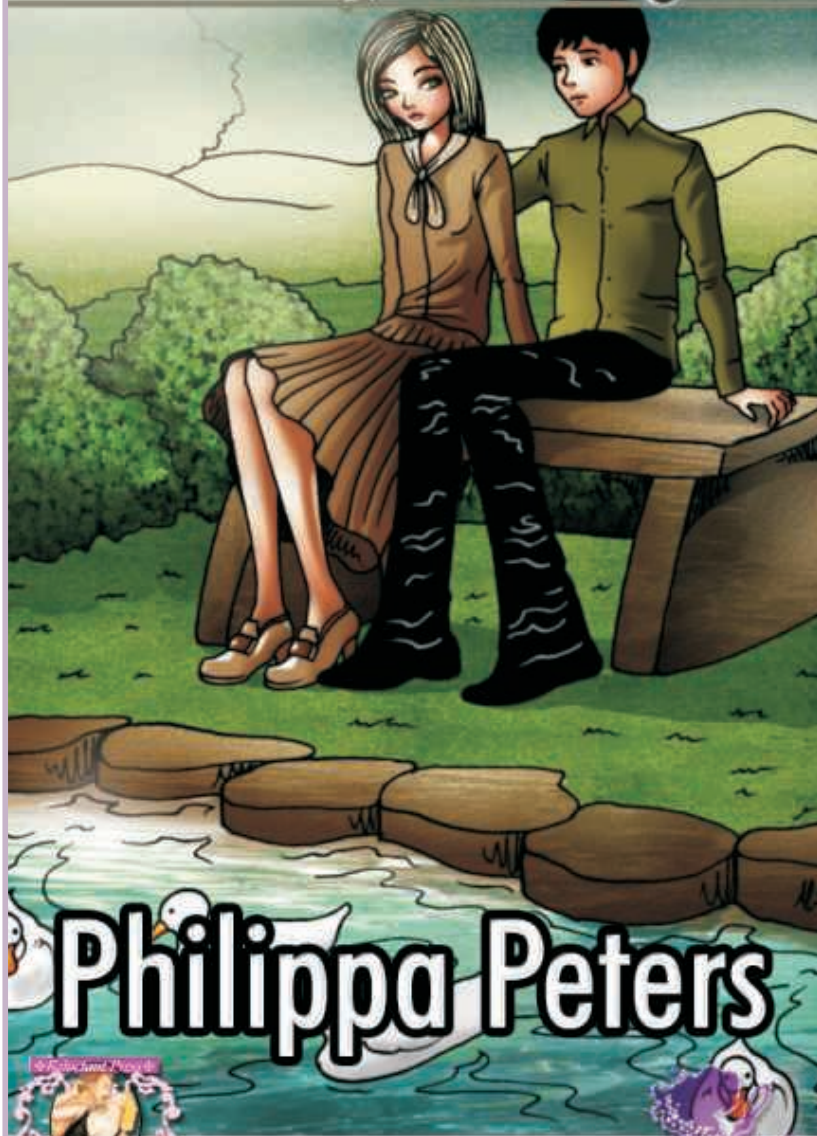


Mama's Innocent Daughter



Philippa Peters



A "Young Adult Tv" Novel



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MAMA'S INNOCENT DAUGHTER

by Philippa Peters

WHOSE LITTLE GIRL ARE YOU?

Of my life before, prior to Trudi and Mama, I really only remember the enormous room full of toys. There was the wooden rocking horse that I was lifted on to ride. There were white walls, plaster figures molded into the ceiling, woolly creatures much bigger than me, hanging things, birds, butterflies, and white wooden bars.

That must have been a crib or playpen, or so I think now. I can distinctly remember the feeling of being trapped, however, trapped behind white bars, as if I was in jail. I must have been three or four, at least, at that time.

There was Hannah of course, always angry, and before her, sweet-tempered Gitte, and others before that, nurses or nannies.

Then, on occasion, scrubbed and specially cleaned, I recall being presented to large people with fat, clean-smelling hands, jovial, always smiling, jowled cheeks, and pink skin. I remember the black uniforms, the grey suits, the huge chains of pearls or shells on the ladies. I think that I was told to call one of them Mama, but I can't be sure. It was so long ago.

I do remember the explosions, the clouds of fine dust floating down from the cracking cherubs on the ceiling while we huddled, Hannah and me, under the sturdy table where I was served meals each day.

Hannah, bad-tempered as always, pulled a coat on me and took me out of the shaking, high-ceilinged house, onto the street. There was a tree ablaze on the boulevard, at the end of our street. I can always recall that, a blackened pillar inside a flaming torch. Hannah tugged on me to hurry on, to I-don't-know-where. There were lots like us on the strasse, Hannah did give it a name but I really can't remember it now. There were lots of people running across the wide boulevard, away from us, adults clutching children. I recall that and also wondering why we didn't follow them.

Suddenly, there were soldiers, in a Jeep of some kind, jumping out. Hannah pulled me into an alley between two huge walls, yelling at me to run. I remember the sounds like moths hitting the lamps in summertime. Hannah fell, pulling me down beside her. She was staring at me, unblinking, as we lay together on the hard concrete.

I remember saying, "Can't we get up now?" But she didn't answer.

I stood up finally and saw the mark on her coat. It was as if someone had torn a hole into the back from the outside. I knew without any shock or fuss that she was dead.

I recollect thinking that I should go back to our house, back the way we'd come. It would be easy. But people came round the corner of the alley, running straight at me, screaming. I was terrified by the frightened looks on their faces. Immediately, I ran too, out the other side of the alley, into the ruined buildings of another boulevard and on, until the fear in me couldn't make me move at all.

I wandered for several days where there were no unshattered buildings before I met Trudi. I'd already lost my coat to two older boys who'd attacked me for it. They were so frightening because they said nothing, just hit me and hit me until I let it go. I think they would have taken all my clothes if a soldier hadn't seen us scuffling in the flat ruin near the only working water tap I'd found. The soldier shouted and fired a round of bullets our way. The boys took off like rabbits. I ran the opposite way, into a bombed-out church. Trudi was crouched down behind a splintered bench.

"They always shoot at the boys," she told me. "Sometimes, they'll give us girls something to eat."

Eat. I hardly remembered what that was. Trudi brought out some blackened pumpernickel, as hard as a rock. I remember how delicious it was, softened by rain-water, collected in a stone basin near a blasted-out doorway.

I followed Trudi after that. She showed me how to get close to the garbage can fires at night time, to lean against the old people's legs, but not the young or middle-aged men or even near them, she warned me. Gradually, the old folks, the women mainly, would let us in.

We scrambled away from gangs of other kids. They wanted everything we had, especially my clothes, until my sweater and pants became as tattered and dirty as everyone else's and didn't look at all like the clothes I'd worn on Friedrichstrasse. There, I do remember the name of one huge street. It might even be close to where I once lived.

Trudi found some sacking which we took to wearing all the time, not just covering ourselves with it at night. With it about us, we looked very much alike. We found some sacks that were complete. We called them smocks after we tore out holes for arms and heads and wore them on top of everything.

My hair was thick about my neck and in front of my eyes. Hannah hadn't taken me to the barber in ages. Once she'd muttered that four marks were four marks. She'd taken scissors to the fringe on my forehead. Today, when I think about it, I know that she pocketed the money.

Trudi found cloche-like hats in the ruin of an old store. I wore the green one and Trudi the blue. Somehow, we were warmer.

A soldier near the Horse Church (it had one carved on its wall) once called us to come to him just after we started wearing the hats. He had a loaf of bread, a wine bottle, even a sausage. "Come on, little girls," he called to us, his voice thick and slurry, a foreign voice Trudi called it. "I don't want much for this."

Trudi led me away quickly, holding my hand tightly after seeing the look I gave the sausage. She explained what the soldier wanted from little girls. I felt repulsed even though I would have done almost anything for the food he offered.

Trudi led me over to the Lady's house. We'd approached before and watched. The Lady would open her

door and carry out a tray with what looked like buns and cups of milk. She gave it out to the little line of children at the door, girls with younger ones, you couldn't tell of what sex.

There was often a car in front of her house, with soldier's flags. There was actually glass in her windows and light. We caught strains of music and saw flashes of movement within, in front of the light. That, Trudi said, was the Lady dancing with her men friends.

We stood in the shadows across from the Lady's new, brightly painted door. I was thinking of the soldier's sausage, wondering who had earned it and how Trudi had known what the soldier would want from a little girl for the sausage, when we saw a car arrive. A couple of men in black, fur-collared coats went up to the door, waving parcels as they were admitted into laughter and music. On either side of the Lady's house, the other buildings were gaunt, empty of glass, wood, or life.

"They're rounding up the kids in this quarter," Trudi whispered as we stared at dark, unlighted windows next door to the house where the music was coming from.

We were about to go when another black, shiny automobile came gliding down the street. The soldier driver stepped out to let the Lady, yes, it was her, and a fat, uniformed man, out the back.

The Lady tripped lightly up the steps to her doorway. She handed something to the fat man who began to fumble at the doorway. She turned and looked about, a few stray, reddish curls blown across her smooth face by the light breeze. She looked across the street to where we crouched in the bay window of the burned-out house.

We slunk down but the Lady had seen us. She waved and called us over, light pouring from her doorway, the sound of music wafting out to us. We heard a girl scream

in laughter. The Lady turned as the man with her smiled, urging her to go in with him. The soldiers with the car were angry, lifting their weapons and calling out for us to come out with our hands up. Even I, by then, knew better than to go to soldiers. We slipped through the broken doorway of a once-proud town house and hid.

The big car stayed there all night. One of the soldiers searched the house for us but we hid beneath treacherous floor boards. He finally left some time before dawn when the air is at its coldest. The big car took away the man who'd come with the Lady but more cars arrived and more people left. I popped my head round the door post and watched the last one go. The lights of that one shone into the doorway, almost blinding me, before it was gone.

The Lady must have seen me. There I was, lifting a floorboard to huddle back down with Trudi, to try and get warm again when I heard her, the Lady, at the ruined doorway.

"Oh, you poor little darlings!" she exclaimed, stepping gingerly over the rubble, still in her black, shiny, high-heeled shoes. "No, I won't hurt you," she said quickly when Trudi jumped up after I nudged her with my elbow in her ribs. "Come with me and we'll get breakfast."

All the kids I'd talked to had said never to let yourself be taken inside. So, Trudi and I paused in the doorway of the Lady's house and just stared in at the shiny floor, the carpeted stairs, and the white-painted walls. Warm air flowed over us and with it came the smell, a sugary smell, of cinnamon toast and warm cake.

At the end of the hallway, the Lady appeared again in a white apron about her flowered dress. "Come on, little girls," she said, pointing back to what must be a kitchen.

“Come and eat. Close the door and keep the warm in. You needn’t lock it. You can run if you have to.”

The Lady had a nice smile. Her teeth were white, not yellow and dirty-brown, nor missing, like those of most people who smiled at us.

She sat at the far side of the table and talked almost non-stop, in a gentle, soft voice, while we drank milk, ate cake and hot, buttered toast until I thought my stomach would burst or I would, at least, be sick.

“You need somewhere to sleep, don’t you darlings?” the Lady said at last. “Somewhere warm.”

We followed, ten feet behind, as she showed us the basement, the pipes and an old, rickety metal cot. She put a short ladder by the window beside the bed and showed us how to flick the lock open so that we could crawl out easily, if we had to.

Then she left us to sleep or leave as we wanted. Trudi tried the bed first and I soon followed. The mattress was softer than the piles of papers, rags or boards we usually slept on. It was warm next to the pipes. I cuddled up to Trudi, feeling fat and bloated. Trudi was asleep in an instant. She didn’t hear the Lady tiptoe in or feel her cover us with a blanket. I did.

I was trying to fake being relaxed, as if I slept, while all the time I was really tense and listening. “Poor little girls,” I heard the Lady say. “Thirty years ago, I could have been you. Mama found me and took me in. Now it’s my turn.”

We slept all day, fitfully. It wasn’t right to be in a bed nor for the world to be so quiet. The Lady woke us as evening was darkening the basement again. A smell of cooking, something spicy, came wafting down on the air with her.

We sat again at the white-painted table on white chairs while the Lady put sausages, fried potatoes and bread with butter on our plates and gave us glasses of milk. She talked and talked while we just ate. She talked about everything, the food, the artifacts in the kitchen, the patterns on the plates, everything.

“Well,” she said when we’d finally cleaned our plates with the last of the bread. “You’ll have to go back downstairs after we’ve tidied up. My friends will be here very soon. Can you do that? Can you be quiet as church mice while there’s a party going on up here?”

“Of course you can! It’ll be a long time but when they’re all gone, we’ll have a party of our own, won’t we? You’ll be my daughters now. You’ve no other family, have you?”

We both shook our heads. Always agree with adults. We’d learned that rule the hard way. “You can call me Mama,” the Lady said with a smile, “and I shall call you ...” She looked at us expectantly.

“Trudi,” said Trudi, squeezing my hand hard beneath the table. “And this is Erika.” She feminized my name as she had before when we’d sneaked up to the fire, claiming to be waiting for our Papa.

We helped to clear the table and learned where to put things. I could see Mama frowning at our dirt-grimed hands and arms. I caught a glimpse of myself in the polished surface of the stove. I was as dirty as Trudi and looked just like her. She was a little taller than me. Otherwise, we could have been twin sisters.

My clothes were dirty. The clothes we wore were battered and torn, pushing our hair down about our faces. We wore shapeless smocks over the sacking, and over other clothing I scarcely remembered.

I saw Mama wrinkle her nose as I handed her the basket from which the bread had been served. I was so used to how I smelled, and how Trudi smelled, that I could only suspect how rancid and aromatic we'd become. Mama took away Trudi's cloche and glowered at the matted hair, chunks missing where we'd cut it away to keep it out of her eyes. Mine was much the same.

Mama didn't say anything but showed us where everything went. We peeped into the front room where she entertained, amazed at the luxury of soft cushions, carpets and draped windows.

When the doorbell rang, we scurried downstairs, more buns, a slab of cheese and glasses of milk in our hands. We lay on the bed, nibbling, thinking only of the wonderful food, the wonderful house above and how to please Mama to get her to keep us there.

The music and creaking across the floors went on for a very long time. Mama was tired, dark circles beneath her smudged eye makeup, when she came to the top of the basement stairs and called us back up, into the kitchen.

We cleared away the remains of Mama's party very willingly. The bottles, cigarette butts and ashtrays, even the food remnants, we could have used for barter on the streets where we lived. We worked quickly and filled the two trash bags Mama set out while Mama moved about, finding and putting glasses in the sink.

Hot water, boiled on a working gas stove, filled the washbowl. We pushed over chairs to reach the sink. I washed my hands, leaving a clear borderline between clean and not-clean on my arm. I washed the dishes while Mama, a delighted smile on her face at the care I took with her things, Trudi had stressed that to me, dried up.

Mama put some more water on the stove and heated it. We didn't see what she was going to do at first but then

she put a towel about Trudi's neck and had her stand on the chair again in front of the sink.

The washing and drying of Trudi's hair took forever. Trudi didn't look like Trudi any more, not with a cleaned face and hair, not with shiny, black curls. Mama quickly snipped her bangs level, fighting with tangles and combing and cutting her hair level again.

Then it was my turn. "My goodness," said Mama when she lifted my head for the third time. "You're a blonde!"

The water was so filthy that Mama insisted on pouring it away and heating more for us to wash in. She took out an old metal washing clothes container from behind a door in the kitchen. "Used to wash Putzi, my dog, in this," she said cheerfully, as she began to pour water in, cold and hot, followed by soap powder and soap.

Trudi tried to hang on to her clothes. "Erika first!" she screamed, but Mama insisted. She still had the scissors and, before Trudi knew it, Mama had cut away the smocks, string ties and linings until the thin, almost skeletal Trudi was bare and shivering on the kitchen rug in front of her.

Trudi got into the water slowly, sorrowfully, as if she was about to die. But her expression changed when she felt the warm, soapy water. She began to smile and finally it was hard for Mama to get her out, Trudi's hands and fingers wrinkled, pink and clean as I'd never seen them before.

Mama snipped at my hair as I stood, trembling, thinking only how I'd get poor Trudi kicked out with me when Mama saw what I was.

"Someone really cut this off too short," Mama said, pulling at the back of my hair, low-down. Then she cut loose my smock and the sacking.

“Whew!” she laughed as I stood, clutching what I had, embarrassed at what she might see and afraid of what she might do. She dropped my outer clothing into the garbage bag with Trudi’s.

I tugged and twisted myself out of my torn pants, the tattered sweater and the grimy shirt. I had an even dirtier vest and underpants below and holed, woollen socks. Mama’s eyes looked as if they were smarting.

“Excuse me, Erika dear,” she said and went out of the kitchen. When she came back with a nosegay, my clothes were all bagged with Trudi’s. I was in the dark, warm water, already used by Trudi, washing myself earnestly.

“What a good girl!” exclaimed Mama. She took the large towel from Trudi and took her out, to her bedroom, as I later found out. I was wrapped in the towel when she came back.

“Really, you could have soaked a while, darling Erika,” Mama laughed, depositing what were clearly girl’s panties, a night dress and a huge, white dressing gown of hers on the chair.

While she took the water to the back door, I was able to turn and put on the panties. I remember how strange I felt as the elastic in the legs and about the waist pinched at me.

Mama sighed as she looked at me. “You’re as thin as Trudi,” she said, taking the little, light pink night dress and putting it over my head. It was tight at my neck, a kind of ruff tickling me. The arms ended with a similar ruff at my wrists while the main part fell about my ankles. Her robe held the cotton against me, warm but shivery all the same, because I knew these were girls’ clothes I was wearing.

Mama finished drying my hair, took my hand and led me to her bedroom, the night dress seeming to float about

me, leaving me with the most alarming feelings. I knew I shouldn't be dressed as I was. Trudi knew it as well but she wouldn't look at me. I just hoped so desperately that she wouldn't tell on me to Mama.

Trudi was already in the big bed, propped up on a frilly pillow. She finally looked at me in the little girl's, pink night dress but said nothing. "Luckily I have some clothing from before. Before all the fighting started," Mama said. "But they're still too big for both of you."

She adjusted the pink, frilly, rosebud-covered neckline on my nightie and helped me into bed while she took off her robe. She had a black, silky nightie on beneath, and most of her bosom was exposed. She smiled at me and climbed over me to sit in the middle of us. She smelled very nice, like roses in summer.

"You like that?" Mama asked me as I wrinkled my nose. She reached up behind her bed for a little bottle. She dabbed some liquid on my wrists, behind my ears and on my chest until I realized that I smelled like her. I smelled like Mama.

Mama read to us, a story about a mouse, as we lay together, warm and snug, the scent of roses in our nostrils.

