

The Other Side of The Street



Philippa Peters

An "Adult TV" Novel

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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STREET

by Philippa Peters

I. THE GILDED CAGE

‘THIRD KIDNAPPING VICTIM RANSOMED!!!’ screamed the newspaper headline.

“With three exclamation marks,” said Detective-Lieutenant Al Dwyer to his partner, Detective-Sergeant Jim Givens.

Each of the men knew that there were nine victims of the gang, if it could be called such, that was making its illegal, criminal living from the affluent communities that surrounded Palermo and its beautiful, Pacific-side harbor and port. They also knew why the ransoms had been paid, and why the families of the kidnapped boys and young men wanted no publicity—not even that their sons had been kidnapped

and subjected to terrible ordeals before finally being bought out of their captivity.

“Still keeping our hats on tight about this one?” Givens asked grimly. “Still not enlisting the public on our side?” He climbed out of the front seat of Al’s sedan, hiding the paper against his forearm, as Police Chief Vincent Bruckmeyer came bustling out of the building and headed towards them.

Al Dwyer shook his head as Givens secreted the paper away behind the front seat. The secrecy about the kidnapped victims, their rights to privacy and such, was a very sore point between the two ‘sides’—the ‘regular’ detectives, members of the Palermo police, and the division of the FBI, the ‘Feds’, both supposedly investigating co-operatively what were federal crimes of kidnapping.

“What time did you set for the raid on *The Gilded Cage*?” barked Bruckmeyer, his voice loud, typical of the way he spoke to almost everyone.

“Around one o’clock,” murmured Al Dwyer.

“Anything else besides the raid tonight in that paper you bought, Jim?” Bruckmeyer asked over his shoulder.

Jim Givens swore silently to himself. “Nothing on that. Yet, separate story, separate writer,” he answered as they zipped into Central Palermo, with Dwyer’s driving speed making other drivers honk furiously at them. “Quotes the FBI that transvestism is an angle on two of the victims. Rich families with boys of that persuasion are cautioned to keep them off the streets or risk having to pay a fortune to see their sons again.”

“They wouldn’t recognize them if they did,” snorted Bruckmeyer. “It won’t take five minutes for some

television reporter to connect this raid to that conjecture. After all the progress you boys have made, this could cause the bent gang to pack up its frilly panties and head for sexier pastures.”

Police Chief Vincent Bruckmeyer watched Al Dwyer tap impatiently on the custom-made wooden steering wheel of his Impala. Al moved his thick body around on the car seat, fidgeting as he did so. His companions, Vince in the front, beside him, and Jim Givens, in the back, noted his unease and themselves became more on edge.

Across the dimly-lit street, loud rock music blared from the garishly lit night club. Occasionally, the door at the front of the club would open and a dark figure, usually female, would slip out of the place and into a side alley, sometimes stopping for a frenzied bout of petting with the male who’d accompanied her from the club.

“A little on account before finding a room,” Givens said, repeating what he’d said twice before.

“What time is it?” Bruckmeyer growled impatiently.

“Ten to one,” Dwyer said without even looking at his watch. The bust was due to go down about one. Bruckmeyer was obviously eager to start, still not telling the men why he’d ever chosen to be part of solving this strange kidnapping case, nor saying what this particular raid was all about, or what they’d learn from it all, if anything.

“They’re all leaving,” said Bruckmeyer in an aggrieved tone. He opened the door of the car aggressively. “Come on. Let’s get this thing over with!”

Givens and Dwyer rolled their eyes at each other but did as they were told.

There were two sets of heavy, metal-lined doors protecting the entrance to *The Gilded Cage*. Through the second doors, there was a narrow hallway, with a coat check to the left, now closed. A planter, with ivy-covered stems concealing the bars from view, acted as a sentinel to the long bar itself. At a table beyond the planter, a blonde woman in a red evening gown was totalling a number of receipts.

She glanced up and then froze, her hand posed in the air, as the three big men bore down on her. Bruckmeyer's hand, firmly holding the big gold captain's star in its black case, pointed towards the woman and then towards the bar. She rose, carefully placed the receipts on one side of the table, and made a slight, ironic curtsy to the police captain.

Bruckmeyer's face was like thunder as he followed her into the dark club. The only good lighting came from behind the bar itself. Two red-vested waitresses, both with blonde curls piled up high on their heads, were cleaning glasses and re-stocking shelves, their expressions turning to bright smiles as the new men approached.

The dark room was divided into many booths, each table therein protected from its neighbors by a small curtain. Even as Dwyer motioned Givens towards the rear exit, several figures got up from the tables and flitted down the narrow hallway in search of a way out. Cops are easy to spot in a place like this, thought Dwyer sourly.

Bruckmeyer cursed loudly. "Hold it right there!" his voice boomed across the club. The gentle hum of conversation died away. There was a crash of fallen glass as one figure stood and began to rush to the main entrance where Al Dwyer blocked her way.

The scene began to dissolve into chaos as more and more of the nightclub denizens tried to escape

the police. Givens was cursing loudly as he grabbed at a couple trying to scamper over the small stage and past him. "Stay put!" he yelled.

Bruckmeyer had specifically ordered that there be no gunplay. Givens cursed as his hand slid off a silky wrap and a slender, feminine figure disappeared past the crash bar and into the night.

Confusion reigned for several minutes until the sudden noise of police sirens howled out of the night at the front and the back entrances. The retreat was cut off. Several men and women were pushed back into the club by the arrival of uniformed men and women, a couple of minutes after one o'clock, Al Dwyer noted. Within seconds, the entrances were secured, the clients thrust back in their seats.

Givens pushed to the club's serving bar. The blonde in the tight-fitting red dress smiled wickedly at him, her lips as red as her dress.

A uniformed sergeant was berating the detectives. "One o'clock!" he yelled. "You called it for one! Why didn't you say you were going in early? We got chases going on in half the alleyways in this block. We're arresting bystanders, and we've probably let some go that we shouldn't."

By the twitching of the chief's jaw, Givens could see that he was about to explode. Bruckmeyer had put away his star, no longer really valid since he'd been promoted to Chief the year before.

"It's all right, Sergeant," Givens smoothly interceded. "We've got the ones we wanted. We heard they were about to leave and so we had to act fast."

Bruckmeyer glanced at Givens, giving no hint of surprise at the other's inspired lie; but then he had chosen Jim Givens for this because Givens was one

of the quickest thinkers on his feet in the Department.

"You said one o'clock," said the sergeant stubbornly.

Givens shrugged. The blonde was now watching him tensely as he turned his attention to her. "Turn up the lights, Donna," he ordered. She stared at him defiantly but then broke away.

"Jackie," Donna said in a surprisingly low and gruff voice. A cute, dark-haired barmaid, in black tights and a white, frilly blouse that displayed her buxom wares very favorably, edged forward from the silent group behind the bar. "Light up," the blonde growled. The brunette nodded and stepped to one side of the bar, reaching high.

As light flooded the room, the dark, mysterious ambiance disappeared. The walls were painted a drab, grey-white while the light fixtures were cheap and tinsely. Givens blinked rapidly like everyone else.

"You and your staff first," Givens snapped at the blonde, as Bruckmeyer peered about, apparently mesmerized.

"Why?" growled the blonde, hands on her hips. "Whatya charging us with?"

"You'll find out at the station," snarled Givens as angrily as he could. Now, under the harsh lights, he could see the excessive makeup worn by the blonde and the blueish tint beginning to show about her chin.

"We have rights," stated the blonde, her voice even more mannish, incongruous, with her feminine attire



and petite, womanly shaped figure. Now he could see that she wasn't a woman.

"At the precinct station!" bellowed Givens. The blonde stared at him for a moment as if she would defy him, her lips in a thin, shiny, red line. Then, she shrugged.

"Oh, Jackie darling," she said. The voice was higher, huskier, less masculine. The brunette with shoulder-length hair came to the front of the bar, her false eyelashes fluttering uncertainly as if she was unused to bright lights. "Start us off." She indicated to the red-vested waitresses to follow. "We're all going for a ride to the precinct house." She smiled at Givens and held out her hand with its extra long, vivid red fingernails. "Will you help us into the van, kind sir? Long dresses and high heels are such a trial going up steep steps."

Givens was about to grab the smirking, falsetto-speaking 'woman' in front of him when Vince Bruckmeyer stepped past him. He grabbed the blonde's arm and yanked her towards the sneering, uniformed police guarding the doorway. His jerk pulled down her sleeve and the front of her dress, revealing a black bra strap and the lacy top of a well-filled black bra.

"All right! All right!" the blonde lilted, her voice almost womanly. From behind the bar, six young waitresses, all in either fishnet stockings or black tights, in black micro-miniskirts, displaying rounded, feminine figures, minced after their employer to the doorway.

The uniformed sergeant raised an eyebrow to Givens who nodded at the customers. "Yeah, them too," he said as the sergeant shrugged. Twelve men and eight women had been detained in the club. Several more of each apparent gender were outside. "And

no, there ain't a real woman in the whole place. But separate them in the lockup. We don't want any making out in the cells."

They both looked at a brunette being helped to her feet by an older man, who put his arm about her waist as he led her with great dignity, as if she were his woman, towards the exit and the paddy wagon beyond. Givens returned stares with her as she swayed towards him, giving him a most attractive smile, which he would have loved to respond to with a smile of his own.

I was the fifth 'girl' to be interviewed by Bruckmeyer, and his two cronies. I presumed that he wanted to talk to me but it seemed like an odd way to do it, staging a raid on the place where I'd told him I'd be. There had to be more to it than just talking to me. What had Lieutenant Pam said to me when she'd finally persuaded me to do this job? Something about Bruckmeyer being very political and wanting to impress his sponsors in the rich villas of Southern Palermo.

But a raid on a well-known drag club? I supposed it would show that the Palermo police were doing something about the kidnapping of young transvestites—more than our friends among the Feds were doing, anyway. I stretched out my stockinged legs, re-arranged my dress about my thighs, and followed the desk sergeant, who'd come for me, into the interview room.

Bruckmeyer frowned, looking me up and down, as if he'd never seen a pretty man in a lovely, swishy dress before. I shook my long, wavy hair at him and wiggled to a chair, crossing my shapely legs. All the

men I met these days commented on my lovely legs. I was beginning to believe them that I did have girlish, pretty legs. Yes, I was still on the job Vincent had set for me, ten days before. The uniformed officer who'd brought me to the interview room knew nothing about that, about complimenting a woman on her looks. He left with a smirk on his face. Bruckmeyer courteously offered me a cup of coffee that he'd already poured.

"They, um, we, were pretty rough on you out there," said Bruckmeyer as I crossed my legs as women do. My dress rustled noisily, because of the stiff, crinolined underskirt that I'd worn and arranged to do just that. That seemed to affect the larger, older of the two detectives in the room with him as it had my 'client' earlier.

I nodded. I didn't like to speak too much, as that could destroy the illusion that I might be a female. I looked down and saw my nails about the cup, pink-painted and femininely manicured, thanks to Jackie, who'd done them for me earlier that evening, each of us primping while we waited for customers to arrive at *The Gilded Cage*.

"Not as bad as the Hill," I told him as Bruckmeyer had waited for me to speak. I wasn't sure, but I thought my voice was all right. It was hard to say. The people who came to the transvestite club didn't worry about little things being a bit off. My body wasn't off at all. I had a tiny waist, made tinier by my corset, ample though totally padded breasts, and brown, well-cut, femininely styled, shoulder-length hair.

It was my own hair. Jackie, again, had introduced me to a hairdresser who was a cross-dresser, as I was pretending to be. I had gulped a hundred times, but finally allowed Guy (Giselle when in drag) to cut,

perm, and color my hair. Now, with my thin eyebrows, I was called 'Miss' all the time, wherever I went shopping in Palermo, even without makeup on my face. I swore to myself that I was going to get a micro buzz cut as soon as this assignment was over.

I actually felt overdressed in that office. No, I wasn't going to call Vince 'Chief' or 'Mr Bruckmeyer'. I was acting like a woman. I'd do what a woman did, and call him Vince or Vincent as the mood struck me. I was in a lilac-colored, party dress, the shoulders puffed, the skirt flared and pleated, making it seem that I wore several petticoats. My light purple stockings matched the dress. I don't even want to say what I was wearing under the dress. Oh, all right, I was in dark purple panties and garter belt, matching my camisole underslip and bra.

"You've made progress," stated Bruckmeyer, which surprised me. I looked at him suspiciously through the mascara on my darkly painted false eyelashes and thought of Barbara, and the afternoon we'd spent at her apartment, laughing and fooling around. She'd taught me how to do my eyes, slapping at my hand all the time as I fondled her, telling me repeatedly to be serious. She didn't want me to get killed out there.

I re-crossed my stockinged legs, the dress rustling seductively. I was getting hardened to the sounds, sensations and fragrances of femininity that marked the world into which I had plunged. I noted how Givens reacted to me, almost in awe, as I mimicked a female while Dwyer looked stolidly at me.

"I want Jim Givens and Al Dwyer in on this," Bruckmeyer had said to me that first afternoon when we'd met, formally. Bruckmeyer's reaction to me then, in a woman's tailored suit, my hair parted in

the middle and drawn back in a long ponytail at the back, had been similar to that of Givens now.

We'd been at the lunch meeting with my boss, Lieutenant Pamela Wright, for over an hour. Bruckmeyer pressed her to lend Ross Barkley—he knew my name and what I'd done before for the Beacon Hill Department—to him and the Palermo police, as the FBI was getting nowhere. This was before she dropped on him that the 'Penny' sitting so prettily beside him was me, Ross Barkley, coming off my latest exploit: arresting a suspect, now charged with three murders, before he could murder me.

"I want you both to meet Detective Ross Barkley," Bruckmeyer introduced me formally, in the interview room, to Givens and Dwyer. "We got him from north of San Francisco to do this job for us. He was instrumental in breaking up the Marino syndicate in Frisco, among a lot of other fine jobs."

