was to take care of the instruments and make sure the removers and engineers got them there and installed in the right place. Wendy was to arrange transport and make sure the agents had proper accommodations for them wherever they needed it. To Lisa's surprise, Sharon was in charge of their costumes, which included arranging the makeup and hairdressing for them all.

Janet was in charge of the tour overall and was to make decisions where any conflict arose. She was the clear leader.

That left Lisa. He was very much the new girl in the group, and felt like the junior partner, but volunteered to make sure the crew did the sound checks properly, and to help Alison wherever she needed it. He wanted to fit in, and told them so with spar-

bling eyes. Janet announced her first decision that night. They all agreed that this was a great idea. They wanted to be noticed for the music, not the fact that they had recruited someone who might get all the publicity, for the wrong reasons, if the story of Fred and Lisa got out.

They talked some more, then the meeting gradually ended as tiredness took over from elation. Janet followed Lisa up to her room and stayed to help her undress and clean off all the makeup. Standing there, naked except for a robe, he looked at his reflection in the mirror.

“Even without makeup this face is female,” he said. “I guess I'm committed to this.”

“It's going to be great,” Janet assured him.

He looked again. The finely arched eyebrows and the framing of such extravagantly colored blonde hair could never be male. The earrings peeping through the tumble of hair added to the image. Lisa realized in that instant that whatever he did, he could never look male with the changes to his hair and eyebrows, even if he wanted to. At that thought, he had to admit that he didn't really want to go back. This was much more fun, much more exciting.

Yet the body underneath was different, not quite in keeping with the rest of the image. It was slim, yet had no curves to speak of. Those that he had during the day were the result of tight lacing and padding. The lacing was constricting and the padding was going to be hot and uncomfortable on stage. He said as much to Janet, who realized immediately that there was much sense in this observation.

“They wouldn't know you,” said Sharon, “but does it matter? They know you're working with us.”

“I'm not afraid of that, but I don't want my changed appearance to distract everyone from the music. I'm writing better than ever, and it's got to stand on its own.”

So it was agreed, they would take the van from the garage and collect the instrument themselves that afternoon. Sharon was well known in the studio, and she would do the talking. He would keep in the background as much as possible. He telephoned the guard to let him know to expect them, and off they went.

Lisa felt uneasy on the journey, he felt that everyone was looking at him and said so. The girls did their best to reassure him.

That evening Janet returned with a lot of information, most of which she was not going to share with him until later that night. She also had a few pills and potions which he was going to start taking if he declined any other route into greater femininity. She did not know if he would consent, or indeed if she would ask for his consent, but the information the doctor had given her dispelled her doubts about altering his body, especially if it would keep him with Casting Couch longer than perhaps he intended.

As usual they rehearsed that evening. Janet took charge, and with the tape running they performed the songs they were going to do in the first part of their slot. The sound

was as near perfect as they could wish. Then, with the tape still running, Lisa moved to the slide guitar, and they experimented with a couple of the new arrangements for the first time, and then returned to familiar material for their final numbers.

They stopped after the rehearsal and separated. Janet stayed with Lisa in the studio, and together they played a couple of songs again, slowly, discussing the arrangements they would have. These would be tried by the whole group on the next day, and together with the other new tracks, would be recorded and sent to the record company, with a message to throw away some of their older recordings to make way for these.

As they were feeling mellow, relaxing on the couch, Janet raised the question of Lisa's figure, and how she would look on stage with the group. Lisa did not know how to respond.

"There are three alternatives as I see it," said Janet forcefully. "We can pad you out and lace you in, but that's going to be sweaty and uncomfortable. Everything will have to be changed each day, and it will take a couple of days to wash and dry out."

"Can't I just stay behind the keyboard or the guitar?" asked Lisa. "They won't get such a view of me from behind there."

"Well," said Janet slowly, looking him in the eyes, "there are two other solutions, but they're not instant ones. Firstly, you can have some hormone treatments. It will make your body think bits of it are really female. You'll find your skin getting softer, and your hair will grow thicker than ever. Some curves will develop, as your hips get rounded, and the main advantage is that your breasts will swell. With just a little padding you'll look real, especially in something cut low."

She was speaking slowly, and he sensed there was something more she was not saying.