"Isn't this nice?" Mama laughed. "All of us girls together in one bed."

"It's lovely," said Trudi, looking at me. "I used to do this with my Nana before the fighting started."

"And you, Erika?" Mama asked. "Whose little girl were you?"

"H-Hannah's," I whispered, curling up closer to her, the frills of my nightie tickling my chin and neck. "She was my nanny, I think. She was shot."

Mama nodded in sympathy. "Well, you're *my* little girl now," she said to me, seeing the tears on my face, hug-

ging me. "If anyone asks, you can say you're Frau Buren's daughter."

MAMA'S DAUGHTERS

The next day, we wore aprons that Mama had cut out and sewed, over our night dresses. We did chores for her and waited in the cellar when she went out, anxious about her return for we had no protection against the elements if we had to run. All we had were thin, cotton night dresses and cotton panties.

Mama, however, had been out buying for us. She came back with little dresses, blouses and skirts, stockings, and shoes, black, shiny, patent-leather shoes with silver buckles, girls' shoes.

Trudi and I had to dress for her and show her how our dresses and skirts fitted. Mama marked them for altering and re-sewing. She'd bought little bodices, with garters that stockings attached to, and underslips, to cover up our new, pink and lavender panties.

Mama dressed me quickly while my lavender panties kept hidden what I knew was there and what Trudi must have been aware of too. It was funny, sort of awful, to put on the white stockings and attach them to the garters on the tight, white bodice about my chest, Mama adjusting the straps for me.

But it was also kind of exciting, kind of nice, to be in clean, soft clothes, even if the dresses did cling to me and swish about my legs. Trudi smiled at me as she swirled her dress. I did it as well. Yes, girls had it so much easier than boys, didn't they? I really did feel strange, but nice as well, as everything smelled so clean.

"Now you look like little girls," said Mama, tugging on me here and there to make the dress fit better. The shoes were new and pinched our feet. I looked down,

charmed to see how bright they looked with the white stockings I wore as dark, purple skirts flared out below my knees.

Mama took us to the mirror. She smiled at how stunned we were. We did look like rich little girls, a brunette and a blonde. Mama bent down and hugged us to her before she touched my head. "Tonight," she said with a laugh, "we'll do something about your hair."

Mama set mine in tiny rollers and put a hood over it, still complaining about us hacking it off so short before. Trudi's hair didn't need so much attention. She just had to wear a net to keep her curls in place.

Our hair treated, we went back to the cellar in our new, long grey work dresses with white sleeves and collars, our pretty clothes put away, while Mama had another party with a lot of loud men friends. We put on our aprons to keep clean even downstairs and, as we lay on our old bed, we hugged each other and promised to do nothing, ever, to upset Mama and to help her in every way we could. Trudi told me that, if we were Mama's girls in every way, she'd keep us with her. I didn't say anything against that. But I did shiver as I agreed with her.

The next morning we got up earlier, tiptoed upstairs to see that all the men had gone and made Mama breakfast in bed. Mama was almost crying as she hugged us both and called us her beautiful daughters. She combed out my hair. It was bright and golden when I looked at it in the mirror, my face surrounded by curls, just like Trudi's natural ones.

"You are such a pretty child," Mama said, kissing me as I admired the little girl in the mirror, only vaguely thinking that she was me. Trudi gave me an encouraging smile and complimented me too, calling me her sister.

My deception couldn't last long, however. At our next bath, a few days later, Mama undressed Trudi and put her in the warm water as she had before. It was a bath large enough for two; so, when Mama stopped me from hanging back and began to undress me, I knew what would happen.

"What is this?" Mama asked as I stood without clothes, trying to conceal my boyhood. Trudi looked away, clearly unhappy. Now we would both be sent away, I could almost hear her thinking.

I couldn't look up at Mama. She lifted me after a short while and put me in the bath with Trudi and made me wash myself very thoroughly. After she dried me, we were all very quiet. Mama stared at me and gave me a new pair of panties, pink just like Trudi's, softer than before with lace trim at the legs, not elastic. I put them on quickly while she just sat with her arms crossed, not saying a word. The panties covered up what I hadn't wanted her to see. She gave me a new nightie, flowered and light blue, like Trudi's, floating down to my ankles.

We went to bed just as before in our nighties, Mama between us. She stroked my curls absent-mindedly as she read to us about a beautiful, golden-haired princess, who, the night before she had said was just like me, quiet, a good girl, and deserving to marry the handsome prince as she did at the end.

"I wonder, do I still have two beautiful daughters?" Mama asked as she put the book away behind the bed. She looked at me and smiled in a funny way. I felt a shiver go through me as she touched my nightie and moved me a little beneath her silky night dress.

I nodded, wanting to please her, not wanting these wonderful days, with warmth and food, to ever end. I

hugged Mama while Trudi did the same. Trudi wanted me to be her sister and go on as we had the last few days.

“We shall see,” Mama said gently, hugging me first and then Trudi. “I already spent too much on clothes for little girls. It would be easier for a few days anyway to keep you alike.”

Trudi and I worked even harder to do everything to please Mama. We kept the house tidy and sparkling clean. We washed our aprons and pressed them every day and we learned how to wash, dry, and iron Mama’s clothes, even her pretty underthings. She said she didn’t know what she’d do without her beautiful daughters, looking at me intently as she did so. I wished she could forget that I was really a boy. I wanted only to do everything I could to be her daughter.

Trudi and I dressed almost identically from the start. We had our work dresses, long to the floor, which we wore with long underslips and white socks. We also had colored woollen slippers to keep our feet warm as we worked in the cellar. Our everyday nice dresses, which we changed into at night when we weren’t working, had long, puffy sleeves with little frills at the wrist and round our necks. They were long as well and we didn’t have to wear stockings when we were in them. The long skirts kept us warm.

We wore pretty aprons over all our precious clothes and cotton scarves about our hair whenever we worked. Mama said that we should be proper little ladies all of the time; and we tried very hard to please her.

Our best dresses were different. We hung them on hangers from pipes in the cellar, having hopes of wearing them soon, even as Trudi and I cuddled in bed. Our best dresses were silk-lined velvet, gorgeous to wear, making both of us shivery and giggly whenever we put them on.

They were light and filmy on our bodies and legs. We agreed that they made us feel girlish.

Trudi acted differently all dressed up. She was coy and posed a lot. I imitated her which made Mama laugh.

“Dear Erika,” she said with a smile, pulling me close and giving me a big hug. “You must learn to be yourself, little girl. Trudi wants to be a vamp, but you don’t have to be. You will always be more of a lady than her, I think!”

So I copied Mama and did what she wanted. She showed us how to sit properly, how to walk in long and short skirts, and how to do girlish things like sew and knit. I think I was much more faithful to her teaching than Trudi ever was.

One afternoon we were sitting in the kitchen, legs crossed, of course. Mama was teaching us to embroider tea cloths when, suddenly, we heard a bang on the front door. Before we had time to put everything away and scurry to the cellar, a large, fat, uniformed man came bursting in, shouting Mama’s name.

“What are these?” the military officer asked, wrinkling his long nose in disgust as we rushed about, trying frantically to store all the silk threads properly in Mama’s work basket.

“Gunther, these are my daughters,” said Mama proudly, signalling for both of us to come over and stand beside her. We clung to her skirt, her arms about our shoulders as the large man inspected us.

“This is Trudi,” said Mama showing off my sister, “and this fair-haired beauty is Erika, my youngest.”

The uniformed man stared, finally shaking his head as he set the bottle he had brought on the table we were clearing.

"And where were these last night?" Gunther asked, amused.

"In the cellar," said Mama haughtily, "in bed, where they have always been at that time of night."

The soldier grunted and frowned. He thought for a moment before saying, "Time to bring them out then, Liesl." His teeth gleamed as he smiled at Mama.

We could feel her hands shaking as she held us.

"Tonight," the man called Gunther said. "They can serve at Koenig's party. You always need help."

Mama squeezed me so hard that it hurt. "Frieda and Hilda will serve," she began.

"They'll be busy," leered Gunther.

We were happy to go to a party. We wanted Mama to be proud of us. We wanted to wear our beautiful dresses and look pretty for her.

Mama muttered under her breath all the time she got us ready but would only say, "It's nothing," when we asked her what was wrong.

She brushed our hair for a much longer time than usual and put white, silky ribbons in our curls, even though I had little hair at my collar. Oh, how I wished for my hair to grow long like hers.

We wore our velvet dresses at last and white, lacy aprons that Mama brought from one of the special drawers we were never to open, or look into, in her bedroom. It had been a while since we had worn stockings and garters but with our knee-length dresses and petticoats, they felt perfectly right as they swished so noisily about us. Just pulling on my stockings and hooking them up made me feel very girlish. I hardly needed the perfume Trudi claimed we girls absolutely had to wear at our necks and wrists.

Mama sprayed us both but she wasn't happy doing it. I could tell by her distracted manner. She went over with us how to make up the trays in the kitchen, how to serve, how to bend in a ladylike manner so as not to show off our stocking tops, garters or lacy underwear.

We stayed in the kitchen when the first people arrived. We could hear laughter, the shrill voices of the women and the low booming of a very deep baritone.

It was the man called Gunther who came for us, shepherding us into the crowded living room, Mama had called it the salon, each of us carrying a tray of hors d'oeuvres.

The people seemed shocked at our appearance. "Daughters, Lies!" exclaimed one red-haired, older lady. "You've never mentioned before that you had daughters!"

"Where do you live, little girl?" asked one man, taking food from my tray with one hand and stroking my velvet-covered arm with the other.

"Here," I whispered, looking to Mama, who left a grey-haired man in uniform to come over to me. The other man's arm was now about my waist but Mama removed it forcefully.

She looked reproachfully at Gunther who'd also started to come over to rescue me. "Now you can see, Gunther. It is time for my daughters to go to bed," she said firmly while he nodded and grimaced at the man who'd put his arm about me. "And they will lock the door tonight from the inside," Mama added.

We went downstairs quickly. We did everything Mama had told us to, putting the bolts across the door so that no-one could come where we were. Trudi was put out with me. "I wanted to stay," she said wistfully as we lay in our matching nighties and similar lavender panties,

the boards creaking above our heads. "I wanted to see the dancing."

"Why did Mama have us leave so early?" I asked her.

"It was that man," Trudi said with a sigh. "You couldn't see his face. He wanted you, like you were a grown woman, like Mama. You looked too pretty in that dress with the ribbons in your hair. Mama saved you from him putting his hands in places you wouldn't want him to feel."

I felt sick at the thoughts that came to me. But Mama had saved me. I fell asleep in Trudi's arms feeling so grateful to have a Mama like our Mama. I would always do my best to be like her.

From that time on though, Trudi and I served regularly at Mama's parties. It seemed as if she'd been ordered to do so. She wasn't too happy at the new red, silk dresses that were delivered at the house for us. They had stiffer petticoats; we got real stockings, too, made of nylon, which made our legs so smooth. We kept on playing with them, smoothing them over our legs, so delicious was the feeling of being a woman and being grown up.

"Do that in front of Gunther," Mama told us, her expression grim, "and he'll spend even more on you." But as we looked wide-eyed at her, not quite knowing what we should say or do, she relented from her seriousness and began to dance with us about the salon so that our dresses flared. We got cool, airy sensations about our legs from our new, silk dresses.

"Oh, you make such beautiful little girls," said Mama, almost breathless as we collapsed into a pile of petticoats on the sofa, giggling as she tickled us both.

Mama would even let us wear a little of her makeup at times, especially about our eyes and on our lips. Trudi and I were always trying on her perfume. Its fragrance

made us feel so ladylike. We played games where the gentlemen escorted the pretty girl to the dances. We had to behave like ladies. We took turns being the pretty girl and the gentleman.

But we never wore makeup or perfume to Mama's parties. We weren't that sort of girl, Mama said. I was too shy to ask what sort of girl that was.

OFFICIALLY ERIKA FRANCESCA

When Mama decided to move, it all happened very quickly, to us at least. Gunther came around one morning and talked with Mama in the salon. When she came back to us in the kitchen, she was as pale as the flour I was kneading for bread.

Trudi and I were concerned right away. "What is it?" we both asked together, knowing that something bad was going to happen to us girls.

"I have to leave," Mama said, her face still stunned from whatever Gunther had said.

"We can look after things here," I said, quickly, anxiously, wiping my hands and rearranging my grey skirts so that I could sit and dice carrots we needed for dinner.

"No," Mama said, suddenly looking at me with a frown. "I mean that I have to leave this country. Today."

Trudi and I looked at each other, dumbfounded. We'd thought it might happen some day. We'd talked about our wonderful life with Mama coming to an end and what we might do. Everyone at Mama's parties talked of 'getting out' before it was too late. Would Mama go some day, we'd wondered fearfully, as we lay in our basement bed listening to the dancing, and leave us behind? We'd whispered late into the night about it. We knew it could happen.

"We'll, we'll help you pack," I said, putting the bowl down carefully. "Then Trudi and I," I looked helplessly to Trudi.

"We'll make out," Trudi said brightly, wiping her hands on her pretty, frilly apron that matched mine. "We have so many fine things now."

"No, no!" Mama snapped in surprise at our words, opening her arms and gathering us both to her in one emotional hug. "I won't leave my beautiful daughters. No, you must come with me. We must all pack and leave right away."

Which we did. We hadn't worn coats before. Nor hats, schoolgirl hats. Mama made us wear the new, knee-length, grey skirts, with the pleats all round the back, that she'd bought us. She found us white blouses with bright red bows for ties which we'd only seen hanging on the pipes. We also wore long white socks and got to wear our shiny, black, patent shoes outside.

Trudi and I then put on the girls' coats, straight, dark-grey coats with large buttons that pressed against us when fastened. Mama pinned my hair back behind my ears with barrettes. My hair was thicker and clustered about the nape of my neck. I looked like a real schoolgirl but I'd never been to school.

We went outside, each with little suitcases with nothing but girls' clothes inside. The wind got up and blew my hair round my neck and across my face. I could barely see where we were going once we'd left Mama's. Then the wind whistled about my knees, and, despite my coat, ruffled my skirt about me, the cold air seeping up my legs. I wondered how schoolgirls like me put up with such airy, delicate feelings in their skirts all the time.

The city's streets had changed. They seemed orderly, somehow, the rubble swept in piles in the months we'd

spent at Mama's. At the platz, Mama called on us to run and we did, catching a bus wending its way through the ruins.

Mama joked with us and re-pinned my hair severely though I'd liked the touch of loose hair across my cheeks. She joked with the conductor about seeing us off to school after meeting our Papa at his office. We didn't say a word at that but Trudi's eyes were large with worry each time she looked at me, a schoolgirl dressed exactly like her. We got off in the midst of office buildings. From there, Mama said, we would get a taxi. It cost Mama a lot of money.

"Don't worry," Mama whispered, giving me a big smile, hugging me after seeing the worried look on my face. "We can't spend it, darling Erika, where we're going."

We ended up at an office building. We followed Mama while the taxi driver waited with our suitcases. Gunther was in an office doorway. He looked very angry with Mama as she swept into his office with us in tow.

"I told you it would be a passport and visa for only one," Gunther hissed at her. He looked nervously over his shoulder as if there was someone behind him but there wasn't. The others in the office had left the moment that Mama, Trudi and I had arrived.

"I will not leave without my daughters," Mama said, clutching our hands firmly in her soft ones.

"You can't stay here," said Gunther. He seemed extremely nervous, glancing about as if he expected someone else to arrive at any moment.

"We can't go anywhere else," said Mama in a calm voice. I could feel her hand, though. It was shaking as she held on to mine. "If it has to be today, and you say that it must, then we will go today, the three of us. Call Herr Koenig if you must. I won't leave without my daughters."

We were there for a very long time. The taxi driver brought up our suitcases and was paid off. Trudi and I were left alone; so we sat and were the best girls that we could be as we waited. Several times we saw people come to the door and look at us, their mouths open.

Mama left the office with Gunther and was gone for hours. We heard furious arguments going on outside but always, when Mama looked back, she smiled at us and told us that things were going to turn out fine. Then someone else would ask her curtly to go with them. She always went so gracefully, telling us to be good girls and wait for her quietly.

Trudi had to go with a man then, as I did, after her. I was asked all kinds of questions. I gave the answers Mama had taught us while we packed and journeyed. I had to stand in front of a wall and have my picture taken. They even took my fingerprints before I went back to a relieved Mama and Trudi.

We waited even longer until Gunther, scowling at us, came back with a package of documents which he grudgingly gave to Mama. We picked up our coats and put them back on, over our pretty dresses, and left in another car, not a taxi this time. We were driven to a bridge and a frontier checkpoint, right in the city. Mama showed the papers Gunther had given her to some soldiers. We were allowed to walk across the bridge, our pretty shoes gleaming in all the lights, with our suitcases, to the checkpoint on the other side.

There, we were taken into a crowded hut and asked lots of questions again; where we were born, Mama's names, ours, how old we were. I repeated what Mama had frantically tried to drill into me as I had folded my dresses and girl's clothes carefully back into my suitcase.

I was Erika Francesca Buren, daughter of Liesl Anna Buren, born Liesl Mueller. My father was killed in the war as were my grandparents and uncles as far as we knew. We were going to live with Mama's cousins and best friends in West Berlin. They had a hotel, close to the Kurfursterdamm. Mama told us she actually was the owner. I was sister to Gertrude Liesl Buren who was eleven months older than me. I was born in Hamburg, seven years before.

The passport officer gave me back my passport while he talked to Trudi and Mama. I opened it and looked at myself. I had remembered everything correctly. There I was, Erika Buren, with birth certificate, visa, a temporary Bonn Passport, all declaring me female. My photographs, side and full on showed a serious-faced little girl, her longish blonde hair pinned back from her face.

I looked up at Mama who seemed both relieved and happy at whatever the man was telling her about regulations and entry into Berlin. They caught my look and Mama squeezed my hand.

The passport man smiled at me. "Well, Erika," he said. "Little girls should never have to be afraid. Over here, you'll never have to be afraid again."

Afraid of what? I thought. I really didn't know. Mama had taken all of my fears away. I was now officially Erika Francesca Buren, determined to be the most loving daughter ever in the history of the world.

JUST LIKE THE OTHER GIRLS

Mama said that she had bought the Hotel Grunewald before the war. It was run for her by an older couple, the Langers, who were distant relatives of hers. Naturally, Trudi and I believed everything she said. The Langers moved out before we got to know them as Mama took over running the hotel, the bar and the restaurant.

Trudi and I shared a room in the attic which was fine with us from the start. From the window, we could look out and see the windows of other buildings, and, between houses, the lights of Kurfursterdamm. We lay with the window open the first night, just listening to the sounds of traffic that never seemed to stop all day or all night long.