I saw the look in the other men's eyes when Bruckmeyer said 'San Francisco' and 'other fine jobs'. I wondered why Bruckmeyer didn't tell Givens that none of the jobs had involved dressing as a woman. I had only done that after I'd been transferred to Vice, where Lieutenant Pamela Wright had requested me. She told me frankly that she wanted me to act as transvestite 'bait', to capture a sadistic killer who'd been preying on men who liked to wear dresses.

We didn't arrest all the men who made passes at me when I was in drag, being monitored by Barbara and Fred, my partners. They loved to say outrageous things to me that I couldn't respond to over the wire I was wearing in my bra, or, sometimes, in my panties. They thought themselves really funny as they told me to 'sashay, darling, sashay'. I'd flushed out a few leads in investigating the lives of the dead queens,

but then the killer had been caught the old-fashioned way: someone had informed on him.

I'd just had to sashay past him, when we spotted him drinking at the Bijou and led him out to the parking lot for a little 'party'. Oh, how he'd cursed me, thinking I was a real tranny, as Fred dragged him through the gravelly parking lot to the waiting police car. Yes, I got the usual funny looks from the uniformed officers as they hauled him away, Barb going with them to make sure the charges were correct.

I'd gone back to my usual jeans, sweater and t-shirt, not cutting my hippie-long hair as I hung out in Haight on another intelligence case, when Lieutenant Pamela had asked me to do this thing for Bruckmeyer. It was to repay a favor to an old buddy who needed help with a case involving a killer of transvestites.

"Okay," the lieutenant had said. "I know it's an oxymoron to call you a woman. You know it's an oxymoron. But I saw you on the street. You were really convincing, Penny"— she used the girl's name I'd been using as a tranny, on the street—"even when you were giving Barb the finger behind that john's back, the one we arrested for soliciting."

The john had pulled a gun when we'd arrested him. I'd had to wrestle it away from him while Barbara and Fred came running. It was a laugh as two guys, coming out of the liquor store, dropped their beers and ran over first to help a lady in distress. They were mortified to find out it was me, a guy, and that I was a cop. They were even more mortified to find their liquor gone when they returned to where they'd set it down, to come and help a poor, defenseless woman.

As I drank the coffee Bruckmeyer had given me, I could see that Givens and Dwyer were wondering

how a deviate like me could ever have got onto the police force, even in degenerate San Francisco, which I wasn't actually a part of. I guess Bruckmeyer was trying to give me a good reference when he said I'd worked 'north of San Francisco'.

I could also see the detectives wondering how I could possibly be of help in this case. Frankly, I agreed with them. I didn't think that I was doing much to solve Bruckmeyer's problem, except to sit around in pretty dresses and have men fawn all over me as if I really was a drag queen.

I said that in my softest, most feminine tones to Bruckmeyer, who held doors open for me and helped me sit down in restaurants even though he knew I was a man. I was glad he did that. It made me angry with the men I worked with, who knew what I was, who slammed doors on me instead of opening them for me. I hated it when they didn't do things they would do for a woman, and treated me like one of the guys when I was all dressed up. When I was dressed as a woman, I wanted to be treated as a woman.

"I've kept all the right company," I said, smoothing my skirts as I re-crossed my legs without thinking of the impact on Givens of maintaining my feminine identity. "But either the organized gang members you want are keeping a very low profile or they've moved off this turf completely." *Or they don't really exist*, I thought but didn't say. Givens was staring in fascination at my high heels and, I guess, my legs.

"We picked up Judy Landon, as you suggested," said Bruckmeyer. I saw that both of the others were surprised by that. "And you were right. She, he, is in on all this. She, he, had been told to get clean for the last week of the month by Belinda Lee. We can't find anyone by that name. Have you had any luck?"

My newly cut hair swirled about my face, my earrings bobbling, as I shook my head. “No Belinda Lees at all,” I said softly. “I even checked the impersonators, figuring it might be some girl who sang or impersonated the singer—but they hadn’t even heard of the singer, period. If this girl really was a stripper, she must have used another name, or else Judy had it all wrong.” I found it easier to call all the trannies ‘girls’, as they did themselves. It was easy then to say ‘she’ and ‘her’, and not keeping on using corrections and invisible quotation marks as Bruckmeyer seemed to be doing.

“But in finding Judy,” said Bruckmeyer, eyeing me sharply, “you found a hint of some kind of pipeline.”

I pushed my hair back, knowing how feminine a gesture it was. I had lost a bobby pin in the pushing and shoving as we were arrested. My long, femininely permed hair wouldn’t stay behind my ears.

“Kind of,” I agreed. “Judy claimed she had this girlfriend, a real girl, who picked her up at the Columbia after a big Easter party. I was just making idle talk, but I recalled that Bobby Allenby was snatched from there just after Easter. And I could tell Judy knew all about that by the way she looked at me. She wanted to tell me something, to brag about something, and then she shut down. That’s why I had you take her in.”

“There have been nine kidnappings we know of, though we’re only admitting to three to the media,” said Bruckmeyer. “Judy clammed up when her lawyer arrived. She won’t say a word, even though she’s terrified of being raped in the main prison population we’ve been threatening to send her to.”

“It was the Columbia thing that got me,” I told him. “As I recall, all of the victims came from here, or lived here in Palermo, before they were snatched. But

Monty Dulier only came here to attend a friend's twenty-first, at the Uptown Scala; and Richard Martin was only ever here a day for a big party at the Collins Ballroom. Well, like the Columbia thing, those parties were catered by the Lubin Brothers. And Joe Lubin, the brother, who is known as Silvia, spelled with two Is, caters all the transvestite balls and parties and clubs. I saw the name once, twice, in your reports. I've been mining through all your paperwork, and that's what's been coming to me."

"Very circumstantial, not conclusive at all," said Bruckmeyer, frowning. "Um. The Lubins. You think they're involved in this? Judy's been hinting ..."

"I agree," I said. "And I think I'm done here at the *Cage*. But you asked. I don't understand. Did you arrest the whole club just to ask me about Judy Landon and what I learned about the Lubins from her?"

Givens coughed. "There was a picture of the Townsworth 'girl' in his, her wallet at a New Years' Party. It was taken at the Columbia." He did mime quotes when he said the word, 'girl'.

Bruckmeyer considered. "Al," he said, "check the Lubins out, but quietly. Don't tell the Feds what we're doing."

"You're not sharing with the Feds?" I asked him in disbelief. "Kidnapping is a federal offence."

Bruckmeyer scowled at me, not for the first time. A coldness radiated out from him. He didn't have to tell me that he hated Norwood, the Special Agent in charge of the FBI investigating team. He didn't have to tell me about the bungled ransom pickup. There was enough blame in that one incident to ruin a hundred careers.

“We’ll do this one our way, the old-fashioned way,” Bruckmeyer said. “Boots on the ground, not eyes in the sky.”

I looked at him. He should have said *high heels on the ground*, I thought cynically—though high-heeled boots would look great on me, I thought and giggled inside. Givens caught the quirk on my lips and smiled in his turn.

Sometimes I would cringe at the thoughts I had, and think I was turning into some pervert or something. I couldn’t believe the way I felt when I put on nylons and smoothed them over my legs and attached them to my garter belt. Barbara had put it into perspective for me, as I had shivered while dressing in woman’s underclothing in her apartment.

“I’ll let you in on a secret,” Barbara had told me. “The way you feel is the way women feel, the way I feel, when I put on stockings and a garter belt. The way you talk about wearing a dress is exactly what I want to feel when I wear a dress. So, you see, what you feel is perfectly normal. You should feel the way you do. Enjoy it. Have fun with it. I do.”

I had kissed her then. We’d made love, our smooth legs in stockings and garter belts, our panties in place until we could stand it no more. She’d taken off her bra, but wouldn’t let me take off mine. “Let me enjoy as well,” Barb had said as we made love.

That occasion had been the last time I’d kissed a woman. I’d been feeling perfectly normal. It just hadn’t occurred to me that, when Barb said what I felt was perfectly normal, she might have been meaning ‘perfectly normal for a woman.’

“If what Landon also told us is right,” said Bruckmeyer, “the ones we want recruit locally. They must have a local talent scout. They seem to pick

those with some kind of record. So we're going to bust you for possession as well as solicitation. We think it will help get you noticed. At least, that's the idea behind the raid tonight. If our prime suspects are still around, you could be visited, recruited, as Judy Landon was."

I looked at the little bag of weed which he gave me to handle. "I was only holding it for a friend," I joked with him.

"Judy Landon told us," said Al Dwyer quietly—the first time he'd spoken, I thought—"that she was busted for auto theft two weeks before Silvia's Valentine's Day party. She didn't say who Silvia was. We didn't catch that at the time, Chief. It might be a connection." He turned to me. "Having a criminal record is one way of getting yourself known and trusted by a tight crew like the one running all this. By taking out a transvestite from the group, Judy Landon, we've made an opening. If they don't look at you, you might see who has been taken up before the end of the month. Keep your eyes open."

I nodded to him as Bruckmeyer picked up the purse I'd been arrested with and accompanied me out to the little courtroom where all the inmates of *The Gilded Cage* were being charged, remanded, and released with assembly-line dispatch.

"You be careful," Bruckmeyer said to me quietly before he went up and told outrageous lies about me in court. It was a good job. He had put money in my purse or I would never have met the bail the judge set on me, five times as high as the others. I had tipped Vincent off to Judy. Judy Landon must have told him that she had replaced another queen, Billy May or May Berry, in the kidnap crew, before she'd clammed up on the advice of her lawyer.

May Berry had been found dead at the wheel of a car that had taken Edward Clement away from a ransom pickup site. Edward Clement and May had got away in that car, with the fake money ransom, the police in fairly close pursuit, but the 'girls' had been spotted. The car had driven into an underground parking garage where police had been blocked only for a minute by trucks and cars pulling out into driving lanes.

Shots had been exchanged. May had been found dead at the wheel. Edward Clement had disappeared again. His body had later been found across the city, in a shallow, unmarked grave, by a group of school-children. It was first thought it was the body of a young girl. Then a sharp-eyed young policewoman had noticed that the dress matched that of the girl in the kidnapping case.

Clement had died from a bullet wound. The Feds had not realized that the kidnappers would send the victim himself to pick up his own ransom. It was possible to excuse the police for not recognizing Clement in the girls' clothes he was wearing, particularly since his hair had been dyed blonde and styled like a woman's. He still wore earrings and makeup in the shallow grave where the kidnappers had cast his body.

Bruckmeyer hadn't answered my question as to who had killed May Berry. The Feds, notably Norwood, always said, in public, that ballistics showed that both Clement and May had been killed by the kidnappers.

"The Feds took a lot of bullets out of that garage," the police chief had said to me after I'd tipped him off to Judy and she'd been brought in. "They won't tell us about gunshot residue on the two dead bodies, because I'll bet there wasn't any. They've used Clem-

ent's death to whip up sentiment against this kidnap crew as ruthless murderers."

"They're not?" I'd asked him, stirring my latte slowly, finding it absurd that I should be out with the chief of police. Me, wearing a dress and with my hair down my back, I had met him as any girl would meet an older man, and no one had challenged me as I had kept my makeup to a minimum.

"These are professional practitioners," Bruckmeyer said distinctly. "All kidnapping is vicious. But I think when these cases get to court, as they eventually will, we're going to find out that Edward Clement and Billy May Berry died from police bullets. Vicious criminals, yes; murderers, no."

I also knew that Bruckmeyer had been the first to recognize that the girls with the baby carriage had just picked up the ransom, and not the diaper they were giggling over, as they left the parkway for their car with the baby seat. It had been the indecision of the Feds that had led to Clement and May Berry getting away as Bruckmeyer frantically called local police into the chase. The Feds had bullied the locals. Clement had apparently disappeared, according to the Feds, into an apartment and shopping complex before the extent of the tragedy had unfolded over the next few days.

Without informing anyone, Bruckmeyer had formed his own investigating group, consisting of himself, me, and two of his best detectives—or so he had told me, though I hadn't met them. I was flattered at first to be the fourth member. I suppose my lieutenant, Pamela Wright, in a way, was the fifth.

I didn't think using me as a transvestite had a chance of working. I'd been really lucky, almost right away, to meet Judy Landon. I'd been trolling for old friends of May Berry and come across Judy. She was,

as one 'girl' had said to me, the only person she'd ever heard say it was such a shame May had been killed.

I smiled at the detectives as I left the court, with Jim Givens opening the outer door to where the media stood, filming the spectacle of me in dresses and high heels.

"Silvia caters a big party at the Uptown Scala next week," I whispered to him as he handed me back my purse that I'd had to leave with a policewoman outside the court. "It's by invitation only, of course. Maybe I'll crash if I'm not invited after my court appearance."

"Well, tell me," said Vince Bruckmeyer when the three men were back in a quiet office.

Givens twitched nervously as his boss looked steadily at him. "The Feds aren't in on this," Jim said. "Shouldn't we leave it up to them rather than, well, dealing with a, a person like that?"

Al Dwyer looked at them both and shrugged, saying nothing.

"The Feds haven't a clue," Bruckmeyer sneered. "They shot the only lead they turned up. They don't know how to pursue the info they got from that. Ever since I talked to Ray Sanchez, back East, about how he broke up the Bent Organization using an undercover cop who posed as a queen, I knew it was the only way to break this crew. We've gotta get inside their organization. Barkley can do it. You've seen him."

Givens looked unhappily at Dwyer but his partner still said nothing. "I don't know," said Givens slowly. "You call that a policeman?"

"His record proves it," said Bruckmeyer, his jaw set in a dogged, obstinate line. "Look. Where are the Feds now? They've rounded up and questioned eight hundred transgendered persons, some straighter in their habits than you and me. They've used 400 agents and conducted 10,000 interviews, and they've even sent a man to the airport.

"It's all numbers with them! They've mounds of testimony and they don't have a clue how to interpret it. Look what Barkley's done, turning up Landon, who says the gang's still here and getting ready to strike again; and there's this possible Lubin connection. It might pan out."

"But Vice has known about Lubin for years," said Givens. "He's harmless. He puts on what they call Fancy Dress Balls every couple of months. Of course, all the best-known queens are going to be there. It's nothing new."