"There's the third option," Janet continued when he did not respond. "I'm told breasts could be fitted almost at once in a simple operation. They'd look real, and best of all, no one looking for Fred would think of looking behind real breasts. If they're not comfortable, or when you're finished with Casting Couch, another operation can remove them, and you'd be like you were before. Well, almost. There'd be a little scar, and you'd have some different experiences to think about in your old age."

Seeing Janet's earnest face, Lisa laughed, not so much with amusement but in nervousness. If he did not want anything to do with hormones, and he was afraid of the thought, then the idea of breast implants intrigued him. He was always fascinated by breasts, as is many a man who has watched the best women entertainers. The idea of having his own was different. He tried to hide the excitement in his voice as he spoke. He knew he would choose this option, without hesitation, but he did not want to appear too eager to Janet. While she had suggested it, he did not know how she would take his eager acceptance.

"I'm not keen on the idea of hormones," he said.

“That leaves only the other option,” Janet replied, challenging him to disagree.

“Well, can we agree to investigate it as an option?” Lisa asked slowly, hoping he didn't sound too interested.

In the morning Janet had him up and dressed before the rest of the house was awake. He dressed in a button through dress, with a little padding in the brassiere, and went bare legged with just sandals on his feet. If all went to plan, this would be the last time she had to put padding in his bra, but she was not going to tell him that yet. They arrived at the private clinic and were shown into the consulting room at once. Janet hugged her friend, who knew all about the task at hand from her telephone conversation the night before.

“You'd better sign these forms, then we'll proceed to the physical,” the surgeon announced.

Lisa stood, feeling foolish and naked, as the surgeon felt the skin around his chest. She pulled the flesh, as if feeling how deep his rib cage was, and then asked to take his blood pressure and a blood sample. He felt the inflatable belt around his arm tense, and then release, and again tense. This time, she pushed a shunt into a vein on his wrist, explaining she would need more than one sample. Lisa felt faint as the blood was drawn off, and as the second syringe was applied to the shunt, he felt a pressure that had not been there the previous time. He opened his mouth to say something about this discomfort, then felt the room slipping from around him as he fell back onto the bench.

Lisa awoke in a small private room in the clinic. He felt lethargic and tired as he tried to work out where he was. A nurse came in to see him, and gave him something through the shunt which was still in his hand, then he slept again. This was repeated several times, and then suddenly he was awake; Janet was there with him.

He knew what had happened, she did not have to tell him. He tried to ask a question, but his voice would not work and he gave up. He felt the bandage tightly wrapped around his chest, and then felt himself slipping into sleep again. The next day he awoke feeling much more alert, and much more curious. When Janet came in, he was full of questions.

“You've been here about ten days now, and yes, your implants were fitted on that first day. The surgeon kept you sedated so that the operation would have as much time to heal without disturbance as possible, and it's also helped you to lose some weight. The dressings have been changed successfully, and today they're going to be removed altogether.”

“You've answered everything before I could ask,” Lisa replied. “But how big am I?”

“You're a bit bigger than I am,” Janet answered evasively.

As she was about to say more, the door opened and the surgeon and a nurse entered. The bedding was removed and then slowly and carefully the remaining dressings were cut away. Lisa looked down, and the surgeon was looking up. There on his chest were two large swellings. He felt them move to the side as the dressings were removed, and as he tried to sit up, he felt their downward thrust. This was different.

Seeing his confusion, Janet and the nurse came forward, and as if they had rehearsed the movement, they lifted his arms and fitted a black brassiere over his new breasts. Lisa lay back against the pillows and rested, his brain seeming to tumble over and over at the new sensations he was feeling. Were these mounds on his chest for real, were they as permanent as they felt? As he asked himself these questions, he remembered the discussion before the operation. They were permanent, at least for the foreseeable future.

The surgeon spoke at some length to Janet, almost ignoring Lisa, who was in no fit state to listen to complex instructions. With the nurse's help, Janet got him dressed in a loose dress and flat shoes, then took him to the car waiting outside. They were silent on the way home, Lisa turning things over in his mind several times as he tried to come to terms with what she had done to him. The car turned into their drive, and there at the door stood Wendy, Sharon, and Alison. There was a banner over the door as he entered, 'WELCOME BACK LISA, WE LOVE YOU.' He walked unsteadily into the kitchen, where they each hugged him in turn. It was a genuine, warm feeling he was getting from them all. He knew he had been tricked, but he could not be angry with Janet. She was tough, but she knew what she wanted. She had not done it to hurt him, but had done it for all their benefit, for the Casting Couch to succeed.