We'd thought Mama generous before but now she seemed determined that we should be the best-dressed little girls on Ku'damm, where we often went, primped, perfumed, in our latest dresses, for morning coffee with Mama.

I vividly remember a pink dress with an overlaid taffeta skirt that I loved to wear with my hair pinned up and held back by a pink ribbon or bow. I wore it around the apartment whenever I could, loving the sound and feel of the taffeta against my legs whenever I sat down. It was soft and silky. I thought I looked like a bridesmaid in it. I dreamed of being a beautiful bridesmaid to a lovely bride, usually Mama, with me dropping rose petals, pink of course, to match my lovely pink dress.

When the weather turned colder, though, we had to go to school. Coffee on the Ku'damm became an inside affair, because of the change in the weather, a ritual reserved for Saturday mornings only.

Trudi and I were enrolled in the Academy, a few streets from the Hotel where we lived. We walked there, our hands in Mama's, often skipping delightedly all the way, watching young girls like us arriving in sleek, black cars. Trudi and I were separated for the first time which was very scary at first. But she was older, a year ahead of me.

Before going to school, Mama took me to one side a few nights ahead of time and had me try on a new gar-

ment under my panties. It was very tight around my sex parts and held them pressed very uncomfortably to my body. But when I put on my new girl's bathing costume, a gorgeous black and white suit, there was no bulge at all in front of me.

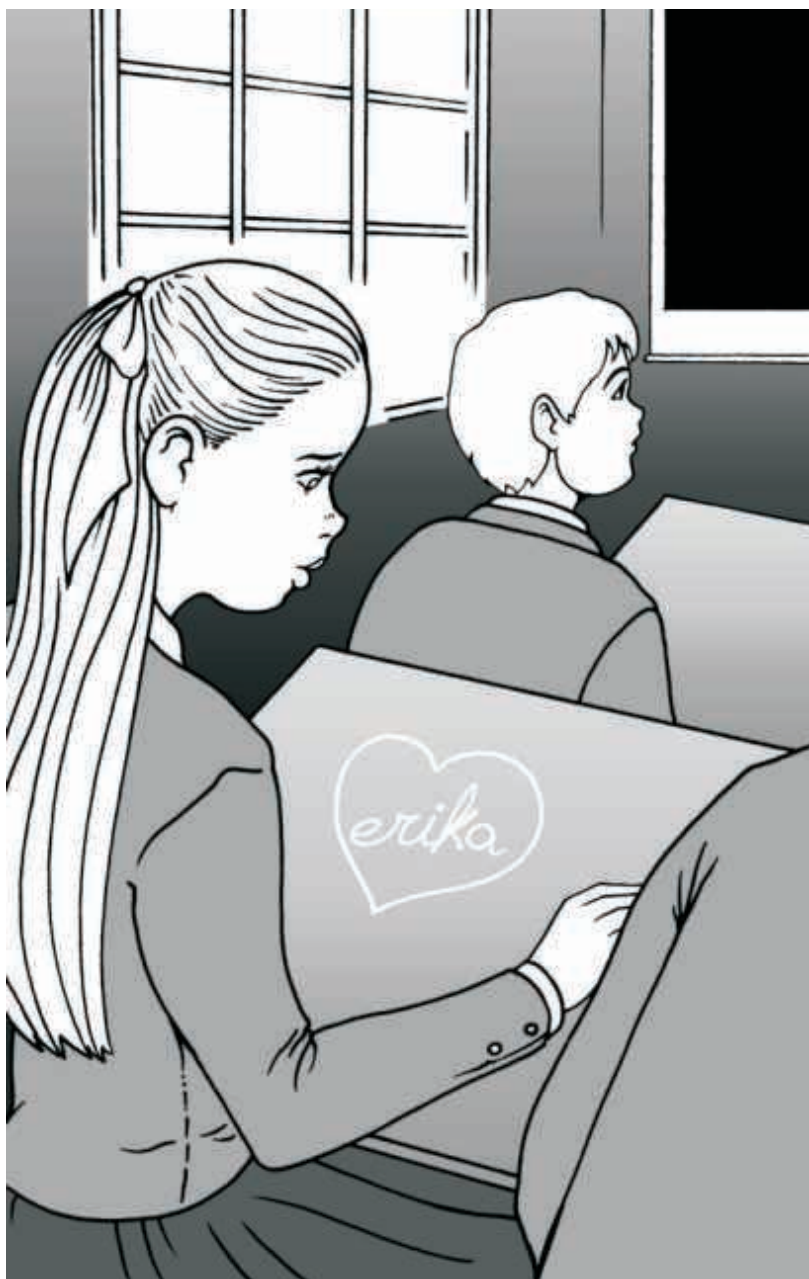
Mama told me I'd have to wear my gaff all the time if I wanted to go to school with Trudi. I did. I really wanted to and told Mama I did. So I didn't complain even when the gaff hurt, especially taking it off at night to bathe. Sometimes the pain took away the pleasure of wearing the white, pleated skirts we had to wear with our white blouses.

At school, like all the girls in my class, I had a crush on my teacher, Fraulein Wietelmann. I found out that I was very much behind in all my school lessons but Fraulein Wietelmann was very kind and patient with me, helping me to learn how to read and write properly. I caught up very soon.

Those Academy years flew by so quickly. I became friends with several boys and girls and brought them back to the Hotel often. I'd never go on a sleepover, though, for obvious reasons, but I still had good friends like Silke, Romy and Maria. We skipped rope, played tag and teased boys. I recall that I was accused of having a crush on Wilhelm Ertmeyer, which I denied, even though it was true.

I drew his name and surrounded it with a heart on the inside of my private binder. Silke drew a heart on the board one day with my initials and Wilhelm's on each end of the arrow; and so everybody knew. Wilhelm told me hotly not to speak to him any more as he didn't like girls like me. I went home crying to Mama who held onto me in my school uniform, wiped my tears and told me that one day I would make Wilhelm pay for his unkind

remark. I remember hoping I would, hoping I'd live long enough to get my revenge on stupid boys.



One day later, I had a note passed to me by Helmuth with my name in the middle of a heart with his name surrounding it. 'Will you be my girl friend?' his note read. He turned and looked at me when we were supposed to be reading, raised his eyebrows in query and smiled. I remember how my little heart beat faster and faster as he smiled at me. I nodded and hastily bent my head into my book.

I kept that note with me all year. Helmuth and I never did anything but nod to each other on occasions but it was such a nice, warm feeling to know that I had a boyfriend. I think Helmuth felt the same. It was such a pity he wasn't in my class the following year.

When we turned twelve, first Trudi, and then me, had to leave the Academy and travel further west to the Fasching Institute, another private school, where boys and girls were also in the same classes. My hair was quite long by this time. I was very proud of it, how golden it was. I loved to see my girlish reflection, after I dried it, as it hung loose about my shoulders.

At Fasching, we had to wear blazers, blouses, sweaters, dark grey skirts, grey socks and black shoes. How Trudi and I looked forward to the weekends when we could dress up in our stockings and open-toed shoes with the small heels that Mama would allow us to wear.

The boys were such pests at that time, too, particularly to me. They were always teasing me with notes, putting 'Erika' inside a heart with some boy's name linked to mine. I learned just to smile at the drawings and shrug. That saved me from lots of fights with other girls who liked certain boys more than I did. I got lots of ink on my braids too. The boys behind me liked to dip my long hair in ink wells if ever I leaned back.

I wished I could be in all girls' classes. Boys were such pests! I was glad I wasn't one of them! I was glad I was a sensible girl, studying hard and generally bringing credit to Mama for having such a willing daughter.

At Fasching, we played lots of games but soccer was the most popular. Fasching wasn't a very big school so we girls had to play with the boys when we had outdoor sports days. I guess I was a good player because Rainer or Frank would always pick me in front of lots of boys, much to my embarrassment.

Trudi said it was because they liked to see me blush and swing my ponytail, which is how I wore my hair for soccer. I was often the only girl in the 'top' game. So, I got rid of the ball if it came to me as quickly as I could which is why they said I passed the ball well, I think.

After watching one of our games, Trudi said they picked me because I had such pretty legs in shorts and distracted the other team. It would be worse, she said, when I started to 'bloom'.

I think Trudi knew how that would hurt me. It did. I knew that I wasn't going to 'bloom' like the other girls. Sadly, I wouldn't get those wobbly, rounded, chest mounds that Birgitte had been showing off for a year. All around me, as we changed for gym, I could see girls changing shape in front of my eyes. They would giggle and compare developments and show off their pretty new bras, holding up their pretty, new, sensitive breasts while I could only look on woodenly.

Mama found me crying about it in the attic room. She held me and stroked my hair as I wept in her arms. In answer to her question, I told her how unfair it was that Silke and Romy had real breasts and I had none.

"I think we can do something about that if you really want to," Mama said slowly to my astounded ears. I sat

up, crinkling my petticoat, too excited and delighted to pay any attention to her cautions, that maybe I shouldn't, that I would have to give up soccer with the boys.

I didn't care. I just wanted to bloom like the other girls. I wanted to be like everyone else, the girls that is. I wanted to be like Fraulein Nussbauer who was so rounded everywhere that she was called "Miss Pneumatic" by the boys, in most admiring tones.

Mama's pills made me very sick in the mornings and, for a time, didn't seem worth it. When we showered, we did it modestly, each of us in a separate stall. I always kept my disguise. I always turned the water off and put on my panties before I walked out to put on my dress (we were allowed flowery dresses with white collars in summer).

The other girls didn't tease me, I think, because they knew how ashamed I was of being the last to develop. They'd hidden their attributes, too, until they began to 'bud' and grow pubic hair.

When it did happen, it came so quickly, I couldn't believe it. One day, it seemed I was flat as a pancake, and then, in the shower, after a rough game of soccer with the boys, I felt sore and rubbed myself vigorously to take the hurt away. And I had little mounds. My nipples were huge and sticking out!

They were little, almost invisible, but they were there. It was my aroused nipples which gave me away. How could I go in front of the boys with my nipples like that, showing through my blouse? I put on my black panties and stood in front of the locker, wishing I had a sweater or something extra to wear until I got home.

I shivered and touched my new breast softly, strange feelings of delight engulfing my body, my thighs and

groin aching. I glanced around - and there were Hilda and Silke looking at me, amusement on their faces.

“Hey, everyone!” Silke yelled across the room.
“Erika’s started!”

Suddenly, everyone came crowding by. I must have been scarlet as the girls looked at my erect nipples and tiny ‘cleavage’. Soft female hands touched me gently and welcomed me to being a woman. They had all kinds of advice about napkins and tampons. I trembled and tried to dress femininely in my garter belt and stockings while each girl wanted to hug me and press their big breasts against my tiny, but definitely growing, ‘buds’.

I don’t know why but Silke still had what she called a training bra in her locker that would in no way fit her any more. But it did fit me. My first bra, it was white and very soft, nestling my sore appendages gently but immediately tenting my blouse. In the mirror, I could see the white straps of my bra and the thinner straps of my underslip. I knew the boys would notice right away that I had shape. They did. It was all over the school in minutes, it seemed, that I was wearing a bra. I was teased and whistled at unmercifully for several days.

I piled on Mama’s pills to hurry up my growing after that. When I was sick in class, my female teachers were very understanding, knowing how hard it must be to be so late in turning from girl to woman.

Naturally, Mama found out from school and knew right away what I was doing. She stopped me. She took over and regulated my dosage from then on.

“You don’t want to be like Birgitte, believe me,” Mama said, laughing at my indignation in her reduction of the pills I was taking. “You’ll be just perfect, you wait and see, particularly now that you’re getting some hips and rounder at the back, too.”

I didn't like that. I didn't want a huge, rounded backside like Frau Schipper, who would have made two of Mama. I began to diet but it didn't work except that my waist got smaller but, somehow, in less than a year, I had a female figure.

It was delightful to have bras and panties that fit me properly. I became more popular, too. Probably, it was because I smiled more and was happier now that I knew I could take my place as a woman in society when I grew up. Possibly, my popularity was also because of Mama and the Hotel Grunewald. Often, kids, boys and girls, would drop by the Hotel for Trudi and me. We could always rustle up some kind of treat from the kitchen which is why we always had a group of boys and girls around, noisy and giggling, much to Mama's mock annoyance.

BOYFRIENDS

I was almost fifteen when the pairing off of boys and girls began to break down my social life. Trudi and Georg became inseparable, necking on the attic sofa while I tried to stay out of their way and out of Mama's, who expected me to chaperone them.

Mama found them one day and scolded me for not staying with them. I tried to explain the facts of a girl's teenage life to her but she wouldn't listen. She got on to me about my school dresses being too short and the amount of leg I was showing. I couldn't tell her I needed new dresses because I was growing again. My bras were so tight!

I was in such a bad mood, with what Mama had accused me of, that I gave a surly answer in class to Frau Brasch and had to stay after school for a thirty-minute lecture on respect.

When I left, I had a huge amount of homework, my art project portfolio and my gym kit to get back to the Hotel.

Everyone had gone home except for Frank Aller, one of the nicest boys in my class.

“I was waiting for you,” Frank said, licking his lips very nervously when I stopped on the Fasching steps and looked at him inquiringly.

Frank was a good athlete and usually picked me for his team. Sometimes, the boys would kid and snicker that Frank and Erika were in love. He’d always say, “But Erika’s good, better than any of you!” I’d blush as I’d have to go and stand beside him for his team, looking back at all the girls, still to be picked, grinning at me. Frank was also tall, dark-haired. All the girls said he was good-looking.

“Let me carry your book bag,” Frank said; then, surprisingly, gulping. I saw the Adam’s apple bobble in his neck.

Georg always carried Trudi’s books. He was her boy friend. I looked up at Frank, startled, I guess, but he was pink with embarrassment.

That unnerved me. My hand shook as I passed him my bag. He put it over his shoulder and crossed behind me to walk on the outside to the curb as men should. I was dry-mouthed in embarrassment and couldn’t think of anything to say. I just shivered inside at the thought of a boy walking me home. We walked that first time in silence, he clutching my bag, while I used both hands on my art portfolio.

I thanked him when we got to the Hotel. Frank nodded and almost ran away. He must have been as embarrassed as I was at what he had done with a girl like me. He did seem to be in a tearing hurry to get up to the Ku’damm.

The following afternoon, Trudi came bouncing down to our sitting room beside Mama’s office in the Hotel.

Mama had tea ready. I was doing my homework at the old desk.

“Erika’s got a boy friend,” Trudi announced to Mama, giving me an arch smile.

Mama looked at me sharply as I flushed. “I don’t!” I denied hotly.

“She does,” said Trudi, a sneaky smile on her face. “She came in late yesterday; and Frank Aller carried her books.”

“I was late,” I protested. “Brasch kept me in.” I had to explain my surly remark to Mama. Then, I had to explain ‘boyfriend’ to her.

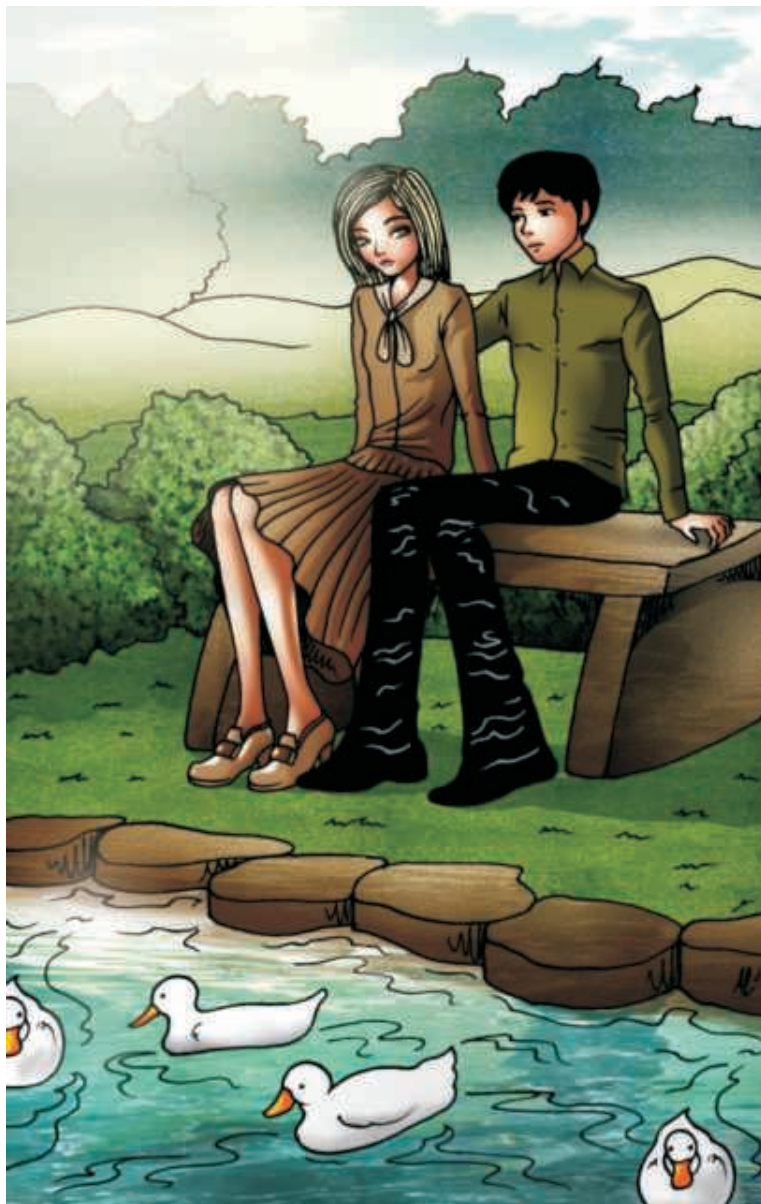
“You must bring him in,” Mama said with that note in her voice that Trudi and I could recognize. It meant she was making a pronouncement. Whoever she was directing it at would have to obey her absolutely.

“It will never happen again,” I said, shuddering, undoing my hair from the braid I wore at school and letting it swirl about my neck. I usually wore it loose at home.

Mama was giving me a funny look. “You will accept his offer to carry your books. You will keep your hair braided or pinned up when you are with him, young miss,” she said to me with a smile, her eyes holding mine, looking right into me. She knew just what I was feeling, I thought with a quiver, what I was longing for. “You will have a boy friend. You I can trust.” Trudi had the grace to look down and blush at that remark from Mama.

Mama took us upstairs to her room after our tea. I got my first real makeup lesson. It was incredible how eye-liner and mascara changed my eyes. Mama tweezered some of my eyebrows, too, and encouraged me to try lipstick, rouge and one of her new perfumes.

I felt so old, so grownup, so womanly. It was heavenly. Trudi seemed to enjoy the lessons, too, though she'd been wearing makeup for a year, mostly when Mama couldn't catch her.