Bruckmeyer was quiet for a moment. "You want me to turn this over to the Feds?" Givens nodded his head but Al Dwyer only frowned. "Al?"

"Let's run with it a little bit longer," said Al, surprising his partner. Then he smiled, a very rare occurrence, but the smile was very bitter. "Don Norwood couldn't find the bottom of a bag if it was opened in front of him. He couldn't spell bag if you spotted him the B and the G. I was there when we had to tell the Clements parents that their son was dead. We didn't have to tell them about him being dressed like a girl or playing with that doll as if it was his baby, even pretending to breastfeed it.

“Norwood gloated over all the details in his interview, which luckily the parents objected to and so it wasn’t run by NGTV. Besides, there’s more than a practitioner at work here, Jim. There’s a *sick* practitioner. And I want to get him off the street before I have to go through all that again with another victim being killed.”

Al Dwyer went on, letting out everything that was bothering him, as Givens had heard him do before: “Oh, and I don’t have a doubt in the world that the Feds killed both Clement and Billy May. I saw the scene in the parking garage. There wasn’t even a suggestion at first that they were doing anything but running away. If you tell Norwood now what we’re doing, it’ll be on the six o’clock news anyway, after the raid we just pulled. This crew will split for sure to start up somewhere else. Let’s nail them ourselves.”

II. PENNY

I’d been detained for nearly a day. It was a relief to get away from the cameras and back to my own apartment. As Bruckmeyer had predicted, the spectacle of so many men in dresses had brought out newsmen and spectators by the hundreds. I’d had to run the gauntlet of flash-popping photographers and the ogling men and women who’d called out so many things, some of which would even have been complimentary—if I’d been a woman.

If they could have seen beneath my makeup, they’d have seen I was red with embarrassment as I tried to walk gracefully on my heels, my rear slightly in motion, my dress so light and featherlike, touching the stockings I wore, sending all kinds of awful, feminine feelings through me. Luckily, the blonde, busty waitresses took over the spotlight.

Donna, the blonde owner of *The Gilded Cage*, had quickly realized the enormous amount of free publicity the arrests had generated for her club. She had been quick to organize her waitresses to pose provocatively for the cameras. I watched the cavortings on the early evening news as I took off my lavender party dress and hung it in the closet. My landlady was well aware of my proclivities, as were the other tenants, almost all of whom were gay. They all called me Penny, the name Pamela Wright had chosen for me, when I first went undercover as a queen.

The news anchor was droning on about the scandalous arrests as Bunny and Fiona, both with long blonde hair and exaggerated implants, posed for the television cameras like models on the runway. I had to smile as I took off my slip and undid my corset with relief. Without it, I didn't have quite the curvy figure I'd been showing the detectives. I eased out of my bra as well, and undid the taping that gave me the cleavage Givens had been looking at with such intensity.

I sat on the side of the bath as I ran it for myself and looked at my image in the mirror. There were marks on my hairless skin from the taping and the tightness of the corset and bra. In my stockings and panties, though, with my hair so femininely cut and waved, I looked like a young, unendowed girl.

The queens had noticed. I'd received all kinds of advice on which hormones to take to make me bloom like a woman. I'd had to smile at the earnestness of several in trying to make me more girly. As Lieutenant Pam Wright had said, "You'll be surprised, Penny. A slim guy like you in a dress—they won't think twice about trusting you with their innermost secrets."

Lieutenant Wright had been right. We had been well on the way to identifying the killer in the first

transvestite case I'd been working on, when we'd been partly pre-empted by the informant and subsequent confession. It had saved me a day in court, however, as well as an admission that I'd gone undercover as a drag queen.

Barb and Fred hadn't let me forget it, but they were good in one way. They didn't spread it around the rest of the precinct we worked out of. The jokes about me having nice legs were always kept for when we were together. It had been quite a surprise when Lieutenant Wright had said that she needed me for a special job. I didn't even have time to tell either of my friends what I was going to do.

I sighed as I creamed my face and took off my makeup. I felt this way each time I took off the clothes that had been chosen for me by the lieutenant for this investigation. I had, of course, bought more women's clothes and shoes over the month I'd been in Palermo. I really only had one pair of jeans and a t-shirt that could be considered as masculine.

I shivered as I thought of *Donnie Brasco* and how the cop there had almost become part of the mob, so connected had he become to those he had been spying upon. It had jarred on me when I'd watched it again on some movie classic channel the week before. I looked at myself in my garter belt and stockings, and could sense it happening to me as well. I'd found myself getting just as aggrieved as Fiona and Jackie at being arrested, just for being transgendered.

But of course I wasn't, I knew, as I slid off my stockings and my panties and then the gaff that made me look so flat in front. Getting into the bath was such a relief, with the soft fragrance of blossoms all about me.

It was other men, of course, who were the biggest problem in this job. I had promised the Lieutenant that I'd go 'to the end'. I had to let some men touch me or I'd have looked very suspicious to the queens I was trying to 'work'. Ooo, in my bath, I washed away, as I thought of it, all the caresses and kisses from men that I'd had to endure as a drag queen.

I had to behave in the same way 'the other girls' did with men, letting them fondle my tush, stroke my body and hug me. The men I met in the drag clubs always said I smelled so nice. They liked dancing and holding me, and even kissing me.

Yes, well, I had to let some of the men kiss me. Barb had been adamant that it wasn't so bad. She kissed men all the time. She was right that it wasn't the end of the world—but I still felt awfully strange being kissed by a man trying to put his tongue in my mouth. Then there were some, luckily only two so far, who had kissed me so nicely that I'd found myself kissing them back in return.

I'd gone on far too long with Alan the other night. He'd been so surprised when I wouldn't go to bed with him. I'd really led him on much too far, and had felt terrible—both about the way he felt and about the way I felt.

I had to get back to the Hill soon, and to Barbara. Not that she was my girlfriend. I knew Barb slept with Fred as much as she did with me. But she wouldn't say No to me. I knew that. She never had yet.

Judy Landon had been a man who'd lived full time in women's dresses. She'd confessed that she was a 'tranny' when Bruckmeyer had threatened to shave off all her lovely blonde hair and stick her in the main population in the remand center. Vince said to me that she'd said she'd partnered Belinda Lee, another transvestite in the kidnapping gang.

Judy's living full-time had been the reason Belinda Lee had approached him/her to replace Billy May, Judy had said. Of course, Belinda had known that Judy would do anything for money. Judy had told her enough times. All she had to do was look after a 'girl', that's the way it was said, and make sure 'she' came to no harm, as the two of them trained her to be a girl. Belinda had done it before, several times.

But Belinda's last 'close friend', Judy had recognized as the dead girl, last name Clement, in the police case. Judy knew her and May Berry very well. It was a long shot that I'd ever be approached as Judy was. I was such a newcomer to the scene, but I was following Judy's career path as closely as I could.

Judy wasn't talking any more to Bruckmeyer. He'd pushed her to share what information she had, and she'd finally said the magic words. She wanted a lawyer. Yes, Bruckmeyer said that she'd be charged soon. Maybe something would happen. Maybe I could go home then.

I had to wash out my stockings and my panties and gaff, likewise my bra and corset, after wearing them all night and most of the day. My bathroom looked like any girl's bathroom after I left it, with all the women's underthings hanging about to dry.

I had to get some sleep, but I had to brush my hair. Giselle had seen it once when I hadn't brushed it enough, and scolded me in front of an amused group of 'tourists', as we girls called them. They wanted to dance with us, drink with us, kiss us lightly, and in some cases, wanted sexual acts at prices I turned up my nose at. I directed them to others who would do the unnatural acts, as I thought of them, at the prices they wanted to pay.

My hair was the crucial factor in convincing others of my femininity, my queenliness. It had been the

right thing to have Giselle cut and perm it. It bounced back to its wave when I pulled on a dress or sweater. It hugged my neck, the layers and the highlighting so naturally female that I could pass wherever I went with my slenderness. A little lipstick was all I needed, but I usually did much more than that, particularly about my eyes, which I was always being complimented on. Away from the police station, and away from the immediate vicinity of the transvestite clubs, I felt that my makeup made sure I was accepted as a woman, instead of as a freak.

I shivered as I thought about that, being accepted as a woman. It had seemed to come so easily, especially since the constant attention of electrolysis, wax and other depilatory creams by Barb. I still felt I had to wear foundation to cover my face but Barb insisted that I shouldn't, given the short time I was doing the work we did. I hadn't shaved, except for my legs, since that first time of being a 'drag queen'. My legs I did every second day whether they needed it or not.

Giselle made me consent to let her dye my hair. She said I'd be really hot as a blonde, with my fair skin. I think she was right. Shaking nervously, I'd gone to her at her salon—she dressed as Guy, me made up femininely, in a leather miniskirt and black top. I had to endure the snide comments of the female hairdressers as Guy did my hair. They knew I was a man even though I went there in a miniskirt and nude pantyhose. They had comments, though, for Guy as he did my hair—and complimentary observations for me, about how pretty I was becoming and how my new hairdo would drive my boyfriend wild.

The second time in Guy's beauty salon, I'd had a manicure and let them paint my nails. One girl called me a real blonde cutie, making me shiver and know I was going too far in what I was doing. Giselle always

wore acrylics, as I had. One of the reasons I endured it was because Judy had gone there for years to be dolled up, lately by Giselle, whom I'd tracked to *The Gilded Cage*. I was trying not to leave any stone unturned, but I still thought what I was doing, dressing as a girl, was really a waste of everyone's time.

There was a nightdress in the bag at the end of my bed, long white and very silky. It was there in case someone investigated me closely. Judy had giggled that she slept in nighties. I'd told her I did as well. I'd dumped my pyjamas and boxers and bought myself three nighties.

I tried, but I couldn't get used to sleeping in a nightie. I usually slept in the buff and re-played all that had gone on the night before. This raid Bruckmeyer had staged seemed overly dramatic to me. I'd thought that about Bruckmeyer the first time I'd met him with Lieutenant Wright, me trying so hard to be a demure, little girl that he wouldn't notice as anything else. It had worked well to intrigue him into using me on this transvestite caper, as I thought of it, but I also was beginning to think that Bruckmeyer was getting impatient with me.

First, I understood, Judy Landon had said that a strike was imminent. But they must be calling it off, I thought, with Judy gone. Her arrest hadn't been reported, of course, because technically she hadn't been arrested, at first. I wondered if she knew that Bruckmeyer had kidnapped her and was holding her in confinement just as she had helped to confine Gerald Townsworth.

Jimmy Givens had quite a hard time getting through the security screen around the Townsworth

estate house. There was now an electrified fence about the grounds, and perimeter cameras, as well as a guard in the house. It was Mrs. Townsworth, the strength of the family, who finally came and met Givens at the security gate.

“Have you got a lead on the kidnappers?” Mrs Townsworth snapped at him through the grille, leaving the gate locked.

Givens shook his head. “Just following up another lead,” he said frankly. “I need to talk to Gerald further about places he visited in Palermo.”

Mrs Townsworth just looked at him. “We’re trying to help Gerald forget the whole experience, and you want him to relive it?” she finally asked, shaking her grey hair in negative fashion. “No. I’ll answer any questions you have.”

“Mrs Townsworth, you’ve helped us all you can,” said Givens gently. The girl who’d been picked up in a daze at the bus station had clutched a teddy bear and a pink purse, and had responded to ‘Geraldine’. She’d been drugged, of course, but she seemed to think she was Geraldine Smith. She’d been going to a sleepover party with her girlfriends. That was why she had Prissy, the teddy, with her.

It had taken the Feds a day to get it sorted out that Geraldine was a very disoriented Gerald Townsworth, who was still speaking in a little girl’s voice and clutching Prissy and her pink purse, when the angry Townsworths had driven off with what had been their son, his hair now red and a mass of tight curls.

“I need to talk to Gerald,” Givens insisted.

“He is not able to answer your questions,” said Mrs Townsworth angrily. “His psychiatrist is with him

now, trying to undo the damage done to him in captivity. Any questions you want answered must go through me.”

Words such as ‘obstruction of justice’ and ‘hindering an official police investigation’ went through Givens’s mind. But one look at the multi-million-dollar home in front of him was enough. These people would have lawyers interfering at the drop of a hat.

“I’ll get a pad from the car,” Givens sighed, “and write out the questions I’d like you to put to Gerald.” But it will be Geraldine who’ll be answering them, thought Givens grimly. It had been amazing how the red-haired girl had insisted she was Geraldine even as the drugs wore off, even after an examination by the female doctor the Feds had had to find, to prove that Geraldine was a boy. Givens had overheard a private comment from the doctor to Bruckmeyer. “She isn’t going to be a boy for very long,” the doctor had said quietly. “She loves being a little girl too much.”

III. A LITTLE REACTION

There wasn’t any action on the boulevards or in the clubs until the sun went down. I slept the rest of the day away. Gaylord, as queer as his name implied, dropped by in the evening as I was dressing, to tempt me to a pot party later that night. I was painting my nails. He stayed to watch me, fascinated, as I did my toes as well. I wouldn’t have, but he was there. Gaylord asked me why we girls liked our toes painted so much. So, I showed him and offered to do his. That’s when I thought that Gaylord would leave me, but he didn’t. I think he liked me. He certainly treated me as if I was a girl—his girl, his girlfriend.

I refused his pot. Gaylord commiserated with me on what I’d lost to the police. “They’ll try and get you

for dealing if you don't become a snitch," he said hesitantly.

"I know," I said. "Luckily, I bought it from you."

"You never," Gaylord began. Then, he laughed and hugged me, even as I was putting on my false eyelashes. My flirting with him made me seem authentic, authentically a drag queen, I hoped. "Oh, it's going to be like that, is it?"

"No, Gaylord," I sighed. "But everyone is going to think so. Especially when the plants they took from me turn out to be ginseng, herb roots and bean leaves, a herbal flu remedy of my grandmother's. Everyone will think I made a deal when in fact that's what it was in my purse."