Lisa went to bed alone that night, feeling strange and insecure. He could see that his hair had grown, darker roots were showing under the pale blonde which he had enjoyed so much. His hair felt lank and out of condition. He took off his bra and looked down at his chest. He saw the great mounds which were now attached firmly to him: his breasts. He felt the strange weight as he moved. There was no pain, but some movement which gave him strange feelings. Uneasily he went to bed and slept almost at once.

"I'm glad you're back," she said. "I've missed having you around."

"I've missed being here," he said, realizing how much he wanted to be part of the group, part of Janet's life on any terms she would allow.

"How do you feel?" asked Janet. "Do you think we could practice a few harmonies today? I want to have a couple of dress rehearsals before we go on the road. All our costumes fit, but we need to see about yours."

"I'll make you a deal," he said. "I want my hair done again and the full works, like last time, then I'll work with you after that."

"Deal," Janet replied, smiling. "I'll make the arrangements, and then help you dress."

Within the hour they were on their way. Although he didn't know it, Janet had everything booked before she woke him. He was dressed in a body top with a low scooped neckline, showing real cleavage for the first time, and a full skirt, with only light makeup. As they approached the town center, Lisa asked her to stop.

Once inside, he felt so confident, he was able to tell the senior stylist exactly what he wanted, which was the same color as last time, only slightly lighter, more blonde.

He felt he was explaining it badly, but she nodded in understanding. He asked for the nail technologist to deal with his hands as well, and then for the makeup artist to come and talk to him while his hair was drying. If he was to have a feminine image, then he felt he was going to have some control himself.

The activity around him was the same as before, only this time there was more chatter, more laughter between customer and staff as they carried out his wishes. His hair turned out just as he had envisioned: more blonde, more frivolous, more 'bimbo-looking'. He chose the most impractical length of finger nails, and chose a blatantly extravagant color. In the makeup chair he gave his instructions and lay back to enjoy the sensations all over again. Last time he had been in awe of the process, this time it was for pure enjoyment.

"Ouch." He winced as his eyebrows were plucked back again, and again.

"Hush, it'll be worth it," he was assured.

He saw Janet in the waiting room, and came up to her, taking her hand kissing her cheek as he had seen ladies do to each other. He was careful not to do more than the slightest touch so that the make up should not be smudged. Then they went shopping.

Lisa was quite unrestrained. It was as if a well of confidence had been found within him. He went as if determined to sample every feminine sensation, spending more money than was prudent. He went into the plushest lingerie store, and not only looked, but tried on several brassieres, before settling for an extravagant lace-trimmed silk creation, with panties to match.

"Darling," he gushed, "this is my first real shopping trip in ages. I'm going to enjoy every minute, and every dollar you spend."

With Janet following, too over awed to protest, they went and bought perfume and makeup, taking his time, and sampling everything before making a decision. Janet listened as Lisa did all the talking. His voice had gone quieter, more feminine. She watched his gestures and the subtleties of his body language. Without a doubt they were as feminine as could be. He had not been taught this, it had come with the breasts.

The last stop on this shopping trip was to a jewelers, where Lisa selected a ruby and diamond cluster, real and expensive. Janet hesitated when she looked at the price, but then he whispered that she should pay for it, it was a present to her from Fred. She understood at once what this meant, and paid without hesitation. He left the shop, wearing it on the third finger of his left hand.

They got home much later than Janet had intended. There were messages for her, and she went into the office to deal with them. The first date of their tour was fast approaching, and their time was more limited than she had imagined because the record company wanted them to make a video before they left. They had liked the new songs, and one was to be released as a single; it was going to be pushed really hard on the play list. The Casting Couch were really moving at last.

They rehearsed late that night and for the next few nights, polishing their performance until they each knew what the other would do in any situation. Of course, there would be the inevitable problems on stage, but for now they felt secure with the music.

Janet had to leave Lisa to his own devices a lot in this time. She knew she should have made more time, but just could not. The video shoot was causing a problem, and it was decided finally to do it here in their home, showing them getting ready, then for the final verse, showing them in full stage costume, as they would appear on tour. This made a lot of work for them all, as the costumes had not been ordered so soon. There were fittings and adjustments, endless journeys to make sure things were right.

The costumes were to be basically made in black for them all. It was a cliché, but it was a good and reliable one. They all liked the concept, and as they were all to wear different designs, they had some say in what they wanted and went separately to the manufacturers. Lisa would only go with one of the others at the start of the process, but Janet noticed that she was becoming quite happy at driving off on her own for fittings.

