



*Reluctant Press* presents:

My Life II:  
**BEAUTY QUEEN**

Charlotte Mayo



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALEXANDRESSON

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A 'HER TV' E-BOOK

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# *My Life:* **Beauty Queen**

**Part two of the DRESS CIRCLE trilogy**  
**By Charlotte Mayo**

## **CHAPTER ONE**

It was just like the old days. I planned to have a day off work and go to a village called Guisborough where I had located a small dress shop called Philippa Jane's that sold cocktail, and evening dresses. The aim was - and this was ambitious to say the least - to go to the shop dressed as an attractive, young lady and, after trying on half the stock in the shop, actually buy a ball-gown. Such a scenario had always been a dream of mine and one of my favourite 'dressing' fantasies. What about the voice? I hear you say. What about the deportment? What about *everything*? That didn't figure in my madcap, off-the-wall, zany, wild, mental, foolish, deranged scheme. The fantasy of going into a changing room and trying on a lovely dress completely transfixed me and the fact that I would, in all certainty, be read by the assistant and assorted others along the way and probably not be served at all didn't even cross my mind.

It was late November 1989. The day before the 'big day' I creamed my legs and arms with Immac to make them perfectly smooth. I then prepared my clothes. I tried on my new pair of black patent shoes with 3" heels, they were a perfect fit. Fortunately, I've been blessed with small feet (size 7) so can I buy women's shoes off the shelf. I got my Danimac coat out of the wardrobe and I then laid out all the other things I intended wearing: my silky blue camisole, white blouse, skirt, bra, panties, stockings, suspenders and corset. On the day itself I awoke at 6am. I bathed and then I greased back my hair. I wet-shaved,

moisturised and then powdered my face. It took two hours to apply make-up. Next, I pulled on my blonde wig. I've always liked looking like a girl before I start dressing; so, having finished in the bathroom, I wrapped my negligee around me and walked to the bedroom where my en femme clothes were neatly placed. I took each article of clothing that was either laid out on the bed or hanging on a hanger in the wardrobe and watched my reflection in the mirror as I dressed.

I put on my panties, pulled up my stockings, attached my suspenders, tightened myself into a corset, fixed my bra, added fillers into the two pouches, pulled on a blue silk camisole, buttoned up my white silk blouse, stepped into my black leather skirt and popped the button before pulling up the zip. Finally, I slipped into my shoes. Then for the finishing touches; I applied false nails, earrings, jewellery and perfume.

After many glances in the bathroom and the bedroom mirrors I put on my Danimac coat, buttoned it up, tied the belt, picked up my handbag and opened my door. Having locked it, I walked out into the communal hall, down the short corridor and out of the front door onto the path, bathed in warm winter's sun.

I strolled to the end of the path not feeling as nervous as I had expected. A woman pushed a pram around the corner and a car was reversing. Neither seemed to take much notice. I walked on. A sense of calm and tranquillity enveloped me. I'd convinced myself I looked good. I made my way along the street to a cab company called Jet Taxis who had a corner office. I had decided that a taxi was a better option than my white company car as it had a logo on the side, clearly identifying the union I worked for. Anyway a taxi was more fun. I walked up the steps of the taxi office, pushed open the door and walked in. Two Asian men were playing pool. They stopped. Gapped. Amazed. Mouths dropping to the green beige of the pool table. A small, plump, pimple-faced blonde girl of maybe twenty-years old stood behind the customer service hatch; her eyes never left me as I made my slow, deliberate approach, walking, I hoped, like a model on a cat walk. I reached the hatch. She looked me in the eye, holding my mascara covered eyelashes and immaculately made up face in her sight, drinking in my feminine beauty – just as the two Asians were doing. She smiled, I smiled. Then, in a coarse Northeast accent asked,

“Where do you want to go, Mister?”

Downfall, downfall, downfall and so early. “A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a fucking horse,” I felt like saying in true Shakespearean tragic fashion. In fact I said,

“Guisborough.” My voice was so soft it was almost inaudible.

“To where?”

“Guisborough.”

“Where?”

“Guisborough,” I squeaked.

The younger of the two Asians, who had been playing pool, said he'd take me.

“Thank you,” I said in a male-ish voice which sent the other, older Asian and the girl controller into fits of laughter. The Asian's hands slipped down his pool cue as he covered his face to conceal his mirth. I felt like crying.

I followed the first driver out to his car and got into the back. I wanted to go home. To abort. Mission abandoned. But the car was speeding out of Stockton with me sitting passively on the backseat, shaking with fear and perspiring like an Eskimo in a Turkish bath during an Istanbul heat wave. All I wanted to do was pull my wig off, ditch my nails and my stupid clothes and dive for cover behind the thickest shrubbery on the planet. And I couldn't even grip the door handle to release some of my tension; those nails, those damned stupid false nails.

All the time the young, slim driver was making furtive glances in his rear view mirror. I wondered if I would end up being taken to Guisborough or a police station. A police station seemed more likely because the driver had not a clue where Guisborough was and constantly asked me directions. I replied in a mincing voice -mimicking a kind of camp Kenneth Williams on speed.

When we finally reached the outskirts of the town I told him about the shop and he couldn't find that either and had to jump out of the car to ask pedestrians the way. The problem was it was now lunchtime and the streets were packed with school children and shoppers. Finally, we arrived in the High Street but couldn't find Philippa Jane's dress shop. In the end, the taxi driver told me to get out and try and find it myself. Fearing he might drive off and I would be marooned in this tiny market town with no way back, I told him to wait. I eased out of the car seat and ran along the street looking for the shop. And yes, I do mean ran – 3inch heels, in a tight black skirt, in a Danimac coat, I *ran*.

My nerves had been shredded by the, "Where to, Mister?" The last thing I wanted to do was to be ridiculed on the streets of this market town in the middle of winter. I ran blindly for a while, then looked at a couple of shop doors whilst a couple of hundred (or so it seemed) people stared at me. The thing with being a transvestite is that there's no hiding place - if you get caught, you get caught, you get caught - for 'getting read' is too tame an expression for what happened to me in Guisborough. Just writing about it now, over fifteen years later, makes my palms clammy and my heart pulsate.

Having glanced at two or three shops, I ran back to the car and demanded that the driver take me back to Stockton. I was now sweating and flustered and I could hear laughter – lots of laughter - and I could see people staring at me from across the road. So this was what it was like to be a freak.

The driver, being a friendly sort, became really concerned that he had driven me all this way for nothing and that I couldn't find the shop. He tried to be helpful. He asked me to tell him exactly where the shop was and so I pulled a tatty advertisement out of my handbag. He took the piece of paper and got out of the car. I buried my head in my hands and prayed.

"Dear, dear God get me out of here. I promise *never* to dress in women's clothes again. Dear God, I'm so, so sorry," I prayed.

Mr Taxi Driver, meanwhile, had walked up to a bunch of sixth formers, who were standing near the boot of the car. He conversed with them. His window was down and I could hear laughter and the word 'transvestite' being bandied about as if it were a disease. Obviously it didn't apply to the taxi driver, who may have looked good in a dress, but at

that moment was dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt. He came back to the car and got in. He shrugged.

“Can’t find. You want to go and look again?”

“Please,” I said, gripping the back of his seat so tightly four false nails came unstuck from my cuticles and dropped down the back of his chair, “*take me home.*”

On the way back, all I could think about was getting inside my flat, locking the door, undressing and lying in a warm bath. The friendly driver continued to make furtive glances in his rear view mirror. At one point the controller’s voice came on the radio,

“Have you dropped him off yet?”

Embarrassed silence for a few seconds, followed by,

“How much did you charge him?”

“£10,” the driver said softly.

Again the girl’s voice came back on the radio. She obviously thought he had dropped me off. “It should have been £7. Buy us fish and chips on the way back!” Laughter crackled over the radio.

The driver looked in the mirror and shrugged as if to say, what’s £3? What he didn’t realise was that I’d have paid him £50,000 and regular instalments of £1,000 a month to be back in doors and lying in my bath.

Still, when he pulled up outside my Shaftesbury Street address he only charged me £5. I guess he felt sorry for me. I got out of the taxi and ran indoors with as much dignity as I could muster – which was none. Fortunately for me, the post thieves from upstairs weren’t on their way out and I was able to walk unhindered to my own front door. Once inside I locked it, undressed and jumped in the bath. Thank God, I was home. Safe. An important lesson learned - *fantasy never becomes reality*. But when it does it’s better than that as you will see later.

After a while I left the bath, dried myself and then went to my wardrobe to hang up the skirt and blouse. I’ve always loved the warmth that female clothes have after extended wear, the leather skirt felt particularly nice to my touch. Curiously, years later that very same skirt would get someone else into trouble when they went on a shopping trip. You see, it wasn’t me, it was the skirt - it was jinxed.

I put on my male clothes that suddenly felt so good. As I left the house to go to work for the afternoon (there was no way I could have stayed in the flat) a taxi was parked on the corner. The Asian driver watched me go. I got into my car and drove down to the bottom of the street so I wouldn’t have to pass him. I then turned right along the cobbled path between the rows of terraced houses and back onto the main road.

When I came home from work there were no taxis near the house and there were no other repercussions from my act of mindless recklessness – except one. When I was leaving the flat just before Christmas and packing up my car to go to a small bedsit around the corner that was cheaper, two working-class men, hands stuffed in donkey jackets, came out of a neighbouring house and walked up their path. When they reached the gate one turned to the other and said, in a voice too loud for my liking,

"I see the transvestite's leaving us."

I moved to a small bedsit because, by then, I knew my employment contract was going to expire in the February of the following year and that it would not be renewed. So, instead of looking for another job, I had started planning a trip around the world with my brother. Helen was not amused and, as the weeks passed, her mood deteriorated.

Just before I moved out of my ground floor flat, Helen and I went shopping in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. As we walked around the centre I told her I was keen to buy a pair of leather trousers. We went to a large leather emporium and I asked the young, slim assistant which trousers on the rack were men's and which were ladies. She said it didn't matter and handed me two pairs of trousers; one pair were men's the other pair ladies. Guess which pair I bought? It was a pair of size 14 ladies' leather strides. Of course, to go with the trousers I needed a pair of boots, so, next we went to a small shoe shop and I picked up a pair of ladies' ankle boots in a size 7. They were a 'pixie' style with winkle-picker toes and a turned down trim.

"What do you think of these, Helen?" I said in all innocence.

"They're ladies," she said.

"Yes, but I think they would go..."

A mature female assistant approached. She had a shock of white and black hair.

"Can I help?" she enquired.

"Thanks. Can I have the other one to this, please?" I asked.

The assistant huffed but took the boot.

"They'll look good under the trousers," I said as way of explanation to Helen.

"I suppose they're not much different from men's," she said.

When the assistant came back I tried the low-heeled boots on. They fitted so I bought them. As I paid I was still trying to explain myself to the assistant.

"I've just bought a pair of leather trousers and..."

The assistant stared straight passed me as she handed the change over. She had sussed out that I was a transvestite, even if my girlfriend hadn't. Occasionally, Helen would say things like, 'You take a lot of interest in women's clothes,' or 'I bet your mum thinks it's me that likes leather, not you.' (The latter was said with real venom when we were having a row). Or, once when I had made love to her, still wearing my leather trousers, she said, 'Was it the leather that turned you on?'

But she never suspected, or if she did, she never said.

That evening, following the day's shopping in Newcastle, I saw an example of Helen's flirtatiousness. We went to a nightclub in Stockton called The Mall and Helen dressed in her tan leather suit and a black top. I went to the toilet and when I came back, I saw some youth wearing a jacket and a kipper tie chatting to her. I stood watching; Helen was laughing and fiddling with the necklace around her neck. She made no effort to tell the lad she was with someone. In the end, I went up to her and the lad disappeared into the crowd. She told me he had touched her bum and asked her where she was from. I suppose I had

had too much to drink for I took Helen by the wrist and led her back to my rented flat. Once there we argued and she stalked off to the bathroom. I followed her, caught her by the arm, pushed her over the sink and gave her rump a few healthy smacks. I then went to bed. Helen emerged about half an hour later in her peach coloured negligee, rubbing her buttocks,

“That hurt,” she said. Even so, we still made love.

I went back to the south for Christmas, after which, Helen, my brother, my friend, Dave and his girlfriend, Louise, and I visited some student friends of mine in North London. Two of them, Gunn and another lad, had just come back from India and were keen to relate tales about what to expect there. We had booked the ‘Global Trip’ by this time and were due to depart in March. Helen spent the whole evening sitting on my knee, not saying a word. I could tell she was in a bad mood. When the dope circulated her mood worsened.

Later, we went upstairs to a messy, single bed. At 4am I heard a noise and awoke to find Helen dressed in her jeans and jumper, packing her bag.

“What the hell are you doing?” I asked.

“I’m not staying here, it’s too dirty, I can’t sleep – I’m going to find a hotel.”

I couldn’t believe it. This was the early hours of the morning in Edmonton, North London, one of the most violent and dangerous places in Europe.

I jumped out of bed and grabbed hold of Helen before she could get out of the door.

“Get back into bed before I spank you,” I said. She did as she was told and once back in bed I was aroused so I made love to her. I just loved playing the role of the masterful male. It was such an antidote to the ‘dressing’ and the ultra-feminine clothes I liked to wear. The macho posturing was a way for me to compensate for my feminine side. Helen often said she liked macho men: policeman, soldiers and firemen. She had actually dated a soldier briefly before we had met. I suppose, after my years of loneliness at Polytechnic, I wasn’t prepared to give her up because I appeared too soft. I can still recall a girl I fancied telling me that I was ‘too nice a guy to date.’ One of Helen’s biggest, unintentional compliments to me came one night after we had watched something on television.

“I can’t imagine you being gay; you’re just not a feminine guy at all,” she said.

Look in my wardrobe, love, I thought. I’ve always been good at hiding my double life and presenting as a ‘normal’ good-humoured, heterosexual male free from hang-ups and problems. Still, I take you back to my fantasy – me, a single guy living in a flat, scoring with lots of different girls and going out dressed. It nearly happened in Stockton, for in truth I chatted up quite a few girls in the Northeast but never quite cracked it.

Despite my threats, Helen’s moodiness continued unabated. She was finding ways of getting back at me for leaving her to go around the world with my brother. In retrospect I can see how selfish I was but back then I saw nothing wrong with it. I expected Helen to wait for me and then expected that we would settle down together. That was if I could ever find a way to tell her about my dressing. Anyway, she became more and more flirtatious and, that New Year’s Eve, when we were down Dave’s local pub in the Southeast celebrating the mid-night chimes, Helen again showed me she couldn’t be trusted. At the

end of the night, when everyone was filing out of the pub, a tall, bearded New Zealander who worked behind the bar came up to me.

“Hey, mate, don’t keep her all to yourself,” he said.

He then promptly grabbed hold of Helen, wrapped his arms around her waist and gave her a long passionate snog, at one point even lifting her off the floor – Helen didn’t seem to put up much resistance, in fact she responded in kind.

Things were becoming very uneasy between us. Two weeks before my brother and I left for Egypt, Helen and I were at my brother’s rented house in Leicester. Helen and I had gone out for a meal whilst my brother had gone to a club with some friends. We came back early in the hope of having sex in the back room which was where Rob had said we could stay. Once again Helen had worn her tan leather suit and I had worn my leather trousers and boots. Neither of us had been drinking and the night went pretty well until we got back to my brother’s rented house and went up stairs to bed,

“I’m going to sleep with other men whilst you’re going around the world,” Helen suddenly announced when we were alone in the bedroom.

I slapped her face. Helen was stunned, I said I was sorry and tried to make up to her.

The next morning she said. “I shouldn’t have said that last night. I thought you were going to make love to me after you slapped me.”

My brother and I travelled for six months, taking in Egypt, India, Nepal, Hong Kong, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia and America. In India Rob and I got conned into buying some carpets and gems which added a few thousand pounds onto our credit cards and in Indonesia I nearly drowned on Kuta beach in Bali after being sucked out to sea by a strong undertow. I really thought my number was up. Some Australian surfers glibly told me to swim along the coast and back in to avoid the undertow – this as I bobbed up amongst them whilst drowning. I swam on but I was getting pulled further and further out and gulping down salty seawater. It’s a strange experience to look at a beach and know you’ve not got the strength or the stamina to make it back, that, in fact you’re going to die. The intelligent part of the brain can assess the information before you logically: too far out, tired, waves too large; whilst at the same time the survival instinct says: *Panic!*

I splashed away aimlessly until my Guardian Angel arrived in the form of an Indonesian surfer who saw my plight and swam towards me with his surfboard. He told me to grab hold of the end and swam me back to the shore. I went to thank him for saving my life but, instead, spewed up several gallons of Pacific seawater. Later Rob and I read the Lonely Planet guide and realised that we’d been sunbathing on the wrong part of the beach and that every year a few people are drowned on the area of the beach we were on. If it hadn’t have been for my Indonesian friend I would have been one of them.

Other than those two incidents it was a successful trip. The two ‘transvestite’ highlights occurred in India and Thailand.