Gaylord raised his eyebrows at me. He manfully invited me still to his party, ate two thirds of the omelette I'd made for myself, took a beer from my fridge, hugged and messily kissed me, and left. I was on a diet; a few mouthfuls of cheese omelette, most of it off Gaylord's face, were enough for me. I was going to go back to *The Gilded Cage*. No, a girl like me couldn't go there, two nights in a row, in the same dress.

I chose a red, wide-skirted dress. Barbara would have loved it and asked me how I felt in it. All cute and girly, I might have admitted if we were being serious. As if I was Barbara's sister, if I wanted to joke with her. Both were actually true, I realised, as I found my red, platform-heeled shoes with the tiny straps. My friend Giselle had convinced me to buy them when we 'girls' had to cement our friendship by going shopping together. It's what we girls do, Giselle had declared, finding me the sleekest, most feminine shoes in the store. Oh, I had to buy them.

I had to take a wrap as well, for the sleeveless dress was too flimsy to keep out the cold of the early morn-

ing, when I hoped I'd be returning—possibly with a man whom I'd ditch somewhere in the alley. No, a few kisses and caresses there didn't count in what I was doing as a 'woman' or as a 'drag artiste'. I wore dark stockings, like most queens, to make my legs look a little thinner. Judy had said I didn't need to, but I would have stood out if I had worn the nude stockings I had bought the day before.

It took me a while to complete my makeup. When Gaylord came back, he barged right in, as I hadn't locked the door behind him. "You should come to my party," he said. "I've got some straight friends who would dig a girl like you. And, babe, you are looking so fine these days. You *pass*, you know."

Gaylord was trying to compliment me. I smiled at him and blew him a kiss as I put a red bow in my hair, pinned back behind my ears to show off my new earrings. I looked like a girlish teenager, years younger than I really was, an asset among the people I was going to associate with.

"Sorry," I told Gaylord sweetly, also girlishly, flicking my long hair over my shoulder. "But I have unfinished business to attend to tonight."

"In that outfit, baby?" asked Gaylord, disbelieving. "You be a good girl, Penny."

I laughed at him. It had taken a week of practise with Barbara for me to learn to laugh girlishly so that I didn't reveal myself when I laughed or worse, giggled like a little girl, at a joke. I didn't keep it up because I could still slip into a very masculine laugh at anything I found really funny. "I intend to be a very good girl," I said to Gaylord breathily, pouting femininely as he smiled at me.

“Ooo,” he said, putting his arms about me, and kissing my red lips very, very lightly. “If I wasn’t gay, I could go for you, girl.”

“Gaylord,” I joked with him. “I am a guy, you know, just as gay as you are.” Oh, how I hated saying stuff like that to another man! I wished I could have arrested Gaylord, rather than kissing him to the door.

Gaylord considered as I shooed him out and locked my door behind me. “No, not the way you look,” he called as the door closed on him. “You’re nothing like a gay man! I’d still be thinking of you as a girl even if I was trying to bang you. It would never work, you and me!”

It was absurd, I thought, as I went down the stairs, smiling and nodding to Johnson, the white-haired stamp collector, standing in the doorway of his first-floor apartment. Johnson frowned at me, knowing I was a man. It was absurd that Gaylord, who looked as masculine as Johnson, would be preferred by him as a sexual partner, rather than a woman like me. Gaylord was the same. He liked men. He’d told me, when he wouldn’t go home after invading my apartment one night, that I was quite safe from him. He’d held up my nightie and shivered.

“I can’t go to bed with this,” Gaylord had said before he’d passed out, lying on the nightie. Somehow or other, after I had dragged him to the sofa and let him sleep there, draping the nightie over him so that he slept with it, Gaylord had become my friend. We went food shopping together, and went to the bar when he wanted company. He came over and told me all about his lovers and his job in the bank, and how hard it was to be both black and gay with so many straight women coming on to him. He had become an easy way for me to get the street cred I needed, to get

near the people I was supposed to be finding out about.

I wasn't going to do a job like this again, I thought grimly as I caught a cab, smiling boldly at the cabbie and feeling my skirts whip about me in the evening breeze, my legs shivering as I smoothed my skirts about me. I gave the driver an address on Tarpin Street. He suddenly gave me a second, hard look, doubt entering his eyes.

I have to get out of this transvestite thing, I resolved, as I relaxed in the back seat. If I didn't, soon I'd be good for nothing else in the eyes of my superiors, for sure. I missed Barb's touch. She had always been touching me, stroking me, when I was in drag. I was thinking more about it now, and wondering uneasily if it was the fact that I was in drag, in women's under-clothing and a dress, that had turned her on so.

The cab dropped me at the corner of Tarpin and Windrow Avenue. Then, it took off fast, ignoring the signalling and shouts, baritone shouts, from two queenly persons just a little down the block. The size of Palermo's gay population had surprised me. In this area of approximately eight by eight blocks, there were bars, hotels and clubs that catered almost exclusively to gays or to people who tolerated them.

Tarpin was the northern boundary and Windrow the eastern. Many of the people who could be classed as permanent residents of 'the Park' never left it, save possibly for a foray to a place like *The Gilded Cage*, two blocks north of Tarpin. On a city map, the district was Parliament Park, but the complete name was unknown to any but the city's ward managers.

Besides the permanent residents, tourists and visitors flooded the brightly lit areas at night. With fine weather, several of the clubs and the streets they were on had a carnival-like atmosphere. Drag queens

then were really the show, in elaborate and colorful dresses. But this wasn't one of the carnival nights.

I pulled the wrap tightly about me. My dress billowed out all about me as I went the half block to the Copa Club. When Silvia Lubin visited the clubs with her entourage, they invariably went to the Copa. Giselle had told me she actually owned it, but a call to Bruckmeyer asking who owned the Copa had turned up different names.

Funny, Vince had never asked me why I was asking. My own check of the Lubins had only shown the two brothers as owning a catering company and nothing else. I checked the dance halls they catered and where Silvia held her fancy dress balls. All were close by, but outside the Park.

As I might have expected, a hot and heavy Latin beat was being delivered by the musical group featured at the Copa. "Penny!" Sophia screeched over the din around the doorway. I dropped the cover charge on the queen, trying to explain to the tourists that they had to pay to enter, and ducked under the thick, velvet-covered rope to join Sophia. She was an insurance agent by day. I had cultivated her as a guide to the Park. Her trademark, a long, black evening glove with a fake diamond bracelet gleaming at her wrist, waved as she invited me to her table.

Sophia always dressed in black. Her makeup was definitely on a pancake base that was too white, rather like a clown's face. She wore a very curly black wig that deceived no one, but she wasn't absurd, as many of her age and size were. She wore her fetish openly and sincerely; if the lights were dimmed enough, she could easily be taken for the matron she wished to be seen as.

"Penny!" I had only to follow that screech to find Sophia. She jumped up from the lap of a young,

dark-haired fellow who looked relieved to let her go. "We so missed you at Rococo's yesterday," gushed Sophia, loving to play the girl in front of an audience. "Then we heard that you were busted!"

I nodded and tried to look sour. As usual, Sophia had two or three studs in tow. They'd stay with her as long as she kept buying. But sometimes, they'd turn ugly when she insisted on going on. Sophia got restless when the studs she was buying drinks for started paying more attention to other queens, like me for instance, than to her. Two young queens were deciding whether to join Sophia, I could tell. They ogled me in my red dress and my womanly hair.

I had to laugh when one said tentatively, "Are you real?"

"Of course, I'm real," I said with a smile which only confused their tiny minds some more.

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Sophia, giving me the limp wrist gesture that I had mastered a long time ago. "Whatever were you doing off the Park? *The Cage* has been asking for it, for months. Didn't you know? The girls there were doing so many blow jobs that the whores on Windrow were complaining they were losing business." She laughed as the young queens joined in. "I mean, what do they expect? It is our specialty, isn't it?" She laughed some more.

"I like to live dangerously," I told Sophia, as none of the queens or studs moved to accommodate me. If I sat down, I'd have to sit in someone's lap as Sophia had been doing.

"I knew it," said Sophia triumphantly. "You were meeting your sugar daddy, weren't you?" She always said that about me. I had too much money for her to account for, since I didn't work at a regular job. Having a drug bust attributed to me wasn't going to be

bad for my street cred, either, when Sophia learned what I was charged with—as I would make sure she did.

“*The Cage* is kind of nice at times,” I smiled at her. “Miles likes it.”

“Oh, Miles,” sniffed Sophia at the mention of a man whom I could call a queen, as he had been one for most of his life. Now, though, he said he was too old to be bothered with all the fuss of being female. He tried to hit on me repeatedly and was quite charming. He’d have had the young queens with Sophia eating out of his hand if he’d been with us.

“Needn’t worry about Miles any more, my dear,” Sophia said, sitting down on the lap of one of her studs and signaling to a waitress for a round of drinks. “She’s in Municipal now. Had a coronary at the Romper Room yesterday.”

I was genuinely sorry to hear that. The old man had been sincerely interested not only in laying the prettiest girls, but in their welfare as well. He’d had a wealth of knowledge about queens and their boy-friends, and how to avoid conflicts. He’d been a fount of information on the Park and its principal inhabitants.

I turned down the drink with Sophia, mentioned the outstanding charge against me, and told her about Gaylord’s pot party. “He’d love to see you,” I told her sincerely, knowing that she wouldn’t go. No, I didn’t live in the Park, and Sophia wouldn’t go off the Park in drag.

There was no sign of Silvia Lubin. So, I wanted to move on. It was Miles I’d wanted to see, anyway, about something he’d said. I gave Sophia a kiss that missed by a mile and waved goodbye to her as I

headed out the Copa, filching back my cover fee from the queen at the door, still arguing with the tourists.

One part of the kidnappings I hadn't really got clear was why the gang, or crew, needed transvestites at all in their operation. Why not use real women, Bruckmeyer had asked Judy Landon at my prompting. She hadn't answered, Vince had told me. Probably she didn't really know.

The crew did a good job of disguising its victims as women. Why transvestites were needed to keep them company, as women, wasn't clear to me. None of the victims, dressed and perfumed as girls, had dared to try an escape even though they'd moved out of state and stayed at prominent hotels. Jimmy Gilbert had been photographed at the Lido Club, in Vegas, as a pretty girl with long, dark hair and wearing a short black dress, dancing with a young man. Jimmy had shown off very nice legs in his long, dark panty-hose.

The young man hadn't even been a member of the gang. Judy said that Belinda had laughed at the picture. Judy had worried about her picture being taken. "If you are in such a place," Belinda Lee had assured Judy, "you'll have a wig of your own and a disguise as May and I did, every night. Good luck to the cops trying to find us that way."

Gilbert had said that one of the places he'd been held had been a strange club, where all the 'girls', including him, had been attired as Roman slaves. The men had to dress in togas as well before they could approach the girls. Couplings took place in the large room called the Forum in front of whoever was in there, Gilbert heard. He'd been terrified, he claimed, as he wore a girl slave's dress, a false bosom, a wig, bracelets and anklets—but he hadn't had to service anyone.

Gilbert had served one couple wine, though, after which they got into it, very hot and heavy, on a divan. He, their slave girl, had had to sit and fan them as the 'senator' did the slave girl, who had male genitals, right in front of Jimmy. Jimmy hadn't known that a man could take another man like that, face to face, and the disguised male had seemed to enjoy it and had begged the older man for more. Then they'd gone off to the orgy room, known as the Forum.

Gilbert had been red and totally embarrassed as he had told detectives about the incidents which came after the Lido photograph. His parents had had the message from the kidnappers to look at the picture in the *Chronicle*, closely. His mother had been the one to recognize him. *Pay up or you won't recognize your daughter at all, next time*, had been the next message. The Gilberts hadn't co-operated with the Feds from then on, and had got Jimmy back within two days.

Jimmy Gilbert still looked like a girl, according to the report of the interview Bruckmeyer had written, even though he was dressed in his gray pants, waistcoat, shirt and tie. He did say that Belinda and May had been in big trouble with Angela, one of the women who ran the kidnapping ring, for the Roman club incident. He wasn't supposed to be exposed to the Roman club, Angela had ranted at Belinda. Melanie (Gilbert's name to his kidnappers) had then been drugged and hadn't awakened again until he'd been discovered, disoriented, wandering about the lobby of a Los Angeles hotel as Melanie.

Such a club as described by Gilbert had been thoroughly researched by the Feds, but they'd come up empty on it. Yet it shouldn't have been hard to trace, I'd thought. But, thinking of the coupling Gilbert had described, I began to wonder if it had been a transvestite club he was in. I had wanted to talk to Miles

about it, even though I wasn't long in the city of Palermo and hadn't long been a member of Miles' tranny group. I was still trying to convince Gaylord and Sophia that I was a tranny.

"He knows every piece of action from here to the coast," Sophia had once told me grudgingly about Miles. Miles had been regaling us with the story of Jenny Morrison, at the time, a tranny like us. He described 'her' as a real, feminine beauty and outlined her scandalous affair with the governor of a Midwestern state, whom she'd married and lived with as his wife.

I'd tried to talk to Miles about the Roman Forum, a little bit later, but it hadn't been easy to raise the topic. I found him all alone very late one night. I'd let him be the gentleman and treat me to a nightcap at the Beverly Hotel. In the wallpapered lounge, where dark beams gave the illusion that we were in an Old English pub, I'd enticed him to speak about his early life as a female impersonator.

As we drank some more, Miles had come on to me. I'd let him hold my hand, I sat in his lap, and let him put his arm about me. He nuzzled my neck and ear, as I did the same to him. He believed entirely the tale of my sister, which in queenspeak meant my brother, who was also a queen. She'd taken a job at a Roman club as a slave girl and hadn't been heard of since.

"That's not a Roman club, darling," Miles had muttered in my ear. "That's Emil Petriglia's Club Continental. They're into *A Thousand and One Nights* now. Emil changes it completely every six months."

I'd been right. It was a transvestite club, but with a full range of sex changes and pre-ops for the customers who wanted to 'explore' their other sexual personalities, Miles put it, as well as the usual crossdressers. The common thing was that the house

‘girls’ were crossdressing prostitutes, employed by Emil.