The day before the video shoot, everything seemed to arrive at once. There were the costumes and shoes, new makeup and supplies for the road so that nothing was left to chance. Fortunately, Janet had arranged that their makeup girl, Andrea, should start work on the same day, so that she could sort everything out. Andrea was more than competent from the start, and had a cool air of efficiency which calmed everyone else. Quickly she organized things, and not only managed to get the right costume and shoes matched up to the right group member, but she found some time to talk to each of them, to get an idea of what they all wanted for the video.

The crew were to arrive at ten in the morning. They wanted to show the girls in domestic confusion, getting out of bed, dressing, eating together and then walking around in the garden. There would be lots of shots, edited down for the first two thirds of the finished product. The last part would show them dressing in their stage costumes as if getting ready for a concert, then it would finish with a segment of them performing in the studio, with the full stage costumes as they would appear on tour.

Andrea was with them as they discussed the shoot that evening. While Lisa was little known as their newest recruit, they decided to keep his origins a secret. It would add to the publicity, and raise their profile in the media if there was speculation. The beauty parlor would keep quiet. They relied upon discretion for a lot of their trade, and could not afford to frighten away future business by being too public about certain matters. The few people who may go public about Lisa were in the business anyway, so it mattered little what they did.

"I can't believe how you've changed!" Andrea looked at Lisa properly for the first time since the operation.

"Does that mean no more shaving twice a day?" he asked.

"It means more than that. I can get rid of the beard, so there's no more shaving at all, but I can also shape your eyebrows permanently, so there's no more plucking to do either." Andrea replied. "I have an electrolysis kit with me, and an hour a day when we have the chance will make all the difference. Your skin will soften and become much

more feminine as soon as the hair follicles are killed. It will make a world of difference.”

Lisa agreed that they would spend a little time each day, when they could, working with the electrolysis. He never thought that such a simple thing as not having to shave any more would make him feel so feminine, but after a few weeks he found Andrea was completely right. His skin was smoother, and he felt so much better. In reality, he was one step more distant from Fred.

“You're kidding!” Lisa yelled.

She told him all about the process, and said she could give him that effect, if he wanted to try it. She would inject just a little collagen, and if it was satisfactory, she could repeat the process to build up his lips into a full and generous pout which would take lipstick wonderfully well. He liked then idea, and over two treatments, his lip profile was subtly enlarged. He decided against any more.

Next morning the video crew arrived and set up quickly. They were not recording any sound at all, so it was easy to allow them to follow the band around the house and into the garden. All the girls allowed them into their bedrooms except Lisa. She was up and ready before the crew came. Andrea had prepared her fully, and the director hit on the idea of shooting it as if she were getting home, just as the others were getting up.

“Help me,” he whispered to the others. “All these cameras, all these people, it's frightening.”

“Just do it,” they chorused.

Lisa felt uncomfortable as she acted out the role in front of the cameras for the first time, but kept calm and moved as they told her. Andrea had assured her that her dress and makeup were flawless; but, as he moved, Lisa was experiencing just a little of Fred's old stage fright. It surprised him to have these feelings after all Lisa had been able to do, but then as he got more used to the cameras and the crew, he felt it was just a game. He slipped into playing Lisa, playing the role they wanted him to play, until Lisa took over completely. It was easy. Lisa even began to flirt a little with the crew.

There were the electricians, riggers, technicians, lighting and sound experts, instrument specialists, all bustling around as the tour got under way. It was a wonder that anyone could afford to tour, yet they were doing it relatively cheaply. They had only a dozen dates, supporting a touring group who had several years of hit records behind them. The tour would be over in less than a month, and then nothing was really certain. Janet would not allow their manager to make bookings too far ahead.

In the middle of all these preparations, there was a new excitement. Casting Couch were the coming craze. Their record was being played everywhere. The video was well reviewed and very popular. Everything was happening at once. Lisa quickly added up the royalties from their recording, video and performance. It was substantial, more so because, as Janet pointed out, they were the writers of the material and owned the copyrights as well. The expenses would be tremendous, but there was still a profit at the end. Janet was a much more shrewd business woman that he had ever realized.