In Bangkok I persuaded my brother to see a transvestite show (Holiday Fantasy). Now there were lads who really could pass in public! And in Bombay, India, we saw transvestite prostitutes in saris on Falkland Street. Also, in Bombay, a teenage lad came up to me

whilst I was leaning against some iron railings, staring out to sea. The lad started feeling the hairs on my arms as if he were grooming a monkey. Of course, the hair had grown back by then and was crying out for a dose of Immac.

“You shave your arms,” the lad said.

It was a remarkably perceptive comment and I still wonder how he knew. At the time I was just pleased my brother didn’t hear.

Helen wrote to say that she had finished with me but six months later, when I arrived back in the UK, I took her to Tenerife for two weeks and we got back together. She’d been as good as her word though, and had been unfaithful to me with two men whilst I had been away: a policeman and her best friend’s separated brother who was some years older than her and a bit of a womaniser. I never knew the true tale about what had happened with the latter but the story Helen told me went like this. Helen’s best friend, Rebecca, had moved to Bournemouth with her elderly parents who ran a care home. Helen and I had visited Rebecca there once before; anyway, whilst I was away, Helen had visited Rebecca again and Rebecca’s half-brother, Mark, who Helen had never met before, happened to be visiting. Apparently, Mark lived in Bournemouth and offered to take the two young ladies out to a nightclub. He was in his thirties and a builder who lived in a large Victorian terrace which he was renovating, whilst his estranged wife lived on the third floor. Rather than disturb the residents in the care home, he offered Rebecca and Helen a room in his house for the night. Helen confessed to me that she had had a slow dance and a lingering kiss with Mark down the nightclub and that when the three of them came back to his house they had sat downstairs drinking and talking into the early hours. Mark’s estranged wife had knocked on the ceiling because they were making so much noise. Helen also told me that the next morning the estranged wife and Rebecca ignored her and gave her dirty looks – I assumed from this that Helen had been unfaithful. The policeman Helen was less coy about; as far as she was concerned, at that stage we had split up and he was her boyfriend.

I moved back to Slough when we returned from Tenerife and tried to patch things up but it didn’t work out. Helen thought I was applying too much pressure to her and wanted some time on her own. Finally, when my temporary job in Slough finished, I went to live with my parents. I still saw Helen at weekends and at least once in the week but things had changed. Even so, she still maintained an element of her submissiveness. That November, I went around to her parent’s house to take her back to Croydon for a friend’s firework party. Helen, as was usual, wasn’t ready.

I went upstairs to use the toilet and saw Helen in her bedroom; she came out, wearing jeans and a thick jumper.

“James,” she said, “what do you want me to wear tonight, training shoes or boots?”

That was the Helen of old and I loved it.

“Boots,” I said decisively, “wear your boots.”

Seconds later I heard the zips of her high-heeled boots being drawn up the side of her legs.

On another occasion we were staying at my parents' house. I think it was my dad's retirement meal. Anyway, Helen slept in my bed, my sister in my brother's bed (He was still in the States), me in my sister's room and my sister's boyfriend downstairs. On the Sunday morning I was laying in bed waiting for my sister's boyfriend to finish in the shower. I knew everyone else was up, apart from Helen who was not good in the mornings. On a whim I decided to wake up Helen and pulled on my boxers and padded across the landing into my old bedroom. My bed was closest to the door, the curtains were drawn, I crept in. Helen was sound asleep. I slipped off my boxers and gently lifted the covers. In a moment I was in bed and on top of her. Naturally, she started to stir. I lifted her nightdress and slipped my erect penis into her.

"Wh...wh...what's going on?" she pleaded. "Get off me!"

It was too late. I had my wicked way with her before she was properly awake.

Later, she came down to breakfast, her hair wet from her shower, wearing tight jeans; she ignored me and just spoke to the rest of my family. As I took her home she accused me of "helping myself" and said she was annoyed as she hadn't wanted me to make love to her, and what if my mum or dad had come in?

That Christmas I was working, again temporarily, as an accounts controller for a mobile phone company. Helen had a new job too – as a PA in a large corporation. Her manager really liked her and one day gave her a company coat. It was a large, men's vinyl jacket with the company logo on it. Helen loved wearing it to work (I suspect because it hid her mini-skirts from her mum!) – she also enjoyed wearing a black bomber jacket of mine which I had left at her house one time. We were in London, Christmas shopping and had stopped for a coffee. I mentioned her liking for these two men's coats and also the fact she was dressed in jeans that day.

"You know what, Helen," I said, biting into a Chelsea cake. "You're a transvestite."

"What's a transvestite?" she asked.

"Someone who enjoys dressing in the clothes of the opposite sex."

She sat silently for a minute. "You don't really think that, do you?"

I laughed. "No, Helen, I don't."

A couple of weeks later it was her company's Christmas party and she asked me to collect her from work so we could both go back to her colleague's house to change. The colleague had kindly agreed to let us stay the night there.

Typically, on a Friday night, the M25 was grid locked and I arrived late at the company's Slough premises. Helen had left and gone back to her colleague's house. The security guard gave me directions to the venue for the Christmas party and said it was best if I made my way straight there and meet up with Helen later. This was before the age of the mobile phone and there was no way of contacting Helen, as I had no address or phone number for her friend. .

I got to the restaurant, changed in the toilet and went to join the other guests who were filing in. I found our table, sat down and waited; and waited.

Helen and the couple we were supposed to be staying with were late. Very late. The place was soon full and the people on our round table were asking me whom I was with. There must have been two hundred odd people in the company, including the directors, plus assorted partners. We ordered our starters and, as I was eating, I suddenly noticed that the place became quiet, heads started to turn. Someone wolf whistled. A couple were walking down the steps into the restaurant, conservatively dressed. But then I saw her, trailing behind, her hair fluffed up, and a broad smile on her face. Helen came up to our table and stood by the spare chair beside me. She was beaming, milking all the male attention she was getting.

“This is my Christmas outfit,” she said to me as she stood by me. I was speechless. My eyes ran from toe to head. Red stilettos. Bare legs. Red leather mini-skirt. Thick, red belt around her waist – larger at the front and then tapering behind to a thin, silver buckle. A creamy, white camisole top through which you could see her white, lacy bra and large breasts. She looked amazing, but typical Helen, it wasn’t quite the right attire for a company Christmas meal, not with Directors and their staid wives present. Still, she had come a long way from her days of being a frump – perhaps too far.

Four weeks later she finished with me and started dating Peter, a go-getting young manager, who just happened to be seated on the next table at the Christmas meal that night. By the end of the following year they were engaged.

## CHAPTER TWO

1991 was a bad year for me, probably the worst of my life. For most of it I was unemployed or doing temporary jobs. My confidence was at an all time low and the one of the things that gave me greatest pleasure – dressing in women’s clothes – was impossible for I was living at my parents’ house and my suitcase full of en femme items was safely tucked away in the storage room at Transformation, Euston.

With dressing very much on hold and jobs at a premium due to the economic recession, all I could do was dream about better days: about Helen and Stockton and dressing every night and Slough and my first tentative steps on the TV ladder. I was 27 and I thought I might have reached my TV zenith. How wrong I was!

In November I finally got a job. Another mind-numbingly tedious admin post, this time in Stoke-on-Trent. I moved up there, booked into a B&B and then found myself a single room the size of a prison cell in Newcastle-under-Lyme, which at least had its own small cooker and wash basin. The room was in a large Victorian terraced house that contained six such bedsits of varying sizes; mine happened to be the smallest. There was a communal front door and a hall and stairs up to my room, which was at the back of the house next to the toilet and the bathroom.

A couple of weeks after my move to Stoke, I went to collect my suitcase from Transformation. One Saturday I caught the train to Euston and walked the short distance to the shop. Disaster; the Aussie lass that served me couldn’t find my case. Eventually, I had to

go into the storeroom and try to identify it. An easy enough task because I was so familiar with the old brown suitcase. At last, after 22 months I had my case back. I paid for the rental and then, learning from the Stockton Taxi Incident, I bought a book and a cassette to help me speak with a female voice (which didn't work). In optimistic mood I set off for Stoke.

Whilst whiling a way the two hours on the train, I suddenly became aware of wolf whistles and ribald comments further down the carriage. I looked around and saw a tall, well-built girl with a blonde bob. She was wearing a red leather mini skirt, a white blouse and red stilettos; it was an ensemble that was not dissimilar to Helen's at that fateful Christmas meal. She strutted along the central aisle, wiggling her arse provocatively. Of course, I knew straight away that 'she' was a 'he' and that there were at least two trannies on that train. I admired his pluck. A few minutes later he came back along the corridor carrying a hot drink and a sandwich. He didn't have a care in the world. Good on you, who ever you are.



Sundays in my prison cell-like room became known as 'TV Sunday's' in honour of the fact that I would spend most of the day dressed. I was living close to the centre of Newcastle-under-Lyme and would go into the town on the Saturday to purchase make-up from Boots the chemist and lingerie from assorted small shops. Then, on a Sunday, I would dress. That was the highlight of my week; it was what I lived for.

On one occasion a colleague from work called around on the off-chance that I might be in. She rang the bell for my flat; the sound echoed through the house. Fortunately, no one else opened the communal front door or she would have been able to come straight up to my room where she would have been merely a plank of wood

away from seeing me dressed in women's clothes. Because the light was on in my room I'd have most probably been caught. After a while she went away and I could rest easy.

The big concern for every TV is hair, particularly for me as I'm a hirsute bugger. Like most followers of female fashions I yearned to get it off. Providence, it seemed, had been kind for it delivered a beauty salon on the other side of the busy main road from where I lodged. The salon was small, a little run down, and quiet. One day I walked in and asked about hair removal. The story I concocted would have been a classic of fantasy but the owner; a dark, haired lady called Kirsty with a permanent suntan and enough gold jewellery to replenish Fort Knox guessed straight away what my game was and, though she played along, her smile said it all. Electrolysis was the key, she convinced me.

So, every Saturday morning I walked across the road and had half an hour's electrolysis on my face. It was time consuming and costly and because I shaved during the week there was little growth in terms of hairs to pluck. A plumpish, sixteen-year-old called Michaela operated the equipment as I lay on the couch. The electricity sent shivers running through my lips and I had that slightly discomforting feeling of nerves shimmering – like ice cream touching a nerve. Michaela constantly bemoaned the fact that the hair wasn't long enough to get at with her tweezers but at the end of the session she would show me a tissue filled with tiny, little hairs.

"Look how much I got out," she'd proudly announce.

Going to work in a suit and tie and shaving every day thwarted my ambition to have a face clear of hair, I considered a beard but then people would question the smooth, bald patches. After about ten weeks I gave up. I enjoyed those mornings on the couch though. At one time, Kirsty suggested waxing and that worked for a time but only when the hair was reasonably long.

During the evenings, on my return from my day in the office, filing and taking minutes at meetings, I would write a book. This was the third novel I had tried to write, having written two whilst studying for my degree. Unfortunately, this one was the worst of the lot, being a rather self-indulgent piece of fiction about a young lad who couldn't lose his virginity (not a self portrait, at all, Ha! Ha!).

Sometimes, I would go to Stoke's main shopping area, Hanley, and walk around buying female goods. My big purchase was another leather skirt. I went into a large, family run leather shop – a true leather specialist - and showed the assistant a picture of the actress Candice Bergman wearing a lovely, tan coloured, loose fitting leather skirt, I loved the idea of the leather swishing around my legs as I walked. The woman who served me took out a black flared leather skirt reduced from £150 to £69 and said that was the closest to such a skirt they had, I took it.

I slept in my corset that night and the next day was really excited over the prospect of wearing the skirt. I went through my usual make-up routine, which involved firstly holding my head over a bowl of steaming water to cleanse the pores of my face and then applying moisturiser and foundation. The radio, which sat on the kitchen cabinets, played Dave Lee Travis' Sunday selection on Radio 1. Beside me on the table as I did my make up was a make-up book, which I followed as avidly as a Haynes manual on car mechanics. When I was satisfied with my appearance, I slipped into my undergarments before button-

ing up my white blouse. Next, the skirt. I pulled it on and tried to fasten the button at the back – the skirt was far too small. Later in the week I took it back. The same assistant said,

“Send the young lady in to try it on and we can adjust it.”

I made up some excuse. It was a present, I said. She agreed to take it out an inch. It was a typical hair-raising moment, or at least one that tested my powers of bullshit to the limit.

Bored with the admin job and the tiny, tiny room, writing and dressing were the only things that kept me going. I managed to squeeze in an all to brief affair with a married woman who worked for the same company. She was in her early fifties and had two teenage sons. I also dated and bedded another woman I worked with called Cathy, but despite her fondest for me I could not continue the relationship and it petered out after a few months. I also had a few dates with girls I had met in nightclubs but they also came to nothing.

Otherwise, I filled my time with occasional trips to football (I've always had this bizarre ambition of visiting all 92 professional league grounds) going out with people who lived in the other bedsits in the converted house, friends from work or going to the cinema on my own. The big film of 1992, for trannies at least, was *Just Like A Woman*, starring Julie Walters. It is the story of an American transvestite called Gerald who became Geraldine when dressed. It was a good film but I didn't appreciate the ending when a caption came up on the screen stating that one in ten men were TV's and one may be sitting next to you. Heads turned.

The year faded out with nothing of any event happening: my book got soundly rejected by all and sundry, I lost money betting on football and, apart from that brief affair and a few sessions with Cathy, I had no further success on the woman front, whilst the dressing was limited by the size of my room. No, the glory days were still to come.

## CHAPTER THREE

I hadn't been working for long in Stoke-on-Trent when I smelt the familiar stench of a 'Boss from Hell'. I've had many managers in my long and far from illustrious employment career and most of them have been bad; some have been appalling and one or two have been good. So, shortly after taking up post, it came as no surprise to me that once again my line manager was a Boss from Hell. After I started with the company, which it has to be said included a large number of managers in the BFH category, they had a reorganisation, couldn't find me anything to do, put me on filing duties in a different part of the building (where my days were enlivened by a young girl who used to clip around the stone corridors in short skirts and stiletto heels) and then moved me back to my original boss who had been 'reorganised' into a top job and didn't much like me being palmed off on to him. Nichols was actually quite different from Smarts in the Health Service as he was bone-idle. Despite his swearing, callousness and sarcasm Smarts was actually incredibly industrious, getting into work at 6.30am! To cover for his lack of aptitude and industry Nichols always needed a scapegoat. And, right from the start I was one of the chosen ones. If anything ever went wrong it was my fault. He actually had several scapegoats, whom, he picked on in turns. A theory used to be circulated about Nichols; whenever you went to

his room he wasn't there but his jacket was hanging up on the back of his chair. Could it be that the jacket actually did the work like some mad sorcerer's apprentice? However, just like Smarts he had no dress sense and used to wear vulgar navy blue vests under white shirts and was forever sharpening pencils. He really was a hideous, odious little man. If a Shakespearean drama circle ever needed a 'Richard 111' then here he was in all his ignominy.

Work, as has always been the case for me, is just a way to earn some money so I can socialise – preferably dressed. As long as I can get through each day, I'm not particularly bothered what I do. Anyway, in many ways the dire company I worked for were far better than the abysmal NHS; at least here I didn't have Nichols breathing down my neck the whole time. Nichols kept out the way and left his employees to get on with it until he emerged from his cave and carpeted one of his scapegoats.

During my first period being managed by Nichols he had had a secretary called Jean, there was actually two Jeans in the office and this one was nicknamed 'Fat Jean' because she was, well, overweight. Fat Jean was extremely bossy and would even tell Nichols what to do. She loved giving opinions and unwanted advice on everything and anything and on one occasion said to me,

"That shirt and tie you are wearing don't match. It's totally the wrong combination."

I remained tight-lipped but made a mental note to contact Marks and Spencer's because the tie and shirt had actually been a matching box set given to me by my mum and dad as a Christmas present.

I've noticed that women have an amazing desire to comment and pass judgement on the clothes of their colleagues and on men and make comments to men that men would never dream of making about women. Not to their faces anyway. I've often been tempted to tell women that they have no dress sense, they look like frumps they need to slim down or their clothes are old-fashioned but it would be more than my life's worth, yet it seems socially acceptable for women to comment on men's attire.

That beef over with, I have to say that Stoke-on Trent was good for me, for by the middle of 1993, things were at last happening on the TV front. I had finally bought a house and made some contact with other TVs in the area. The latter had happened due to my reading of the magazine *Forum*; a magazine I still bought from time to time. *Forum* happened to have a small snippet on an organisation called Roses, which was a new club for TVs. There was an address and I promptly wrote away for details. When I received the information back I sent off a cheque and joined. Now, I was the proud recipient of the glossy and informative *Rose's Repartee* magazine. It may surprise some that I hadn't delved into the TV scene before, and I must say in some ways I'm not sure why I didn't do it earlier, for apart from the odd trip to Transformation at Euston I had not really been involved with other TVs.

So it was Roses and the *Repartee* magazine that gave me my first, full introduction to other TVs. Each *Repartee* magazine carried a list of members and contacts and I noticed there were four TVs in Stoke, and it was through this that I got my big TV break for one morning a letter landed on my mat (at this time I was still in my rented room), inviting me

to a TV party. I responded by phoning 'Stella' and asking her about the party. She suggested I come over in the week for a chat. Excitement drilled through my veins.