“And if your sister was there for a performance, she wasn’t just serving drinks,” Miles had drunkenly told me as he leaned me against the wall outside the room I’d taken at the Beverly. “When I was there, years ago, I served drinks—but it wasn’t long before the customers had my panties off me and I was joining in with the other girls.”

The Club Continental was at the heart of the Park, according to the very drunk Miles whom I took up to bed in the room he’d booked for us. I left him there after an hour, slumbering away, unable to get it up, as he mumbled apologies to me and my adorable femininity, but he couldn’t make it with me, after all he’d drunk. I smiled and thanked the goddess for small mercies as I sashayed out of Miles’ room.

I went out the next day to research what he’d told me. I couldn’t find the Club Continental, or Emil Petriglia, and neither could Bruckmeyer. I’d concluded that Miles had made it up to impress me, or he’d been mistaken. Well, it gave me an excuse to visit him in the hospital and check it out again.

The Municipal Hospital was old. The sandstone was crumbling as the overlaying paint peeled away and was not renewed. The place was very hot, or so I thought.

“Mr Harrison’s room,” I said in my best female tones. I had misted my throat as I walked in. The frosty-faced old maid guarding the desk eyed me very carefully. I think she must have known about Miles and his earlier vocation as a prettier woman than she could ever have been.

"Only relatives can visit at this time," said the woman, eyeing my silky blue dress which clung so provocatively to my feminine figure.

"I'm his daughter, Lucille Harrison," I smiled at the older woman, wishing I had toned down my lipstick. "I just flew in from St Louis to see him."

"I'll call the floor," said the older woman icily.

Miles was propped up in his bed, a drip attached to one arm, a bandage about his throat. His eyes lit up in surprise and delight as I swished into his room. I winked at him.

"Here's your visitor, Mr Harrison," said the nurse cheerily, "but your daughter can only stay for a short time. It's really time for you to sleep."

"How are you, papa?" I asked in as pouty a voice as I could make, bending over and leaving a glossy, red lipstick print on Miles' forehead. "Doug sends his love as well." I put the gifts I had brought, the expensive, rum-filled chocolates he loved so well, in the drawer beside his bed.

Miles' eyes gleamed with pleasure. "So great to see you, er, Lucy," he said hoarsely.

"How are you really?" I asked him as the beaming nurse withdrew, smiling as he stroked my hand, admiring my manicured nails.

"Not at the end yet," Miles said with a smile. "This wasn't as bad as my first. Penny, my darling, you actually came to see me?" There was wonder in his voice as he looked at me with real gratitude.

I sat on his bed and lifted the hem of my dress. His eyes gleamed as he saw my garters and the flasks I had filled with his favorite Cutty Sark. I let him touch

my legs, getting a lovely, girlish chill, or thrill, as he stroked my stockings and removed the gifts I'd brought him.

"You are such a lovely girl," Miles told me as I stowed the gifts under the chocolates in his drawer. When I sat back on his bed, he put his hand back between my thighs, under my dress above my knees, grinning as he stroked me. It was funny, yes, and made me feel gooey inside. I'd normally have rejected such an intimate advance—I'd broken one guy's finger who wouldn't stop when I told him to—but Miles was an old man, a friend, I suppose, and I was trying to be a pretty, passable girl. I had information to seduce out of him.

"Let's not give you another heart attack," I murmured to him, holding on to his hand, which had reached the top of my stockings and soon would have touched my frilly panties.

"Wait till I get out," Miles sighed, gently caressing my thighs. "You're the only one to come and see me, you know."

"It's the relatives-only rule in intensive and post-intensive care," I told him. "You've had a lot of phone calls."

"Neat way to get around the stupid rules," Miles grinned at me. "How is the *real* Lucille?"

"Purring nicely and clawing all Bridget's new velour armchair covers," I told him, making him laugh. The real Lucille was his cat.

"All your friends send you their love." I opened my purse and gave him the pack of Get Well cards I had had all the queens I knew sign for him. It brought tears to his eyes to see so many.

"Read them later," I told him, patting Miles' hand, which was now fondling my panties and what was in them. "Some are really funny, but Sophia's—well, be prepared to be grossed out." That made him laugh again as he clutched the bundle and left my legs alone for a minute.

"I want to thank you as well," I told him.

"Thank me?" asked Miles. "For what?"

"I've heard from Alison, my sister," I told him with as big a smile as I could. "She wrote me first from Seattle. She had been working at the Club Continental, as you said, and she says she's going back."

"I told you about the Club Continental?" Miles gasped. He looked as if he might have a second heart attack at any time.

"Sure," I told him, acting puzzled. "When you made love to me at the Bentley and passed out before I got mine." That wasn't true, but I had told him that. I think he half believed me by now. "Remember. I told you how Alison had disappeared into a Roman club, and you told me about the Continental. Anyway, Emil, that's her new lover, is going to pay for her last surgery in Mexico. She wants me to be her bridesmaid and come and work with her. Isn't that great?" I bubbled and smiled as girlishly as I could.

"Don't do it, Penelope my love. *Don't!*" said the old queen, half rising in clear anxiety, out of his bed, to take my feminized hand again. "Your Alison is very lucky. She must be very pretty, like you."

"She's gorgeous," I said brightly, but he just carried on as if I hadn't spoken.

"When Emil finishes with a girl," he said with a shudder, coughing. "Don't go, Penny, please. Listen

to an old queen who's been around. Don't go near Petriglia."

I frowned. "But I've already bought my bridesmaid's dress for the wedding. It's pink with ruffled sleeves and ..."

"No!" Miles thundered at me before falling back on his pillow. "Listen, Penny. You won't be the sweet, innocent girl you are if Emil Petriglia gets his claws into you. And he will want you if he sees you. I know. You'll never get out of him what you really want. Oh, he'll dangle it in front of you, but then—" He paused. "If you ask me, your sister's riding for some kind of fall right now. Forget her, Penny, and don't go near the Century, or whatever name Petriglia's using for his business right now."

"Oh, I won't, Miles. I won't," I promised the disturbed older man. The Century Tower was on Tarpin, across the wide boulevard, and on the wrong side as far as queens were concerned. It had a helicopter landing pad on top of its roof, and had a drinking club for the very rich on its top floor. I'd often heard girls saying that they wished they could get up there.

The Century stood up stiffly, a priapic sign if ever there was one, overlooking the Park. More than one person called it a phallus, or some filthier word for a penis. There were bars in the place at street level, but they were off limits to queens. Crossing the street and going in would lead to broken bones from the security men working on the Tower; everyone knew that, on our side of the street. To get in there, I'd have to be able to convince the powers that be over there that I really was a girl.

IV. INVITATION

The answers Jimmy Givens got from Gerald Townsworth were very straightforward. No, he had never visited any of the places listed by the detective. He didn't visit the city unless brought in by one of his mother's security men. He'd been kidnapped from the Grosvenor Bar, beside the museum he'd visited, the first time he'd ever gone into it.

Gerald had chosen it for a drink on a whim—he'd written that at first, and then scratched it out. I knew what he'd told us from the start. Actually, it was a pretty girl he'd seen going in who'd smiled at him. Yes, that was his first reason for going into the bar. He hadn't even got close enough to speak to the pretty girl, he'd said, in that first explanation about what he was doing in the Grosvenor. She'd gone to the Ladies' and he'd followed, going to the Men's to kill time. That's where 'they' had been waiting for him.

Bruckmeyer was on one phone when Givens got back to the office, Dwyer at his desk. "Gilbert was at the Uptown Scala," Bruckmeyer called across to Givens, as if the two of them had been engaged in a conversation about the kidnapped young men—all transvestites, Givens was sure by now—"two days before he was snatched. Judson was at a Halloween party at the Darlington Club, catered by the Lubins. It was the only place he went, before he was grabbed three days later, from his dorm."

Givens frowned. He'd thought Geraldine's reply would have finished off the Lubin connection.

"Cornfeld," said Bruckmeyer, turning from the phone, "was on Lubin's payroll over the summer before they took him. Denton was at Columbia's New Year's party two years ago while Clement was in the

city, partying almost every night, sometimes in the Park, for three months before he was taken, according to his friends.”

“Parents still won’t talk to us?” Givens had to ask.

“No,” said Bruckmeyer. You couldn’t blame the parents for blaming the police for killing their son. But how could they have known that the young girl picking up the ransom was a boy? *We ought to have suspected*, thought Givens grimly. The way this deviate crew operated had been well established by then.

“Geraldine claims no Lubin connection,” Givens told Bruckmeyer. He could have kicked himself for referring to the young man in the feminine gender.

“What do you think, Al?” Bruckmeyer asked Givens’ partner, who looked at him in his thoughtful, bemused manner.

“I’d leave Townsworth out since we can’t talk direct to him.” Al stressed the last word lightly, but Givens got it and winced. “Could be something he doesn’t want his mama to know. I’d say this Lubin connection is how the crew has been marking out its next victims.”

“And we know they’re going to strike again at the end of the month,” said Bruckmeyer.

“To make up for the lack of funds from Clement,” said Al Dwyer quietly. “Could be that they’ll disappear for quite a while after this one if it’s a success.”

“You said that about the last one, Gerald Townsworth,” said Jimmy Givens.

“Well, they held him a long time, and he was by far the most feminized of all the boys and young men they’ve taken,” said Al Dwyer. “You’re probably right,



Jim, that the Townsworths are going to have to reconcile themselves to having a daughter and not a son. And that's because the Townsworths were obstinate. I think Mrs. Townsworth was proud of herself for getting her son back for under a million."

"I hope she thinks he's worth it now," said Givens sourly, not caring how the other two looked at him.

The Copa Club was overcrowded the following weekend with the usual crowd of weekend drag queens and tourists. Of Sophia and her entourage, there was no sign. I hadn't seen her in a week. There were queens everywhere. One or two looked at me very coldly, recognizing me as one of them, in my little black dress. At least that's what I'd thought until one definite queen sneered, "Bitch!" after me. It took me a moment to realize she thought I was a real woman, slumming.

Wow, I thought, I was going to have to act a little more mannishly. I'd had my hair freshly highlighted and permed by Giselle. I noticed several men looking at me and frowning. Oops, they were probably real guys I was confusing, I thought, as I wandered about the club looking for a familiar face.

I actually went to the bar and took the stool of a man who was leaving. That was when I saw Silvia Lubin at a table at the far end of the club, surrounded by her social group—a loud, high-pitched, laughing and giggling bevy of 'girls' around her. She was making merry, sending off various female-dressed men to dance with the male-dressed men who attended her.

I ordered a Wallbanger from the harried bartender and looked at the broad-shouldered queen beside

me, blonde but with dark Liz Taylor eyes. ‘She’ was trying to entice an older man to buy her another pink, frothy thing. She glowered at me as the older man smiled at me. I didn’t want to get into a queen fight, and the blonde looked like just the type who would start one. So, I picked up my drink and sauntered down to Silvia’s end of the club.

It was clearly a transvestite sorority that was around her. Half had come in dresses to the club and half in male suits, I noted. There were even a couple of women in the group, sitting with their feminized husbands, I thought. As a group, they looked much older than the queens who were shrilly laughing together, with Silvia encouraging them, at several nearby tables.

Suddenly, after one o’clock, the sorority stood up almost as one and began to move off. All of the men and women gave Silvia a hug before leaving. One of the young studs, who looked like a construction worker in a nice suit, came away from Silvia as I was moving out, too. He stood in front of me as I was thinking that Silvia would be gone very soon as well. I was thinking I’d try to get close to her, let her know who I was, a woman like her—but on another night.

“Silvia wants you to join us,” the young stud said, taking my arm and my glass. I saw Sophia, newly arrived, also moving in to join the undoubted ‘Queen’ of the Copa Club.

“All right,” I said, as if I had thought it over. The stud looked at me in astonishment. He probably thought I’d had no choice but to agree to his statement. He was probably right.

I clutched my little black purse and followed the man who had my drink. Waitresses were cleaning up the tables and chairs. Suddenly a chair was held for me, my drink was put in front of me, and I was seated

beside the smiling Silvia Lubin. She patted Sophia's hand and turned to stare at me frankly.

I'd known that it would come to this, that I would be assessed as to my womanliness. But I shivered nevertheless, feeling my pendant earrings shaking where they peered out beneath my lovely hair. I didn't look away. Women didn't, Barb had taught me again and again. *But I'm acting like a drag queen*, I'd told her. *Drag queens act like women*, Barb had said. *Do not look away, Penelope*. It was funny. Miles had called me that at the hospital. Barbara had been the only other one.

"So," said Silvia Lubin. "You're Penny. Sophie's told me a lot about you." All of it bad, I hoped. Being nearly fifty had not damaged Silvia Lubin's attractiveness as a woman. She wore a lot of makeup, to be sure, but it was expertly put on. She wore a gown, tightly clasped at the neck, as if she were made to do so. Like me, I thought with a shudder, she could have gone anywhere in the city and passed as an attractive female without danger of detection.

The shudder that went through me continued as we inspected each other. I was all too conscious of the stockings on my legs, my tight panties and gaff, the bra I was wearing. I was held too tightly by the waist cinch; my dress seemed too light and ethereal to be clothing. It was almost like being naked; only the thinnest of materials kept her from seeing me nude, as I saw myself every day in my bathroom mirror.

The hair on my neck was too thick and too soft, too curly and too wavy, too alluring. I felt feminine, and I was ashamed of the feeling. I broke eye contact with the woman who had studied me and had seemed to share all the feelings that were now coursing through me.

It was far too hard to think of Silvia as a man, the way she was looking at me. She arched a well-shaped eyebrow as if to ask if she had passed my inspection as I had seemed to pass hers. I smiled back at her ruefully.

“Sophie talks too much,” she said softly, giving Sophia a gentle smile and a touch of her hand to soften the sting of the remark. “You’ve just been busted?” she went on. Her control of her contralto voice was impressive. It must have taken years to become so womanly. It made me wonder why she was still here, the Queen of the Copa.

“At *The Cage*,” I told her. “But it won’t stick unless they frame me.” I gave her my little story about the herbal mix I’d promised to try. I changed the story I’d given to Gaylord, mentioning the famous herbalist who sold from a stall in the market, several blocks from the Park.