We hugged Mama when she said that we could have our ears pierced on the weekend and, when we dressed for dinner on Sunday, use her makeup to make ourselves into proper young ladies. When we'd learned enough to apply our own makeup well, we could each invite a boy to supper at the Hotel. We hugged each other at the thought, Trudi as excited as me.

We spent so long trying on lipsticks that I couldn't finish all my homework. So I had to stay in the next day with Miss Pneumatic. I left school cautiously. I didn't really expect him but Frank was there, hiding behind a tree. I smiled, I think. He smiled at me, came and took my bag.

He put his hand out. Nervously, I slid mine into his. It was if a bolt of electricity went through me. Frank's hand was soft like mine but it was a boy's hand. A boy was touching me. A boy was holding my girlish hand as he might that of any of the girls at school. I found it hard to walk.

"Let's go through the park," said Frank suddenly. There was just one park, out of our way really, close to the school. There were trees there, benches and recessed walkways. I'd always thought of it as gloomy and too shaded before. Now it seemed an ideal place for me to get my fast-beating heart under control.

We held hands and sauntered down the paths, Frank's hand brushing my dress against my thighs and stockings. I felt very hot as we talked about stupid things, teachers we liked and didn't like at school, subjects we liked best, American music, and, inevitably, what we remembered about the war.

Frank suggested we sit by the pool and watch the ducks for a while. I agreed. He put his arm about my shoulder. I didn't object, even though I was tense, on edge, with a boy touching me so familiarly.

He moved very close to me. I tried to look away, down, anywhere, but all I could see and feel were my smooth, stockinged legs and the constriction of my bra concealing what I knew were the very sensitive, swollen nipples of my breasts. My stockings, pleated skirt and low-cut heels were so feminine in contrast to his creased trousers and black oxfords.

Frank was saying something about how warm the spring was when I risked a quick glance at him and saw that his mouth was quivering. He was even more anxious than me!

I don't know why I did it. Perhaps because of what Mama had said about us girls being more mature than boys. We had to teach them to be civilized, to do and to be what we women wanted. I reached up with my inside hand and almost pulled him onto me.

Our trembling lips met as I closed my eyes. It was everything I'd expected it to be whenever I'd dreamed of a boy kissing me. I was shaking with excitement as I pulled on his hands and blazer collar. I could feel him shaking, too. At last, I gloated inwardly. At last, I know how it really feels to be a girl like Trudi. I'd caught up to her. It was all I ever wanted as a young teenager, to be a girl like Trudi.

So, when I got home, mussed and thoroughly satisfied from necking with Frank, I got heck for it, just as Trudi had before me.

"I thought I could trust you!" Mama screamed at me, rounding on my sister. "See what you are teaching her! She's going to end up just like you, a tramp at sixteen!"

I looked at Trudi's guilty face and suddenly realized what she and Georg must have been up to. I was so naïve! I was very far from being a girl like Trudi. I couldn't be like her, in fact, I thought sorrowfully.

“No, Mama,” I contradicted her. “Neither of us is a tramp. That’s not fair of you.”

Mama’s mouth dropped open. I’d never disagreed openly with her before.

“Yes, I did get Frank to kiss me on the park bench,” I admitted. “I-I liked it. I-I made him do it, in truth, because I wanted to find out what it was like between boys and girls. Trudi is the same as me, Mama. We wanted to find out what kissing was like. But we’re your daughters, Mama We’ll never do anything, ever, to hurt or disgrace you. Will we, Trudi?”

So we had a few tears and a reconciliation. We made promises as daughters never to kiss boys again though Mama changed her mind and agreed that a few kisses wouldn’t hurt any of us. But I had to promise to bring home a very nervous Frank Aller the very next night for Mama’s close inspection.

The following evening, I brought Frank into Mama’s office. I refused him another trip through the park and promised him a treat at the Hotel, a special treat. Mama had been waiting for me at the entrance to our private apartments to shanghai my boyfriend, telling me to go and change into the dress she’d left out for me.

I shuddered all the time while I was changing into a proper dress, a black, square-necked shift with long sleeves that matched my high heel pumps. I put on lipstick and fluffed out my hair and tried to walk like a model in my new heels and skin-toned stockings, hurrying to get back to Frank before my mother totally embarrassed me with my first, real boyfriend.

I heard Mama say, “Erika is a very special girl,” as I entered our little sitting room above the reception area.

Frank looked stunned as I approached him. I smoothed my skirts against my stockings and crossed my

legs as I sat beside him, my stockings giving a very satisfying rasp of silk on silk. My perfume reached Frank's nostrils. He seemed speechless as I took his hand.

"You're not going to do homework in that dress," said Mama, pointedly, smiling and looking me up and down, from my stiletto heels to my dangling earrings. She'd probably noticed that I'd padded my bra with tissues to fill out the new bra she'd bought me. Trudi said all the girls did it.

"It's the weekend tomorrow," I said nervously, squeezing Frank's trembling hand. "With your permission, Mama, we might go to an American movie. That is, if Frank would like to."

Mama smiled and put her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing at me. Poor Frank. What else could he say but that he'd love to take me out? "The early show," Mama agreed.

I nodded my long, loose hair and wondered why Frank hadn't already asked her. He'd already asked me as he was walking me home. I'd told him that Mama might let me if he asked her.

Mama ushered Frank to the telephone while I put on my pretty apron that accentuated my slim waist and got tea ready. Trudi joined us and teased Frank unmercifully. I couldn't get back at her with Mama eyeing me to see if I could handle it like a woman.

Frank heaved a great sigh of relief when we finally got away after the high tea that Mama's restaurant was famous for. "Does your mother grill all of your boyfriends like that?" he asked, becoming a talker again as we walked hand-in-hand down the sidewalk towards Ku'dam.

Boyfriend? I felt the thrill running through me at his words. I had a boy who thought of himself as my boy-

friend! I wanted to pull him to me and kiss him right there. Oh, yes, I could think of myself now as Frank's girlfriend! I was a girlfriend, I thought, loving the way that sounded in my mind, loving the way such a thought made me feel, wanting to be so girlish with my boyfriend.

"All of them," I said nervously, squeezing his hand, a deliberate, feminine giggle in my voice.

It startled him but Frank put his arm possessively about my waist, so slim in my new coat. I hugged him in appreciation before he squeezed me. People looked at us and smiled as we were clearly a boy and a girl in love. My glowing face would have given us away but I did look good, I thought, my long, golden hair loosely combed and pinned so that some blew over my made-up, female face. I felt every inch a woman from my long legs, so slim yet curvy in my high heels, my figure accentuated in its womanliness by my tight clothes.

Of course we took back seats in the cinema. When the lights went down, Frank put his arm around my shoulder and pulled me towards him. I was eager and excited as I accepted his kiss on my fresh, lipsticked mouth. He was aflame, too, and forced his tongue into my mouth. I recalled how girls had said boys liked to do that. It wasn't unpleasant. In fact, as he moved his head and increased in passion, I really liked it.

His hand stroked my thigh. I had to hold him off from exploring under my dress even though I let him touch my garter belt through my dress. I could feel myself fluttering inside. My white panties were so tight about my groin as Frank's quaking hand found my breasts and gently caressed them. I didn't want to be such a good girl then, so aroused was I by his kisses and touches, but I knew I had to be. It was too dangerous but, like a moth drawn to a flame, I wanted to be cherished. I wanted Frank to want me as his girl. I wanted to give him what he wanted.

We'd all talked, we girls, of fighting off the boys in the back seats of the cinema, of their frenzied kisses and fumbings, of how far we would let them go at first, and later. Mama would have been astonished by how far, in letting them touch and caress, the Fasching girls would have let boys go. She would have been equally astounded by what those girls would do for their boyfriends, under cover of darkness, to satisfy male needs. We discussed doing things that nice girls should never talk about.

I'd been a conservative in the group talk. I'd never do what many had already done until I found myself faced with reality. I kissed Frank as fervently as he kissed me. I let his hands wander over my stockings up to where my stockings met their garters, even to caress between my legs at that point, but I wouldn't let him go further, though he had touched my panties from outside my dress. His hand fondling my stocking tops sent enough thrilling shudders through me as it was.

We really didn't see much of that film. We came up for air occasionally, but mostly we were glued to each other's active mouths. I was quite bruised by the end of the show. I had to totter into the Ladies' Room with other girls, as dishevelled and lipstick-free as me.

We joked about our 'men' and their wandering hands, though we admitted we liked it anyway, adjusted our dresses and bras, found and reattached earrings, primped our hair and re-did our makeup and perfume. With provocative sways and flirtatious smiles, we swept out of the bathroom, past other ogling swains, to entwine ourselves again, demurely or brazenly, on our chosen champions. The boyfriends greeted us with swift kisses on our expectant, upturned faces, just enough to leave a lipstick brand on their mouths.

Now they were ours. We could go for a languorous stroll down the Ku'damm, ogling and being ogled at, be-

ing whistled at by American servicemen, blushing shyly, while our men strutted along and looked so proud to have such pretty girls on their arms.

Despite my blushes, I was so glad I was a pretty girl. My clothes were fashionable, my black dress and black shaped coat emphasizing my figure. I was dressed in modern female fashion, inside and out, from my bra and panties to my stylish purse and dark gloves. I knew how female and sexy I looked just in my underwear at home in my mirror even if Frank and the leering oafs on the Ku'damm didn't. But their, and his, admiration was the crowning touch, save for our passionate good night's kiss, to a wonderful evening.

We went out several more times for equally arousing evenings, with Mama's blessing; but when Frank found that he couldn't touch me any further than my stocking tops, he began to cool off. I was stunned just the same when I heard that he'd taken out Gitte, a well known 'tramp', who'd let boys feel her beneath her panties and bra.

It hurt me terribly for a short time but, when I met him for an embarrassing minute between classes, I surprised myself. I could smile at Frank's flushed face and assure him that it hadn't really been serious between us. If it wasn't serious between Birgitte and him, he could call me sometime. If I was free and wanted to go out, I'd go with him. He seemed very relieved I didn't make a fuss or call him names. I even smiled when I saw him later, in the local coffee bar where he and Gitte were holding hands.

"I don't know how you could," said Trudi when I joined up with her to walk home. She'd had coffee with some of her friends, but not Georg.

"Why?" I asked, puzzled. "We weren't that serious." Part of that was true. He hadn't been as serious as me,

clearly. I didn't tell anyone that I'd had dreams of what it would be like when somehow we were married and I was his wife.

"Boyfriends are always serious," Trudi snapped at me. "You can't just drop them like that. They have to squirm."

That made me laugh and soon Trudi joined in, too. But she was still going on about it when we got home which tipped off Mama that Frank and I had 'broken up', a ridiculous way to phrase it, I thought. Mama was thoughtful and came to my bedroom later that night to talk about it.

She sat on my white, frilled counterpane as I leaned back on the matching pillow. My dark blue silk nightie was gathered about my knees as I slid into bed. Mama arranged the thin straps over my shoulders and my breasts. They weren't small, almost non-existent like Maria's, but they weren't huge, either. Frank had said that they were just right. I noticed Mama glance at them as she arranged my neckline. Then Mama re-did one of my braids so that it wouldn't crimp my hair as I slept.

"How are you feeling?" she asked at last. "About Frank," Mama went on as I frowned. "Don't frown. It's not ladylike."

That made me giggle as she frowned herself for a moment.

"He's going out with Gitte," I said. "She gives him what I never would. Everybody knows. It's why some of the boys go out with her. Or so the girls say. I don't really know."

Mama nodded. She adjusted the front of my nightie, her gaze resting for some time on my breasts so clearly seen through the gauzy material. I blushed under her inspection, not quite knowing what she was thinking.

"You're not upset?" Mama asked carefully. "You don't regret that you didn't let him touch you even more?"

"Oh, Mama!" I exclaimed, reaching out to hug her. "I told you that I would always be a good girl. And I will. I liked Frank. I liked - no, I like, kissing him. And it was nice to have a boyfriend like all the other girls. But I can get another one if I want. Today, in class, Kurt von Falkenburg asked me to walk out with him. But, really, I'm too young still, aren't I?"

Mama looked at me, sighed, then hugged me, her large bust pressing against mine. "Yes," she said. "Yes, you're right, my darling Erika. You are too young. Go out with lots of boys. Enjoy the kisses and caresses you can wheedle out of them."

We both laughed at that. I didn't dare to tell Mama how far I'd let Frank go and how much farther I'd dreamed of him going. She'd have been appalled, I was sure. Mama took my hands and talked of creams and polishes I should use to keep my hands and nails pretty and feminine.

A PERFECT CANDIDATE

I knew that it wasn't a coincidence when, two weeks later, Mama took me out of school to see Dr. Kurst. She didn't tell me where I was going until we got there. I'd been to a doctor before, of course, but just for cold medicines and stuff. This was the first time that a tall, efficient-looking nurse told me to go into an examining room and strip.

"I'll be going in with my daughter," Mama said when I froze and couldn't uncross my legs, my tight grey skirt seeming to trap me in my chair. I was panic-stricken at the thought of a doctor looking at me, the real me, but Mama took my hand in hers and helped me to my feet.

Why had she made me wear makeup for this day and put on my sexiest underwear, even my dark stockings and high heels? Why had Mama had me emphasize my femininity so much for an examination by a doctor?

"We don't usually have someone else in here with us," began the haughty nurse. She was really pretty, a white-haired blonde with grey eyes. "But your daughter," she stressed the word as if she knew I wasn't. Sickly, I felt the heat rising in me, "can have someone of your, your gender with her, if she wishes."

I don't know how the nurse knew what I really was. But she did. I could tell by the way she said 'she' and 'her', as if I didn't deserve to be described that way. I could barely move one high heel in front of the other as the color rose in my cheeks. I could feel the nurse's eyes assessing me, my stockings, my tight skirt, the sway in my walk, my pretty, dark blue, frilled blouse, my obvious breasts, my long hair, my earrings and my made-up face.

"She knows," I whispered anxiously to Mama as the door closed, leaving us in a tiny cubicle.

Mama undid my white school blouse at the back, revealing my dark blue slip and matching bra. The uplift bra, a birthday gift from Trudi, pushed my chest muscles in slightly so that with a little padding, I looked very-well developed for my age. My red lipsticked mouth and lightly powdered face enhanced the feminine image my made-up eyes suggested.

I stepped out of my grey school skirt and saw myself in the slip that came to mid-thigh covering my garter belt and dark blue panties. I was female-shaped. The dark stockings made my legs look slim and rounded like a woman's. I looked like a young woman and felt like one. But I was trembling inside trying to imagine what the

nurse was thinking of me, what she would think of a girl who had what a boy normally has in her panties.

"She knows what you are because I told her," Mama said carefully, watching me for the way I would react.

I stopped as my stomach lurched. I couldn't have felt worse if she had punched me. "You-you couldn't," I gasped at my mother, my eyes wide with fright. "What did you do that for?"

It was then that Dr. Kurst entered the room, me in my white, silky slip, leaning forward to show off my ample, female cleavage, one of my red-tipped fingers stopped in unhooking a garter.

Dr. Kurst was an older man, silver-haired, nearly sixty. He looked at me, posed there, and his eyebrows went up. I tried to cover my breasts with one hand, exposing again my feminine nails. He smiled as I blushed, hugging my slip about me.

"You must get undressed for me to examine you," Dr Kurst said confidently, shutting the door on the nurse, who was staring at me avidly. I shivered, standing there in my underwear.

"Go on, Erika dear," said Mama. "Finish undressing."

I was almost crying as I undid my garter belt, slipped out of my heels, rolled my stockings down my legs and took off my slip.

"Very nice," said Dr. Kurst, looking up from a chart he was consulting and indicating to me to lie out on the examining table, just in my bra and panties. I wanted to hide as he talked to Mama, removed my bra and examined my breasts, which unexpectedly hardened as he palpated them.

Dr Kurst smiled and explained, "That often happens with young girls on their first examination." He gave me

the most thorough medical that any young girl or boy could have gone through.

Afterwards, I realized that Dr Kurst had been very nice to me but I didn't realize it at the time. I was too shaken and too upset by what I was thinking of as Mama's betrayal. I was weighed, measured and examined in every way. I was probed and had to remove my panties and gaff while the doctor's hand touched my private parts. I closed my eyes and tried not to cry or jump as my breasts were also measured. But inside I was crying in shame and humiliation that any man had to see me like this, an incomplete girl.

I wanted to die right there as I was revealed to him for what I was, a boy trying to be a girl. Tears stung my eyes. I couldn't see properly as Dr Kurst complimented me on my health and said everything was in proper working order, everywhere. I was a perfectly healthy, teenaged boy.

I wanted the floor to open up and swallow me at those hateful words.

"My Erika is not a boy," Mama said carefully to the doctor. "Erika is my daughter."

Dr. Kurst looked at me, raised his eyebrows again, and nodded to me, as I lay there shivering on his table, to re-dress in my girl's clothes.

"Yes," the doctor said, smiling at me as I frantically hid myself as I slid on my gaff and panties. "I must admit that I have not seen such a delectable candidate before. She is very convincing and has lived as a girl for over ten years, you say? Her school records bear that out. I don't see any problem with having Erika accepted into the sex reassignment program."

Mama and he began to talk about psychiatrists and cures but Mama, to my greatest pleasure, would have none of cures and having me try to live as a boy. Then I

realized why she'd brought me to this doctor. He could make me into a real woman! Change me! I suddenly wanted to sing in exultation and joy as I listened to Mama talking about the endocrine system, hormones and the surgery needed to make me into a woman like Trudi.

I was so sorry I'd misunderstood her. Mama wanted for me what I wanted for myself; and I wanted to be fully a woman. The doctor wanted me to see a psychiatrist but Mama said we were past that. She wanted stronger hormones to make my male parts shrink (oh, yes, I agreed, exulting at her words and championing of my womanhood) and surgery, including plastic surgery to make everything look right.

The doctor was looking at me as I adjusted my bra, eased on my stockings and attached them. I flushed as I arranged my slip and skirt modestly about me. I nodded in agreement with Mama as he looked quizzically at me.

"If you'll give us the stronger hormones," Mama stated as Dr. Kurst grunted an assent, "I'll agree that she can see any other doctor you want, even a psychiatrist."

"Erika is seventeen?" Dr. Kurst asked, writing a prescription. "If Baumann agrees to recommend the procedure, this should work to make Erika more of a woman than most patients I see." He gave me a smile as I smoothed my silky slip over my figure and began to put on my blouse.

"I'll see her in surgery when she's eighteen," the doctor went on, while I felt his admiration for me. "You will make a very lovely woman, Erika. Many men will want to make you their wife." He sounded very regretful that it wouldn't be him. He was very old.

I shuddered as I tightened my skirt at my waist over my blouse and slipped on my familiar high heels. Dr. Kurst was still looking at me as if he would like to be one

of those men lined up to marry me. I couldn't look at him without blushing. Somehow, I got out past the prying eyes of Dr. Kurst's nurse.