I arrived at her house one Tuesday evening. The house was a large semi with a steep, downward sloping drive. Stella's wife, Mary opened the door. She was wearing black trousers and a jacket. She showed me into a back room, which conveyed an atmosphere of warmth with its tasteful décor, neat furnishings and lavish plants. A huge TV stood in one corner. Stella sat in a comfortable armchair dressed in full rig – dress, high heels, shimmering tights and wig. She was tall, wore glasses and was slightly hunched. She had a quiet, deep voice. She gestured towards the sofa. I sat down. Mary sat in the armchair opposite Stella. The conversation began nervously. Slowly, I talked about my TV life up until then as Mary peered at me through a haze of smoke from her More cigarettes. She asked most of the questions. I told them how anxious I was to join the TV scene and to meet other TVs.

We talked for two hours. It was a strange meeting: Mary, short haired and slim, talking in a strong voice with a loud, infectious laugh and the quietly spoken, genial Stella. Mary asked me to come along to the party on Saturday. I said I would definitely be there.

I was, too, I left my London Road flat with a suitcase and drove the short distance to Stella and Mary's house. Mary opened the door again but this time showed me up to a large, double bedroom with mirrored wardrobes; I was early so I had the place to myself. I went to the bathroom and applied my make-up and then went back to the bedroom and put on my corset, fishnet stockings, white blouse, vinyl skirt and heels. I looked reasonably convincing given the nervousness I felt. Apprehensively, I walked down stairs in my stilettos. TVs had started to arrive, I could hear banter in the hall. Most had come dressed. Would people laugh at me?

They didn't, of course. This was a place where men could be dressed as women and no one minded. I edged into the kitchen, my hands sliding up and down my vinyl skirt or nervously touching the hair of my wig; it seemed so strange to be 'dressed' in company. There were about eight TVs in the kitchen from all parts of the Northwest and all ages and backgrounds. Gradually, more arrived. The kitchen was the main focal point though some sat in the dining room and others in the front room.

The party was actually a strangely quiet and subdued affair; no one got drunk, no one was loud or outrageous. Mary joked and laughed a lot. People told stories, about dressing, about their jobs, about every day life. It was like a ladies' meeting in the fifties, everyone was very conscious of their behaviour. At various points people went upstairs to change into different outfits or try on new wigs. Everywhere there was the flash of cameras – a narcissistic pastime for the TV community. It was surreal to hear male voices introducing themselves as Pat or Brenda or Betty or Lucy. Yet, it felt so good to be dressed and in company, to be out of the closet. Before the party ended I went upstairs and changed. I left the house in the male, dressed in drab jeans and a leather jacket. I also left my case in Stella and Mary's garage for I had bought a house and was moving in to it a few weeks later; Mary and Stella had kindly agreed to store the case for me whilst I was in transition.

That was my coming out party – people appearing and disappearing to get changed, the chime of the front door – the walk up the hall.

After that I was busy moving so the TV scene was put on ice for a couple of months. Finally, I had an opportunity to collect the case from Stella and Mary and take it back to my new property.

Then, a few weeks later, another letter fell on the doormat; this time at my newly purchased three bedroom semi. It was from Mary and Stella, inviting me to their next party. Again, I arrived in the male and went to the back bedroom to change. Mary lent me a dress – a black, cotton sleeveless affair with a white sash across the top. Unfortunately, I hadn't shaved my arms and when I appeared downstairs there were a lot of comments. Now, I was amongst pros. I had a long chat with a TV called Natasha and his friend Sabrina. They were both about my age and both looked extremely convincing. They told me that they went to the Northern Concord, a club for Northwest TVs, that met in Manchester's Gay Village every week. At the end of the evening they invited me along that Wednesday.

Stung by the criticism about my arms, I shaved them with Immac on the Tuesday before my departure to Manchester. That evening I prepared my bag of clothes to change into after work. I had spoken to Natasha on the phone who had said that I should go to Sabrina's house straight from work and that we'd leave from there. That night I was too excited to sleep.

The next day, after work, I drove over to Sabrina's house – a small terrace. His girlfriend answered the door. Sabrina was already dressed in a long, black skirt and blonde wig. I went up to a back room and dressed. I felt very nervous but I was getting used to dressing in strange places. Even so, I made a bit of a hash of the make-up. I dressed in the black dress Mary had given me and pulled a thick black vinyl belt tightly around my waist (also a present from Mary). A few minutes after I'd finished Natasha arrived, not dressed. All three of us left the house together – in broad daylight. I felt hot, nervous and restless. We drove up the A34. En route Natasha stopped off on a country lane so that he could add some finishing touches to his appearance, like a wig, make-up and a dress! While he was preparing himself, a tractor turned out of a field and onto the road, past our car. As the tractor trundled along the driver gazed at us, amazed. Natasha was completely unfazed.

"If he wants to stare at us, let him stare," Natasha said.

Not that we could do much about it. I felt happier when we were on the road again, heading for Manchester. No other road users took any notice of us. Natasha and Sabrina sat in the front of the car chatting. I can recall a tale Natasha told. Due to the fact that he lived at his parents' house, he kept his case of clothing in the boot of his car. His girlfriend had discovered some garments and he had confessed that he was a transvestite.

"Why do you like dressing in women's clothes?" she'd asked in all innocence.

"I don't fucking know!" Natasha had replied. We all laughed.

We finally arrived in Manchester and Natasha parked up in Canal Street close to the Rembrandt Hotel, just over the road from UMIST. We got out of the car and Natasha locked up. A couple of friendly hookers smiled at us as we walked, uneasily, to the Rembrandt Hotel (the Rem). The bald bouncer on the door said,

"Good evening, ladies,"

We turned into the hotel and walked up the stairs to the Northern Concorde meeting. At the top of the stairs we went through another door into the long, narrow bar. A TV sat at a trestle table charging entry fees. £2 for members, £3 for non-members. This TV was so convincing I actually thought she was a woman, she even sounded like one. So this was it. A somewhat cosy, pleasant bar that overlooked the canal. Soft music played on the piped sound system. I remember 'Magic Moments' and other Burt Bacharach classics. We ordered halves of lager and bitter and then sat down at a table and chatted to a few TVs and a TS. People came and went. All the men were using the ladies and no one was buying pints. It was no mean feat to go to the Ladies and direct proceedings while standing up and trying to hold a dress but it felt nice to do girlie things afterwards like re-apply make-up.

We left at 10.30pm and strolled back to the car. Three suited businessmen stared at us in bewilderment as we got to Natasha's Ford. The prostitutes were still hanging around by the canal.

We arrived back at Sabrina's house at midnight. We changed and then Natasha and I drove off to our respective houses. The next day I was sitting at my desk at work, wearing my suit and dreaming of our next visit to Manchester.

The following week I changed in the small room at the Rem. It was boiling hot and full of sticky bodies and earthy smells. This time I wore my black leather flared skirt which I had bought in Hanley, a pair of patent black 3" stilettos and 10 denier tights. I also wore a white nylon blouse – it was my favourite outfit. I came down stairs (very carefully in those heels) and saw Val, who was a tall, corseted TV who jointly ran Northern Concord. I paid the £15 membership. It felt so nice to detach my handbag from my shoulder, open it, pull out my purse and remove notes and coins. Such a simple thing but, again, a new experience. I spent most of the night talking to Sabrina about football whilst Natasha spoke to Jennifer, a TV in his fifties from Yorkshire who we had met on our first trip to the Concord. He was to prove a close friend over the coming months. That night we again left at about 10.30pm and undressed at Sabrina's house. Then for the cold, lonely drive back home. Being in the male was an anti-climax; being dressed was a thrill, a 'high'. Changing back into the male and going to my empty house was always depressing.

Being a member of Northern Concord meant that I now received their magazines and this yielded another benefit of my dressing for I wrote my first -ever published material for Northern Concord's resident magazine, *Cross Talk* and later for Roses in-house magazine, *Roses Repartee*. Being a trannie had unexpected spin-offs.

Of course, the following week I was back in Manchester. Again, I dressed at the Concord. This time, when I had arrived at Sabrina's house, Natasha and Sabrina were ready and waiting in their full regalia. Sabrina's girlfriend, Sharon, ushered us out onto the street when the coast was clear.

The small changing room at the Rem that night was hot and clammy. A very convincing slim, black guy and a huge, fat man with tattoos competing for space along with the rest of us. It took me an hour and a half to get the make-up right. Natasha and Sabrina wondered what had happened to me. I came down to the bar and spent the rest of the evening watching the sights come and go – the chap in the Charles 1 wig and the real girl who did make-up in a mortuary. Interesting characters and we were getting to know them

all: the lorry driver from Leeds who told us about the time he was stopped, dressed in his cab, by the police during the Ripper investigation, the salesman from Blackpool, the computer rep from Liverpool - they came from all over the North West to be upstairs in the Rem on a Wednesday night. This time, on the way back I fell asleep in the car. Even extraordinary things become ordinary after a while.

So it became the regular routine – every Wednesday, Natasha, Sabrina and I went to the Rem. Most of the time all three of us left dressed from Sabrina’s house, without a hitch though on one occasion Sabrina left his house and a neighbour, an old man, was walking his dog.

“Evening, madam,” he said.

Sabrina instantly replied, “Evening,”

The man looked aghast. The deep, manly voice didn’t gel with the blonde hair and the dark skirt. He shook his head and walked on.

I lived for Wednesdays at the ‘Rem’. The evenings in between were taken up with shaving (I’d given up on Immac as in brought me out in spots) and trying on new outfits as well as experimenting with make-up. With the assistance of Natasha I began to develop my own style and realised how dreadful I must have looked in the past. Natasha had a natural flair for dressing and make-up and seemed to know instinctively what colours matched and clothes co-ordination.

I was also buying more clothes and make-up. Charity shops were a good source of clothes; but now even normal High Street stores held no fear. I found that assistants didn’t seem to mind and, anyway, I had become blasé about buying female clothes. I felt a lot more confident because after the years of loneliness I realised I wasn’t alone, like E.T. I had made contact with ‘home’.

After a few weeks at the Rem we plucked up courage to leave its hallowed ground and walked to other pubs in the Gay Village. First we walked along the cobbled Canal Street to the New Union Hotel. It was a fantastic feeling: the skirt pulling tight against my legs, the feel of the heels on the stones, feeling every pebble on the pavement through my thin soled high-heeled shoes. From then on we ventured out on every visit to the Rem. Then, one night, a police motorcyclist approached slowly up the street. He stopped by us and pushed up his visor. Oh no, was this it?

“Evening ladies!” he said with a smile.

This was Manchester, this was Paradise.

The good thing about being out with other TVs was getting advice: the wig didn’t suit me, the make-up, the clothes. I suppose it was ‘girly’ chat for male dressers - developing a sense of fashion and a ‘look’. For a long time breast forms had been an issue. I’d experimented with a lot of cheap imitations but none seemed to feel right. Then there was the wig. My early wigs had come from Jacqueline, mail order, no questions asked. Now, I had contacts and Natasha recommend a fantasy dress shop in Crewe. One Saturday I drove down and saw the owner. A large woman took me out to the back of the shop. To one side were shelves full of wigs. She sat me down in front of the mirror and asked me what wig I

wanted to try on. After some time I choose a curly blonde wig and also bought foundation and powder.

That Saturday I wore my new blonde wig and a turquoise coloured dress that consisted of a filmy skirt and bodice on a trip to Walsall. We – that is Natasha, Sabrina and myself - went there to meet some friends of Natasha's called Sandra and Alison. They were members of a local TV support group in Cannock. Sandra was a mild-mannered market trader who always referred to her wig as 'the rat' and Alison was a married examiner who was a committed Aston Villa fan and loved 'footie' talk. They were a terrific two-some and were always good-humoured and fun to be around. We met up in a gay pub called the Golden Lion, which had a club attached called Monroe's. After a few drinks in the Lion we went through into Monroe's, where I got chatted up a gay guy who was very attentive and keen to make my acquaintance, despite my insistence that I was straight.

By this time I was branching out. I called small ads in the local paper and bought clothes from unsuspecting women who expected me to come around with a partner. Most didn't seem to mind. Maybe they didn't realise I was a TV, and anyway, just like in Middlesbrough, the ads didn't carry that sexist message 'female callers only' like the London ads in Loot and the Exchange and Mart. The best personal ad, visa vie selling clothes, I ever responded to was that of a woman in her mid-forties who lived out in a large cottage up an unmade road outside Stoke. I called around one Friday evening. She had a leather skirt to sell. In fact she had three – one black, one grey, one blue as well as a leather cat suit, leather jacket and assorted other clothes.

"My husband has told me to sell some clothes to raise money to buy a saddle for my horse," she said.

Excellent stuff. I bought some skirts from her and thereby contributed to her saddle fund.

Yet, the following day when we went to the Rem for their anniversary party I actually wore one of the skirts I'd bought in a charity shop in Longton where I now lived. The charity shop purchase I wore was a red leather knee-length pencil skirt, topped off with a new white, cotton blouse, red high heels, and a matching red handbag – the last two items were bought from the same charity shop. The shoes pinched my toes and made them sore; still, I felt I looked quite convincing and at least my outfit matched. The red skirt was one of the few items that I owned that actually looked good with my Masquerade hip and bum pads which I had ordered mail order after seeing an advert in Repartee. I found the filling in the pads was too bulky but under this particularly skirt they gave me delightful curves.

The Rem had provided a special anniversary buffet for Northern Concorde members and there was a good turn-out; a number of TV's had their girlfriends or wives present. Sandra and Alison had driven up from Cannock and were keen to taste the delights of Manchester nightlife, so this time we went out as a group.

Despite the pain in my feet, I managed to hobble across the road to a gay club called Napoleon's where Natasha was particularly pleased when the doorman asked him if he was a lady or a guy dressed. He admitted to being a TV because the club offered trannies a discount.

Napoleon's was a small, dark club full of TVs and drag queens dancing in front of the mirrors. We hung around the bar and watched for a while before taking a taxi down to a club called Dickens, outside of the Gay Village area. Entrance was via a steep staircase that led into a large room with an L-shaped bar. There was an area of seating to one side in a partitioned wooden section and a square dance floor to the left of the bar. Mirrors covered two sides of the walls of the dance floor and the atmosphere was dark and smoky. TVs danced around their handbags, admiring their reflections, dancing with themselves. Pure narcissist pleasure. Most wore short skirts and high-heels and danced with their legs akimbo, their eyes never leaving their reflections. Straight girls mingled with the TVs and would stand around watching them dance. Occasionally they approached. The straight men were more circumspect.

After a drink I went onto the dance floor. It was fantastic, watching my female form in the mirror. Pure narcissism. Later, when we left, it took ages getting a taxi back to the Village and whilst we were standing outside Dickens we got talking to two blonde girls who had arrived with their arms linked around another TV. One of the girls was dressed in long boots and a short skirt and the other in a black fur coat. Both were attractive. They wanted us to return to Dickens but we refused.

"Life's not a rehearsal," one of the girls, Kimberley, said as they entered the club. She pulled her coat up around her mouth and walked through the door.

Next, a couple of abusive lads came up and started insulting Sandra and Alison.

"Have you got a steamer under your dress then?" one asked Sandra. Strangely Natasha, Sabrina and I didn't receive any verbal; we suspected it was because we were of similar age to the lads.

Over the next few months I graduated from being an OTV (Ordinary TV) to being a RTV (Regular TV). My life revolved around TV pursuits. Sometimes, if Sabrina couldn't go out, Natasha would come to my house and we would stay in and have a dressing evening. That afforded us the opportunity to experiment and try on outfits and make-up. We would start off by going up to the fish and chip shop close to my house and buying chips and burgers. After that we would dress.

Natasha was excellent at applying make-up, and often, after I had donned my lingerie and tits and applied the foundation, Natasha would take over. He would carefully apply eyeliner, mascara, shadow and lippy but being a perfectionist, Natasha would wipe it off and start again if it didn't look right. It felt fantastic being made-up by someone else. I suppose it took me back to that August day, all those years ago, when my sister had made my face up. When we had finished we would take photographs of each other in different outfits. I bought a tripod for some self-portraits and would dress in the week and try new "looks." My appearance was gradually improving and I was becoming more and more convincing.

Most of the time, however, we went out: Wednesdays and Saturdays up to Manchester - that was the routine. Sabrina used to go out with his girlfriend, Sharon, at weekends so Natasha and I would often go up to Manchester together. We took it in turns to drive. Driving dressed was a new experience for me and one I thoroughly enjoyed, though I did wear trainers over my stockinged feet and not pointy high heels. I also left my house

dressed. To begin with, when Natasha and I left my house to go out for the evening, Natasha would be dressed and I would be in the male. Perhaps, with a shell suit over my female clothes but with most of my make-up applied. Finally, as the nights drew in, I emerged, fully dressed, from my house. The first time I left dressed I was wearing a black pleated skirt, black high heels, a silky blouse and blonde wig. Though my drive was long it was also narrow which meant that Natasha had to park right at the top of the drive, behind the house, to access the driver's door. This meant we could be seen by both sets of neighbours. Before we left the house via the backdoor I would go to my bedroom window and look up and down the street to see if anyone was about. Then, when the coast was clear, first Natasha and then I would leave; carefully I would turn the key in the lock of my back door. Then I would step around the side of the car and squeeze into the passenger seat. It was always a relief to be in the car but we were aware that the difficult job was still to come; reversing back down the drive onto the street and the pulling away. We didn't appear to be seen on that occasion but, of course, over the years we were seen on numerous occasions. I realised later that one set of neighbours - the neighbours I was attached to - even had a little area where they would go 'TV spotting'. This constituted of a hole in the fence where they would stand and watch us! If I'd known that then I'd probably never left the house. Even so, as Natasha said,

"Who cares?"