“What was the concoction for?” Silvia asked with an encouraging smile.

I looked down demurely. “Well, stamina,” I said. I hadn’t thought that I could blush on demand, but her raised eyebrows made me shiver and flush for a different reason than the one that went through her mind.

“Yes,” Silvia smiled at me. “You haven’t been in the Park long, have you?”

“Long enough,” I said with a smile. “Actually, I don’t live in the Park, but I’m here often.” *Let her find out all she needs from others*, I thought, recalling my earlier training from Lieutenant Wright. *If something puzzles her, she’ll ask.*

Silvia’s attention was drawn off by a waitress, who had appeared with some discrepancy on the earlier

bill that had to be resolved. It was about the women's names used on credit cards made out to men.

Sophia leaned over to speak to me, her wig of shorter, waved, brunette hair suiting her much better than the curls she so often wore. "Didn't know you'd be here so late," she said. "I was telling Silvia all about you a couple of days ago, but you haven't been around; and then, lo and behold, you're suddenly here."

"And we'll see you again, Penny," Silvia said, standing up, while one of her young men was putting her shawl around her shoulders. She gave him a lovely smile. I frowned at her. "At my party at the beginning of next week," she smiled at me.

"Your party?" I said, in all innocence, looking at Sophia. "But that's by invitation only, isn't it?"

Silvia smiled even more. "Oh," she said, "hasn't Sophia recruited you yet? She's supposed to invite all the best-looking girls in the Park to meet my friends who want to meet girls like you. Arnie, put Penny on your list." The young stud who had invited me to join her took out a pen and paper. She blew me a kiss. "We'll have a longer time then to get to know each other, I promise."

Silvia murmured something to Sophia, who swept off with several men in dresses. They were attempting to walk and act like women, and were being encouraged by the men in evening jackets with them.

"Your address," the young stud asked me curtly.

"What?" I asked, looking up at the vivid scar on his cheek.

"Where do you live, honey?" he asked. "Silvia wants you to get an invite, pronto."

And also check up on me, I thought, as I told him where I lived. I hoped Gaylord wasn't still mad at me about not going to his party, and would give me a good reference.

The gold-embossed invitation arrived the next day. 'Formal evening wear' was the attire of the evening. There was no indication that it was a transvestite ball. I phoned the number on the invitation and replied to the 'response requested' that 'Penelope Smith' would be at the ball.

I undid the phone after I'd called—and I saw a little extra attached to the receiver. I hoped that it was Bruckmeyer and not Lubin who was tapping me. I should have called Bruckmeyer earlier about Miles. Luckily, I hadn't. I tried to stay off the phone, mostly because I didn't like to talk to Bruckmeyer.

But it had taken me a while to figure out how to get in to see Miles and organize the cards and gifts. The only thing now was that I'd have to disable my phone and check on the Century Tower myself, without blowing what might turn out to be the best lead we had. After all, it might just be someone who fancied me for aberrant sex.

Dwyer put the phone down. "Townsworths left this morning," he said tersely. "Pull the stakeout?"

"Sure," said Bruckmeyer.

"No," said Givens, at the same time.

The two older men looked at Givens, who flushed. "Just who left and who is in the house?" he asked. "If we get a chance to interview Gerald"—he cut the last

syllable off in time—"we should jump at it. He was the last one to see those who kidnapped him."

"If Mommy is away, he might come out to play," mused Dwyer.

Bruckmeyer shrugged. "Check on who left on the plane they chartered, but get those guys off the stakeout as soon as we can," he said. "I don't want complaints getting to Norwood's ears about how we're ruining his investigation into all this."

So, we're not running an investigation that's all our own, thought Givens, watching his partner nod as if in agreement with what Bruckmeyer had said.

"They're setting up to run a new sweep in the Park," said Dwyer, not having to say that he meant the Feds. "More statistics, a thousand interviews, a hundred agents on the street and ..."

"And a man at the airport," the other two finished for him.

It wasn't long before the photographs came back. Three Townsworths had left the estate house empty for the season. Three Townsworths, Mr, Mrs, and Miss, had left on the chartered plane for the Bahamas. Of Gerald, there was no mention. The surveillance team at the airport got the best photo of the threesome. Mr and Mrs Townsworth, their faces harsh and drawn, had almost pulled the young girl out of the car and into the plane. She had been caught in profile, her dark hair curved along her jaw line, her eyes heavily made up.

"Nice," grunted Bruckmeyer. "So this is Miss Townsworth now?"

Givens' face was expressionless. "There is no daughter or female cousin in the family," he said

carefully. He slid another picture of Gerald in profile in his first year at university.

Dwyer slotted it together with the girl's profile of the girl on the steps up to the plane. "So this is what has happened to Gerald," he said.

Bruckmeyer looked at Givens. "So, we don't know if there was a Lubin connection," he said. "But the transvestite angle is visually clear. This couldn't have happened overnight to Geraldine. Let's check on all the other victims. I think we might all have been snowed by the parents or by the Feds. Let's see how many were involved in transvestite activities in the past, and how many are involved now. But quietly, of course."

V. SILVIA'S BALL

It was dry-as-dust stuff, but at last the Office of Public Records gave up the information that there was a Century Club, Inc., in the Century Tower, and that it was owned by a Mrs. W. Evans Gregory. It seemed to be a private, family-owned company. If it was associated with Emil Petriglia, or if a Club Continental had ever existed there, there was no official record. I could, however, visit the company that was supposed to run the Tower complex, using one of the IDs I'd winkled out of Bruckmeyer at the beginning of this investigation when I didn't know where I was going.

Entry into the secure Century Tower was hard. The security guard at street level had several television monitors in front of him, the one at the end showing the inside of an elevator. The hardest part was to stand there and present myself as a woman, a member of Senator Hogan's staff. I hoped that my hair was right, pinned up now. I hoped that my makeup was right. I hoped that my tight gray skirt

and jacket made me look like a business woman. I had had to wear medium high heels, but everything about me seemed a little too tight. Surely, I feared, the guard would see right through me.

But he didn't. He called me 'Miss' and directed me to Ed McKinley's office on the second floor without a qualm. I had the feeling that he was watching me walk all the way to the elevators. I was sure he studied me in the elevator. It was almost a relief to meet the older woman with glasses as I stepped out on the mezzanine. She was waiting to show me the way through the bare hallway to McKinley's office.

The lawyer was a large, florid man. At 250 pounds, he looked overweight, and he was short of breath. According to the public records, he had drawn up the papers to incorporate the Century Club. The room, to me, was unbearably hot.

"You work for Senator Hogan, Miss Richardson?" asked McKinley, his eyes either on my well-padded chest or my smooth legs. He smiled when I crossed my legs, his admiration clearer.

I gave him the card Bruckmeyer had given me. I was 'Stephanie Richardson' for a while, remembering Bruckmeyer's instructions not to use the card lightly and get him into deep trouble. It wasn't as hard as it had been once, to be so feminine with another man, but I still felt very uneasy.

"I do work for the Senator," I smiled at Ed, as he'd asked me to call him. "This is a courtesy call, really. His committee is looking into questions of finance in this part of the city's urban renewal. Most of the tenants in this building we know and have contacted about replacing or incorporating this building in a new complex, after *that*—" I indicated the whole of the Park district across the wide avenue from us—"is demolished. But I understand that a Mrs. Gregory ac-

tually owns this building and the land it stands on, and has a club of some kind on the upper floors?"

"I can't divulge," Ed said, getting all huffy.

"The Senator would like to set up a meeting with this Mrs. Gregory," I said quickly. "I suppose you could have said No to me easily on the phone, but it might be in her interest to talk to the Senator. We've seen the latest development plan for an eight-stage development over twelve years for the biggest shopping and amusement mall in North America right here.

"The Senator is looking for reasons to oppose this, I must tell you, even though it would double the value of this tower complex almost overnight. I think that public appropriation of this tower, and replacing it with a sixty-floor office block and hotel, is part of the plan the city expects to receive federal funds for. If Mrs. Gregory is for it, the Senator would easily bow out of the opposition to the complex, as all federal offices in the city would be part of it, brought together under one roof."

"Mrs. Gregory is a recluse," said McKinley stiffly. "I doubt she will see the senator here or at her home in Point Lewis Park. She wouldn't be interested in selling off this land. I know she'd be asking us to fight any appropriation."

I talked to him for half an hour about the urban renewal about to sweep down on the area. Mr. McKinley wasn't happy.

"Well," I said at last, "does the elevator go up to the club? It must be quite a view over the Park. If you'd like a drink, I'll buy and show you where all the principal development is proposed to take place."

"You can't go up there," said McKinley as I stood with my hand on the door. He was almost in a panic that I was not heading straight back to the lobby. "You're not a member."

I smiled coyly at him. "I'll bet *you're* a member, Ed," I said. He was so close to me then that I knew he could smell my delicate fragrance of Coty Lemon. "What do you say?" I asked, being a flirtatious, giggly girl, as well as I could play such a role. I wiggled my tush as I eased the door open. "You'll take Stephanie up for a drinkie, won't you?"

"I—I can't," said McKinley as I put my arm through his. "It's just not done."

"The Century doesn't allow *women* in its club?" I asked him, feigning shock. "In this day and age? Ooo, the Senator wouldn't like that, Ed baby. You should get your principals to think that one over again." I think that I was cooing at him as I spoke, but it made no difference to him.

"No," said Ed. "I mean, yes, certainly, I'll talk to Mrs. Gregory about women and the club. But guests are r-r-rare now. If we have a female guest, like you, we've been asked to sign them in well before we bring them." Oh, shiver, shiver, it was so lovely to be called a female by someone who seriously meant it about me!

I pouted prettily at Ed and cooed a little more about breaking the rules once, telling him how grateful I would be to him, before I finally left in a girlish huff. But, as I rode back to my apartment, I was very pleased with myself. I made sure no one was following me and called Bruckmeyer on the cell he'd put in my purse after the arrest. He was at home and very receptive to my report. He promised to brief Senator Hogan about Stephanie Richardson, and promised to investigate Mrs. Evans Gregory of Point Lewis Park.



I had two days then to prepare for Silvia's party. Luckily, with Gaylord coming in to visit, I didn't think I'd have time to be lonely. And that I was. I was lonely and was trying to guard against it. Lieutenant Wright had been most emphatic about that. It didn't matter how far out my assignment would go, there would be times when I was cut off from support and friendship. Very likely, I'd start to bond with those with whom I was in constant contact, the Lieutenant had said. I would start to like different people. I wouldn't want to see them harmed. I wouldn't be completely truthful to my superiors.

I felt it. I liked Miles. I liked Gaylord even though he was always touching me as if I was a girl and probably thinking that I, a queen, should like his touches. He ran his hands freely over my rear as I made the two of us supper. When I pushed his hand away and turned to protest, he put his arms about me and started kissing me.

"Hey, Gaylord," I said, "I thought you only liked men." His alcoholic breath almost seared my face as he was also trying to press his tight pants against my slim, equally tight skirt. I caressed his prickly chin and wriggled my tush as he flirted with me, fondling me as lots of men seemed to want to do.

Gaylord put his arms about me and played with my bra through the blouse I was wearing. Ooo, that was so enervating, such an active caress. "I do," he said thickly. I felt myself kissing a man without any backup this time to help me if I got into trouble. I tried not to kiss him back but he took possession of my mouth, his arms frantically caressing my back and my rear as he forced my head back as he tasted my lipstick and the inside of my mouth.

"But you are a guy, aren't you?" Gaylord murmured, pushing the bulge in his pants against me.

“And I just realized that. You look so much like a woman, Penny, I been thinking of you as one. But I reckon I could make it with a girl like you.”

I suppose I should have been flattered. Gaylord had spent the day with me, telling me so many stories about all the people in the building as well as about all the clubs on the block. I knew he was a drug dealer; I knew that, when he took his phone calls and went to his room for a little while, he was conducting business. But he was funny, in a Chris Rock kind of way.

Gaylord pulled me to the sofa and kissed my cheek as I tried to keep my mouth free to talk to him. If I had really been a transvestite, a queen, after all, I would have welcomed making love to a guy like him. Frantically, I began to think of ways to put him off, to make him not want to be my sexual partner.

His phone rang again. Gaylord said, “Dang, I’m not going to answer it.”

I laughed at him, took it, and answered it myself. “It’s Mo for Maurice,” I told him as he nuzzled my neck, telling me how he liked my fragrance, since it was so girly.

I put the phone to his ear and encouraged him to make his drug deal, promising, with a girlish giggle, and pouting at him, to hold his place for him while he did it.

Gaylord had three or four calls in the next couple of hours, in which he ate the meal I made for him, drank the wine I served him, finished off a twenty-six of Jack Daniels, and smoked some pot. I could have and should have busted him and his clients several times over. I learned who some of his customers were, who his contacts were, and where he kept his stashes.

Yes, I paid for it with kisses and letting him fondle my smooth legs and my active, writhing rear, which Gaylord loved touching, thinking he was tantalizing me, as I'd told him he was. I made up my lips twice with the red lipstick he liked and put on perfume several times, letting him hold me and squeeze me as if I was a woman, through the whole flirty, girlish procedure.

I'm sure Gaylord toked or snorted with his customers because, by the end of the evening, he was snoring on my sofa. I was able to go to bed in my nightie and wonder what I would have done if my boy friend hadn't been a junkie and I hadn't been encouraging him to commit so many felonies and misdemeanors.

When I woke him at midday the following day, Gaylord wanted to have me before I left the apartment, but I slapped his hand as a girl might slap a naughty boy. "I have to get ready for a big party tonight," I told him.

Gaylord wanted to come. "I look good in a tux," he said, holding me, stroking me, kissing me and fondling my upper thighs, my skirts hitched up for him.

"I want to look good in my evening gown," I told him, between cuddles and loving kisses. "And this is by special invitation only. But I'll be all ready for you when I get back, your new favorite girl friend, won't I?"

"This thing starts at the Uptown Scala, doesn't it?" Gaylord asked. "When I get big enough, I'll get invited as well and join all the puffs pawing over the queens. It's quite a sight, I hear, and the money's always good."