There was no trace of Fred. This was a confident looking and totally feminine image. This was Lisa, and she could play her music in front of anyone. Lisa would be wonderful on stage. Both Andrea and he knew that, as the finishing touches were completed. He changed his earrings for enormous hoops in each of his pierced lobes, and laughed as they tinkled together. His hair was brushed out and sprayed into wilder volume than ever; he took a final look before walking to meet the others in the final moments before they took to the stage.

“If you ain't hot now, you never will be,” Andrea dismissed him, and he walked toward the stage where the others were waiting to be announced.

Their first concert went beautifully, as did the second. By the last two dates of the tour, every one was talking about Casting Couch. The media had picked up on Lisa. The rumors of his sexual identity were circulating in the music press, then in the more popular daily papers. There were close up photographs and interviews with people who professed to know all about him. Lisa had never heard of some of these so called 'intimate friends'.

As they had agreed, the group and their management team made no admission at all. They said they would make no statement and stuck to that. At the group's press conference, Lisa made a point of almost exposing her nipples, so low cut was her dress, but even then the speculation gathered pace. The next day there were close up pictures of his breasts in the papers.

The band finished their soundcheck. Janet and Lisa decided to grab some lunch; the other girls wanted to do some shopping with their newfound money.

“Where are we?” Lisa asked as they sat down in the diner.

“I think we're in Cleveland. It's so hard to keep track of things like that on tour,” Janet replied.



“I feel like all we do is go from hotel to stage, then it's off to another hotel. Don't get me wrong, I love performing. It's just that traveling like this can be really mind-numbing.”

“I can't wait to get back to the house and take some time off. Oh, here comes the waiter! I'm starving,” Janet said with a big smile.

“Can I help you ladies?” the waiter asked. Janet and Lisa ordered lunch, but the waiter seemed distracted. As he wrote down their order, he kept looking slyly at Lisa. After a few moments he left them alone again.

“Did you see that?” Lisa asked.

“Yeah. I bet he recognized us from our video. Maybe he wants an autograph?”

“I don't think so,” Lisa responded. “He looked at me funny. I don't like him, he gives me a bad feeling.”

Just as Lisa said that, he caught the waiter staring at her from behind the counter. He looked away abruptly and busied himself with another customer's order.

“This is the only thing I don't like about being in the band. People treat me differently now. It's even worse considering my... situation,” Lisa said under her breath.

“You can't let that bother you,” Janet said, trying to assuage her fears. “This comes with the territory. If we want to get our music out there, our faces are going to be with it. Just think of the music. And how good you look!”

The waiter returned with their food. As he placed the plates on the table, Lisa caught him trying to look down her low cut dress. He cleared her throat assertively and gave him a stern look. He slinked away, embarrassed.

“Why worry?” he said when they sympathized with his predicament. “It all helps to sell records. I'm just happy they want to speculate, as long as it doesn't take away from the music, and you girls. After all, there's no such thing as bad publicity in this business.”

At the end of the tour, they agreed to play an extra concert as the headline group. It was the biggest stadium they had ever played in, and seemed too big for comfort. The screens erected around the ground displayed close ups of the group, and it was noticeable, every time the cameras lingered on Lisa, the focus went down to his chest; the attention of the audience was focused there too.

After the last date, they wanted a rest. They had been together for so long that it was time for them to split for a while, to recharge their energies for the next tour and the next recordings. Alison, Sharon, and Wendy went their separate ways, to look up their families and old friends or to travel and spend some of the hard earned money that was now flowing into their bank accounts.

Lisa and Janet remained alone in the house which they had decided to buy. They asked Andrea to remain with them, paying her a retainer to come in each day and help

Lisa with all the things which he still had to do to maintain his appearance. It was during this time that the electrolysis was finished.

Janet had taken more control of the group's career into her own hands, and had to spend time with the accountants and lawyers, making sure they did not get committed to anything unrewarding. The next video was made using film from their concerts and the sound from the record, so they escaped the ordeal of making another video. There was a third to plan, however, which would require them all to be present. Janet wanted to shoot it in the sun on a tropical beach. That would give them all the opportunity to show flesh, and could fuel the renewed speculation about Lisa.

Lisa was soaking up all the interest and attention. He could not believe just how easy it had been to turn from such an introvert into this fascinating woman. He felt comfortable and secure now, both on and off stage. His breasts were responsible for changing his life, he knew that. Much as he might have wished for some less cumbersome ones, he was well used to them and knew he used them to his full advantage.

"Are you sure you weren't a woman all the time?" Janet asked him one evening, as he put the finishing touches to his eye make up.