My neighbours still spoke to me. No one ever made any comments about the 'TV thing' and so, like Natasha, I became very nonchalant about being seen dressed. Natasha was in a worse situation as he lived at home, so over the years his neighbours, brother and parents saw him dressed.

One Saturday, during the day, Natasha and I went to Transformation in Birmingham and then on to a small quiet shop near Winston Green prison to purchase some proper boobs. I was in the male but Natasha was dressed. He was able to spend the day dressed because he had very smooth skin and so didn't have to shave every day, unlike me who has always suffered from thick beard growth.

The shop looked disused but Natasha rang the bell and a middle-aged grey haired man came to the door. He was very quite and well spoken. For the next three hours - and yes, I do mean three hours! He told us about the breast forms he sold and that we shouldn't buy them unless we were serious TVs. It was almost like buying a pet from a loving pet-shop owner - he wanted 'his' breasts to go to a good home. In the end we both bought a pair. They cost £260 each - no, not each breast but for a pair. Both of us were size 36B.

That night we went up to Manchester and met Jennifer in the New Union. Jennifer was the TV from Yorkshire who we had met in the Rem on my first outing. We had become good friends. I felt a bit self-conscious, as we were the only TVs in the New Union, so after one drink we took a taxi down to Dickens. There were a lot of straight girls in and one called Carol was interested in the TV scene. She kept talking to us and asking us about the dressing; she even showed me her left breast in a 'show you mine, show me yours' exchange. The difference was that I took mine right out of my bra and lobbed the thing at her - all £130 worth of it. Unfortunately, she couldn't respond with a similar stunt.

Later, the two blonde girls, Kimberly and Holly, who we had seen the night when we had gone to the Rem's anniversary party with Sandra and Alison, came into the club but this time we didn't talk to them.

The breast forms looked and felt good, even though during the night I had to dispense with the corset and the hip pads as the hip pads bulked me out and made my bum look like the arse of a pantomime dame and the corset was too restrictive. Over the years I've come to the conclusion that the simpler the foundation garments the better.

By this time I was shopping for women's clothes regularly, often with Natasha. We'd go to Hanley (one of Stoke's six towns) on a Saturday morning and get blouses and shoes and make-up and then come home, have our fish and chips and get changed for our night out. Occasionally, we went out, in the male, to pubs and clubs in Stoke-on-Trent or Stafford for we both hankered after girlfriends – preferably ones who tolerated the dressing.

One of our regular shops of choice was the Charnos factory shop where we used to buy our lingerie. Like most TVs we had a fondness for expensive lingerie and would buy bustiers, basques, knickers and suspenders. One of the wonderful things about shaving all over was pulling on a pair of stockings or tights which were ten denier; we would often buy lycra-based tights/stockings or high shine. Oh, they felt so wonderful against my legs!

Sabrina had started drifting in and out of the TV scene by this point. He rarely went out weekends and on a couple of occasions, on a Wednesday, he had stayed at the Rem when we had gone to the New Union Hotel or New York, New York.

One Saturday night I went up to Manchester in jeans and a blouse and waistcoat. Natasha and I got talking to Kimberly and Holly in Dickens. One claimed to be a sociology student and the other worked for a finance company. Both lived with their families. We chatted to them for the whole night. It was 5am before we returned to Stoke.

The following morning, Vicky, a girl who lived around the corner from me and with whom I worked, came around to see me. She had a rather tumultuous weekend-only relationship with her boyfriend who lived some distance away, which meant she was often at a loose end and would visit me at odd times in the week or on Sunday afternoons. She took a rather maternal attitude to me, wanting to know details of what I had done and whom I was seeing. I used to go swimming with her every Tuesday, so she was well aware that I shaved my body and I think suspicious of what I got up to in Manchester with the anonymous Natasha. Anyway, fuelled by my Manchester stories that Sunday she said she wanted to go to Manchester with Natasha and myself and bring along some of her friends. Of course, the stories had included everything bar dressing. It was getting difficult to keep my private life a secret.

A few weeks later I bought a black leather mini-skirt in a shop in Longton and a pair of black high-heels and two camisole tops, one white, one red. Days after that, ever the keen footie fan and a mug for a lost cause, on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1993, I went to Rotterdam for the England verses Holland World Cup qualifying game, which we lost 2-0, a defeat which meant we failed to qualify for the 1994 World Cup Finals in America. That night Natasha and Sabrina had gone up to the Rem and met up with Kimberley and Holly. Apparently, they had had a good night.

The following week Natasha came to collect me to go to the Rem. He arrived late; Natasha was usually early for everything. He wasn't dressed. He said he had some bad news as he walked into the hall.

I stood against the hall radiator, I immediately thought of Sabrina. He had lost his job recently and his girlfriend had dumped him.

"He's dead," Natasha said slowly.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Sabrina had killed himself. Gone out into the country, placed a rubber hose over his exhaust pipe and started the engine. Carbon monoxide poisoning. That night we went to the Rem in a sombre mood. Neither Natasha nor I wanted to dress. We told Val, met up with some of the other regulars who had known Sabrina and informed them of the sad, sad news.

The unofficial inquest started down the Rem, Natasha thought that Sabrina wanted to be a woman – to do the whole thing and he couldn't face his family. I'm not sure. Later, I heard that he had tried to kill himself when a previous girlfriend had left him and he had a child. Even so, over the years I've met a number of TVs who've gone TS when I've not been at all convinced they really are 'women in men's bodies'. Usually, they have been looking for something that they could not find in the male world and have become convinced that a change of sex will solve all their male problems. Unfortunately, life doesn't work like that; if a TV is unemployed becoming a TS is not going to help him get a job – quite the opposite. Some might disagree, but I'm not convinced that all those that chose the TS path do so for the best of motives.

Natasha and I were desperate to find out if Sabrina had killed himself whilst dressed, fortunately he hadn't so the TV side of his life remained a secret. His funeral was a week later and Natasha and I attended. It was a terribly sad affair with 'Bridge over Trouble Water' by Simon and Garfunkell playing before the ceremony. Sabrina's girlfriend, Sharon, had split up with him when he killed himself and this was deemed to be the main reason for his suicide.

Natasha was constantly in contact with Sharon, trying to help her through the devastation she felt and convince her that she should not blame herself for Sabrina's death. To her considerable credit, Sharon did not divulge the secret of Sabrina's transvestism to his parents. It was a sad, lonely time – the apparent consequences of the transvestite lifestyle coming to haunt us. At the time, I felt truly miserable; I hated my job and the thing I lived for – dressing – had possibly caused the death of a friend. Natasha and I talked for hours on the phone, usually after he had spoken to Sharon. However, we accepted that Sabrina's suicide had been about much more than transvestism and we decided to continue to go out to Manchester.

On our next trip we met up with the two blondes, Kimberley and Holly who chatted to us all night and accompanied us to Dickens. When we parted they agreed to meet us the following week.

The next Thursday we went down to Sandra's house in Cannock for the meeting of her support group which was linked to the Beaumont Society. A representative from *Colour Me Beautiful* gave a make-up demonstration, which was interesting but, as with all these things, it's difficult to take it in at one sitting. The only way to improve is to practice.

When we next met Kimberley and Holly up at Manchester a young man who we had met on the first night told us they were a couple of prick teasers and that he had had sex with them both. We bumped into Holly and Kimberly later whilst doing our usual crawl of the Gay Village. We told them what their friend had said. They were annoyed and said they would try to find him,

"I'll have him, I'll have him" Kimberley kept repeating. It made me think she was a bit aggressive and untrustworthy and that the liking of TVs was all for affect.

As we entered November Scarborough beckoned. Scarborough was a Rose's weekend – organised by the president of Roses, Martine Rose, and of course a 'must' for Natasha and I. Natasha came to my house on the Thursday night and the next day he left my house dressed. I was in the male. I dressed in the car on the way up to Scarborough as Natasha drove.

After I had dressed we had an interesting conversation about what we would do if, when dressed we were either a) were involved in an accident or b) we witnessed an accident. We both agreed that we would have to stop – particularly if people were injured, Natasha was actually a keen first-aider. The thing about being dressed and read is not to panic, to have complete confidence in yourself and appearance and if, for what ever reason people do read you, let it pass over you – but this is easier said than done as you will see later.



The hotel in Scarborough was a sandstone Victorian affair on a corner plot. The staff seemed unfazed by TVs standing around their suitcases in the lobby. Throughout the hotel sales people sold their wares: dresses, make-up, make-up lessons, shoes and assorted accessories.

Natasha and I were booked into a twin room. That evening we met up with Jennifer and the three of us went down for our meal dressed. On our table was another TV called Diane and the following morning Diane took Natasha, Jennifer and myself to Scarborough town centre in his Mercedes. It was our first shopping trip en femme. We parked in a multi-story car park and walked into the middle of the Paddock Shopping Centre. I was wearing jeans and a blouse and a leather jacket so that I blended in with the crowd. It appeared to work, as no one seemed to read us. My first purchase dressed was a newspaper from a newsagent outside of the shopping centre. . After that, we split up, Natasha and I went to Debenhams where I bought some Clinique foundation and then onto Boots where we bought some more cosmetics. All the shop assistants knew of course but served us as if we were real women. When we got back to the hotel I felt fantastic. That first shopping trip was so, so easy. It wasn't until later that I realised that it was something of a false dawn. The good burghers of Scarborough are used to TVs (the Beaumont Society also occasionally has its annual bash there) and so were not surprised by our appearance. Later, when we did some more shopping trips I realised how hard it actually is to walk around dressed and not be read.

That evening, two young men from Edinburgh gave Natasha and me a make-up lesson. They really knew their business and the effect was fantastic. Made up to the nines and looking glam in my blonde wig I went to a stall that sold evening dresses. The lady supplying them could also make them if required. It felt wonderful to pull on beautiful taffeta dresses and swirl around in them feeling the weight of the thick layers of skirt under the material.

The Scots lads had said that my black wig (which I had purchased from Mary) would look better so, when I went up stairs to change for the evening meal, I exchanged my blonde wig for the black one. There was no doubt about it, it looked far more natural. Dressed, Natasha and I went downstairs for the evening meal.

There must have been 120-plus transvestites in the room, drinking, smoking, and laughing. It was a fantastic atmosphere. Of course, our table generated the greatest level of noise and drew some disapproving looks from the tables around us. The older TVs clearly liked to be more sombre, some even wearing gloves for dinner and dressed in two pieces suits and pearls.

That wasn't for me. After dinner I changed again, this time into my black leather mini skirt and silky white, camisole top and patent 3.5-inch heels on the end of my bare, shaved legs.

There was a disco in the next room so Natasha and I danced along with some of the other TVs. The disco was a small portable affair and one of the helpers was a lady called Jessica. She was a divorced mother who assisted with the disco on a Saturday night. Coincidentally, she was wearing exactly the same outfit as me – black leather skirt and white top. Towards the end of the evening, when the slow numbers came on we danced, skirt to skirt, my prick bursting out of my panties.

On the Sunday Natasha drove us home to Stoke-on-Trent; we both left the hotel dressed. We didn't get changed into the male until we got back to my house that afternoon. It had been a fantastic weekend that had more than lived up to expectations.

The following Friday we were at Roses in Sheffield. At that time Roses premises were in a large out-of-the-way house. Roses met in the upstairs part of the house. The place seemed to be like a scout hut or student accommodation all paper thin plasterboard walls and tatty sofas. We saw Martine Rose and his then girlfriend, Diane, as well as another TV, Josephine, who helped to compile the *Repartee* magazine. There were other TVs there as well, of course, for this was the usual Roses Sheffield meeting. After chatting to Martine for a while, Natasha and I had a wander around and looked at a stall selling clothes. I bought a PVC skirt with lace up sides. Natasha had seen it on a rail and insisted I bought it – and as a result got his photograph in the magazine as an interested customer looking to purchase merchandise – it remained in the magazine for ages. Later, we went to a gay Sheffield club, which was very quiet.

The next night Kimberley and Holly came around to my house for dinner. We had tried to arrange this for some time and eventually they turned up in their small hatchback. During the day we had spent hours preparing a meal for them and even gone to the trouble of placing photos of ourselves, dressed, around the walls, to add to the candlelit atmosphere. Sadly, it wasn't appreciated; much as I'd like to describe how the evening started with a romantic meal and soft music and ended with Natasha and I making love to the two girls, dressed, it didn't happen like that. They got drunk very quickly and criticised the food we had prepared. Then, they started messing around, chasing us around the house and trying to pull up our skirts. There was nothing sexual in this. Indeed, when Natasha and I did make a pass at them they ran up to my room and locked the door. They slept in my bed. Natasha slept in the next room and I slept downstairs on the sofa bed.

I wasn't happy as well that the two girls had been through my cupboards and drawers. Although nothing was stolen, it was a stark warning. The dressing had brought me into contact with a lot of honest, good people – like Natasha, Sabrina, Mary and Stella - but it had also brought me into contact with some unsavoury characters like Kimberley and Holly.

Even so, like Oscar Wilde I could resist anything but temptation and when, the following day, they were repentant and apologetic we forgave them and arranged to meet them on the Wednesday, 17th November 1993 in Manchester. Or to be more precise, to pick Holly up from her house.

Dressed, we called around at 8pm after locating the council house on the outskirts of Manchester. Natasha knocked on the door and through the frosted glass I could see a male figure approaching. I was pleased that I had worn my jeans for I legged it. Natasha stood his ground. From behind a privet hedge I saw the door open and Natasha, who was also in trousers, a blouse and a bushy blonde wig, calmly ask the person who had answered the door if Holly was in. The man was in his thirties and thick-set. He took no notice of Natasha's appearance, in fact, he ushered him in. I stood up and walked quickly up the path, smiling at him as he held the door for me, as if hiding behind bushes was something that I did every day.

“Hiya,” Holly said, looking up from tying up her long boots. Natasha walked further into the living room. Holly’s brother and girlfriend sat on the floor in front of the television. The man who had opened the door sat back on the sofa. There was another lad and girl in the kitchen – no one said a word.

Gazing around the room, my attention was drawn to the TV screen. England was one-nil down to San Marino in their final World Cup qualifying match.

“Is that score right, mate?” I said to the guy who had opened the door.

“Yeah, fucking Pearce let them in after 30 seconds.” He picked up a can of beer.

“I can’t believe it,” I said.

What then followed was a surreal lads’ conversation about football. The only difference was that I was wearing powder on my face, lipstick, blusher, mascara, eyeliner and eye shadow, all topped off with a black curly wig. OK, the jeans that I stuffed my painted nails into the pockets of could almost be considered manly but the silky white blouse certainly wasn’t. The door opener didn’t appear to notice my appearance. By the time Holly had tied her boot laces England had equalised.

“Let’s hope we go on and win it,” I said as we left the house.

“Yeah, too right, mate.”

Next we went to Kimberley’s place. It was on the same estate – just around the corner from Holly’s house. Kimberley’s elderly mother answered the door and showed us into the living room. The room was comfortably decorated and there was a picture of the Virgin Mary on the wall. This time someone did take notice of us. A little girl ran for sanctuary behind Kimberley’s chair.

A few minutes later we left the house. Natasha and I followed Holly and Kimberley up to Manchester City Centre. We parked up and the four of us went to Napoleon’s.

“You’ve got an edge about Saturday, go on, admit it,” Holly said to me once we were in the club.

I shook my wigged head. “No.”

She was right though, I did have. It had been a major disappointment. Even so, we parted on friendly terms and agreed to meet again.

The following day we were off to Derby for one of Madeline’s meetings at his house. Madeline was a TV we had met at Scarborough who ran a support group and had a dedicated phone help line for TVs. His girlfriend was also involved in the TV scene. Like most of the TVs we met, he was some years older than us, having married, brought up children, divorced and then joined the scene. This seemed to be the pattern of many TVs and I think that because Natasha and I were young and looked reasonably good we got invited to a number of TV social events. That, coupled to the fact that, Natasha was excellent at keeping in touch with people, and, when we weren’t out dressed, would spend evenings at his parents’ house, lying on his bed, talking to TV’s we had met.

There was a frenetic pace to our lives. Out of one outfit and into another. To be more feminine, I selected a black skirt and blouse and high heels for the night at the Derby Support Group. I sat on the chair; my legs together and my palms up like a proper young lady.