"Lubin Catering," I told him, femininely excited, and he nodded.

"I know lots of kids who'll be waiters there tonight," Gaylord said. "I should go talk to Frank Menaro, the boss at the Copa, and get myself hired. You do know, don't you, that all the girls who go to Silvia's parties get laid. I could meet you in the bathroom there."

"You couldn't get into the ladies' bathroom," I told him, with a definite womanly giggle, as I swayed out of my apartment, heading for the beauty salon, almost next door. Giselle waved a girlish good-bye to my boyfriend, leaving him muttering to himself. *Well, there's a first time for everything*, I said to myself. It could be a first with Gaylord, if we got home together in the evening, I could invite him into my place, but it wouldn't be the first time I'm laid by a man. It might be tonight, however, for the first time, that someone at Silvia's ball doesn't get laid.

Thinking about it all day long, as I went to Giselle's hair salon and got the works—mostly to stay away from Gaylord, who'd now become a big problem—added tension and nerves to the whole day. In the past it had been pleasant to sit back, among all the well-groomed women, and listen to their gossip, a chuckle in the back of my mind as I thought what they would do if they knew I was a man and listening to them.

One of the new girls worked on my hands and Giselle, as Guy, came and teased and curled my hair, adding a fall to the back of my hair to give me quite a mane. Giselle knew I was going to Silvia's ball and so she had Laura, the expert, do my makeup for me, shaping my eyebrows and fitting me with false eyelashes more naturally than I had yet learned. Laura added eye shadow and eyeliner, finishing with sparkle on my upper eyelids when Guy said that I had a heavy date that evening.

Laura finished off my nails as well, changing the color to a deeper red. Since I had time, she did my toenails as well. As I left, she put some sparkle in my hair. Only when I thanked her did she suddenly look quickly to Guy, as if she suddenly realized that I was a friend of his and what I must really be. She retreated, embarrassed to have assured me, a man, that I was bound to be laid that evening. Guy just winked at me.

I had chosen a long, dark blue evening dress for the ball. I had bought it shopping with Jackie, one of the waitresses at *The Gilded Cage*. She had seemed so clued in, and so aware of what was going on in and out of the Park with girls like us, that I thought her a likely source on the kidnap crew. From her, I'd learned a lot about the Feds' awful tactics in trying to interview the girls about the kidnappings, which Jackie only knew from the newspapers. The Feds, however, were so easily spotted and laughed at by everyone, or so Jackie told me.

I shivered as I put on my dress, glad of the extra hair over my bare shoulders. The narrow skirt hugged my figure tightly. I had difficulty mincing in it, never mind walking. Again, I wore a tight bra, low at the back. I used adhesive on my chest to keep the inserts in place, so I looked bustier than I usually did. I shuddered at the woman I presented myself as, in the mirror. With the wrap I wore and a tiny purse, I looked real, in my opinion of myself as a girl, my makeup so perfect and earrings and necklace in silver, complimenting my dress.

Gaylord and his friends gaped at me as I wiggled down the stairs from my apartment to the cab I'd ordered. The cabbie came running to open the door for me while Gaylord just stood there, grinning. I ignored him as I clicked down the steps in my high heels. I could see them all watching me as I gracefully sat in

the back of the cab and pulled my stockinged legs in, while my open-toed heels showed off my newly painted toes. I waved and blew a kiss to Gaylord; some of his friends started to punch him on his arm. I knew they were telling him he wasn't gay if he was friends with a girl like me.

I shivered and overtipped the driver for the short trip to the Scala. He almost fell over himself to run around and open the door for me before the doorman could. "Nice party," he said as other men and gorgeously dressed women were arriving as well. "Have a fun evening."

"Hope so," I said. I smiled at him and the doorman, but inside I was trembling as I thought about the idiotic thing I was doing. I gingerly minced up the steps.

"Good evening, miss," said the doorman, a neutral smile on his face. A tall woman in white fur and masses of blonde hair swept in past me, a man in a tuxedo almost running to keep up. And I was in among many women, all smiling and eager and enthusiastic about being there, many with Adam's apples in their throats and deeper voices than one would expect from so many gorgeously dressed women.

"Penny, darling," sparkled Sophia—in pink, no less, with lace and ruffles disguising most of her musculature. "Isn't this just fantastic? I couldn't go in without you, darling, but look at you! You are absolutely ravishing! Ravishing! You'll be the belle of the ball, for sure."

Sophia slipped her arm under mine and edged me forward towards the enormous double doors, now open to welcome us to a ball. We could hear a small string orchestra playing as Sophia took my invitation and handed it with hers to a young man, who looked like one of those who had been clustered about Silvia.

We entered the ballroom. It was just like any other formal balls and dances held there, with just the one exception. All the women were men, and the dance floor was almost full of handsome, twirling couples as the orchestra played some old-fashioned music. The older women seemed to love being swished through sets that made their wide dresses swirl out and showed that all were wearing stockings and garters of varying shades.

Almost all the women we passed were wearing heavy, costly jewellery. Perfume assailed me on all sides. At the bar, I noticed a cluster of men who were procuring drinks and taking them to the tables where older women sat, elegantly gowned. They would smile and touch the young men on the arm as they sat with them, some exchanging kisses, but all smiled dazzling smiles that seemed to promise more to the evening.

I wiggled after Sophia, noting that several people looked at me more than once. Sophia led me to a numbered table near the dance floor. "Sergio will bring us drinks," she said to me. "I sent him ahead." She smiled at me, and all her pink ruffles shimmered as she sat and crossed her legs like a woman. She even had pink ribbon in her hair.

"Look at Pauline!" she exclaimed, pointing to one of the most resplendent queens, over six feet in her heels and high bouffant hair. "Did you ever see so many sequins? And Georgina! What a cleavage. Has she ever been hitting the hormones again!" She eyed me thoughtfully, particularly the bounce at my chest. "You don't, do you?" she lowered her voice. "I told Silvia you weren't like that." She seemed worried. "You're not, are you?"

"No," I smiled, trying to keep my composure as more women rustled by us, all accompanied by men.

The way they clinched on the floor made me think that Gaylord had been entirely correct. The way the women looked at the men, the way they let the men hold them, all showed a passion that I was sure would have to be consummated at some time in the evening.

A dark young man came threading through the growing throng and sat down with us. Predatory glances from madeup, feminized faces turned to look at him, but he came and sat with us, presenting us with some kind of punch.

“Sergio,” hissed Sophia. “Where are your manners? Penny, you’ll have to excuse him. He’s not really sure about girls like us. I only met him last week, but Silvia said to bring him.”

Sergio grinned and put his arm about Sophia’s shoulder, which brought a smile of affection to her heavy features. “Hey,” he said to me. “You look real!” His voice was blurry with alcohol or something else. “Not like most of the old guys here.”

“Sergio!” There was real pain in Sophia’s voice. Her heavily laden, mascara-lined eyelashes blinked rapidly as if she had been so embarrassed. She dug into her purse and pushed a bundle of money at Sergio. “Why don’t you get us another round?” she asked anxiously. “Treat your friends at the bar.”

Sergio needed no urging. He stood, swayed a little, winked at me and moved off. “You shouldn’t do it, Sophia,” I told her, seeing a woman’s hand—mine, I thought with a start—caressing Sophia’s wider, thicker fingers. “He’s the type who’ll get his kicks out of hurting you.”

“He already has,” said Sophia in a bitter, strangled voice.

It was strange. There I was among hundreds of men, all trying to imitate women—but, when I looked at Sophia, all I saw was a lonely, middle-aged man in a pink dress who deserved better from life. “Let him go,” I said to him, the man beneath the Sophia mask.

“You’ll find,” Sophia said, circling the drink with a gloved hand, “that you can’t get what you were used to, as you get older, Penny. You won’t have your pretty girls’ skin forever, my dear, as the male body thickens as you get older. And we all do get older, Penny, and lonelier.” She smiled at me wanly. “And then all you have is your money, darling, and it’s nice to have money. You’ll have to do something about that soon, won’t you, before you get picked up for drug selling. You really don’t want to do time in a men’s prison, Penny. Really, you don’t.”

By the look in her eyes, I could see that Penny was speaking there from personal experience.

“There’s plenty of time for that,” I said airily. We might have continued talking for much longer, but for the arrival at our table of the glamorous Silvia with a large party of men and women. She immediately swept out into the center of the dance floor as the orchestra continued with a livelier waltz.

Silvia was wearing a white lamé dress, gathered in a sort of halter top at each shoulder, leaving her arms and neck bare. Her blonde hair was curled softly about her neck. At the raised hem of her dress could be seen white lamé hose that matched her dress and high-heeled shoes. She signalled to her party. A young man with fair hair, waved and long, began to dance with her, while she smiled and waved, and other couples applauded her. She femininely beckoned everyone to join her in the dance. Soon the floor was filled with swirling, twirling couples.

"I'm going to get Sergio," Sophia muttered to me. "I should get some of what I paid for."

I watched her go, watched Sergio leave his stool at the long glass bar, and watched the unlikely pair stagger along an unsteady path to the dance floor. In the next hour, I, too, was invited to dance by a wide variety of men. I began to wonder what I was doing, however, smiling at men and dancing with them while Silvia only waved to me as she changed partners. She merely smiled at me and said, "Glad you could come," as if it was the most natural thing in the world that a man like me, in a long, shaped, dark-blue evening gown, should want to be at a ball and dancing with so many men.

"You look out of place here," the fourth of my partners said. "Are you a man or a woman? We weren't quite sure at my table."

"What do you think?" I asked softly, trying to smile. At such an affair, what could this guy be thinking?

The man smiled down at me. "I wouldn't care," he said. "You're beautiful and feminine, and I like dancing with you. If you would get a little closer, we could both enjoy it more."

Despite the pressure on my waist and bare back, I managed to keep the heavily muscled guy off me until the waltz ended. I slipped off to where Sophia was waving to me. "Penny," she gushed, smiling at the man who was so reluctant to let me go. "Have you ever seen such a fabulous crowd! They're just pouring in from everywhere! Sergio thinks that you're a cinch to win the pageant!"

"Pageant?" I asked, a sinking feeling in my stomach.

“Yes!” said Sophia, excited as always. “At Silvia’s parties, we always line up and parade around the floor. Silvia gives the most beautiful girl in the room a prize, and this year it’s a car to drive home in. And you’re sure to win!”

“Me?” I asked, thinking of all the eyes that would be on me in such a parade. “No, I’m not entering any parade.”

Sophia was aghast. “But you must,” she insisted. Another young man, smiling, dark-haired, with Elvis sideburns, wanted to dance with me— and what could I say? I shivered as he became about the tenth guy in a row to tell me that I was beautiful and, what was new, had I had my sex change yet? He would have me whether I’d had it or not, he told me earnestly, smiling down at me. He kissed my neck and cheek before leaving me. He made me wonder, trembling in alarm, if I could get out of this place this night without having some man wrapped about me.

It was a bust, I thought savagely. Judy Landon may have been approached at a ball such as this and recruited to the kidnapping crew, but lightning wasn’t going to strike twice. I went several times to the ladies’ room with Sophia and repaired the girl’s makeup—that of the girl I saw in the mirror, knowing that the sexy woman there couldn’t be me, and yet ‘she’ was.

The pageant came and went. Sophia was almost in tears when I wouldn’t enter and Julie, a thin, blonde copy of Jean Harlow, flounced off with a giggle of girls to take possession of her new car.

The young men who kept me dancing after that included Sergio. All told me that I should have entered the pageant, which I would have won. They were getting drunker and took more liberties with their hands, trying for more wiggles and giggles out of me,

especially in the slow dances. It was an education in how men treat women—and yet they all knew that I wasn't a woman. But they persisted in treating me as one.

"Think about the last dance and the girl you're going to take home," the emcee announced with a big smile. "We have more men than girls here tonight, you know—and you'll only get lucky with a lady, guys, if you ask her. I hope you'll all get lucky tonight."

Ball gowns swished as girls descended on the floor with their men. I refused several men who asked me and hovered nearby as Sophia, tugging Sergio, came up to me urgently. "Who is taking you home?" she asked me.

I shrugged at her. We were the only girls not dancing. I wished I could just pick up my wrap and leave. It had all been such a wasted evening. The long shot rarely pays off in horse racing, and it certainly hadn't paid off for me at this ball. I was not going to be any help in finding the kidnappers even if they did strike again. All I was being selected for was an evening of deviate sex, and I didn't want that—not with any man, at least.

"Silvia wants you to come on to her place," said Sophia tensely. "She said she was disappointed you didn't parade so that she could show you off to all her friends. They're very rich," she added in a low voice. "Silvia always has a small party afterwards. You will come, won't you?"

I hesitated. But I'd had enough. This was all a dead end anyway. I shook my head.

"Oh, of course," said Sophia, shaking Sergio loose. "You need an escort. Sergio, go and ask Tony to take Penny to Silvia's party."

My protests went unheard by Sophia. I turned back and picked up my purse and wrap. "Hey, Penny!" said a man's voice. It was the dark-sideburned man, smiling broadly, his white teeth contrasting with his tanned skin. "Sophia just asked me to take you to Silvia's, but there's no rush for that."

I was already shaking the exquisitely soft fall of hair about my bare shoulders, strange sensations sweeping through me. "No, thank you," I whispered. "I'll pass for tonight."

His smile became broader, his eyes opening wider. Tony—that was his name, wasn't it?—didn't smell of liquor or anything rancid, as most of the men I'd danced with, and been fondled by, had. "Okay," he shrugged, even smiling down at me. Yes, Tony was taller than me. Even the self-defence lessons I'd taken with Barb wouldn't help me too much with him, I thought miserably, picking up my purse, and giving him a little feminine wave as I tried to leave.

"So I don't turn you on," Tony said with a crooked smile, a twinkle in his eyes. "Let me take you to Silvia's anyway. There's sure to be more guys there. Between the two of us, we'll find you someone to cuddle up to."

Wow, that was a weird invitation for this place, I thought, with a shiver. "No, thanks," I said, removing the arm he had put about my waist, squeezing me most seductively. I had to get away from that. I saw an opening through a group of other men to the door. I took it, mincing along as fast as I could in my dress.