I think I looked down at the floor all the way out past so many other women waiting to see the doctor about real women's medical problems. With a sickening feeling, I realized that I could be Dr. Kurst's patient for a very long time, which meant I would often have to see his nurse.

We had a long wait at the druggist before Mama said we weren't going back to Fasching that day. She took me for lunch at one of the outdoor garden cafes on the Ku'damm.

"Did you understand what I was saying to Dr. Kurst?" Mama asked me. I nodded my head slowly. I think I'd understood the main idea. I was to be changed surgically so that I could be a real woman, but she'd often used words about medicine and anatomy I hadn't yet been exposed to.

An American serviceman at a nearby table smiled at me and raised a glass in my direction. I flushed and turned a little to ignore him, not caring how my loose hair blew across my face. I could see myself in the shiny marble of the cafe wall, a slim, pretty girl, with nice, crossed legs, elegant and well made up, her blonde hair mostly in a loose, French braid, golden strands about her soft, delicate features.

"You do want to be my true daughter, don't you?" Mama asked, as well made-up but more elegant than me, as any older woman should be.

I remembered all the times in the ruins and the cellars, the cleanness of the dresses she'd given me, the starched whiteness of my little aprons. I remembered how heaven had descended on me after so many weeks, months perhaps, in hell.

“Oh, yes, Mama,” I said, my eyes bright with tears. I hoped my mascara and liner didn’t get smeared. “I want to be your true daughter always. Th-thank you so much for all you’ve done for me. Are still doing for me.”

Mama smiled and opened the vial of pills, putting two in my hands. “These will really help,” she said, closing her hand over mine, her nail polish bright and shiny like my own. “You will become a woman, no longer a girl. These pills will cut off all masculine activities in your body. It will be like a chemical castration.”

“But,” I still had a hundred questions to ask. I couldn’t help but shudder when my mother used such words to me that had such horrible connotations.

Mama smiled and indicated our coffee. I looked down at what was in my hands, quivered as I smiled at her. I took the pills and swallowed them. “Don’t worry,” said Mama reassuringly. “These days, changing sex has been done many times before. You won’t be the first beautiful daughter born on a surgical table.”

DISCOVERY

I had ‘morning sickness’ for what seemed like all of my last year at Fasching. I recall saying to Mama, after a month, that if this was what it was like having a period, or being pregnant, I’d willingly skip both. My breasts were itchy; my hips changed, becoming rounder. I didn’t mind being bare-breasted with the other girls in gym because I wasn’t flat any more, not like Maria or Steffie. I actually jiggled when I walked and never had to pad any more.

I caught Frank’s, and other boys’, eyes on me a lot, looking me over in a most predatory way. I really did want to go out with a boy, to the back seats of the theatre, to let his hands wander over my female parts. But I shuddered when I thought such things and tried to shut them

out even as my breasts hurt so much, both from my thoughts and from the changes happening in me.

My biggest problem with a boy, I already knew, would be whether or not I would or could stop him in time. It was my own control I worried about. If a boy was really nice and wanted me, I might not want to hold him off. I worried that I might not be strong enough as a girl, physically or emotionally, to fend off a Juergen or a Michael. They were so big and so strong. I could never date men like them.

I got called to the office by Frau Brasch who tore into me for my provocative dress (I liked shorter skirts), the way I wore my hair, how I flicked it off my face to attract boys, how my perfume was too seductive, how I wore too much makeup, how I was showing too much leg to the boys, how I was flirting with the boys all the time and they couldn't work around me. I was told I had to buy bigger blouses, looser, and button them up properly. I was to stop padding my bra (I wasn't, of course). I was not to wear any more lipstick, not even the faint, clear lip balm Mama wanted me to wear.

I was mortified after a thirty-minute lecture-harangue and late for the bus taking us to the American base for a science field trip. I went clattering down the halls in my low heels, the guys all leaning out of the bus windows and cheering for me as I ran to catch the bus that had started to depart. Of course, with all of the yelling, the driver stopped for me but what a look he gave me as I boarded the bus, my coat and school bag over my arm, my hair a mess and my blouse kind of ruffled after Frau Brasch's attention to my supposedly too tight bra.

"Had to be a blonde," the driver grouched to Herr Doctor Luder, the older teacher in charge of the trip. Herr Luder just smiled at me and nodded to the driver to go on to the American base.

I buttoned my blouse to the top as I slid into my seat, all eyes on me and my flushed face. Gitte saw what I did and laughed. "So you got the tits and lipstick lecture," she said loudly. All the girls around me began to laugh, too. They looked at me and I felt most peculiar. I pushed my hair back behind my gold-studded ears, and started pinning back my hair, remembering what Brasch had accused me of. I glanced around. Frank was staring at me. I ducked my head.

"She told me I was wiggling my fanny when I walked," said Silke, opposite us, leaning over the aisle to talk. She raised a skeptical eyebrow just as Frau Brasch did. "And that the boys couldn't work near me."

"That's what she said to me," I began and couldn't finish as all the girls joined in the laughter with cries of "Me too," "Me too!" I realized with relief that I wasn't abnormal. I was just one of the girls.

Miss Pneumatic heard our noise and swept down the aisle of the bus, telling us to speak in ladylike tones to the person beside us, no-one else. We all scrunched down to avoid being singled out. Gitte was beside me and, as soon as we go onto the autobahn, she began to talk to me as we never had before.

"You know why Brasch gave you the lecture, don't you?" Birgitte asked, glancing at my crossed legs. I tried to pull my skirt down to cover my stocking tops.

"No," I had to admit, making a small wiggle to smooth my skirt more properly over my girlish hips.

"You're eighteen," said Gitte with a quick, little smile. "We all got the lecture a week after our eighteenth. Now we're adults, in Brasch's eyes, at least."

"So she can't legally stop us from smoking or drinking or whatever," I said as lightly as I could, understanding in relief that I hadn't been singled out at all.

"You're still a virgin, aren't you?" Gitte murmured, looking hard at my flushed face.

I stretched in my tight bra and blouse, thinking of Frank and Kurt and the times in the park when we'd spread our coats out under the trees and kissed and caressed each other. I had felt the boys' erections against my stockinged thighs and legs and against my panties and skirt. They'd felt my aroused breasts through my bra and thin, open blouses. We'd exchanged passionate French kisses. I think Kurt had come once with me as I held him close because his embarrassment at supposedly kissing me too hard had seemed odd at the time.

I blushed and nodded. No-one had felt my private parts or penetrated me. I was still a virgin.

"I wish I was," said Gitte in a subdued voice. "Frank only ever went with me to get it, you know."

I nodded again. "I know," I whispered, shivering as I thought of all the attempts he'd made on me to feel my private parts.

"You were right to drop him," Gitte said, giving me a wan smile. "He's really just as much a creep as Walther." She named the male teacher we all regarded as a sex maniac and pervert.

"Maybe I should do it," I said offhandedly. "It's not such a big deal, really, is it?"

Gitte took my arm fiercely. "Don't be like me or Silke," she hissed fiercely. "You see how the boys treat you. They know you're different. They know that you won't put out till you find real love. You should at least wait till you're at university in the fall. Find a nice man and marry him. With my reputation, I'm never going to be able to do that."

Birgitte was very glum for a little while but cheered up when we got to the American base. The soldiers were admiring and very funny to all of us girls in the tour group. I was soon feeling much better myself, Brasch's lecture receding in my mind as the men, yes, they were men on the American base, admired us girls so. I didn't even mind when one called me 'Barbie-doll' and another called me 'Blondie'. Actually, such names made me feel quite thrilled as they affirmed that, yes, Erika Buren was indeed a very special girl.

When we went through Security, the Americans divided us into different groups and showed us different routines they went through. I didn't mind when the cutest of the soldiers, all of us girls agreed on that, took my fingerprints and then took his time cleaning the ink from my hand. His fingers were so thick and rough, not slender and tipped by long, polished nails like mine.

Hank wanted to know where I lived and if I'd like to go out with him. I was very tempted. Later, I heard him say exactly the same words to the girls behind me in line. Still, he had a nice smile and stroked my hand as if it was porcelain. I was also tempted when Jerry, even nicer-looking than Hank, asked me if I would go out with him some time in the future.

"I'm still in school," I reminded Jerry which made him smile.

"But in July?" Jerry said with a handsome, knowing smile that made me curl up as if I had a fever. "You graduate then, don't you? You'll be your own woman, won't you? I don't think that I've ever seen anyone as pretty as you around here, Erika. I'd love for you to show me Berlin. I'm thinking of staying on here when my term's up."

I don't know why I did it but, when Jerry persisted and asked where I lived, as he already knew the general area I was from, I gave him the address of the Hotel Grunewald. He wrote it down with a pen on his hand, giving me a smile that made me feel warm all over. He told me I'd hear from him. I was blushing and didn't dare to look back as we girls were ushered to another part of the base. I never thought what might happen to the fingerprints I'd given.

Mama bought me my first evening dress, black, sequinned and figure hugging, for my eighteenth birthday. Trudi gave me a silver evening bag. Naturally, I just had to splurge on new heels and new earrings to match my beautiful dress. On the weekend, we'd go dancing, the three of us, as the final birthday present for me, Mama promised, to a club on the Ku'dam. Mama said it would be a perfect evening for us.

Trudi and I could barely contain our excitement after school was over for the week. We hurried through supper because we knew it would take hours to get our makeup just right for our first sophisticated night out at the Paragon. I'd listened to other girls talk about the place. They said that only the richest guys from university went there.

I was in an airy peasant blouse and skirt as I whisked away the supper dishes, dreaming of the kind of boys Mama was lining up to meet Trudi and me. I wished Trudi had stayed with me a little longer as I needed time to get ready in my new black lingerie before putting on my new evening dress. I'd need time, too, to do my hair and makeup.

At first, I was annoyed thinking that the American soldier, who came and knocked on Mama's private apartment door, was 'my' American from the base. He wasn't. He was just there to accompany another man,

leather-coated and looking like a Gestapo agent from spy films.

Mama clutched my arm as the man pushed into our sitting room past the soldier holding the door.



"Frau Mueller?" the man asked. "Frau Liesl Anna Mueller?"

"Now I am Buren," Mama exclaimed, motioning me to the office area and the door that led to the stairs. Trudi came down at just that moment in her dark green slip, her dress over her arm, with some problem she had to talk to Mama about. She gasped when she saw the men.

"Oh, yes," the Gestapo-type man said with a thin smile. He waved to the soldier who moved to stop either Trudi or me leaving the room by the back stairs.

Mama turned deathly pale but didn't say anything. We stood there as well, stunned, not knowing what, as Mama's daughters, we should do. I thought that Mama's name now was Buren, the name she'd given to us.

"Did you know that your marriage certificate was not issued until after Gerhard Buren was listed as killed in action?" the policeman asked. "And the sequential birth certificates of your daughters. Interesting, are they not? Perhaps your friends should have gone to more trouble for you."

"Go upstairs," Mama said to us urgently. We moved to obey but the soldier put up an arm to stop us. I looked at Trudi, clutching her dress to her breasts. She looked as scared as I felt inside.

"Trudi can go," said the man in his smooth voice. "But I have business with Erich von Hitte. He must stay."

We both turned, Trudi and I, open-mouthed in surprise and horror at the words he'd said. He pointed to me and motioned to me to sit on the sofa. The American looked as if he'd been hit over the head with a pole. I felt the same way. Erich was the masculine way of saying my name, Erika.

"Who?" Mama blustered. "Whom are you speaking of? There's no one here by that name. These girls are my daughters, getting ready to go out to a dance tonight. You have no right to be barging in like this. I have a good mind to call the police right now and report you!"

The man whom I thought was a policeman sighed. His look of world weariness did not change. "The Americans took fingerprints from all of the girls at the Fasching Institute who visited the base near Templehof," he said patiently. "Some of the young soldiers were showing off when they demonstrated for the girls how they sent them to police and international agencies for background checks on Russian and East European spies.

"You probably didn't know, Frau Mueller, that the fingerprints of Erich Albert von Hitte have been on record since he was a little boy. He disappeared in the conquest of the city and has been presumed dead by all but his mother. She refused to accept that her son was killed in the fall or during the occupation of Berlin." He stared at me. I felt chills going up my spine as my peasant girl dress swung against me. "She kept searching, particularly after his prints turned up on the identification record of a young girl brought across the line over eleven years ago.

"And lo and behold," the policeman stared at me even more intently while the American soldier's mouth was hanging open in astonishment, "the American computers say that an older Erich Albert von Hitte was in that class of Fasching Institute girls who went through the base and was fingerprinted by a horny American GI."

Mama stepped in front of me. "You're not suggesting," she began hotly.

"Please don't lie," the policeman said wearily, his eyes still on me, taking in, I suppose, each aspect of my femi-

ninity, from my long, golden hair to my clearly female figure.

“It has been a very, very expensive search over the years,” he went on. “But I do know who you are,” that was directed at me, “and where you’ve come from. I know what you, Frau Mueller, have done to Erich, how you’ve made him into a girl and what surgeries you’ve planned to have done to him soon by Dr Kurst. The Countess von Hitte also knows because I have told her. She, however, still wants her son, Erich, back. She knows about Erika. In the last week, we have had many interesting photographs taken of, of *her*.”

With a start, I recalled Anni with her new Leica in the change room, taking candid shots, claiming she didn’t have the money for film. I was coming from the wash-room, breasts proudly displayed, only my panties over my gaff, so proud to be a girl among girls, as she’d set it off like a machine gun. Anni had laughed and said there was no film in the camera but wouldn’t it have been a sensational set of pictures of me if she’d had film.

“How much would you have paid me for them?” Anni had asked, a tantalizing smile on her face.

“Nothing!” I’d called across the change room. “Pictures of naked girls aren’t worth anything these days. There are too many on the market!”

The man was saying something else in his muffled, weary voice and staring again at me. I was hot with embarrassment as I thought how he might have seen me in the photographs that Anni must have taken of me.

“Of course,” the policeman was saying to Mama. “Entering the West on false papers. In Erika’s case, so easy to prove. You could all be sent back unless, well, you know what the unless means.”

“No,” cried Trudi. She clutched my arm. I looked into her white, frightened face. It was as if we were back in the bombed-out church cellars again. “Leave my sister alone!”

I felt a touch of wonder as Trudi said that. She had only snide remarks to make about me lately.

Mama, too, rounded angrily on the man, moving to stand in front of me and protect me. “I’ve met your sort before, Mr. Secret Agent,” she began with a sneer in her voice. “But if you think you intimidate me, you’re very wrong.”

She went on for some time while the older, grey man just ignored Mama’s tirade and stared only at me. I could tell by the little smile on his lips that he knew me, knew what I was, knew how I was trembling in my pretty dress as he continued just to stare at me; and, yes, I think he was admiring me as well, the pretty girl I’d become. He didn’t care how he was going to hurt Mama and Trudi - or me. I could see that he was a single-minded man. I was in very deep trouble.

When Mama wound down, I moved up to her and slipped my arm through hers. In our heels, we were the same height. I kissed her on the cheek, her soft skin and lovely fragrance almost overwhelming me. Mama turned to me, startled, and began to hug me. I hugged her back while the men just looked at us in amazement. Trudi had to come and get a hug as well, looking at me in horror as she realized, long before Mama, what it was that I was going to do.

“All right,” I said to the secret agent, if that is what he was. My skirt swayed about my stockings, and my bra was tight on my sensitive chest as I hugged a sobbing Mama. “I’m Erich.” I heard the American gasp.

Mama said, "No!" Trudi began to cry and the three of us were joined in a united family hugging and weeping session.

My mascara was smudged, I was sure, as I stood, trembling in my mother's and sister's arms. I could barely mumble as I asked the sighing policeman, "Well, what do I have to do now?"

CROSSDRESSING

They cut my hair. That was the worst of it. When I thought of how long it had taken me to grow my long blonde hair over my shoulders, all the brushing to keep it clean, how my hair framed my face, all the braiding, how Frank and Kurt had liked to run their hands through it, how it had gathered at my neck and caressed me, how it had flowed down my back when I was seventeen and almost reached my waist before Mama had laughingly trimmed it back, that was the worst. They cut my hair and robbed me of all my power and attraction as a girl.

I had to dress in boys' clothing, a shirt, underpants and a vest, a tie (!), and a dark suit. It was horrible. My breasts stuck out and I couldn't get the belt to close tightly enough. The pants almost slid over my hips. They wouldn't stay at my waist.

Kluge, the man who had come for me at the hotel, smiled his sardonic smile as I struggled to keep the black pants up. I didn't see why he was smiling until he went for nail polish remover. He had me sit down at a small table in the hotel room where I was imprisoned. He did my fingers, cutting my nails bluntly so that they looked masculine. He removed all the pink varnish I had so lovingly applied for our expected visit to the dancing club. Kluge also removed the varnish from my toes.

I was most uncomfortable. I was itching everywhere. I needed the soft padding as well as the uplift of my bra.

Instead of my silky stockings and heels, I had black wool-
len socks, not even knee-highs, and oxford shoes, laced up
and very masculine.



“We are going to insist that you bandage those,” Kluge said, pointing at my chest, “and pad your waistline. Your mother will not like what Frau Mueller has done to her son. The Countess von Hitte did not expect her son to be turned into a daughter. She would not have wanted you like this.”

I shook my head. My hair, my head, was too light. There was no tug at my ears, nothing heavy and swirling about my neck or straying onto my face. I hated Kluge, his manner. I hated the stupid, gawking girl, the hair-dresser, so surprised at what she had to do for me. He'd brought her in to cut my hair 'properly', like a boy's. Even though she'd been puzzled, she was in the end only one of my torturers.

“I don't want to be here, either,” I snapped at him. “Why don't you just admit that you made a mistake and let me go?”

Kluge winced. “Your voice,” he said, shaking his head scornfully. “You have the voice of a girl.”

“That's what I am,” I told him angrily, “I am a girl.”

Kluge shook his head and sighed. I pointed to the mirror. Even short, combed hair couldn't disguise my features, my eyebrows so nicely curved, my darkened eyelashes curled, my skin so soft and almost translucent. My figure did strange things to boys' clothing. I looked like a model dressed in men's attire for some kind of fashion shoot.

I heard Kluge sigh deeply again as I got up and walked to the sofa, deliberately swaying my hips, to pick up the suit jacket that he and the unspeaking, horrified American officer had brought me to wear.

“You even walk like a girl,” Kluge said. I was glad to hear a note of exasperation in his voice. I buttoned the

jacket on the 'wrong' side but he got up and redid it, his face grim as he looked at me.

"Ulrike von Hitte can make a man out of anyone," Kluge said, a cruel, little smile playing across his lips. A cold chill went through me. I visibly shuddered which only made him smile even more.