I loved these meetings, sitting around and chatting to like-minded people. That night there were only about seven people in attendance, including a couple of wives and one guy dressed in an all-in-one red rubber suit as well as two men 'in the male'. On the way up we had picked up Ralph. Ralph was an OAP TV who was a very skilled dressmaker. We had met him at a previous meeting in Derby and Natasha had made tentative enquiries about him making us both a couple of dresses.

It wasn't all fun and TV games however. Back in Stoke, a day later, my car broke down and Natasha towed me to a garage. It was a hair-raising experience because the brakes were servo-assisted and once Natasha had started towing I had no way to communicate with him that I couldn't stop. To avoid hitting him up the back as he approached a roundabout I had to swerve around him and, as the rope pulled taut, stop ahead of him. The problem was the towrope caught around my axle and we couldn't move it. Brilliant. We phoned the AA. And, no, we weren't dressed.

The following night we called at Ralph's flat in Derby and he measured us up for a dress each. Two days later they were ready. They were fantastic figure-hugging, long, silk patterned dresses. He had even made both of us a pair of long gloves.

About this time we were invited to a party in Stockport by some of the Northern Concord crowd. The location was a large farmhouse and it was actually an S&M party. For the occasion I wore the black vinyl skirt I had bought at Roses in Sheffield. As we walked in through the front door there was a huge room on the right with a bare wooden floor. The room was filled with stocks and whipping benches, horses and other S&M paraphernalia. Various people were being spanked or caned. As Natasha and I arrived we met up with Val, the Secretary of Northern Concord, who was walking around the room trailing a skin headed lesbian on a dog leash. All quite bizarre. A large girl in a PVC dress with a zip up the front got chatting to Natasha and me and asked us about the dressing. Like a lot of younger women, she was very interested in the TV scene and wanted to know about make-up and where we went for a night out. She introduced herself as Carol. I chatted to her whilst Natasha spoke to her boyfriend about how to out wit the new police speed cameras, which had just come into vogue. It transpired that Carol's boyfriend was a Hell's Angel. Later in the evening he placed his girlfriend in the stocks and caned her a few times on her large, bare backside. He then passed the cane to me.

"She's never been thrashed by a Trannie before. Here, you have a go."

Without needing a second invitation I took up the cane.

The backside of the poor girl quivered. She already had a few long red marks on her arse. I brought the cane down with a healthy thwack. And again. And again. Adding to the accumulation of long thin lines on her flesh.

"Harder," the Hell's Angel demanded.

Again I whacked her butt. And again. Carol moved enticingly in the stocks but there was no chance of release. Her arse gained a deep red hue. I stopped, passed the cane back. Thin, dark red stripes were cut into Carol's large buttocks. The Hell's Angel laughed and continued to strike his girlfriend's backside.

When she was finally released she came back to where Natasha and I were standing - the Hell's Angel was still mooching around the stocks and horses. I asked Carol for her

lipstick, unzipped the front of her dress so that her bare breasts flopped out and wrote my phone number across her tits. Natasha, fearing that I might get a visit from a Stoke-on-Trent Hell's Angel chapter, advised me to rub the number out, which I did, perhaps over zealously because the girl led me around a corner into a corridor and passionately snogged me.

The next Saturday it was the Beaumont weekend and so we set off for a hotel in Roth-erham. We met up with Jennifer again and on the Saturday went shopping; unfortunately, without the same level of success as we had enjoyed in Scarborough. I decided to wear jeans again but this time with the Masquerade hip pads. Result? I got read by virtually everyone and had to make a hasty retreat back to the car. It was a salutary lesson. Just when you think you're good it all goes wrong. I'm now convinced that trousers are the wrong things to wear for shopping trips. Skirts or dresses are better.

The Beaumont weekend had none of the light-hearted banter of Roses and in fact the Annual General Meeting (yes, they even had one of those!) was filled with bitter in-fighting. Natasha and I found it rather illuminating and amusing to see men in navy blue skirts and silky blouses shouting across the room at each other like a bunch of shop stew-ards at a union convention, as they held onto the beads around their necks!

In my experience, and I got this feeling at the Beaumont weekend, TVs are often quite conservative, both in the manner of their dress and views. Of course, for the TV, there is an interest in maintaining the status quo. A society that has no demarcation between male and female clothing would be a complete nightmare to aspiring transvestites as, no doubt, it is to the female transvestite (see Introduction).

That night we attended the Beaumont weekend disco. Natasha and I both dressed in the dresses that Ralph had made us. They were tight fitting and showed every bulge, which meant I had to wear a girdle to hide my beer gut. Mine was in black and Natasha's in silver. They looked terrific and TVs came up to us all night and complimented us on the dresses. We now had our own personal dressmaker.

A funny incident occurred at the disco. The hotel was a large modern affair which had other areas open to the general public. At one point in the night I moved away from the TV area and was standing in the lobby talking to Jennifer. To my side was a bar which was open to the public. As I kicked my high heels against the cigarette machine and chatted to Jennifer, a guy sitting in the public bar looked up and then looked down at his beer and then looked up again. I gave him my most beguiling smile. He tapped his friend on the arm. They both stared. Welcome to TV territory, I thought.

"They're men, Dan," I heard him say.

"Bleeding Hell, they are 'an all."

I had to move back to the TV disco, I was laughing so much.

It has always fascinated me how different TVs look when in the male. Seeing TVs in glamorous frocks the night before was in stark contrast to the oldish, balding men who left the building the following day having queued up to pay the hotel bill in the lobby after the weekend. There's no doubt dressing in women's clothes takes years off you. It also takes your hair off you because I've noticed that a number of TVs have receding hairlines and I put this down to the wearing of wigs. Hats have much the same effect.

Shortly after Natasha and I were walking through Longton when Nastasha found a pair of knee-length black vinyl boots in a basket outside a shoe shop.

“Look, they’re size seven,” he said.

Having small feet was an absolutely God-send as I could fit into women’s shoes.

I bought the boots which were great. Natasha had once again come up trumps with a TV purchase.

Then, early on in December Stella and Mary organised a Christmas meal at a restaurant in Birmingham. There were about forty TVs and Natasha, Mary, Stella and I shared a table. Again, it was a great night, a new experience – a transvestite Christmas meal - with all the trimmings.

The following Saturday it was back to Manchester. This time I was in a tarty mood; heavy make-up, black leather mini- skirt, red camisole top and black, patent 3.5” high heels. Again, I didn’t wear stockings or tights; I loved the chill air on my bare, exposed legs. Madeline arrived with his girlfriend, Anna. He drew up outside my house and hooted his horn so I put on my black leather jacket (purchased in Hong Kong), picked up my small handbag and left with Natasha via the front door; I walked slowly down my steep drive and into the car. Fortunately, it was dark. All the same I’m sure one or two curtains must have twitched, but we didn’t care, we felt like normal girls going out for the evening.

That night we toured the gay clubs. La Cage, New York, New York and finally Napoleon’s. It was a fab night, dancing and chatting. I even had a proposition from a youngish guy who came up to me and told me he fancied me. That’s what comes of being a tart! When I told him I was straight he got a bit moody and walked off. Still, it was one of the best nights ever in Manchester. Madeline dropped us off at 3am and Natasha and I trundled back up my drive, swinging our handbags. As Madeline pulled away Natasha and I stood at the door waving. Oh, if the neighbours could only see us .... in fact they could, only too clearly!

When Natasha stayed, which he did quite frequently after a late night in Manchester, he would sleep in the spare room, often getting up early to go and take his ambulance to rallying events. I used to wonder how he did it, surviving on only a few hours sleep. Unlike me whose always needed a good eight hours.

A couple of weeks later and it was over to Stella and Mary’s for their annual Christmas party. For the occasion I wore a pretty, feminine party dress which consisted of a black silky dress, full skirt, tight bodice and high, high black stiletto heels. Now I felt completely comfortable at TV gatherings, especially at Stella and Mary’s house. Natasha and I were respected on the scene because we went to Manchester so frequently and others were keen to hear our tales of trips around the gay pubs and clubs.

However, despite the good time, maintaining two wardrobes and two lifestyles was an expensive business; for whilst making our twice-weekly excursions to Manchester and delving into the TV scene I was also maintaining links to the straight and narrow world of nightclubs, pubs and meeting women. Occasionally, Natasha and I would have a spell of going out in the male to clubs and pubs.

We both loved going to nightclubs and seeing the girls, their hair nicely done, their make-up well applied and wearing tight dresses, mini- skirts, boots or high-heels. Heaven. That was the arena that aroused me. Not for me the drab world of feminism and students in jeans and grunge styles. Yuk. Give me a girl with good dress-sense. Throughout my life I have been attracted to places where women are likely to be well groomed and stylishly dressed: nightclubs, casinos and horse-race meetings – even weddings. Certainly, part of the glamour of the casino lies in the fact, that of an evening, the female punters and their partners are well-attired – but then I love gambling and have done so all my life.

When Natasha and I were in a nightclub we would talk about how good the ‘floor show’ was, meaning were the girls up to much? In TV mode that phrase would mean ‘well dressed’ but when I was in the male the same expression would mean were the girls fit.

Still, my interest in women’s clothes has given an added dimension to my sexual urges. Sometimes it has been a woman’s clothes rather than her body which has attracted. I recall a fattish girl in a pub in Newcastle-under-Lyme. She was dressed to impress in an A line black leather skirt and white silky blouse. She was drinking with her more attractive friends and yet I went straight over to her and started chatting her up. I didn’t get anywhere but she enjoyed the attention. Had she been dressed in something else, would I have bothered? I doubt it.

Yet is this that unusual? I believe there’s a part of the TV in every man. For clothes make such a huge difference to a woman’s appearance and men are often worried if their partner’s clothes are provocative and by the same token like to admire women in mini-skirts, low cut dresses and so on. I remember having a conversation about women’s clothes once with a non-TV friend of mine who was an out and out womaniser. He confided in me that he loved girls in leather mini skirts and if he saw a girl with a reasonable figure in such a skirt he would chat her up for to him the skirt meant sex and he thought he was likely to get a fuck that night. Given his track record he was usually right.

One straight club we particularly liked was in Stafford. It was to prove a very successful hunting ground for me, but more of that later. Natasha knew the doorman and we were guaranteed entrance. The club was a mixture of ages but one character who was always there was a man in his early forties who looked the spit of a miniature Rod Stewart; he dyed and styled his hair in the same manner and would wear suits with tartan waistcoats. Often the D.J would rib him with lines like,

“Oh, I see Rod’s back in again, and is that Rachel Hunter with you?” This was in the days when Rod Stewart was still with Rachel Hunter.

“Rod” would laugh and smile and milk the attention for he always had an attractive girlfriend with him and I suppose for him, he was living out his fantasy of being the famous rocker. In some respects, I admired him. He was just doing what we were doing when we dressed – living out a fantasy. One time, I’d been to the club on a Friday night with another friend and stayed at his house. The next morning my friend gave me a lift back to Longton to collect my car, which was in the garage for one of its regular repairs. I was sorting out the bill with the manager when who should walk in with his dirty blue overalls on and carrying a cup of tea for the boss? None other than “Rod Stewart”. It was quite a contrast.

Just before Christmas we paid one more visit to the Rem. We saw the usual crowd plus a couple of new TVs. The scene always changed fast and it was difficult to keep up with who was 'out' and who was 'in'. Later, we took a stroll down Canal Street to the New Union Hotel and then onto the glitzy New York, New York,

"You'll never guess what somebody said to me the other day?" the drag queen said over the speaker as we entered. "This lady came up to me in the supermarket and said, 'I bet you've been picked up by the fuzz a few times, dressed like that,' 'No love,' I replied, 'I haven't been picked up by the fuzz but I've been swung around by the tits more than once.'"

The repartee on the gay scene was always razor sharp. I loved how gay men called each other by girls' names and would say things like,

"Oh, she's got a right face on her," whilst dabbing a freshly lit cigarette to their lips.

"Have you seen her, right moody bitch!" another would say.

"Oh yeh, what a slag, she seems to think denim is cool!"

Such banter always put a smile on my face as the beat of the music would create an edge of excitement and anticipation. I remember such songs as Haddaway's "What is Love?" and "Go West" by the Pet Shop Boys blaring out of the speakers in New York, New York and other gay clubs. A mixture of strong aftershave and perfume lingered in the air and there was always an air of restless excitement and hedonistic *fun* which I've never experienced in any straight clubs.

"What will it be tonight, love?" the bar man would ask.

And we would order halves and soft drinks and stand at the bar and watch the scene before us. My foot would slip in and out of my high-heeled shoes and I would just enjoy the experience of being dressed and out in Manchester. The Gay Village was excitement – pure divine excitement. And the best thing of all was that no one took a blind bit of notice of the fact that we were men in women's clothes. No one at all – except perhaps one or two guys who fancied us.

Sadly, that night was to prove one of the last we spent in Manchester – it was becoming too expensive and the nights too long. On the way back to my house we stopped, still dressed, just along the A34 at a quiet Chinese take-away. We ordered a portion of chips each. The assistant tried to repress a giggle as she handed over our food. We sat in the car eating the chips and drinking soft drinks. One thing was sure, 1993 had been the Chinese Year of the Trannie.

## CHAPTER FIVE

During the day I worked in a drab office pushing bits of paper around the desk and trying to keep out of Nichols way and by night I shaved my legs, wore tight fitting dresses, 3" or 4" heels, lippy, mascara, blusher, eye-shadow and a brunette wig.

Trying to keep my life as a transvestite separate from the day-time male world I inhabited was becoming increasingly difficult. And, 1993 was the year in which I was given a gen-

tle shove out of the closet and stood before my unsuspecting colleagues and friends in women's clothes. There was no solitary incident which meant I was branded a transvestite but an accumulation of evidence that led to quite mutterings in corners of pubs, and at work.

It started with Vicky, she was the tall blonde who lived around the corner and worked in the same office as me. Every Tuesday I would go swimming with her which meant every Tuesday she got to see my super-smooth hair-free body. Added to which, she increasingly questioned me about Manchester, and kept insisting that her and her friends should join us one weekend for a night-out. I made up excuses but they wore thin.

Then, there were Vicky's friends. Vicky looked upon me rather as an older sister may look upon a brother and loved the idea of getting me together with one or other of her single friends. First up was Lucy, a nervous girl from a strict family. Lucy worked for the same company as Vicky and me. Next was Josephine, a tall, girl who was extremely quiet. Neither relationship lasted long but Vicky would love to question me endlessly about how things were progressing.

Spurred on by my dates with Vicky's friends, and feeling more confident now that I had a house and somewhere to bring girls back to that wasn't the size of a shoe box, I hit a rich vein of form with girls with whom I worked. Over the three years I worked there I dated Alice, an insecure administrative assistant; then Debbie, the doctor's daughter, who worked as a temp in our office; then the coquettish Ann, who thought every man fancied her, and because I was the only man in the place she gave her attentions to me and lastly a very attractive seventeen-year-old secretary called Gemma.

If I wasn't dressing, I would go to a local pub with Vicky and her boyfriend and a friend of mine, Brian. One time I was in the pub on my own with Brian when I took my jumper off. The evening before I had shaved all over, including my arms, and he uttered a gasp when he saw them. Embarrassed, he then said he was looking at the logo on my T-shirt. Some weeks later when I was in the same pub with Brian, Vicky and Vicky's boyfriend the word "transvestite" was used, though not directly to describe me. I think the conversation went something like,

"You know you go up Manchester, do you go around the Gay Village clubs?"

Me: "Sometimes, a lot of the clubs are mixed; gay and straight. It's a good atmosphere."

"Do you ever see any transvestites?"

A few heads stared at pints, including mine, and there were a few suppressed laughs and giggles.

Me: "Yeh, sometimes."

Fortunately, the point wasn't pursued, but I knew they all knew, just as I knew that Gemma, Ann, Debbie, Lucy and Josephine had revealed things about me under Vicky's incessant questioning – things about my shaving, my unwillingness to sacrifice a trip to Manchester for a Saturday night date. In short, it wasn't long after I had started going to Manchester that Vicky, her boyfriend, all her friends, Brian and some of his friends, and assorted others knew, or at least thought they knew, that I was a transvestite.

And I guess that's why, on 17th December 1993, on the occasion of our office mid-day Christmas meal I kind of dressed as a girl. For, when I got dressed to go to work that morning, I slipped into a pair of soft white Charnos knickers, buttoned up a black and white striped cotton blouse, pulled men's socks onto my feet and then slithered into my lovely pair of ladies black leather trousers, finished off with the ladies boots I had purchased in the North-east. Apart from the socks, my only other tribute to masculinity was my blazer. I spent the morning, at work, parading around the office and even went to another area to see how many comments I attracted. One woman said,

"James, you never seemed the type to wear leather trousers."

That afternoon I arrived at the restaurant and sat next to Vicky and her friends. One girl friend of Vicky's I wanted to date but who had always eluded me, despite my ham-fisted efforts at pursuing her, was Theresa. When I went out with Vicky and her friends, Theresa would occasionally wear leather skirts and – shock, horror – she hated male body hair to such an extent that she had made a previous boyfriend shave all his hair off. She also happened to be on Nichols' hit list, so we shared a common enemy. Still, it wasn't to be. In fact, I always got the impression she didn't like me that much and when I wore my *ladies* leather trousers to that Christmas dinner and she wore her black leather skirt she said, I thought rather pointedly,

"It's a good job I didn't wear my leather trousers, I would have hated to have clashed with *you*."