"No," he smiled. "If I'd been a woman all along, the makeup wouldn't be this good." He was voracious in his search for new femininity. He watched women everywhere, looking at their hair and mannerisms, changing whenever he saw something different, and enjoying every change.

He used Andrea as a willing helper in all these adventures. His hair changed from straight to curly, to tumbling waves over his shoulders. They experimented with extensions, changing his image repeatedly. This gave the press photographers, with their telephoto lenses, more and more photographs to add to their speculation about him. Andrea herself had to run the gauntlet of reporters outside the gates to the house whenever there was a new wave of interest in the press. It was all to their advantage, as the music continued to sell, and everyone kept quiet about his real origins.

Suddenly, as they sat together in the kitchen, it seemed to both Lisa and Janet that they had been on vacation for too long. They had enjoyed the rest, but now it was time to get on with their careers. In the studio, they worked through the night, writing and making rough recordings of new songs, short choruses, and musical ideas. Over the next few days, they returned several times, as if the music had become the imperative. At the end of a week, they had enough songs for the next recording session.

Janet had to go away for a couple of days to attend a contract meeting with the record company. While she was away, Lisa returned to the studio and began to lay down the basic tracks for their new album. He sent copies to the girls on holiday, asking them to listen and telephone in with any suggestions.

"I'm the producer," he said, "but the group's name goes on the CD, and we all get to share the writing credits. I need your input, even to tell me if something sounds over arranged."

Although he had taken on the role of producer, he really wanted all the others to contribute. Casting Couch was moving well, but it depended on them all.

He was determined not to be in the foreground, and not to be featured for more than a couple of seconds. It was specified that there were to be no close ups of him at all. The video conformed to this when they received the preview copy. They had no hesitation in approving it, and it was released shortly afterwards.

The video release was well received, and as it was shown widely, the press began to comment on Lisa's absence from the main action. Obviously, if Lisa saw himself as just one of the group, these commentators were building up his role into something more. The speculation served to get the video played and discussed. The music was played with it, and it served to publicize the Casting Couch all over again.

While they were in the Bahamas, the schedule for recording the new album was drawn up, and they would meet at the studio a week after going home. That week saw Janet and Lisa working long hours in the studio, getting as much prepared as they could before the others arrived. As they worked together, each realized that the Casting Couch was probably recording together for the last time.

The three girls arrived separately on the appointed day. It was interesting to see how their new wealth and fame had changed them already. As they settled in to the recording process, there were no extra tensions, but Janet felt a slight twinge of sadness. She could feel that Casting Couch had run its course. The girls were each quite wealthy now, and their fame was pulling each one in different directions.

The video shoot had convinced Janet that this album would be their last. As they began to record it, she announced their second tour was booked for a month's time. They would play just twelve dates. The concerts would be recorded to make a video, then after twenty personal appearances, chat shows and the like, they would part for at least six months. Each member would be free to take on any other project in this time. They all agreed this was for the best. Janet's feelings about the band were more accurate than she realized.

"LISA'S A MAN!" the headline read. Underneath there was a report which seemed to have been confirmed by their former partners.

Lisa and Janet hoped it would be a one day's wonder, but that was not to be. They were especially distressed when they heard their former friends were allowing more facts about Lisa to emerge in the press and through their interviews. They remained hidden in their home, and Andrea had to cope with endless reporters again. Telephoto lenses were trained on them whenever they ventured outside, and it finally became too much. They had to get away.

The three of them planned their escape carefully. They went to the airport, and with the press in pursuit, departed in three separate directions. They had planned well, and within a couple of weeks appeared to have shaken off their pursuers. The house was sold through an agent and everything that was personal was stored. It was eventually reclaimed and sent on to a new destination, but by then speculation had died down, and no one bothered to take up the trail again.

Casting Couch continued to sell records for a year or more, then their songs became popular again through new recordings, “greatest hits” compilations and the like. The money rolled in for Janet and Lisa, wherever they were, and kept them comfortable. Lisa remained Lisa, and still with Janet, returned to the music business again, but as a producer and writer, not as a performer. Andrea became part of their team, and when they bought a new house and extended it, she moved into a room there. They equipped two studios this time, one for recording, the other for makeup.

That strange twist of fate which had created Lisa now allowed him the comfort and privacy which Fred never had, and found for him, in Janet, a true companion to share all the good fortune they had earned.