I followed him from the hotel room leaving behind my black, girl's coat, my peasant blouse and skirt, my red high heels, my black nylons, my dark blue garter belt, my blue lace panties, my dark blue slip that came to mid-thigh, and my pendant earrings, a match to my necklace of several strands of blue beads. My purse with my makeup and perfume was left on the sofa along with my hair. I wanted them all to go back to Mama, but Kluge wouldn't promise that. All he would say was, "We'll see," to my anxious requests.

There was a lump in my throat as I thought of Mama and Trudi. I'd last seen them, standing on the steps of the Hotel Grunewald, weeping, as we'd held each other for the last time. "My daughter," Mama had whispered.

"I'll always be," I'd whispered back, choking on my own tears.

"My sister," Trudi had wept, clinging to me as we'd done for so long as we'd slept in Mama's basement in those few golden weeks.

"Always," I'd whispered to my sister and again to my mother. But there was no turning back. Kluge was blackmailing us with his threats to have Mama arrested for entering the West illegally. I couldn't stand the exposure or the 'something worse' that might happen to Mama and Trudi if I didn't go with the man.

So now I was off with an agent of some kind whom I didn't know to meet a mother I didn't know. The way that Kluge had described her made her seem, however, to be

some kind of tyrant, persistent and ruthless in getting her own way. I dreaded meeting her.

Going through the Berlin air terminal as a boy was a trial for Kluge and for me. The looks I got were unnerving, though I was still very angry, and drew on that to face people down.

“You do not have to walk like that,” Kluge told me angrily when we were seated. A puzzled stewardess had gone off with our tickets. As if I could help walking in the way I’d learned to walk in the last eleven or twelve years. “You walk as if you’re wearing a skirt and high heels.”

“I wish I was,” I sighed. That shut him up.

There was a limousine waiting for us in Munich with a sneering, smug driver, Franz. We drove for four hours without a break in order to be at the Herreinhof Chalet for breakfast. For a time, I napped, lying down on the back seat while Kluge watched me from a folded-down seat behind Franz.

Chalet wasn’t the proper word to describe the von Hitte residence. Fortress would have been better. The woman who lived and ruled there, the woman Kluge introduced to me as my mother, could easily have been the Warden.

Countess Ulrike von Hitte, her full name was much longer, sat behind a huge, polished oaken desk and looked me over from blue eyes that were very familiar. I gulped as I realized it was just like looking into the eyes in my own face as I looked at her. I wished that I had my hair and a dress and heels. Then I might feel equal to her as a woman, at least. It was as if I was called in to see the headmistress of my school. I twisted my head slightly as I looked at the woman called the Countess but there was no reassuring swish of hair or earrings along my bare neck.

I quaked as the cold, blue eyes, in a pinched, aristocratic face, her iron-grey hair short and brushed straight back, like mine now, watched me without changing expression. She did not rise to greet me.

"This one will not go to school, Herr Kluge," the Countess von Hitte said, her voice raspy and breathless. "We will find him proper tutors. His special problems," she had to pause and breathe heavily several times while I flushed under her penetrating gaze, "we will work on together. Now," she spoke directly to me, waving Kluge away, out of the room. Surprisingly, Kluge left immediately without a word. "Did Franz treat you with respect?"

I blinked, surprised at the question. "I-I don't know," I stammered, thinking of the smirks the chauffeur had given me. He hadn't been alone in doing that since Kluge had done this horrible thing to me and made me dress as a boy.

"Take no insults from Franz," ordered the Countess, rasping with every breath she took. She sounded as if she was at death's door. I couldn't think of her as Mother or Mama. "They will all try to take liberties. Servants do. But they do know how to be discreet in this household.

"To be a von Hitte, however, is to be something more than just an employer who demands confidentiality. To be a von Hitte means being responsible to no one else on this earth for your conduct. You can walk any way that you wish, speak in any way that you wish, dress in any way that you wish."

The Countess von Hitte caught the look on my face as I thought longingly of being Erika again. "You will, of course," she snapped, almost choking, "choose to be my son."

I tried not to let my disappointment show.

"There are clothes for you in your rooms," the Countess went on as I realized that she was forcing herself to talk. "We always dress for dinner at night. The dark dinner jacket will be best for you. Your fiancée, Carol von Schauenberg, will be here. You might have been old enough remember your betrothal party at Schiffers. You were three; she was six, when we arranged your marriage."

I froze with shock. Fiancée! Marriage! Me! And to a woman! If I'd ever thought of marriage, it was to a Kurt or a Frank with me the gorgeous, blushing bride. There had to be a mistake here! I shuddered with the awful thought of me being married to a woman. I looked about wildly for somewhere to run to, but in that wood-pannelled office, the windows looking out on pines or fir trees, there was nowhere familiar to escape to.

I'd been missing for twelve years, I wanted to cry out. All things like arranged marriages must be over and done with, surely, I thought in distress. But I didn't dare to speak to this woman, not with my voice the way it was, not after the way Franz had laughed when I'd answered him and told him that I'd had a good flight.

"You've come back at a most auspicious time," the Countess rasped on doggedly. "You have now displaced Carol as my heir. I intended to leave everything to her if you were not found. She is your cousin, after all."

She pressed something on her desk. Franz came in immediately as if he'd been standing outside the door.

"Show my son to his room, see he is fed today and is acquainted with the chalet," the Countess von Hitte ordered the smug chauffeur curtly, glaring at him until the expression on Franz's face changed. "And Franz, I have instructed my son on the correct behavior he must expect from servants."

The smugness was definitely gone as I was shown through the luxuriously carpeted hallways to a suite of rooms, richly decorated and furnished beyond anything I could imagine. Franz showed me how to work the controls to move the curtains, dim the lights and call for servants. The bedroom was beyond what Franz called my sitting room. Through the long windows, I could see gardens stretching down a well-tended valley up to the edge of the forest and mountains beyond.

I found the bathroom off the bedroom, with a huge bath and what appeared to be gold fittings. Trudi would have loved it, I thought at first, but, as I looked around, I realized what I disliked about the rooms, why they seemed so foreign. They were masculine rooms. The pictures on the walls were battle scenes and hunts. The colors everywhere were dark brown, harsh and male. There was nothing soft or feminine, white, pink or frilled, anywhere.

I spent a boring morning and afternoon, eventually napping on the dark brown counterpane of the bed. It was clean and functional but not like my own soft, frilly pillow and pink sateen sheets under the sloping gable roof of my bedroom. There were no gaily dressed dolls nor femininely padded chairs and definitely no makeup mirror nor pink-shaded night lamps.

I was woken by Franz with the Countess's order to dress for dinner in twenty minutes' time. Franz woodenly said I should attend the Countess as soon as possible in the dining room and told me how to get there.

I changed into the male evening clothes, quivering and thinking how I could have been in the arms of a man dressed like this the previous evening if only Kluge hadn't found me. If only I hadn't let myself be fingerprinted by that cute soldier. I'd never flirt with cute boys again, I

thought grimly, and then had to laugh at my thoughts. That was going to be true in more ways than one.

I used the bandages Kluge had waiting for me in the car to bind my breasts as flat as I could. I put the padded belt about my waist. In a soft, white shirt, I didn't look so bad. In my evening jacket, I looked like a little boy, like a ring bearer at a wedding. I could be male if I paid no attention to my shaped eyebrows, curled eyelashes, and ignored the little openings in the lobes of my ears where my earrings should be.

I tried to walk with a slouch along the hallways, trying to be a boy, but that only lasted until I entered the dining room.

The Countess was sitting at the head of the long table, a sherry in front of her. Standing beside her was a gorgeous, dark-haired girl in a spectacular black, beaded, evening gown, a designer original, Balmain, I was certain. I stared at her, open-mouthed, as I had a moment of longing to wear such a dress, with new sexy black underwear that Mama had bought me now that I was a girl of eighteen. Mama, of course, had lots of her own beautiful, female lingerie. Sometimes, Trudi or I had 'borrowed' panties when we'd done the washing.

The striking, brunette girl eyed me with distaste. That emotion was very clear on her face, as I ogled her beautiful dress, her diamond necklace and her earrings that were probably real. Then the expression on her face changed as she smiled, a tight, controlled smile, I thought, and sort of swayed across the room towards me.

She extended a soft, manicured hand to me, her diamond bracelet glittering from the room lights. Her soft, red lips parted, revealing perfect white teeth as she spoke. "Hello, I'm Carol Schauenberg," she said, her voice light, lilting and amused. "Do you remember me at all?"

"N-No," I squeaked as I took her hand and held it briefly. I think she expected me to kiss it.

"Your voice is too high," Carol Schauenberg said, her tone amused, her dark brown eyes glittering as she frowned in puzzlement at me. "Just how much of a girl did that woman turn you into?"

I didn't have to answer that. The Countess intervened sharply, "This is my son, Carol. All things will be righted with time."

Carol, however was undeterred by the Countess' disapproval. She gave me a look of such female superiority, reminiscent of Gitte at her worst, that I wished the floor could open up and swallow me, shirt, black bow tie, suit, shirt cufflinks and all. If only I could have worn a dress as she had, dark shiny hose like her, or her lovely, silver-edged black high heels, I'd have been able to answer her. I would have been her equal, or so I thought.

Carol kept up her disapproval of me with glances and snide remarks throughout the strange dinner. I couldn't eat despite having missed lunch. The Countess' urgings to try this and that only made things worse.

"This is the man I'm to marry?" Carol asked finally, her voice sneering at me. I shook to hear her denigrate me so obviously. I hated it that the Countess had to defend me from Carol's taunts about when I'd be entering the family business and visiting the factories in the Ruhr.

"Exactly so," said the Countess crossly. "My son is the man whom you are to marry, Carol. Von Hitte and von Schauenberg agreed. Should you however wish to withdraw, you might consider what the consequences would be to you and your family." She almost sounded hopeful that Carol would reject me. I sat there, dumbfounded, unable to add anything to their cryptic conversation.

Carol smiled and looked at me, the smile changing to a leer, while I cringed inside. "No, Aunt Ulrike, no," she said serenely. "You can depend upon me to meet my family's obligations. How about you, Erich? Will you be able to meet all of your husbandly obligations?"

I felt distinctly nauseated as I looked at Carol's lovely face. I had to think hard to control myself as I heard the Countess describe her, a shapely, perfumed, breathtakingly beautiful woman, as my future 'wife'. It was a relief when Carol finally picked up her purse and called for the butler, Breiser, to bring her coat. She had a date, she said, with a real captain of industry. Her smile at me left me in no doubt what she thought of my pitiful attempts to be a man.

The Countess' face showed no emotion as we shuffled to the top of the hallway, the dinner over. She leaned on my outstretched arm as Carol swept down the stairs, vamping Breiser a little, leaving through the massive oak doors to the waiting limousine.

"She'll be difficult for you, that one," said the Countess, leaning on me even more as we eased along the second floor hallway towards her lounge, opposite the office where I'd met her earlier that day. "If you wish me to, I will break that connection for you."

The relief must have shown in my face. She stopped in front of a Durer woodblock print, an original, I guessed.

"I will tell you, however, why you should marry her," my mother, the Countess, hissed at me, her eyes riveted to mine. "The Schauenbergs have the politicians, the papers. We have the money. Do not be thinking that our 'von' means that we are the aristocrats in such a match. We received it from the Nazis and I refuse to give it up. Let others deal with that.

“The Schauenbergs have had their status as nobility since the Hohenzollerns moved to Brandenburg. They are too political to use their ‘von’ today but they do need von Hitte capital to prop up their political adventures since they lost their Silesian mines to the Russians. They knew the end was coming for them which is why they proposed a union of our families.”

“Carol Schauenberg is my cousin?” I finally managed to ask.

The Countess nodded. “My sister and her mother’s brother. They’re all dead. Nazis, all of them.”

Countess von Hitte started again for her lounge from where a grey-haired woman came hurrying to help her. The woman looked at me venomously as I tried to help the woman who hadn’t told me anything about how she was my mother, how I’d been lost, nor had made any familiar gesture of motherliness to me.

“I have talked to Carol for a week about you,” the Countess said at last, pausing in her doorway. I found it so awkward to trail her in the awful boy’s clothes I had to wear. “She does not like it at all that you have been found, Erich, and restored to us, but she knows why she must marry you. She would prefer to inherit all the von Hitte holdings without you as she thought she would until a week ago.

“Take some old-fashioned advice. Give her two brats quickly, make her agree to that, and then let Carol live her own life. You can live yours. You can hibernate in the mountains if you wish and become Erika again if you have a mind to that sort of thing. You will be much better off without Carol around you, manipulating you, at the height of her woman’s power. Believe me.”

The grey-haired, older servant looked at me but not a flicker of emotion crossed her face, similar in that way to the woman who called herself my mother.

"I won't ask for a son's kiss," the Countess ended, one hand resting on the door frame as she gasped for breath after her long speech. "I never believed in that when you were little; and I won't start it now."

Countess von Hitte turned away from me while her maid, I think that's what she was, closed the door and left me to find my way to my own rooms on the other side of the huge chalet.

Drained, I went straight to bed in silk pyjamas that were a little like some of Mama's. I always preferred nighties and that made me think of Mama and Trudi. I let go after the day I'd gone through and wept uncontrollably, my arms so girlishly about me, hugging myself for quite a time once I'd started. I only hoped in my misery that they were missing me as much as I was missing them. I was still a daughter and a sister, I said to myself. I'd survived one day as Erich von Hitte. I didn't know for a while if I could stand one more.

THE FIANCEE

I met Carol Schauenberg again three days later as I walked along one of the solitary forest walkways on the mountain side of the chalet. She was standing beside the path, her tight sweater and figure-hugging jeans leaving no doubt about her femaleness. I was dressed in similar fashion but padded and bound. I really felt like a boy when I saw her lean against a tree and give me a lopsided smile. I could, of course, I thought, have looked just like her if I wasn't so bound and padded.

"The Countess said you were probably out walking," Carol said, scrutinizing my shuffling walk and masculinely-cut clothes. "She suggested we need to see more of

each other before the wedding ceremony." She smiled at my obvious discomfort at such a suggestion. "Why don't you try the high paths?" She indicated the public walkways that led well away from the von Hitte estates, as good as telling me to get lost. And good riddance; she'd said with her eyes.

"I-I d-don't think I-I'm quite ready to meet people yet," I said as huskily as I could. I had practiced my 'new' voice alone; she was one of the first I'd tried it on. She gave no sign that I'd spoken in any way differently than I had before.

The thought of the smiles and suppressed giggles directed at me by the young maids of the chalet was already too much for me to put up with. I'd normally have been friends with those girls of my age. In a class with them as schoolgirls like me, I'd have found out what I needed to do to have fitted in and done it.

With me as a boy, however, I was just a figure of fun to them. How I regretted all the fun I've ever made of some of the less attractive boys in my school. I should've been kinder to their fumbling efforts to impress me. I silently prayed to have that opportunity to make it up to those boys some day.

Despite the Countess's admonitions, I didn't doubt that I was a topic of intense speculation and gossip in the chalet and out in the valley or wherever the girls went on their days off. How could they not talk about me? I'd arrived out of nowhere to claim my inheritance. Worse was the story that the reason no one could find me was that I'd been living as a girl all the years in which I'd disappeared.

Little did any of them know that I'd have agreed with those who thought I was a wretched example of manhood and who believed that I should be returned to the situation I'd been in before Ulricke von Hitte had found me. If

only my birth mother had come and visited me in Berlin and brought me back as Erika, I often thought in those first few days; how different would my reception by the family servants have been? I think I could have made them like me if only I'd been allowed to come back as I was, a girl.

Carol stepped out from the tree and began to walk with me, sauntering with her arms folded, as I wanted to fold mine. I put my arms behind my back, swallowing as she made a face at me.

"You're probably right, Erika. You aren't really ready to face anyone as a man, are you? Meeting people would be embarrassing for us all," Carol said, looking at me speculatively. "And what would they think of me, marrying you so hastily once they got a look at you? But you're going to be a man after all, aren't you, and take over all the von Hitte businesses, United Enterprises, Danbank, all that?"

United Enterprises? What was she talking about? That was likely the second or third greatest industrial power in the country. Was the Countess that rich? Well, I knew she was powerful. To have a man like Kluge, whatever he was in the government bureaucracy, working for her, and the Americans jumping to do her bidding in finding me, told me how powerful my mother was. I just hadn't realized how powerful, what kind of business power she controlled. No, I couldn't possibly be expected to get into running anything like that, I thought miserably. Not an untrained schoolgirl like me.

"The Countess has only months to live, you know," Carol went on, giving me a nod as I stopped, startled by what she'd said. "And here you come out of the woodwork." She sounded very bitter. I knew she had a right to be just that. "After all the time I've spent working with the old woman, learning how it all hangs together, getting

to know all the power players, the top bosses. I could run this thing, dammit, on my own. I could!"

I shuddered as Carol gave me a predatory look, eye-to-eye. We were as tall as each other in similar walking shoes.

"Why shouldn't you just go on as before?" I began, my arms folded like a girl's across my chest as I walked. I had to deliberately think about it to walk like a man with my hands down and my rear not wobbling at all.

"Your bloody mother has replaced me with you on ten boards, in every job I did for her, starting tomorrow," Carol said hotly. "I don't have any status anywhere to go on doing the things for von Hitte that I did before."

"I-I didn't know," I said meekly, hoping to defuse Carol's anger. It'd worked with boys before, sometimes with teachers and other adults, if I became all meek and teary.

Carol snorted at me, however, not calmed by my meekness. We turned onto the steps that led down to the rear wall and gate of the chalet. She put a hand on my arm and stopped me.

"Wait," she snapped, staring at me as if trying to bore into my skull and read what was imprinted there on my brain.

"You're trying to do something with your voice, aren't you?" Carol said slowly, her eyes squinting at me thoughtfully.

I nodded, entranced by being able to look at Carol too, so closely. Her eye makeup was so finely applied. I longed to ask her how she did it, or, if she had someone do it for her, who it was at the chalet. Her soft pink lipstick was so unlike the reds I'd preferred before but now I wanted to experiment and see how other colors would

look on me. I'd been going to do that when I put on my beautiful ball gown to go out with Trudi and Mama to dance all night with handsome men. I sighed as I realized where my thinking was leading me. I had to mentally order myself to concentrate on being Erich and not Erika.

"Well, it's a start," Carol said, her smile more mocking than teasing. She sighed, too. "I guess we're going to have to be married soon, you and I. That's part of the Countess' message in moving you into my place, isn't it? She wants to see us married before she dies."

My heart and stomach lurched. I was afraid to speak. I smelled Chanel as Carol moved very close to me, taking my soft, girlish hands into hers. They were just like mine. I just wished that Kluge had left my nails alone. They had been as long and as shaped as those that dug into my palms as Carol held my hands.