It's a good job I didn't wear my leather skirt, I thought; then we really would have clashed!

The meal ended with me being physically attacked by a large male colleague who obviously thought I was a woman.

"What's this, leather trousers?" he said as I was leaving. He started wrapping his long arms around me! Fortunately, I evaded the octopus!

As the New Year began I was short of money. Maintaining two lifestyles had financially crippled me and I had to do something drastic to pay off an increasingly high credit card bill. My job was low paid, repetitive and ultra-boring but fortunately it didn't require much thought or effort so I was able to daydream. I knew, though, that to maintain my existing lifestyle I had to do something that would immediately save money. What I did was to have enormous, unforeseen benefits - I sold my wreck of a car and bought a pushbike. Cycling to and from work each day, a journey of about six miles meant I lost an incredible amount of weight and was slimmer and fitter than I had been for years. In all honesty, I probably lost too much weight, but from a TV point of view I went down to an easy dress size of 12/14.

A couple of weeks into the New Year, Natasha arrived at my house one Saturday morning and we prepared to go out dressed during the day again. For this trip I wore my flared black leather skirt, bought in Hanley; a silky white blouse with silver detail on the collar and sleeves and the pair of knee-high, black shiny boots Natasha had spotted in the January sales - in a basket outside a shop in Longton. I looked quite feminine with my make-up nicely done and wearing my black wig and glasses as I'd bought a pair of unisex ones from Vision Express early in the New Year. Ready, I pulled on my Danimac coat. Na-



tasha was dressed in a long skirt and blouse and his usual blonde wig. At mid-day we left my house, got into Natasha's car and departed for a small mining village on the outskirts of Chesterfield.

At the Roses weekend in Scarborough we had met a very pleasant lady who sold shoes to TVs. Because her shop was in a small village it was not generating enough trade on its own and so she was developing links with the TV community; attending TV weekends and selling shoes mail order. Anyway, Natasha had ordered a pair of shoes at Scarborough and instead of having them sent to him he had decided that it would be far more adventurous to go to the village and collect them - dressed. So off we drove. We arrived in the early afternoon and pulled up on a piece of waste ground adjacent to the High Street. The houses were built of stone and a round sign on the wall of a shop advertised fish and chips and another, a make of beer. This was a very far cry far from cosmopolitan Manchester. Opposite us, on the wasteland, where we

had parked, was a Transit van was parked and two builders sat inside eating their lunch. They didn't pay us any attention as we got out of the car. Children were playing near the waste ground and again they took no notice of us as we walked slowly up the uneven ground to the pavement and along the High Street to the shop.

Phoebe, the shop owner, was delighted to see us and made us a coffee; Natasha tried on and paid for his shoes, after which we stood by the counter talking in hushed voices. Then a bell jingled as a middle-aged woman came in to the shop. At first she seemed to stand back, apprehensive. Had we been read?

Finally, she stepped forward and asked for a pair of stockings; she took no notice of us at all. Then, another woman arrived and asked about some children's shoes, again she took no notice of us. We had passed in public at close quarters.

The next customers were more difficult to hide from in the small confines of the shop, for they were two teenage girls who were friends of Phoebe. There was nowhere for us to go, so Natasha and I were left standing in the shop, mute, whilst the two girls chatted to Phoebe. Occasionally, they would nod and throw curious glances in our direction. After a while they left and went to the pizza place across the road.

"Did they read us?" I asked Phoebe.

"I bloody well hope not. Sam's got a right big mouth on her and if the village knew I served TVs I'd get a brick through my shop window."

Just as she said that I saw the two girls making their way back across the road carrying a pizza box. Instead of having a sit down meal, as we had all hoped, they had decided on a take-away and were making their way back to the shop.

Natasha and I chose to depart. We left without saying a word to Phoebe for the two girls were now in the shop. Despite Phoebe's protestations to the contrary I was convinced the two girls had read us. We walked to the car and Natasha drove back to Stoke.

A lesson learnt: people don't expect the unexpected and wouldn't think they would see two TVs in a shop in a small mining village in broad daylight. That fact alone accounted for us not being read by the two older customers – allied to the fact that we now looked pretty convincing. But I mean to say ... two TVs in a mining village? Pull the other one.

The following week Natasha and I again dressed at my place and he drove to Derby for an area meeting at Madeline's house. There must have been twelve TVs there plus a couple of partners including Ralph (for some reason he did not use an *en femme* name), our OAP dressmaker and his girlfriend. Phoebe showed up with her daughter and set out her shoe collection. We asked her the fateful question.

"Did Sam and her friend read us?"

Phoebe laughed. "Yes. She said you must be men because you didn't speak."

Apparently, Sam had told everyone in the local pub that Phoebe had had 'men dressed as women' in her shop. Phoebe hadn't had the expected brick through her shop window though.

We spent most of the night talking to Phoebe; it was another good night and great to be back on the scene after the long drag of Christmas when both Natasha and I had been with our families. I preferred my TV lifestyle to the holiday periods when dressing was put "on hold."

After that excursion Natasha and I decided to try our hands at another shopping trip. This time we selected Manchester as our location of choice. We planned the trip like a military operation. We even went to the Rem in the male so that we could suss out the car park situation around Manchester.

In preparation for our trip we went shopping in Hanley one Saturday, dressed in the male. I bought a long, black pleated skirt and then I went to Dorothy Perkins where I asked the assistant if she could select a blouse for me.

“How old’s your girlfriend?” she asked.

It was a good question.

“Um. Er. 27,” I said.

“Is it for her birthday?”

“Er, Yeh, I think so.”

She looked at me suspiciously. It would have been better to have come clean. In the end she selected a green, silky blouse for me.

Next to Marks and Spencer’s where I bought a satin slip and a matching red, silky knicker and bra set. You can’t beat M&S for underwear.

We came home and tried on our purchases and then had a TV night in. The following morning it was a trip to Donnington market where I bought a waist length, black jacket to go with my skirt. I was now ready for our TV shopping trip. Unfortunately, due to Natasha’s rallying commitments, we had to put the trip off for a few weeks.

Still, in preparation, we went to a private skin care clinic. The owner advertised in the Beaumont magazine and gave us both a facial and eyebrow shape. We were two of her first TV customers. We talked about the ‘scene’ with her and she was receptive but we found that she didn’t really know much about how to treat men’s beard shadow and decided not to recommend her. The salon was attached to a bungalow and she was yet another person who had seen the market in male-to- female crossover clothing and cosmetics.

Whilst we anxiously waited for an available weekend to undertake the shopping trip in Manchester, we also started to explore local venues in Stoke where we might go out dressed.

One night we went around the local gay pubs, in the male. In one of the run down pubs there was a drag queen working a disco. Typical of drag queens he was insulting the customers. We also met a TV called Yvonne who was dressed in a smart suit. We asked her about the TV scene in Stoke. Yvonne said that there wasn’t a lot going on but that the club around the corner from the pub we were in – The Three Tuns – did accept TVs. We went around the corner to Mates and asked the bouncers and management if they accepted TVs. They said they did. That meant we had a venue in our local area. What could be better?

A few nights later we went to the Golden Lion to meet up with Sandra and Alison and a few of the Cannock TV crowd. We had a great night drinking and joking with them. They were always lively and a good fun. Alison, the tall-married miner told us he was going for the op, to become TS. He had left his wife and started treatment.

It was a Wednesday evening, student night, when we debuted in Mates –dressed. Natasha drove up to the club; we paid our entrance fee to a short, dark haired Welsh woman

called Pat who sat at a small kiosk with a picture of the Princess of Wales on the wall behind her.

We got there far too early and stood at the bar. The staff and management seemed friendly. A large, ebullient Welsh man called Alan ran the place along with his wife, who had been at the front desk. Behind the bar Melvyn and Derek were working. Derek was an educated, well-spoken gay guy and Melvyn a slim local Stoke lad with plenty of chat and cheek in equal measures. Gradually, the place filled up. As it did so we got more and more glances, looks and stares. Two drag queen DJs completely ignored us. Finally, a couple of gay lads came over to us and asked,

“Are you two birds or blokes?”

Natasha and I laughed. It felt great to be thought of as real women but it was a question that would rarely be asked in Manchester where there are so many TVs out and about and the balance of the evidence would be... blokes.

“We’re birds,” we said in unison, in deep male voices. Melvyn, the barman, rolled up.

“You don’t think we’d let a couple of ugly old scrubbers like that come in here, do you? Of course, they’re fucking blokes. What fucking bird would dress like that? Those clothes would have been slung out of a fucking Oxfam shop, they’re so tatty.”

And so it went on. Once released, Melvyn’s wit and repartee was unstoppable. We loved it.

“Shut up and serve us another beer, bartender.”

Natasha howled with laughter. The word ‘bartender’ was to become something of an in-joke with us.

Later that night the two drag queens did a truly awful rendition of old music hall songs such as ‘Come outside’.

When we left we both agreed that it had been one our best nights dressed – and at a venue that was less than three miles from my house. Although Melvyn took every opportunity to rib us, especially me, we formed a good bond with him after that first night and he looked after us as we negotiated our way through the Stoke gay scene. He’d always get us drinks when we came in of a night, though he would undermine his kindness by saying;

“Ahh, not you two again? I thought you’d fucking emigrated.”

Or

“If I’d known you two were coming I wouldn’t have bothered opening up.”

Or

“Oh no, not you fucking two, that’s all I need!”

Or

“You can’t come in here looking like bags of shit tied up in the middle.”

It was great banter.

Mates was a big club with a long bar upstairs with a portioned off eating area at one end and toilets at the other. The décor was a little scruffy but the place had plenty of atmosphere and a regular gay clientele who we quickly became acquainted with. The downstairs led to a spacious dance floor. On Wednesdays only the upstairs was open; Fridays and Saturdays were all right for dancing.

So, we went back Saturday and then Wednesday and then....

One night we came in the male, which was fantastic as no-one recognised us, not even Melvyn! When we finally revealed who we were, I got the distinct impression Melvyn preferred us dressed.

Finally, after having to postpone it for six weeks, we went to Manchester for our shopping trip. Natasha came around to my house on the Friday night and after a night up at Mates we arose at 6.30am and shaved and showered.

I wore the black pleated skirt, green silk blouse and black jacket I had bought earlier in the year plus the black boots I'd bought in the sales. Natasha dressed in a long black, skirt and blouse.

We left at 8am and by 9am we were pulling into a multi-storey car park in the centre of Manchester. We got out of the car and walked towards the exit. The excitement was pacing through my veins as we walked down the ramp out of the car park and passed our first members of the public - a woman pushing a pram with a young man beside her. They didn't even look at us. We both felt confident.

We tottered along the street to M&S and walked through the store, towards the escalator. The shop was still quiet and as we stepped onto the escalator I noticed the security guard side step to the right and take another look at us. Read.

Upstairs in the lingerie department, I unhooked a silky peach coloured nightie from the rail and placed it in my basket. Next, I found a pair of panties and took them off the rail and popped them into my basket too. As I queued up to pay for my nightie and panties a supervisor came up to the till and started talking to the girl on the cash desk about lunchtime rosters. Then she suddenly stopped, mid-sentence. She was standing right next to me and she had obviously seen something that didn't ring true. More than likely the fact I was wearing syrup. After a few seconds of silence she carried on talking. We left Marks and walked to the Body Shop. Despite the incident in Marks I was feeling ultra-confident as no-one seemed to be looking or staring at us. I picked up a tub of moisturiser and then put it down and picked up another.

"What one are you looking for, madam?" a voice came from behind me. I turned and looked around. A slim, attractive sales assistant stood before me, her hair tied back in a bun.

I tried to point but before I could engage my brain and disengage my mouth I'd said, "Aloe Vera,"

The assistant looked at me and smiled. Yes, there really was a big greasy geezer under all that make-up and wig. Still, she selected the moisturiser I'd requested and I paid her £5.

Next, we went on to W.H Smiths where I bought a video of the year 1977. I had recently auditioned to go on a quiz show and 1977 was to be the chosen year for questions.

Again, I queued up to pay in what was now a busy shop. The deal was transacted without any problems.

No one else seemed to read us and the day was a total success. On every shopping trip there will be somebody who reads you but as long there's not a lot of stares in the street then you've made it. At midday we left central Manchester and drove to Transformation to buy some magazines and have a cup of coffee with the friendly staff.

By this time we were feeling so confident that we dared each other to go into a drive-thru MacDonald's. We came up to the microphone and Natasha ordered, in a male voice, "A Big Mac, a cheese burger and two fries, please."

When we collected the food about five heads were pushed into the triangular shaped window looking at the strange woman with the male voice. I didn't bother to sink low in the car seat. Neither of us cared any more.

A few days later I was live on Breakfast TV at Pebble Mill. Not for shoplifting or for female impersonation but as a contestant on a quiz show, I came second in what was basically a two horse race but loved the experience; the adrenalin rush was amazing, just like walking those streets of Manchester, en femme.

Every day I was cycling to work, losing pounds and saving pounds. It also made me more conscious of the scenery. A particular shop that gained my attention as I pedalled along was a bridal suite called Stephanie's Bridal wear. I would take great delight in seeing what new dresses were on display in the window as I puffed and panted on my way home from work. One day I happened to notice they were having a sale. I phoned the manageress and said I was interested in a dress as I was due to take part in a fancy dress competition. The owner of the shop, Stephanie, was fantastic about it and said it was no problem for me to come in and try dresses on, as long as I phoned first and choose quiet times. That started me off on all sorts of fantasies about going down to the shop dressed and trying on wedding dresses, a la Guisborough, but Natasha talked me out of it. It was one for the future, though.

Meanwhile, we introduced some of the Cannock and Derby crowd to the joys of Mates, arriving one Saturday evening with eight TVs in tow. We'd met them on a lay-by just outside Stoke and they had followed us into Hanley. Like lambs to the slaughter, Melvyn had yet more victims for his barbed wit. It was a great night. One of the TVs who was a regular on the scene was called 'Dave, the Dancing Doctor'. He was as agile as a ferret, said very little and danced all night, wearing short skirts, with gold chains around his waist and skimpy tops. Madeline, Sandra and Alison were there too, ribbing each other and talking about the scene. Another one of the TVs from the Midlands was called Gloria. He was a barber and he liked leather which meant we had a shared interest. He even bought a load of leather skirts off me. In fact, Gloria started coming to Mates regularly and meeting us there on a Wednesday and Saturday night.

Mates was hassle-free and congenial, the clientele tended to be the same each week, unlike Manchester, and of course there was Melvyn and the other bar staff. One of the joys of Mates was going to the toilets. Oh, we TVs enjoy such simple pleasures. I loved going to the Ladies toilet and seeing the looks on the faces of the dykes as I did my make-up in the mirror afterwards. Going to the toilet didn't mean I sat down on the pan. No, sir, I made

good use of what the Good Lord had provided me with and would stand – so eliciting comments as dykes stepped into the toilets only to see a pair of stilettos peeping out from under the bottom of the cubicle and hearing a rushing sound like a waterfall.

When standing at the wash basin mirror afterwards, carefully applying make-up, it would always amaze me how big I was (and I'm not a big guy by any means) compared to the women, I suppose the coiffure didn't help, nor the heels and the padding. The women would often watch me applying make-up and occasionally we would strike-up conversations. They'd ask me about my tits, my foundation, my clothes. Generally, we were well received and no one minded.

Venturing into the Stoke nightlife opened up other avenues for us as well. A pub called the Left Bank had a fetish night once a month so we went to one of their first evenings. This was strictly straight territory; I went dressed in my PVC lace-up skirt and Natasha in a bodice, thigh-high black boots and wielding a whip. The bar staff were mainly young girls and they chatted to us all night and asked questions about "the dressing". All were intrigued by us rather than offended. I've often noticed the women, especially younger ones, are very interested in the 'dressing', particularly if you look reasonably good. Drag queens have certainly crossed the divide and regularly entertain in straight pubs and clubs. The places where they perform normally have a large female clientele - as the clubs in Blackpool would bear testimony.

Later in 1994 Natasha and I tried another shopping trip to Manchester. This time I dressed in jeans and a top and flat shoes and Natasha was also dressed in trousers. It was a disaster. We both got read everywhere we went and it made me so nervous I forgot my pin number whilst at a cash point machine and lost my card. We drove over to the shoe shop near Chesterfield and saw Phoebe who said we looked OK and couldn't understand why we got read. We also met Phoebe's babysitter, Sam, who thought we were fine – yes, the very same Sam who had said we were men because we were mute last time we were in the shop.