"Kiss me," she said.

I stared at Carol, shocked. Kiss her? Kiss another woman? Ugh! What was Carol thinking? I couldn't kiss another woman! I wasn't a lesbian! Carol then put her hands on my shoulders. I went rigid. She turned her head slightly and kissed me. Her lips were warm and sticky, moving across mine. I felt so weird. Kissing another woman! It wasn't unpleasant as I wasn't really another woman, I began to realize disturbingly, as she pulled away, breaking off our first kiss. I didn't think much of it. I'd much rather have been kissing one of my boyfriends.

"Just as I thought," Carol said gloomily. She looked at me pensively. "You know," she went on, her anger rising, "Erich, you look like a girl, you walk like a girl, you talk like a girl, you have a shape like a girl, and you even kiss like a girl. I'm not going to call you Erich any more. You really are an Erika, you know!"

I wanted to object but I didn't. My senses were still digesting the strange impression that her kissing had made on me. A girl wasn't supposed to kiss another girl, not seriously anyway, in the way she'd kissed me. I felt different, somehow, as if I'd done something very bad. I expected to be punished for it. So I kissed like a girl. That was what I was, had been for so long, what I wanted to be. It wasn't a bad thing at all, I wanted to scream. I didn't mind at all, either, if she called me Erika. It was, after all, how I thought of myself.

Carol let me go suddenly and skipped daintily down the steps to the garden gate which she held for me.

"Just in time to dress for dinner, Fraulein Erika," she said with another mocking smile. "I'm going to wear a low-cut, red dress to show off my breasts. Don't you wish that you could, too?"

Oh, I did wish I could have worn a dress just like the one Carol described. I'd have hugged her and let our breasts press against each other's while I lightly kissed her scented cheek as she kissed mine. It would have been marvellous, I thought jealously.

Carol ran away through the gardens, skipping girlishly, laughter floating back on the air, laughter directed at me, her goodness-knows-what fiancé.

IN CAROL'S ROOM

Carol had lived at the chalet for some time, I found out from the Countess, even though she was hardly ever there, at least since I'd arrived. She had rooms on an upper floor, in the same wing as mine, above me. But she was never in.

"Carol has to work for me," the Countess said to me in her expressionless voice as I stood before her desk in my business suit and dark tie. "You must learn to use her

without ever giving way to her. I hope you will learn this very quickly from me."

It was strange but after a few days I was actually beginning to like the old, chronically ill woman. Not that there was any sign of warmth or feeling in her manner to me as a person. It was just the non-judgmental attitude she seemed to have of the world in general.

The Countess von Hitte saw nothing, or so it seemed to me, in my appearance, manner or voice to disqualify me from being the heir to a fortune I couldn't even begin to comprehend. I was a von Hitte and that seemed to be enough for her. Nothing I had done, or had done to me, changed that, she said to me each day. Blood will out, she'd added peremptorily, on the only occasion that I managed to ask her why she bothered with me when Carol could do everything she wanted me to do, much better than me.

One afternoon, with lunch over, the Countess became irritable with the work of instructing me on banking interests in Hamburg, Mainz and Frankfurt.

"Go to Carol's room," she said. "Breiser or Hoth will show you where it is. Carol has the prospectus for each of these banks and funds. She was going to take them over for me. Now it is yours," she wheezed and wheezed, grimacing, "so you might as well start now."

Franz the chauffeur it was who was delegated the job of showing me to Carol's rooms. We found her bedroom to be in considerable disarray, her clothing everywhere.

"She won't let it be tidied unless she gives express permission," apologized Franz as we stepped over lingerie and nighties to the corner desk where files and computer disks were spread about in random disorder.

When we returned with them to the Countess's office, the old, grey-haired woman only glanced fitfully at them.

“Look them over yourself, Erich, and give them back to Carol when you’re sure you know all about our hold-ings,” she finally rasped, the rattle in her chest very pronounced. “I can’t work any more today.”

I was dismissed curtly and left with the pile of folders and a stack of computer disks. They were easy to read through. I finished them fairly quickly, I could always read fast. I took them back to Carol’s rooms, thinking only of a long, afternoon walk by the lake, getting away by myself so that I could dream of Mama and Trudi.

Once I got to Carol’s room, however, no one with me, everything stacked on her desk, it was only natural that I look around. Strange feelings stirred within me. There was a dark lace slip on the bed just like the one I’d worn at home. I picked it up, sighing with pleasure at the silky smoothness of it, holding it against me to see it in the mirror.

A thin-faced, delicate boyish girl, or was it a girlish boy, looked back at me. My attempts to be a man had affected the way I stood. I looked somewhat silly holding the slip against my sweater and pants. I dropped the slip on the bed and turned towards the door. Then I saw that dress over the back of a chair by her dressing table. It was the Balmain, long, black and just perfect for a blonde like me. The thin, silver shoulder straps sparkled at me.

I felt a strange apprehension in my stomach. It was as if I was empty inside and suddenly I was aware that I was starving. My jaws seemed to be chattering on their own but it wasn’t from cold. My hands were shaking as I touched the soft, delicate fabric. I knew I would look good in that elegant, sparkling dress. I had the figure for it. I could already feel that my breasts were thrusting forward in anticipation of the dress being about me, clinging to me. But my mouth was dry. I trembled all over, enervated by the emotions washing over me.

I don't know why I did it but I went over to the door to Carol's room and locked it. My stomach was heaving as I began to take off my hateful, masculine clothes.

I didn't try to deny what I was thinking about. I grimaced to the mirror as I stood there in male underpants. I was a boy with bandages about his chest and padding at his waist. I removed the bandages. Even my short hair and lined boxer shorts couldn't hide my wonderful femininity any longer. My breasts stood out, rounded and alert. My figure curved in and out. My hips were rounded as they should be. My legs and body were hairless. I was female.

I knew just what it was I was going to do. I found a pair of panties, black naturally, on the floor. With trembling fingers, I pulled off my underpants and drew on the panties to cover my maleness. I wished I had a gaff or a belt like the ones I'd worn for so long as Mama's daughter.

There were dark stockings, however, and a garter belt, which Carol didn't seem to have worn, but just left out. I donned them eagerly, my skin feeling so pleased by the touch of nylon as I eased the stockings over my calves and thighs. I would've loved to sit there in Carol's underwear and paint my nails. It would have been a turn-on to see my red nails fixing my stockings to my garter belt, but, it had to be enough just to attach the stockings and stroke them tight to my thighs and hips.

There was a black bra, too, at the foot of the padded chair in front of Carol's mirror. I had to adjust the straps tighter and pad with some cotton batting but the mirror showed me that I was beginning to look like myself now except for my hair.

I found dangling earrings that went into my ears, hurting a little. A collar of pearls went around my neck. The

fall of the slip about my legs brought on such a feeling of 'home' that I almost cried aloud with pleasure. I was Mama's daughter again. This was how I should always be dressing!

My whole body shook with delight as I put on the black, evening dress. It was tight at my hips and breasts but loose at my waist. The silver straps were just wide enough to conceal the thin straps of Carol's bra and the slip I'd put on. Suddenly, I was looking at Erika again, in a slinky dress, clearly a very happy Erika, moving so femininely in her wonderful dress, not the morose Erich who had first entered the room.

Surprisingly, my hair didn't look so bad. Lots of girls have short hair, as well as thin, curved eyebrows as I had. With one of Carol's combs, I backcombed as best I could, priming it, setting it off with Carol's dangling, pear drop, diamond earrings, left out so negligently on her dresser. At least I had bangs across my forehead. It could be all right as a 'look' if I really made up my eyes.

Did I dare to try her makeup? The house was quiet, still. I went to the window. Carol's room looked over the valley, as mine did. There was no sign of anything moving on the winding drive up to the house. There was no traffic at all.

The eyeliner was indeed the final touch. I was a very sophisticated Erika now with gorgeous pink lipstick. I only lightly dusted with blush and powder. Oh, there I was, ready to go out. I leaned forward and lightly brushed between my breasts with makeup and with a little perfume. I had cleavage! I was a woman and ready for a man to a date, someone unlike a Frank or Kurt, a man who'd take me to a night club, not to the theatre or a supervised dance at school.

No, this Erika was a woman, me, pirouetting in her high heels and swirling her lovely dress about her tight stockings, caressing her legs so wonderfully femininely. She was ready for a real date with a real man, perhaps Paul Laubmann, four years ahead of me in school, whom all of us girls had had crushes on as silly little teenagers.

Paul had said of me to another upper school prefect, and Gitte overheard, "That blonde Erika is so gorgeous! We'll all be chasing her in a year or two. I know I will!" I would have let him catch me, too, but he left for university that year.

I found another pair of Carol's high heels, higher than her black court shoes and squeezed into them. We were the same size, but my foot was wider. I danced around the room, imagining myself in Paul's arms. I loved Carol's heels but it would have been painful to have to walk a long way in them or to have to dance for an hour at a time. I could hear them clatter on the hardwood floor as well. That sent more goose bumps of pleasure up my spine.

I checked the window. Nothing on the road. I checked the mirror and exulted in pleasure. I was a girl again and felt the need to explore Carol's wardrobe of thrilling, feminine, saucy dresses. I longed to try every one on, to pose before the mirror and check my look in short miniskirts and heavier makeup.

Inside her closet, however, I came on the real prize. Carol had wigs of all kinds, of all shades, all properly positioned on porcelain heads. With excited but careful fingers, my shaking controlled, I slipped off a head of blonde curls, almost my own natural color, and put it on.

The wig was much curlier and bouncier than my real hair but it caressed my neck, filling and warming the empty space that had been such a cold reminder of what

I'd lost. I sat for quite a while on Carol's bed, just studying myself. I turned the mirror so that it showed off all of me from the delightful, dainty slippers on my feet and the stockings peeping from beneath the dress, past my tight bodice and genuine cleavage, to my new hair and earrings.

My breasts ached no longer. I was a prettier, older, 'flashier' Erika of whom Mama wouldn't have approved, not leaning on the bed as I was, practically inviting a boy to come and play with me. Mama wouldn't have liked it when I repositioned the slit on the dress to show off my slim, dark-stockinged leg. She would have disliked the brightness of my lipstick, the length and styling of my hair, and, of course, the plunging neckline that showed my bosom off to such advantage.

I loved the way that I looked, however. Even days in a boy's costume hadn't changed me from who I was. I vamped a little as I stood up, imagining the looks on my male classmates' faces. I smiled at myself. Don't be so serious, I thought, as I bent to show off even more cleavage. Mama must have expected me to be like this one day, even if some of my figure was padded a little. Certainly after our last visit to Dr. Kurst, Mama wouldn't have minded at how flirty I wanted to become as a girl.

I felt so femininely sensual as I twirled away from Carol's bed. I felt so female and sexy as the dress clung to me. I wanted Frank, anyone, even Franz, I thought with a giggle, imagining the look on his face if he came in and saw me like this. I wanted to lie down again in the park as I had with Kurt. I wanted to feel his lips once more on my lipsticked mouth, Kurt's hands about me, caressing me, Kurt telling me what a beautiful girl I was, while I pressed in tight to him, demurely, of course.

One glance at the window ended it all. There it was. The limousine! Coming right up to the house. Grey,

black-roofed, speeding up the dusty road as if determined to catch me dressed as I was.

Frantically, I began to tear off Carol's clothes. Thank goodness she was such a slob. I threw the dress over the chair. The wig I hurried back onto its head. Other clothing followed as fast as frantic fingers could get something off. Never had I put off my female clothes and put on other clothing, horrible and male as it was, as fast as I did this time, smearing my man's shirt with lipstick on the inside before I remembered the makeup I had on. I dumped the earrings on the dressing table, grabbed tissues and began wiping, panic beginning to set in.

The eye makeup wouldn't come off! The eyeliner wasn't even smeared! The mascara clung to my eyelashes as if it belonged there! I heard the squeal of brakes and the thump of a car door. I ran for it, fumbling to unlock, then shut Carol's door. I tore down the passageway to the stairs, down to my own room, frightened that someone would see or hear me.

I ran to the bathroom and scrubbed furiously at my face. It took me half an hour before I was convinced that there were no telltale marks on my eyes or my mouth. Then, the nervous reaction set in. What had I done with all the tissues I'd used? Was my bathroom clean enough? Wouldn't Carol be sure to notice someone had been in her clothes? The folders! The neat stack would tell I'd been in there!

And then I felt depressed. Why should I be so defensive? I'd only dressed as I should be dressed in front of everyone, been the person I was. Tears began to flow. It was just so wrong to be pilloried, as I knew I would be, if I appeared to everyone as a woman. I shouldn't have run. I should have faced them, I thought angrily. But then I thought of what ruin such an action would bring on

Mama and Trudi. I cried for quite a while, by myself, as lonely as I had ever been in my life.

ERIKA REAPPEARS

My heart was beating loudly, ferociously, as I approached the dinner table that evening. The Countess frowned at me, as if she knew I'd done something wrong, increasing my trepidation, but Carol said nothing. She waved a bored greeting from the other end of the room and continued reading an article in a Berliner newspaper.

She folded it up finally and resumed an ongoing argument with the woman who said she was my mother. "I'm telling you, Countess," Carol said. "I don't think anyone in the Frankfurt branch understands publishing or the size of advances you have to give to ensure the best authors are writing for you. My father has made mistakes in the past but he has to have a larger line of credit to get the best people working for both our papers and our publishing houses."

"Listen to this, Erich," the Countess rasped at me. "You will be the one to decide this request."

Carol appeared startled. She wasn't the only one. I was distraught as well but as much for the silence about me dressing that afternoon as anything. I felt that Erika was lurking in my mind, ready to emerge from my stupid appearance. I wanted so much to dress properly for dinner, to be in a red cocktail dress like Carol. She stared for a moment at the Countess before turning her attention to me, a sneer in her expression.

"Yes," said the Countess. "It is time for my son to make his own mistakes. Erich will be appointed President of the Badener Credit Banks from the first of the month. Ask him for your loan, Carol. See if you can get him to go against my advice."

Carol's mouth tightened. I trembled as she continued looking at me, the anger on her face so evident. "Him?" she sneered. The way she pronounced the word made her connotation clear. I agreed with her. I hated the way my supposed mother described me, using masculine pronouns all the time.

Carol was not one of those people who look any less beautiful when emotionally upset. She looked exquisite in the red, sequined dress I had touched in her closet. Her dark hair was delicately waved, the cut so casual and expensive. Her makeup was equally intriguing, the grading of her eye shadow and rouge subtle. Her red, pendant earrings were perfectly suited to her dress and makeup.

Oh, I wished she and I could have been girl friends. Then, perhaps, as I'd done with Silke and Gitte, we could have traded dresses on occasion. I wanted to wear that red cocktail dress. Then, I thought to myself of the times that Carol was never in her room. Yes, I could wear that beautiful dress and very soon, I thought smugly to myself.

Carol frowned at my expression, switching topics and talking rapidly about other business to the Countess; but she also seemed to be quite aware of the scrutiny I had her under. She gave her mouth a side tug of a smile that I knew was directed at me. I found it most attractive even as I shivered, knowing that she understood me, and my interests in her gorgeous clothing, while she was still much of a mystery to me.

"Enough business for tonight," the Countess interrupted, breathing with a noticeable rattle that caused both of us to look at her in surprise. But the bell was already ringing for Breiser and the dinner servants to start serving, which they did, covering our concern.

I could see why I was being rushed into the von Hitte businesses as the Countess struggled with her soup. I didn't doubt at all that my mother was more ill than she'd let me understand. I wondered how long my birth mother had left to live. Surely young people like Carol and me couldn't be expected to run a huge conglomerate like United Enterprises or institutions like the Badener Credit Banks. Those were jobs for old, powerful men, for Herr Doctor Whatever, business leader, not for a schoolgirl like me.

After dinner, at which nothing was said about my entering Carol's room, and nothing hurtful or suggestive was directed at me for the first time, Carol surprisingly did not get up and leave for her usual night out.

The Countess noticed. "Not out tonight?" she asked Carol in a voice tinged with husky amusement as we lingered over coffee in the drawing room.

Carol looked at me, her eyes contracting. It was a predatory look. It frightened me. "Since Erich is to be President of the banks that hold my family's mortgages in hand and is also to be my husband, we need to get to know each other better," she said, repeating the Countess' often-made admonition to her. Carol didn't take her eyes from my face, while I trembled under her glare.

"I have to stay in more often or Erich must come out with me," Carol added after a short pause in which neither the Countess nor I had sought to question her more. Then Carol smiled at me. I felt sick to my stomach. I felt how the mouse must feel when the beady eyes of the cobra fall upon it and the snake prepares to make its fatal strike.

"I thought you might see it that way," said the Countess smugly, while I felt nothing but apprehension. The Countess stood, leaning heavily on a walking stick I had-

n't seen her use before that night. Hoth, the woman I thought of as the Countess's maid, appeared on cue, taking my mother off to bed. I was left alone with Carol.

I expected to be confronted over my afternoon activities but all Carol did for a while was to stare moodily into the log fire that the Countess had burning each night in the drawing room fireplace.

"My family is spendthrift, you know," Carol Schauenberg said finally. "Father had a huge line of credit last year but he used it all up on himself. The Countess will take more shares from his publishing companies before he gets another loan. She owns over a quarter of our businesses already." She stared gloomily at a flaming log. "That's why I'll marry you, anyway, anywhere, anytime."

"You don't have to," I stammered, searching for a way to let Carol off the hook. She and her family could have all the money they wanted as far as I was concerned. Then I wouldn't have to marry a girl.

Carol's eyes glittered as she looked up at me. "Don't think of buying us off!" she snapped. "Or it will only get worse. My father is deeply in debt. Only the Countess buying up his bouncing checks keeps the Schauenbergs afloat.

"And me?" Carol's tone was very bitter. "I was the heiress to a vast fortune, right? I'd never have money worries. I'd pension off my father, my mother, my uncles, my cousins. I'd control my own life. Then, you show up, back from the dead. The one the Countess has been looking for, for so many years.

"Now, it's me on a pension. I give you an heir and a spare as fast as I can. I'm sure the Countess has given you that advice already, hasn't she? Then I'm out of here. You, you live your life any way you want to, playing all the little-girlie games you want."

“Carol,” I began, my throat dry, wanting to reassure her, but recognizing the truth of what she said. Some of it I didn’t care about at all but playing girly games after the Countess passed on seemed like a wonderful idea.

“No, don’t be all nice and friendly or a real martyr,” Carol sneered at me. “I won’t stand for it. Because I know how it will all turn out. You’ll get fed up with us all taking advantage of you. You’ll turn on us. It’s bound to happen. Von Hitte has resources and power you know nothing about yet. You’ll always be able to get even, always be able to crush the poor Schauenbergs.”