I was still cycling to work and looking enviously at the dresses in Stephanie's shop. Finally, one Monday, I could resist no more. I took the day off as annual leave and phoned the bridal shop to see if the sale was still on. Stephanie said it wasn't but that I was welcome to come down and try on a dress as long as it was before 1pm. I decided to go for it. I bathed and shaved, put on silky knickers, suspenders and stockings and then a waist clincher and bra, over the top of which I put on a t-shirt, jumper and jeans. Next, I threw my tits, shoes and silky slip into a bag and went to catch the bus. I got to the shop and pushed open the door. I was felling ill at ease and nervously stood by the entrance. Stephanie came over to me. I garbled some story about not being gay and wanting a dress for a fancy dress party. Stephanie smiled and then matter-of-factly showed me a selection of dresses by the door which were reduced in price. I was not keen on those ones so she then showed me a few others that were on a long rail behind a white curtain. She took out one or two dresses and hung them on hooks on the wall above the curtain so the dresses hung down and could be inspected through the clear plastic they were wrapped in. I didn't really know what I should do. Should I touch them? Should I make some comment?

Sensing by reticence, Stephanie asked if I would like to try them on. I said I would so she took me to the back of the shop and into a large changing room. Stephanie pulled

across the pink curtain. My heart pounded with a mixture of anxiety and excitement. I was surrounded on three sides by wall to ceiling mirrors. In the confines of the dressing room I slowly got undressed and added the breast forms to my bra. I slipped into my shoes and pulled on my silky pink slip. I looked at myself in the mirrors; dressed in girlie underwear in a bridal shop – it was the stuff of fantasies – just what I had imagined all those years before when I had tried to go to Philippa Jane’s dress shop in Guisborough.

I was still admiring my reflection (boy, did I look rough without make-up!)

when the curtain parted and Stephanie came in with one of the dresses she had shown me outside. She looked at me and smiled knowingly. I took the first dress out of its wrappings and slipped into it. Stephanie helped me with the zip. And that was the start of it. Stephanie brought dress after dress into the changing room and I tried on each one in turn; voluminous wedding dresses and tight-fitting bridesmaids’ dresses – I must have tried on about ten in total and I adored every minute of it. Sometimes, Stephanie helped me with the catch or zip or commented on how well a dress suited me. It was a fantastic feeling to step into a beautiful silk or taffeta bridesmaid’s dress or wedding gown and then pull it up to my waist, slot my arms into the sleeves... to feel the weight of the material...

Stephanie knew, of course, that I was a transvestite. I mean, as soon as she saw the underwear and the smooth skin she knew so I came clean.

“I’m a transvestite,” I said as I pirouetted in a wedding dress, admiring my triple sided reflection and feeling the softness of the full white skirt.

She laughed. “You don’t say.”

She went on to tell me that she had some gay friends and occasionally went to Mates with them.

Eventually, I bought a beautiful silk bridesmaid’s dress for £100 cash. Stephanie told me to come again as long as I phoned first. I went back home on the bus carrying a big white box as well as my bag which contained my tits and shoes and slip. When I got in I applied my make-up and wig and then got dressed in the beautiful lilac bridesmaid’s dress. That night, I spent a wonderful evening dressed in the most glorious dress I’ve ever worn in my life. It still remains my favourite TV item.

One summer’s morning I cycled to work in my shorts, I always left my suit at work to change into in the toilet but on this occasion decided to wear my fluorescent shorts all day. When I appeared at the office door the temporary secretary said,

“Oh, you shave your legs.”

I could have concocted some story about wind resistance and bare legs being more streamlined but I didn’t – I just smiled.

Although, leaving the house was straightforward most of the time as Natasha and I had become blasé and the neighbours had seen us anyway, there were still occasions when it could be hazardous. A week after I had bought the dress was a case in point. It was a Saturday in August, so it was still light at 8.30pm. Children were playing right outside my drive and my neighbour was watering his front garden when Natasha and I prepared to leave for another TV night out. Instead of doing my usual safety checks from the upstairs window we both bowled out of the house and suddenly thought,

“Oh shit!”

It was too late to go back. The kids and had seen us. We decided to carry on, not realising the neighbour was in the front garden.

Natasha stepped up to the driver’s door and unlocked it. He immediately took his wig off and started the engine whilst I stepped around to the passenger door and clambered in. I then ducked down in the seat. As Natasha reversed, we eyeballed the neighbour, standing yards away from us watering his plants by my fence. Natasha drove forward – back up the drive - but we had been seen.

“Flipping heck, what shall we do?” Natasha said.

“Go for it.”

He put the car into reverse and shot down the drive again. My neighbour watched us depart and, to make matters worse, his wife and daughter were at the window and his other daughter was standing on the drive. We almost felt like waving.

That night we went to the Golden Lion in Walsall and met up with Sandra and Alison. We went into the beer garden and it was a wonderful feeling to experience the soft earth under my high heels as we sat outside and drank our half pints.

By this time we had a number of TV venues right across the North West and Midland that we visited – Sheffield, Manchester, Walsall, Cannock, Stoke - plus others attractions such as Mystiques in Hanley, which was a straight club but had a drag act, and then there was the Left Bank fetish night every month. We also went to Roses new premises in Buxton.

With all this TV activity. There was little time for anything else. On the odd nights when Natasha and I were in the male we were also part of a six-aside football team and played cricket on the occasional Sunday!

But our lives revolved around being transvestites and we would avidly scan the local papers to see if a new drag pub or club was advertised. One time, we ended up in a club in Newcastle watching a not very good drag act perform in front of a small audience of giggling girls. We were in the male, of course. I loved this sort of thing for both Natasha and I enjoyed watching the girls more than the act. Later, a drunken girl came up to me and said she would give me a tenner if I danced with the drag queen.

I laughed and said, intentionally rather ambiguously, that I’d do it for a ‘score’ (£20).

She then said, “Some men do that (i.e. dress as women) seriously!”

I looked shocked. “Do they?”

A few days later we were back at Mates for the 1994 Annual Drag Queen Ball.

## CHAPTER SIX

Once, whilst working as an admin assistant in Stoke, the other members of staff were discussing ‘skeletons in their cupboards’. All the other staff were female. There were two admin assistants alongside me and we each had a team of two, female secretaries - Vicky

was one of the secretaries in my team. Also there was assorted other secretaries which meant that I was in an office of about fourteen women with just one male, me! Occasionally, they had these girly chats and would talk in a risqué way; and, before you ask, working in a room with so many women wasn't heaven on earth, it was a total nightmare. They got wound up about work, boyfriends and each other and there was always plenty of PMT in the air. No, give me a male working environment any day, just so long as I can wear my silky knickers underneath my trousers. Anyway, back to the story, each person in turn was asked if there were any skeletons in their cupboard. When it came to my turn, Gemma, the attractive blonde who I had dated briefly, said to me,

"What about you, James?"

I laughed. "There are no skeletons in my cupboard, only ball gowns."

The joke was never more appropriate. For at that very moment, hanging in my wardrobe was a rich, silky lilac dress just waiting to be worn in public for the first time and here was my opportunity – the 1994 Miss Mates Grand Drag Ball.

The idea of entering a beauty contest was a fantasy, pure and simple. Those childish dreams of being Miss World, those visions of walking down the catwalk in a gorgeous evening dress, the tears, the tiaras – well, here was my chance!

The Grand Drag Ball was set for 26<sup>th</sup> August and I couldn't wait. Natasha had hired a dress from a fancy dress shop (I'd gone with him, telling my manager I had a dental appointment so I could get the afternoon off work) and we prepared ourselves by buying lingerie, make-up, silver handbags and pretty pink shoes.

August 26<sup>th</sup> was the usual dull day at work but I didn't care. My head was so full of dreams of dressing and the next great TV escapade. I left work as soon as I could and cycled home. Natasha was sitting outside my house in his car. He unloaded his things and hung up his dress, a full-skirted pink creation.

When Natasha had finished we went up the road for our standard meal of fish and chips. After the meal we dressed into our under-garments and applied our make-up. All my lingerie was new for the occasion, which meant I slipped into a new pair of silky knickers, a strapless, ribbed bra, my waist clincher, 10 denier tights and a slinky slip. We combed our wigs, packed our tits and dresses and put them in the kitchen and then got dressed into male clothes, by which time it was 9pm. We loaded up Natasha's car and set off for Mates.

We arrived a few minutes later and met the bouncer, Lee, who worked the door. Lumbering in with our boxes and bags, we were shown to the cloakroom area. Having the make-up and foundation garments on made the rest easy. It meant touching up the make-up, inserting the breast forms and then stepping into our glorious dresses. We took it in turns to zip each other's dress up and fasten the hooks. Then for the wigs. We combed them through and pinned them in place with hairgrips. We both looked fabulous.

I slipped into my pink, low heel shoes and picked up my silver handbag and then we were ready to meet the world or at least Melvyn, who had dressed for the night as an old woman. Alan, Derek and Alan's daughter, Paula, had also dressed to get into the spirit of the evening. We stood around the bar drinking and lapping up the atmosphere. People arrived in various outfits and dresses. It soon transpired that TVs from all over the north-

west had turned up for the contest – and even a few TVs and drag queens from Birmingham. There were more people in the place than I'd ever seen; it was absolutely packed, and was awash with music, chatter, noise.

When the downstairs disco opened we all filed through. The contest was compared by Cuntius, a large drag queen. All those who were entering the contest were given numbers and, after anxious visits to the Ladies to correct make-up and hair, we were told to stand by an area at the back of the club. Then, when our numbers were called, we went down the stairs and were escorted around the dance floor by the doorman, Primrose, with applause and slow-hand clapping from the gathered throng. Meanwhile, the drag queen Cuntius read out a little piece about each contestant.

“This is Caroline and she’s wearing a beautiful, lilac creation which cost a lot of money – or so I’m told.”

It was like being in an amphitheatre. After we’d all done our twirls we walked closer to the judges’ table so they could inspect us at close quarters. Then we stood around on the dance floor while the next contestant came down. When all the contestants had been led around the floor by the bouncer, Primrose, we all did a dance together for a few minutes as if we were at a disco before filing off. There must have been thirty of us, all anxious, all hopeful. Once we had left the dance floor a drag queen preformed a cabaret act.

After a while the judges (two women and a man) came back to the table. Cuntius said they had made a decision. In third place was a drag queen from Liverpool, in second a young lad who is the current owner of Mates (now the Club) and in first?

Well, no one could find her, she was at the bar having yet another drink and talking to Melvyn.

“Come in Number Four – the one in the expensive dress,” Cuntius called over the microphone. “Where the fuck are you number four!”

Number four! That was me! I made my way through the gathered throng and went to stand on the low stage; a sash was placed around my shoulders and a crown on my head. I was given a bottle of Champaign and an envelope containing a £100.

I made a short, stupid speech inspired by alcohol, and went to the bar and bought a few drinks. Later, Natasha and I left in full rig. We couldn’t be bothered to get changed; anyway I loved that dress and never wanted to be out of it. What a night!

There was one proviso, however; as I’d left Alan, the manager, had said,

“Ere, you’d better wear that bloody dress on Monday when we go to Llandudno!”

So there were duties involved in being Miss Mates as well as for the real Miss World, were there?

The trip to Llandudno was a few days later. About ten of us packed into a mini-bus – Alan; his wife, Pat; Robert, the driver; Melvyn and his boyfriend and a couple of others. On the way we picked up Mark, who appeared as the drag act Pussy Galore, and Derek and his boyfriend. I sat there dressed in my luxurious lilac dress whilst Natasha was dressed in a more staid outfit. We got to Llandudno and went to a bright, modern-looking gay club. Cuntius, who had helped compere on the Friday night, was compering again

and “Pussy Galore” was the drag act – in fact the reason for the Mates on tour visit was to see Pussy perform.

There wasn’t a huge crowd in the club, which meant we had plenty of room to watch Pussy Galore miming his Tina Turner numbers. (Tina Turner’s impressions are popular amongst drag queens possibly because her movements are so mannish.)

It was a fantastic evening, especially as some Aussie girl hung around Natasha and me like a groupie. She was fascinated by the idea of getting off with a TV and kept saying, in a broad Aussie ascent,

“Is there really a prick under your dress?”

In the end she gave her favours to some guy in trousers – not sure at all what he was doing in a gay club, but there you go. Natasha and I didn’t get back to my house until 4.30am. And as I pushed the key into my back door, still dressed to the nines, with Natasha right behind me, my neighbour came past on his motorbike to go to work. He just stared at us, his face craggy and expressionless under his crash helmet. Only a few hours later and I had to get up for work...oh, how I hated the sound of that radio alarm the next morning!

The following weekend I had to move all my things because my parents were coming up. I stored the boxes and cases containing my *en femme* life in the loft; I completely cleaned the house, getting rid of all my bathroom scents and potions like baby oil (used after a bath and shave) and made the place look normal.

My parents arrived later in the day for a holiday and the dressing went on hold for a while.

However, I was so excited about winning the drag queen competition I couldn’t help telling people. I told my brother when he came up with my parents, and he told Vicky, who in turn told her boyfriend and he told another friend of mine from work and soon I knew the rumour mill would be working over-time. Despite trying to separate my two lifestyles, I knew people were suspicious about my Manchester activities (I hadn’t told them we had stopped going to Manchester – Mates was too close to home from that point of view.) Why did I keep going up there? Where had I met Natasha? Why was I out so much with no explanation of where I had been? Why was it, when I dated Vicky’s friends I still wanted to go to Manchester on a Saturday rather than have a date? Then there was the concrete evidence, like the time I was watching football around a friend’s house and I made some comment about his bare legs. He was wearing shorts.

“At least they’re not shaven,” he had retorted.

I didn’t even realise that he had seen *me* in shorts!

Life is not a court of law; you’re not innocent until proven guilty – you’re guilty until proven innocent.

Winning Miss Mates really brought my two life styles onto a collision course though and I made it worse by sending a picture of myself in full regalia to a national magazine with a made-up letter. The magazine published the piece and paid me £25 for my trouble. When I saw myself in the magazine I happened to be standing next to my brother (this was at the end of my parents stay and our family holiday) in the newsagents. The yelp of,

“That’s me!” was understandable, but what was probably a puzzle to my brother was that the page I was looking at contained a photo of a slim, attractive woman.

“That’s you?” he said softly.

“Yes,” I said with less enthusiasm. “The Drag Ball.”

“Oh.”

Enough said.

Then, of course, there was Vicky. She wanted to know everything about my reign as Miss Mates, 1994. One lunchtime she even followed me up the road to the chemist when I went to collect some snaps I had taken on the night of the Drag Ball. That time I managed to put her off but she kept asking to see them and I said she could come around sometime. She eventually called in to see the pictures as well as a video that had been recorded by Alan of the happy moment when I’d been crowned queen.

Fortunately, after a while the questions about the drag ball petered out, but I knew I had confirmed their suspicions: doubts had become certainties, I was a transvestite.

Natasha, meanwhile, was hunting out more TV haunts and one Saturday we went, in the male, to a shop called Wet Look. The female proprietor was encased from head to toe in PVC. She tried to sell us some PVC goods and was very friendly but again money was a problem as her rubber and PVC items were expensive. TV things and other fetish paraphernalia tend to be expensive. Strangely, the shop was right above an angling shop, which her husband owned.

Soon we were back in the swing of Mates on Wednesdays and Saturdays; that meant seeing Melvyn and bantering with him and the doormen, Reg and Primrose. Meanwhile, Stephanie kindly cleaned my beer-stained dress for me and dropped it back at my house and, in return, I showed her my TV photo album, which I had just started to compile.

About this time I also undertook a course in hypnosis and NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming). I’d always been interested in hypnosis and, as a twenty-one year old had gone to see a professional hypnotist in Croydon to try to increase my level of self-confidence. NLP helped me to understand how my mind worked. According to the NLP practitioner who taught the course, each person accesses the world through a dominant sense; for 80% of people it is visual but I’m very much auditory based. I’ve always loved the sound of words and, although a terrible mimic, will pick out words and phrases that entertain me. I recall going to see the film *A Fish Called Wanda*. In it John Cleese calls Kelvin Kline a ‘vulgarian’ – I’d never heard the word before and loved it. From then on all my friends were ‘vulgarians’. The NLP also helped to explain why I’ve never liked TV (television) and can’t watch it for longer than about an hour. (I even get bored by televised footie unless it’s an important game.) In some ways it may also help to explain why I’ve such a fetish-orientated-personality because people with a dominant auditory sense are also likely to be kinaesthetic as well. That’s certainly true of me. I’m very much a ‘touchy, feely’ person. Even so, this would not explain Natasha’s interest in dressing as he’s a very visually-orientated. It just goes to show, there’s not one explanation for something as complicated as transvestism. Transvestism seems so natural and gives so much pleasure to the man who practises it, it is impossible to imagine why other people don’t it, but I suppose that applies to all deviations and fetishes,

Anyway, I passed my NLP course and things were going really well. No one mentioned the 'TV thing' again and Wednesdays and Saturdays at Mates were always hugely entertaining. I loved standing downstairs and watching the dancing. Gay guys are such good dancers. One used to dance to Madonna's 'Vogue' and was so impressive the floor used to clear and people would stand and admire his movements. He was as good as any professional dancer and had obviously practiced the movements for hours. Then there was the banter at the door. Most of the doormen had female names and as we approached we would get,

"I'll let you in, but I'm not letting *her* in!"

Or

"Oh God, here *she* comes, Miss Mates 1994 – roll out the red carpet," - Primrose.

"Barrel more like," – Reg.

Once we had run the gauntlet of the bouncers and entered Mates we then had Melvyn's wit to contend with;

"*She's* not so much a trend setter as a fucking Red Setter," he said about me to another customer one evening when I walked in.

Natasha laughed.

"I don't know what you're laughing at!" Looks like you've combed your wig with a fucking toothbrush."

I loved the non-stop banter. Generally speaking, gay guys are good guys. There was always terrific sense of fun and humour in Mates and a feeling of being alive. I recall a large gay guy telling us once how he had been set upon by a bunch of gay-bashing youths.

"I bottled one of 'um with this." He put his hand in his pocket and withdrew a small, square bottle of perfume.



“Really cracked the tosser’s skull.”

Then, one day, my boss called me into the office.

“James,” he said, “you’re a crap worker, you’re not really interested in the job and you don’t fit in. In fact, you’re a square peg in a round hole. We’re giving you one month’s notice.”

So that was it, I was sacked! (Yet again!) I phoned the union representative who turned out to be some dullard with two brain cells and a fist full of backhanders to keep him company at night. He said,

“The boss is right, you know. You don’t fit in. Sorry, but there’s nothing we can do about it.”

I wasn’t too concerned about losing the job. It was one of the most boring jobs I’ve ever had (and I’ve had some boring jobs.) I was sad though, because it brought the TV years to a close prematurely and, as I was about to discover, it wouldn’t be the same again.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Shortly after the conversation with my boss and whilst still working the month’s termination period, I got my first small break as regards writing success. I won a competition in an England FC magazine by writing a match report on the England V USA friendly match at Wembley. For my labours I won an autographed football, two tickets to see England V Nigeria and had the report printed in the next issue. My only previous writing successes had been a few articles in *Cross Talk* and *Roses Repartee* as well as some letters in tabloid newspapers and women’s magazines.

The year faded out in a muddle of deciding what I was going to do about my house. In the event, I rented it out to someone I worked with and put all my things in the loft - safely under lock and key. Then, I had a farewell party at my place. I knew that the great days of dressing were over in terms of being a trannie on the scene. I recalled all the great characters: Gloria; Dave, the Dancing Doctor; Alison and Sandra, Mary and Stella. People came and went so quickly in the TV world that it was hard to keep track. They tended to drift in and out as the mood and circumstance took them - and I was the biggest drifter of them all.

The Christmas Number One that year was East 17 – *Stay Another Day*. It seemed apt somehow. I hated the job and dearly wanted to leave it but the scene was something I would miss, I knew that. So I played East 17’s song and pined, not just for the TV scene but also for the unrequited love of a girl at work and for my house and my excellent social life.

I went back to my parents’ house for Christmas and early in the New Year, having borrowed some money from my brother, headed off to Buenos Aires, Argentina. The fact that the only Spanish I knew was how to ask for a beer did not perturb me because I also knew that “mono” meant “monkey” – you discover such strange things in these phrase books.

Anyway, I pulled on my rucksack and left cold and dull England for the warmth of a South American summer.

What a delight! The Argentine girls were extremely attractive and I spent hours wandering around the wide streets of Buenos Aires admiring the sights; something that was made all the more appealing by the fact that leather was very much in vogue and leather skirts abounded. It wasn't quite Paris, 1984 but Buenos Aires was an improvement on London at any time. What I couldn't understand, though, was that all the women seemed to wear tights under their short skirts and yet it was blisteringly hot.

The trip took me into Uruguay, where I was interviewed by a local TV channel on the appeal of Uruguay as a tourist destination – I came out with some meaningless phrases about the weather, the beaches and the people being friendly – whilst failing to mention the fact that I'd only been in the country for four hours. Alongside me at the guesthouse television interview was a Japanese lad who was cycling around South America. From there I went to Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru, before going to the States to visit friends. My one concession to being a TV, as opposed to being on TV, was that I got a black leather skirt and matching jacket made in La Paz (as well as a gent's jacket). I found a small Indian-run shop that made garments and asked about leather goods. The young lad gave me some pages from a German fashion catalogue and told me to take them away, look through them and return with an order. The whole conversation was conducted in nods, winks and occasional Spanish as neither of us had the other's language. I found the leather suit I wanted, went back to the stall and asked him to make it for me. He duly obliged. However, a few days later, when I came back to collect it I couldn't find him. It was pouring with rain and one stall looked very much like the other when they had their awnings down pulled down with the rainwater streaming off them onto the street. Eventually, I found it. The Indian lad was there with an older woman wearing the full-skirted costume of the native Indian. She fussed around asking me for the correct money and wouldn't take one of my dollar bills because it had a felt-tip mark on it. I lost my temper and threatened to leave without the garments, so in the end she conceded, accepted my note and a carrier bag full of clothes was passed to me. When I finally got my purchases back to my hotel room I slipped into the jacket and skirt and pranced around in my La Paz leather gear like a trannie on a world tour. Boy, it felt good; just a pity they didn't provide a mirror in the hotel room. On second thoughts, it was a good job they didn't because I was back to being a hairy bugger.

Four months later I returned to the UK. The advantage of my little excursion to South America, though it was not planned just for this reason, was that once back on home soil I could claim social security support for my mortgage repayments without an investigation taking place into the circumstance of my dismissal from my dismal admin job in Stoke. So, I swanned around my parents' house for a while, did a ten-week writing course on Saturday mornings and then, as soon as I could, I moved back to my house in Stoke. I had been away for exactly seven months.

Whilst in Croydon I had seen the film *Ed Wood* advertised. The story of a transvestite film director starring Johnny Depp. It hadn't come out on general release so I missed the film in Croydon and the Ed Wood night that BBC 2 screened to coincide with the release of Tim Burton's film. As I was at my parents' house I couldn't show too much interest in an

evening of films dedicated to a trannie. Later, however, I borrowed the film from a friend and read the biography of Wood, *Nightmare of Ecstasy* by Rudolph Grey.

Once back in Stoke, my cases and boxes came out of the loft and all my crumpled clothes went back into their proper place - hanging in my wardrobe. I was still short of money, so I advertised two of my leather skirts in *Loot*, along with assorted other items. Amazingly, a guy came around to buy them and quite brazenly asked if he could try them on. I said he could so he went into the back room, tried them on and bought them both. He was very quiet but phoned a few days later to invite me to a TV night out. I declined the offer.

As soon as I could I returned to the scene with Natasha. Back on my own in Stoke I'd shaved off all my body hair and bought out my make-up kits. I was heavier than when I had left Stoke but I was a lot fitter, physically. Soon, Stella and Mary got to know I was back and they invited me to their next party. I dressed in the black leather suit that had been made for me in Bolivia, along with full make-up and wig. It was a great night; the whole crowd were there; Alison, who had decided on a sex-change and was taking hormone tablets; Sandra, Marianne, in a tight tartish dress and bearing tattoos on her arms, Dora and Hannah in her Charles II wig and others I did not recognise. Throughout the night Mary kept joking that I was going to get whipped at the next party because I drifted in and out of the scene so much.

By this time Stella and Mary had started organising their own excursions to Blackpool and these were proving increasingly popular, rivalling both Roses and Beaumont functions. They hired a hotel, sent out invites to their normal party regulars and then set everything up for a fun TV weekend. With its large gay population and clubs such as *Funny Girls* it was the ideal TV venue. Unfortunately, I had to decline the offer of the weekend trip, as my dole queue allowance would not run to TV excursions.

Though having no money was a pain, being unemployed had many advantages for me, not least was that I was able to start writing in earnest. Before I left Stoke I had had a few snippets published - letters in the tabloids, the drag queen letter and assorted other pieces that had earned a few quid. Now though, spurred on by the writing course I had undertaken in Croydon, I read some books on writing and set about it in a professional manner.

I started writing for women's magazines and during the long, hot summer of 1995 managed to get two stories accepted for publication. Though neither of them was actually published, I did get paid for them both. I also wrote a fantasy story about a housewife in the 1950's who got spanked by her husband. The story was full of shimmering, floaty New Look dresses and high stiletto heels and ended with our heroine over her husband's knee. I sent it to a magazine that published that sort of kinky material and waited. After a while the editor phoned me to say he liked it and asked me to make changes and then send it to him again. I did what he asked and he then suggested another magazine in the same stable but, after all my hard work, the editor of that magazine rejected it. I was annoyed that after being told to revise it, it had still been rejected so I phoned up the editor and asked why? The editor said they had too many short stories and, maybe as a sop, he asked me to write an article for him. I remembered my Polytechnic days and the essay I had written about the treatment of women in films in the Forties and Fifties - a few of them had been spanked. I re-wrote the dissertation I had written at Poly as a spiced up article and that

was accepted. I was paid the princely sum of £80 for it. After that I was commissioned to write for future issues on a bi-monthly basis. It was a good source of income until the magazine folded seven years later.

Occasionally, I went out, dressed, with Natasha. Mates had changed hands after the original owner was gunned down in Manchester after he left a casino one night. I think it was a street robbery that went wrong. The new owner was a drag queen called Angelina who had come second at the Miss Mates contest. She changed the name of the club to just that, The Club.

One Saturday, Natasha phoned me to ask if he could change at my house. He was going out dressed but, because I was short of cash, I couldn't join him. As usual he drove up the drive of my house, brought his bags in and got dressed. When he left in broad daylight, dressed as a woman, I watched from the upstairs bedroom window and to my horror I realised I was not the only one watching him leave! My next-door neighbour had taken out a loose plank in his garden fence and he, along with his wife and daughter had eyes pressed against the gap! Natasha was seemingly oblivious. Slowly, he reversed down the drive. I then went to my front bedroom where I saw the whole family standing on their drive, so they could see the road, and I knew they were watching him drive away. All three were laughing. Seeing it as an outsider shocked me. I suddenly realised that for years we must have been watched in this manner, still, the good thing was that they were laughing. Even so, to realise that all the previous sightings hadn't been "ad hoc" but were part of a conscious game to 'spot the trannie' was unnerving.

By September I was still unemployed so, in an effort to gain employment, I enrolled on a part-time teaching course. The course took place on Wednesday mornings and was good fun. I also joined the Executive Job Club, which didn't help me get a job but did introduce me to an ex-public schoolboy in his forties who was an alcoholic, chain-smoking gambler. He took me to the Hanley casino and introduced me to the joys of casino gambling. I started going regularly on a Sunday afternoon and sometimes in the week. I loved the casino; women would be dressed in tight leather trousers or attractive dresses – like at the races or in the nightclub it was a place where women went to be seen and were usually well-attired.

At the casino I hoped to win enough money to pay off my growing over-draft and other debts as I still owed £3,000 to my brother who had lent me the money to go to South America. It didn't work out like that, of course, and I got deeper into debt – something, that was exacerbated by having a disastrous run of luck gambling on the Euro 96 football championship, for, I was the poor punter who stuck £150 on England to win the thing at 8/1 – God, I hate those Germans – the very mention of penalties and 'Gareth Southgate' still causes my hands to shake and my skin to develop blotches. To make matters worse, one day during the tournament I withdrew £40 of the £47.50 Income Support that I had just received and placed it all on Scotland beating Holland. Yes, I really was that desperate. In fact, the game ended in a nil-nil draw. After that disastrous tournament I phoned the Samaritans for the first and only time in my life.

"Help!" I said, "I'm in fucking debt."

"Do you want a loan?" the effeminate-sounding man on the other end of the phone said. 'Come to the bank of the Good Samaritans,' I thought,

He talked through my betting 'problem' with me and, as with all counsellors, listened rather than diagnosed. I didn't feel that it was a 'problem' as such as I've not got an addictive personality and can never do anything consistently over a long period of time, particularly not jobs or exercise. Being a TV has never really worried me, except when I was a teenager, but losing money drives me to the pits of despair, especially when I've not got it to lose. It brought me to my senses however and after that I stopped betting for a long while.

Throughout this time I was applying for jobs and attending interviews. True to the Job Centre demand that you apply for any job no matter what your qualifications and background, I applied to be a sales rep for a bouncy castle company, a sperm donor – I'm not sure about the payment arrangements for that one; a patient at a cold research laboratory and the funniest of all, a bus driver. I truly have never had any idea at all of what I wanted to do with my life work-wise and I'm as clueless now as I was when I was sixteen – the difference is that now I could tell you what I *don't* want to do! The bus driver job was funny because I actually got interviewed for the position. Now, going for a position of a bus driver could be described as a tad ambitious considering that I didn't own a car and I hadn't driven for two and a half years. The interviews were en masse and we had to complete a short maths test first. The questions went something like,

"If Jane gave you a £5 note and the fare was 0.75p how much change would you give her?"

Then, we actually got to take a bus out on the road. These weren't double-deckers but small, single deck mini-links. Four of us went out at one time with an instructor and took it in turns to drive. Of the three men with me, one had just come out of the army and had driven tanks and one had been a bus driver some years before. They all did pretty well but when it came to my turn I didn't have a clue and, rounding a corner, found the middle of the bus wanted to travel across the pavement. I hadn't taken the corner wide enough.

"Mind that fucking bollard!" the instructor bellowed. He rubbed a hand over his face and looked to the heavens as I fought like mad to turn the mini link away from the concrete post.

"You'll never make a fucking bus man," the instructor shouted. "You're the worst fucking driver I've taken out in a long time."

I didn't get the job.

Despite my brave efforts to gain alternative employment the Job Centre used to give me a hard time. Occasionally they would have clampdowns on claimants and single me out because I had a degree.

"What are you doing to get a job?" the Re-Start woman said to me at one interview I had been told to attend.

"I'm doing a part-time teaching course, I'm looking for work, I applied to be a sperm donor the other week..."

The woman looked flustered. She was wearing a smart business suit. She wanted to be professional but she went for the jugular.

“What arrangements have you made with the college in regards to employers phoning to ask you in for an interview while you’re on your one morning a week college course?”

“None. I’ve got an answer phone.”

“Don’t you think you should tell prospective employers that you are out Wednesdays?”

“It’s only one morning a week!”

“Even so, what if a job came up?”

And so it went on. It used to make me laugh because I was genuinely looking for work, and trying to improve my skills, whilst New Age travellers would tie their flea-bitten dogs up outside the Job Centre and scuff over to the counter and collect their money (always cash) and no one would ever say a word to them. There was a clear demarcation between those the Jobcentre thought it could apply pressure on to get back into work (and thereby help reach the targets set by the Government) and those they accepted would be on the dole for the rest of their lives. I was in the former category.

Another job I kind of had an interview for was to be a barmaid at Funny Girls in Blackpool. Natasha took a day off work and we travelled up to Blackpool together. We found Funny Girls and then spent two hours sitting in the bar waiting for someone to find the manager who was in charge of staffing. I had bought a picture along of myself dressed and when the interviewer eventually turned up she was impressed by the picture, particularly my smile. She had a very forceful personality and fired words at me like a machine gun, ending with a familiar phrase,

“You’ll never make it as a fucking barmaid, love, no way. Not convincing enough.”

So that was that. I wouldn’t ‘make it’ as a bus driver because I couldn’t drive and I wouldn’t ‘make it’ as a barmaid because I wasn’t convincing enough. Surely there were other jobs open to me?

To be honest, my main thrust employment wise, was to go into lecturing. I’ve always enjoyed hearing the sound of my own voice and I figured, having spent three years working in a University, that lecturers had a pretty easy time of it. Hence I had enrolled on the teaching course and was undertaking two voluntary classes at the College of the Third Age for the over-sixties. The courses were about sociology and creative writing.

That summer, my parents came up to see me and spent a week at my house; which meant my poor en femme clothes were again despatched to the loft. My mum used to take charge of the washing and ironing and one day when she went to the airing cupboard a pair of silky knickers fell out of the ironing pile.

“Whose are those, James?” she asked.

“Not sure,” I said. Could it be that I was a womaniser who had so many women he forgot whose knickers had accidentally found their way into the airing cupboard? My mum did not look convinced.

“My sister’,” I ventured.

“Claire doesn’t wear knickers like that,” Mum said.

I knew *that* only too well.

The conversation stopped there, but worse was to come. A month after my parents had left my brother was made redundant from his job and he came to my rescue, financially, by moving up to my house. Sick of the UK and with a girlfriend in the States, he wished to emigrate and start afresh out there. In the meantime, he hoped to sort his affairs out whilst staying at my house.

Again, all my things went back into the loft but unfortunately I left a box of ladies' shoes in what was to be my brother's bedroom. As he was moving in he pulled open the door of the built-in wardrobe.

"Here, James, what's this?" he said, pointing to the box I had left in a wardrobe. My black boots were sticking out of the top and I could clearly make out a stiletto heel. It was my sister all over again, catching me wearing her brown skirt.

"Sometimes, I like to do that kind of thing, you know," I said after a while, I could never mention the dreaded "T" word to a member of my own family.

"With that other guy?"

As if he didn't know. "Yeah."

I made a grab for the box, dropped it on the landing and put the stepladder up to the loft hatch. We were both really embarrassed. As I re-emerged from the loft, he said,

"I thought you'd grown out of all that dressing lark."

"Yeah, I had," I said. I shrugged, "It's just, you know, now and again..."

Well, how would you explain it?

The TV days were over ... or so it seemed.

*To be Continued...*