Carol got up suddenly and went into the great hallway where I could hear her on the phone. I sat and finished my coffee, all her words running through my mind. This wasn’t my world. Poor Schauenbergs! They owned a publishing empire worth multi-millions of marks! And Carol Schauenberg would marry me for more money and power. It wasn’t right.

Carol came back and sat staring at me for the longest while. “You see how it is?” she asked at last as if she knew exactly what I was thinking.

I could think of nothing to say. We sat in silence for a while.

“Do you know when our wedding will be?” Carol asked suddenly.

“N-No,” I answered nervously, hoping it would be a year away at least.

“I brought back my wedding dress and your morning suit today,” Carol said as I felt my temperature starting to rise. I squirmed in embarrassment. I couldn’t, really I couldn’t marry her, not a woman, and not a woman like her. “That’s why I was away so long. They weren’t quite ready.

“The Countess will give us the date tomorrow,” Carol said thoughtfully, fully aware of my distress at talk of the two of us getting married. “I think it’ll be this month. You heard her cough at dinner, didn’t you? I don’t think she’s going to last the year.”

Carol sighed as I went rigid with shock. I must admit to growing feelings for the Countess. I’d never thought to have such feelings for anyone but Mama. The Countess still, however, seemed to ignore human affection completely. I couldn’t blame her. How do you hug a child who looks and feels like a daughter to you when you’ve waited so long to greet the son of your family?

“Why couldn’t you have waited another year at least to show up, Erich?” Carol asked bitterly. “In a year’s time, I could’ve bought you off, left you to your precious Frau Buren. I’d have paid for your sex change.”

I reacted as if she’d slapped me physically. I jumped up and would have run from the room but Carol stood up with me. She stepped in front of me, belligerently, barring my way.

“Well,” she said calmly. “It’s true, isn’t it? Anyone can see the kind of man you are. You’d go back to the Burens and dress like a woman again, if you had the chance, wouldn’t you, my little fairy?”

My mind was in turmoil. It was all right for me to say such horrible things to myself when I was in a black mood, even to think things like that since I’d been torn away from my girlhood, from being Mama’s daughter, but hearing it aloud from someone else’s mouth, from Carol’s mouth, was just ugly. I couldn’t stand that other people would think me as odd as I knew myself to be.

“Let’s get dressed to go out,” Carol said finally, a smug smile as I stood there, blushing and inert. She took my cold, unwilling hand and led me after her. We went

straight up to the third floor to her room. She sarcastically invited me into her bedroom as if she knew I was longing to get in there. I was nervous just to enter but everything was neat and all the clothing had been put away.

“Come and see the dress,” Carol said to me, going directly to a door, in an alcove beside her bed that had been locked before. It led to a space that I would have called a sewing room. Different machines, clothes and seamstress mannequins were scattered about the room. On a mannequin in the center of the room, however, was the absolutely most gorgeous white lace and silk wedding dress in the world.

“Isn’t it unlucky for me to see it?” I asked anxiously, my eyes popping out of my head at the low-cut dress, a beautiful hat and delicate veil draped so skilfully on the dummy’s head.

“Would you like to try it on?” Carol asked, a wicked smile curving her re-painted lips.

I could barely control the trembling that came over me just looking at that dress and thinking how wonderful it would be to wear such a creation. Then to hear her say that and know that there was no way I could ever... It was just torture I tried not to show her.

“N-No,” I stammered.

“Oh, come on,” Carol said archly. “We haven’t actually seen you in a dress, have we, since you got here, darling Erika? Maybe you’re so tacky as a woman that you couldn’t carry it off.”

Carol let my hand go to stalk across the sewing room and stand beside the dress, stroking it provocatively, smiling sardonically at me. I didn’t doubt that she knew exactly the emotions that were running through my overheated body. Oh, I hated the bindings about my chest and the harsh scraping of my male suit against me. I

hated so much being a boy. I couldn't even tell her how lovely I found the dress to be, how fantastic she'd look beside me when we were married.

I retreated, my face afire, my heart pounding, to the safety of Carol's real bedroom. She came after me, flicking the door to the sewing room shut as she advanced.

Carol pursued me as I backed away, trembling all over at the thoughts she'd put in my head of me wearing the wonderful white wedding dress. She came right after me and put her arms about my neck. My senses reeled at her touch, overwhelmed by her feminine perfume and the pressure of her female body against mine.

"Oh, Erich," Carol said, pouting at me, just inches from my face. "You're going to have to be a stronger girl than this or I'm just going to eat you up. I'm sure Aunt Ulricke has already told you that, hasn't she?"

Carol kissed my trembling lips as I stood, a quivering statue, and my world flipped upside down. Her lips were so warm and soft, demanding in a way, but worse, disturbing, unlike the kiss she'd given me on the back steps. I liked it this time as I hadn't the first time. Yes, I had to admit it to myself while my jangling nerves did pyrotechnics inside me. Yes, I did actually like the touch and feel of her. I liked the touch and feel of a woman against me. I liked the touch and feel of Carol Schauenberg. And yet it felt so instinctively wrong that I, Erika Buren, should like to be kissed by a woman. I tentatively kissed her back as she pushed against me.

"Mmm," Carol said at last, breaking free of our clingy kiss and staring at me. She could see my embarrassment at enjoying kissing a woman. She smiled smugly at me again. "Much more like a man," she murmured. "You've been practising, haven't you?"

Aghast, I shook my head. Carol burst out laughing at my consternation. I cursed myself for letting myself kiss this, this *woman* with her arms about me, her breasts pushing so definitely against my bandaged chest. Oh, I thought with disgust at myself. I really must be strange to like this, kissing and hugging another woman even a little bit. Idiot, a part of me said. You aren't a woman, you idiot. This is the way you were supposed to feel all of your life. That's why my mother had me engaged as a child to marry a girl like Carol.

"Well, let's get ready to go out," said Carol, giving me another penetrating look. She twirled around so that I could unzip her dress. With confusion and excitement coursing through me, I did unzip her, her skin so soft wherever I touched her, making me blush even though she couldn't see me.

Then Carol half-turned and indicated her black, lacy bra. With shaking fingers, I opened that for her, too. To my great astonishment, she then proceeded to totally undress before me, unconcerned with any unease I might be feeling at seeing her naked.

I was so embarrassed. I didn't know where to look as she shook her breasts free of all restraint, took off her pantyhose, and even her panties, all the while talking about some place called the Alpine Club.

"Come on," Carol said suddenly, frowning at me. "Take that suit and shirt off, too."

"What?" I gasped, my senses numb. I'd seen naked girls like her before, of course, in the showers at school. There, they all thought that I was a modest girl, keeping on her panties when in the school bathrooms.

I wasn't the most modest girl at Fasching by any means. Alma Steffel always had to wear a bathing suit whenever she went in the shower. Her mother insisted,

she said, mortified when the teachers came around and checked that she was doing what her mother insisted she do. I was one of several girls who were supposed to keep on their underwear for modesty's sake in the girls' locker rooms, though I did take off my bra after I had 'bloomed' enough. None of the girls knew, nor could I tell them, that I should be considered to be a boy, with the male parts I secretly concealed. They'd have attacked me, surely, if they'd known.

I'd seen many naked girls in the showers and felt so wonderful, standing and chatting with my own breasts exposed, the girls finding nothing wrong with me, accepting me as one of them. Looking at Carol was different, though. She was firmly fleshed everywhere. She was a woman while we'd only been girls, our breasts still growing, still soft. Our legs weren't as femininely rounded as Carol's. Our hips were often bonier. We'd giggled about our developing bodies and padded our bras, the more developed helping the less developed with advice and loans of pads as needed.

"Don't you want to dress properly tonight?" Carol asked with an enigmatic smile that made me feel so confused and so nervous. She stood and stretched, her womanly, naked body so voluptuous. I felt undeveloped and skinny beside her. "I've set it up with two guys for us."

My mouth dropped open as the enormity of what Carol had just said to me sank in. I tried to speak but my emotions were such a jumble. Nothing came out. This naked girl, smiling at me, actually expected me to dress in female clothing, in her beautiful clothes, no less, as I so wanted to do, to return to being the girl I'd been. And she spoke of men, of setting something up with two men! Of going on a date with me as a girl, or so it seemed to me.

"They're expecting two sexy, attractive, young girls," Carol went on, confirming every silly conjecture with a

smile that for once was not a sneer, but was actually friendly and encouraging. Could I actually do this with her? Should I? Did I mishear her? Did she really want me to dress in her clothes and show her what Erika was really like, the girl she was going to marry?

“If you really are a transvestite, you should be jumping at this chance to dress in my clothes,” Carol laughed, thrilling sensations going through me. It was true what I’d heard! She wanted me to dress like the girl I really was! “So let’s get with it, darling Erika.”

I wanted to protest at what she’d called me. I was only a transvestite when I wore male clothing, I wanted to argue, but hearing her use my name thrilled me. It was so strange to hear it on her lips! What she was saying began to sink in. Oh, I did so much want to dress properly, to be Erika again, but would I really be that to her, however I dressed? Probably not.

She probably wanted to humiliate me in some way. That was why she wanted me in female clothes. I knew my mother wouldn’t allow me to do such a thing if she knew what Carol was proposing. No matter, I thought sourly. I wanted to be Erika again. I knew I’d surprise Carol if I dressed as I wanted. Oh, I did so want to dress as me again!

Carol turned to her dresser and took out sets of black silk panties from a drawer. She put on one and came and stood before me, looking at me eye-to-eye. “What’s the matter?” she taunted as she stretched the second set of panties in front of my face. “Afraid to let me see the real Erika? Afraid to be a real woman tonight?”

Carol draped the panties on the bed and undid my dark dinner jacket. I let her. I couldn’t decide whether to make a fuss and obey the Countess or to shimmy over and select a pretty dress that would make me feel

super-girlish. I decided to let Carol decide! Then the Countess couldn't blame me! Such infantile thinking but still, if Carol saw me as Erika, maybe she'd stop all this tantalizing. And if the Countess should see me, maybe she'd let me get away from all of this absurd cross-dressing she was making me do.

I quaked as I took off the man's dinner jacket and lay it across a chair. Carol, naked but for her panties, undid my leather waist belt, my white dress shirt and started to undo my pants.

"I don't have a, a gaff," I said shakily to her, trying to stop her hands from going further. The thought had hit me as my grey pants hit the floor, my open shirt revealing my bandaged chest and padded waist.

Carol was open-mouthed as she looked up at me, suddenly perhaps realizing that I was more a woman than she'd thought, particularly as I let her open the thick belt that concealed my skinny waist. She frowned at what I said about a gaff and then understanding flared in her eyes. She giggled. "I have a sanitary belt for female napkins," she said. "You could use that." She pointed to the adjoining bathroom.

I kicked off my heavy men's shoes, scraped off my horrible black socks, and headed into the bathroom, as hot as I've ever been, under Carol's astonished scrutiny. I must have looked funny with my legs so smooth and bare, so rounded like a girl, and yet wearing a man's underpants.

By scooping out some of the padding from a napkin, Carol peeping around the door at me to see what I was doing, I was able to position the belt over my private parts and push and tighten it. I had a flat front when I dropped my male underpants from me. I still had my shirt on to cover me a little as I minced back into the bed-

room, my swaying walk returning naturally with the tightness between my legs.

Carol seemed mesmerized as she handed me the panties, black, lace-edged, a match for hers, as I came across the room. I was quaking inside and trying desperately not to show my anxiety to her. I took the panties without comment and put them on even as she watched me avidly.

My front beneath the panties was quite flat and wouldn't give me away. I just mustn't drink too much. I slipped out of my shirt, slowly undid my bandages and set them aside beside the padded waistband. Carol gasped as she looked at my chest.

"My god, you really are a woman!" she exclaimed as I freed my breasts, kneading them a little to restore feeling after being bound. I tried to be emotionless as Carol looked over my hairless skin, my rounded breasts, my narrow waist, my girlish hips and derriere, and my shapely, shaved, feminine legs. Inside, though, I could hardly bear her looking at me.

We were then both in black panties, our female figures alike, though she was rounder everywhere than me. She had larger breasts, of course, while my hair was awfully short and my makeup non-existent.

Almost wordlessly, we dressed together, as I used to do with Trudi. It had always been such a delightful experience. Trudi and I would chatter on like, well, like a pair of girls which is what we were. We'd be so excited about going out even if it was just with Mama to the cinema. We knew that there'd be boys along the street, in the lines for the shows, and that they'd be looking at us. We'd giggle so much about them and tease each other.

With Carol, however, I was quaking as she loaned me her makeup and her makeup tools. There was a bemused,

cynical look on her face as if she didn't think I'd know what to do. I was determined, however, not to let her think that I was in any way ashamed of what I was doing. I began to make up as I'd always done with light foundation cream. Carol raised an eyebrow as I did that as expertly as I could.

While I started to do my eyes, Carol chose a burgundy-colored dress for me, a flirty thing with a layered skirt and square neckline, my chest and shoulders fully exposed but for the tiny straps.

I put on a strapless, underwired bra, adjusting it to push my breasts upwards and tightly together, showing more cleavage than Mama would ever allow me to show. I'd borrowed Trudi's from time to time and just wished that Mama would let me get one just like it. I'd have been allowed to have one later this year, I felt sure, when I was through school.

A black silk teddy covered the dark pantyhose Carol gave me silently. It also covered the bra. I had to make that tighter over my shoulders to ensure that nothing popped out when it shouldn't. I would have preferred a garter belt and stockings to pantyhose and almost went to the drawer where Carol kept them but stopped myself before I gave myself away.

Putting on pantyhose and then the silk teddy brought on all kinds of wonderful feelings as did the makeup on my face. I took great care of my eye makeup. I re-plucked some of my eyebrows, resisting at first, but then going ahead as I saw Erika's girlish face reappearing. I wanted to be perfect in front of Carol and her friends. Well, I thought with a shudder, that I was going to meet with her friends, two of them, at least by what she'd said. Two men.

Oh, my head swam at the thought of going out with Carol on a double date. I used more eyebrow pencil than normal, more eyeliner and eyeshadow, when I saw how much I had shaped my eyebrows. It would be weeks to get back to where I'd been as Erich with the feminizing I was doing. With mascara on my eyelids, my eyes were Erika's, the way I did them for my dates. The soft blush on my cheeks and the muted pink, more a plum, on my lips made me want to cry. My face was fine with just a little foundation and powder but my hair was all wrong.

"Which hairpiece?" Carol asked in an unsteady voice, watching me avidly as I coated my lips gently, easing them together to spread the red coloring evenly. She opened her closet and showed me the gorgeous wigs I'd found before. I selected the blonde wig again, so close to my own shade and put it on.

"God in heaven," Carol murmured, staring at me as I started to pin it to my mannish hair. Oh, it felt so delightful to feel the touch of hair at my neck and on my shoulders. I glanced at Carol and gave her a shy, tremulous smile. We were dressed almost exactly alike, in our female underwear, but I had hair now, as long as hers. "I don't believe it!"

I felt very pleased as I brushed the hair gently into place. Carol found some more hair pins and helped me to secure the wig more firmly to my natural hair, styling it so that my face was clear of loose strands, yet the hair was thick and comfortable at my neck. She lent me dangling black and gold earrings which I attached easily to the holes in my ears while she raised an eyebrow again, surprised.

I stepped into the burgundy dress as I'd been shown and pulled it about me while Carol was doing the same with hers. I asked her to zip me up as I kept the front in place over my breasts. It was a relief to talk girlishly in

my normal voice, not in the man's voice I'd been practising for the Countess.

Carol was totally bemused, I thought with the first satisfaction I'd felt since I'd arrived at the Chalet. She adjusted my straps for me, ensuring that the bodice hugged my shapely breasts and my thin waist. The skirts of the silky dress flared out from my curvy hips, just above my knee in length.

I thought shoes would be a problem but Carol didn't mind stretching a black pair of open-toed four inch high heels. They were tight but it was wonderful to be back in girl's shoes as I should be. I stood up and sashayed a little in them. They were just fine on my feet.

"I think they were made for you," said Carol, the amazement still on her face. "You look good in them. You must have worn something like these before." She was grinning at me as she said, "I don't think I can refuse you anything tonight, Erika, my dear."

Indeed, Carol didn't seem able to refuse me anything, not a thin, black choker for my neck, nor a matching black, snakeskin bracelet. She also found a Lavrenti black evening purse for me to store my makeup in for repairs.

I twirled on the high heels as easily as she had before, while she stared at me, the Chanel bottle in her hand.

"So now you see Erika Buren, the real me," I said with a smile, feeling so wonderful not only at the delightful swish and swirl of my skirts, but also at the look on Carol's face as she had to think again about me and who I was. I gently took the perfume bottle from her hands and dabbed some femininely behind my ears, at my wrists and at my cleavage as Mama had showed me.

"You really do pass," Carol said wonderingly, staring at me as if she couldn't believe that I was really Erika Buren, a girl, and not Erich von Hitte, a boy. She had

changed to a dark blue dress, short like mine, full-sleeved, but with a plunging neckline that she favored in so many of her dresses.

"I've lived all the time I can remember as a girl," I said with a smile that made my face seem more girlish. I returned the Chanel to her which she used much more liberally than I'd done. She splashed a little more on my breasts, smiling as I pulled away in amused alarm. I loved the smell of Chanel and really didn't mind what she was doing. It was just that Mama never allowed me to wear so much. "I was at school as a girl when they came for me."

"And the other girls never saw you?" Carol asked in surprise. "Not even bathing or in gym classes?"

"I'm very modest," I said with a quick smile which Carol responded to with a dazzling one of her own. I really liked her smile. It sent chills through me. It was so much better to talk to her as a girl. We could be friends, I thought nervously, wondering if that would ever be true, now that we were equally girls together. Well, we actually moved in very different circles, didn't we? I doubted that I'd ever really be a friend of a sophisticated, lovely woman like Carol.

"Here," she said, returning into her closet to look for women's coats. Carol chose a black one for herself and a red one for me, squarely padded in the shoulders, with large golden buttons, very stylish, just above my knee in length. It was delightful how it pressed my flirty burgundy skirt against me. I wasn't surprised to hear Carol say they were from Pauline Auger, in Paris. I suspected that all her so feminine clothes were designer originals.

"We really don't have to go out," I said, though I didn't fear it now that I had my hair back, makeup on my face and wore a pretty dress. I knew I was Erika. I was Mama's daughter. I could go anywhere dressed like this,

in high heels and with clinging, silky lingerie to make me feel so feminine.

Carol opened her bedroom door and looked out before she beckoned me to follow her. "I told Gerhard and Dieter that I'd be bringing my cousin along tonight," she whispered, giving me a strange, guarded look. Why was that, I wondered, but didn't have time to quiz her further. I followed her down familiar hallways, so odd because I was higher, my heels sinking into the carpet as I minced after her.

Continued as *Mama's Independent Daughter*