There wasn't a doorman at the door, nor a cab in sight. I felt so chilled in the outside air. I turned back, but Tony barred my way.

"You need a ride," he said, "and I have a car." Tony pointed to a silver Beamer, parked right across the driveway. He touched his car keys. It started up, and the lights came on.

"Well, pretty lady," Tony said, as I shivered in the night air. "Silvia's party? There'll even be real women there, you know, women as pretty as you, who like men in dresses, like you."

Judy Landon had said she'd been recruited by a woman, a woman at one of Silvia's parties. I shivered, and it wasn't just with the cold. It might be nice to meet and talk to real women for a while.

"All right," I said to Tony, starting to think that I'd freeze out in the air. I should have thought about all the bare skin I'd be showing before I'd come to this stupid ball. Besides, I could call a cab on the cell in my purse as soon as we got to Silvia's party. "I'll go with you."

Tony smiled. He came down the steps, took my hand, and walked me to his car just as if I was a real girl. He put his arm about my waist and opened the door for me. Warm air spilled all over as Tony helped me into his car, admiring my legs as he helped me to sweep my dress back as I sat and crossed my legs. He helped me with my seat belt and closed the door for me. I liked to be treated like a girl when I was in girl's clothing. I was beginning to think that Tony wasn't so bad a guy for a girl like me.

Tony got in the car and smiled at me. "Ready, baby?" he asked me. "Let's go party."

VI. RECRUITED

"I'd prefer it if you didn't call me TJ as most of the people here do", said Tony. He was driving recklessly. I felt so stupid to be in his car. I was sure that he was half drunk as it was, although there was no liquor smell in the car. But, the way he drove, I would be lucky to make it alive to Silvia's, I thought. I started to panic slightly at the thought of being examined after our accident by some female paramedic.

Since I didn't know where Silvia's was, it wasn't until the car mercifully was parked in *Club Madeleine's* parking lot that I realized that Tony had other things on his mind.

"Silvia hasn't even left yet," he said. He smiled wickedly, pocketing his keys before coming round to my side of the car and letting cold air make my exposed skin break out in goose bumps. "We've got plenty of time before the pairing off begins." I shivered at that and took his wrist to look at his watch. It was already half past two.

Tony grinned at me, almost pulling me to my feet, putting his arm around me, caressing me to keep me warm, making all kinds of shivers start up on my bare skin. He was trying to arouse me as a female, I could tell. "You should try some of the Spanish or Portuguese white wines Silvia thinks are so great," he said with another crooked smile, his stroking unceasing. Any cold girl in a dress like mine would have loved what he was doing to me. "You can tell me what you think, if they're really made for girls with sweet palates, as Silvia says they are. Come on, Penny, one little drink isn't going to kill you."

I smiled up at him, hoping I was concealing my anger. I let him take me into the *Club Madeleine*. I intended to go to the ladies' room—I knew I would pass

as a lady, I thought with a shudder—and then I would call a cab on my cell. I felt my temperature rising as Tony just nodded to the maitre d' and swept me over to a table where a couple were already sitting.

“Hi, TJ,” said the blonde woman in a short dark dress. Her strapless dress showed a striking cleavage, which made my fakery look so undeveloped. She had brown eyes which regarded me with undisguised interest. She was quite beautiful.

The man beside her was dark. He studied me intently as well. I glared back at him. He smiled cynically. I had the feeling that he knew what I was immediately when I entered the room. Even though I smoothed my dress beneath me and tried to be so ladylike, the dark guy didn't seem fooled as Tony ordered us drinks and re-ordered for the other two at the secluded, private table.

“Introduce us to your girlfriend, TJ,” said the woman, gripping her glass with nails much longer and more pointed than mine.

“This is Penny,” said Tony, his arm about me. “Penelope Smith, recommended by Sophia to Silvia for the Century Club Ball. And she isn't interested in me, no matter how hard I've tried. Very picky is this girl, Miss Belinda Lee.”

“She's a *man*?” asked Belinda, looking at me, with disbelief in her voice. I looked at her directly. Could it be Belinda Lee, whom Judy had described in such detail? But she wasn't a redhead, although I knew that a woman's hair color was easily changed.

“I can't guarantee it,” said Tony Jackson, smiling broadly. “Maybe if you'd take her to the ladies' room, Belinda, you could reveal yourself to Penny as well,

and both of you could be sure if you wanted to be friends or not.”

The woman rolled her eyes. “You can be so crude, Tony Baloney,” she said. She nodded to the other man, who rose. At the jerk of his thumb, Tony meekly left me as the tall man whispered something to him, put his hand on Tony’s back, and escorted him out of the *Madeleine*.

“I’m Belinda Lee,” said the woman huskily to me. I looked in her face for any hint of masculinity and found none. “My boy friend, Klaus, was sitting here with me when you came in with my brother, Anthony James. Anyway, will you tell me now, Penny? Are you a man or a woman?”

The waiter returned and uncertainly put the drinks on the table as Belinda smiled at him prettily. “Our men will be back,” she said as the waiter looked from her to me.

“If they don’t,” the waiter said with a smile, “let me tell you that I’m off any time I like now. So, if you ladies need an escort?” His voice trailed off wistfully.

Belinda Lee smiled as her boyfriend, if it was him, returned.

“Klaus Lee?” I asked as he sat and smiled at me again.

“Klaus Cornfeld,” Belinda’s boyfriend said, inspecting me again. I felt myself shivering as his eyes assessed my thin waist and my padded chest. My mostly bare shoulders made me feel quite undressed to his gaze, as I didn’t to that of Tony’s ‘sister’. I didn’t say anything, and hoped that my face didn’t give me away, but the name was there all the time in the records of this case. The first boy who’d been kid-

napped and ransomed had been an Edward Cornfeld.

"Hmm," said Belinda, touching her boyfriend on the arm. "She has a nice voice and sounds very feminine. See how easily she fits into this swanky club, just as if she is a real girl. What did Tony say about her? Why did he bring her here?"

I sat stiffly as Belinda spoke about me, almost describing me as a recruiter would. My mouth went dry as I recalled how Judy had told us how she'd been recruited. It had been nothing like this. There had been no brother, no man in the scene. It had been women and drag queens who'd recruited Judy. And one had been Belinda Lee, who'd been a dancer and a stripper, a female impersonator, or so she'd described 'herself' to Judy.

"I—I think I'd better go as well," I stammered, picking up my purse and feeling all the hair swirling about me. "Your brother is my ride, this evening."

"Don't you want to hear my offer?" asked Belinda with a smile. "I didn't have you brought here just because my brother likes your pretty face." Her boyfriend tensed quite a bit at that. "I have a job to offer you, and you'll like it. It will bring you a lot more money than being a dealer for Gaylord Miggs. And you can get out of that apartment building he's sharing with you. I couldn't believe how much stuff he has stashed away in there. I'm sure you don't know that he's selling out of there, tonight, at the party he's giving."

I didn't have to act surprised at that one. I was flabbergasted. I had thought that Gaylord was such a small-time dealer. "If you get busted again, pretty Penny," Belinda went on, "there's no way you aren't going away for all the years when you are at your

prettiest, my girl. And that would be such a shame. Wouldn't it, Anthony?"

I hadn't noticed that Tony had rejoined us, his face quite grim as he looked at the two of us girls. "Someone just tipped off the police that there's a party going on at your place, Penny," he said, making me gasp and shudder. "No, it wasn't me. I don't do favors like that for my sister, either. My source said it was from someone in the Park."

"Silvia!" hissed the pretty girl, Belinda, opposite me.

"She wouldn't," said Klaus with a frown. "She's trying to recruit. She wouldn't want cops hanging over this girl!"

"I—I can't go to jail," I whispered. I didn't have to pretend to be terrified. I was. I was being recruited. Far from being elated, I was scared stiff about what would happen to me when they found out I wasn't a drag queen, as Belinda clearly thought that I was. Oh, and Silvia Lubin seemed to be definitely a part of the kidnapping ring, if Belinda Lee was who and what Judy Landon had said she was to Bruckmeyer.

"With us, that's not a consideration," said Belinda confidently, looking at her brother, who frowned and shook his head fitfully at her. "By the by, that pot you were found with in the raid on *The Gilded Cage*?"

"It wasn't pot," I said. I'd told Bruckmeyer what he had to do to get me off the hook on that one. I was confident that he'd done it. I didn't want some eager judge sending me off to prison. That was much further undercover than I would take this investigation.

"A curious thing," said Belinda. "One day, it's pot and the next it's herbs."

I sat there and felt them all looking intensely at me.

“A queen with her own source inside Vice?” asked Belinda. She didn’t say more but I got the message. They’d seen something in the queen, Penny, that they wanted, the kidnapping crew. I didn’t doubt that I was in the presence of at least two of them. Why, oh why, had Bruckmeyer busted me and then planted the pot on me?

Then it occurred to me that there must be some other cop who was on the payroll of the kidnappers. How else would Belinda have known about the pot and what Bruckmeyer had done to it?

I swallowed and the silence between us lengthened. “He—he likes girls like me,” I said and blushed, while I felt Belinda’s interest grow. Her brother’s jaw clamped a little. He looked quite disgusted. Klaus just smiled.

“Name?” Belinda asked lightly. I knew that it was the most important question I would answer that night. But did I really want to answer it? I couldn’t say Bruckmeyer. They wouldn’t believe it was the chief himself. I thought of how Givens reacted to me all the time. And I thought about how answering that question would draw me into a world of being a queen like Belinda. I was sure she was, permanently, or until the crew was busted entirely.

“Givens,” I told her, knowing it was what Bruckmeyer and my last lieutenant would have wanted me to do. “He tenses up whenever he’s around, well, when he’s around a girl like me. I didn’t even have to ask him. He just whispered to me that he’d take care of it.”

“Around girls like us?” asked Belinda, darting a glance at her brother who was looking at her furi-

ously. "Don't think about it, Tony. She's made me from the very start, haven't you, Penny? And yes, these are real," she smiled, indicating her breasts. "It's one of the perks of this job that I will arrange for you as soon as you do something good for us. We should become bosom friends, shouldn't we, you and me?"

"You entertain him at your place?" asked Klaus Cornfeld suddenly, staring at me.

"Oh no," I told him, hating anyone, even people like this, to think that I had had sex with a man even if it was totally untrue. "That is," I sought to recover. What other reason could I think of that would persuade them that it was the reason for Givens doing me a favor?

"He, he's my cousin," I said in a rush. "At least, my mother called him that. He, he's known about me since, since, well, since I was a little boy and he—he caught me in a dress once, when he visited us."

"Fascinating," murmured Belinda, smiling at me.

"He told me when when I was charged, that it wouldn't come to trial, but I'm not supposed to be carrying for Gaylord again," I went on, embellishing the lie. "That's all I was doing, really. I just put it in my purse to carry it downtown for him. I wouldn't have had the stuff if Gaylord had been on time. But he likes to make an entrance and arrive fashionably late. If he had been there at one as he said, I wouldn't have been caught with anything in my purse."

"The raid went off five minutes early," Belinda said to her boyfriend who was staring at me.

"She's a plant," said Klaus, looking at me. "She's working for the cops, the locals, not the Feds."

I looked at him in complete astonishment while Belinda began to laugh. "You think she's a cop?" she asked her brother then, her lovely features creased in good humor. "Well, my brother, there's one way for sure that we will find out."

"Which is?" Tony asked, still frowning at me, trembling across the table from him. "No, don't answer that, Penny. Look, let's get out of here. Let me take you home. You don't want to be part of anything that Belinda and Klaus are into. I don't and I'm sure you don't want to be, either."

"She's yours for the evening," said Belinda, a wicked smile on her face as I shuddered openly. "I know you say that you aren't gay, my brother, and that you're only looking out for me, and I need your love and assistance. But Penny and I don't think that we're gay, either, do we, Penelope, my darling? We're women. We love tall, dark, handsome strangers, don't we, Penny? A night with my brother and he'll know that you couldn't possibly be some undercover cop, trying to catch me in whatever I'm doing."

I looked at her smiling face in horror. "No, no," I gasped, squirming in my so low-cut dress, feeling it so tightly about me.

A slow smile spread across Klaus Cornfeld's face as he looked at me. "Yes," he said to his girlfriend while my insides seemed to go into a freefall dive. "That's a good test. It should be a most interesting night for you both."

Tony Jackson (I supposed that was his name) didn't want to stay in the club, as Belinda indicated he could do, and dance with me. With all the real girls I

saw on the floor, clutching older men, smiling into their faces, I was just happy to leave with Tony.

"I was just thinking," said Tony suddenly as we were driving down Central Avenue, "we can't go to your place, can we? The cops are going to be all over, if they just busted the guy who gave you the pot to hold for him."

"Oh no," I gasped. Tony was quite right. I couldn't go back to the apartment where I lived as Penny Smith. "But all my clothes are there," was the first thing I could think of to say as we eased around uniformed cops stopping speeders heading out of downtown and the Park.

"I can do something about that," Tony said, giving me one of his crooked, amused smiles. "The Paradise. They have a dress shop on the main floor that never closes." He reached for his telephone before I could object. Well, at least he did reserve two rooms at the Paradise and did confirm that the dress shop was open, and that 'Mrs Jackson' would be attended to with all dispatch. Whoever was on the other end bought the story that Tony's wife's luggage hadn't arrived with 'her', but luckily a friend had loaned her a dress for the night.

"You're making your lie too complicated," I told him, shivering in the light, silky skirts covering my stockings. I needed to visit a man's store and get some manly clothing. No, I didn't want to be dressed in the latest women's fashions, as the person on the telephone had promised Tony that I would be.

Jim Givens rang the bell while Al Dwyer checked the mailboxes at the end of the hallway. Al shook his

head at Givens' enquiry. Givens frowned and pressed the buzzer again, sharply.

There was movement behind the door. Givens buzzed again. Finally a bolt slid back and the door opened on a chain.

"Yes?" asked a young teenager.

"Bobby Allenby?" asked Givens, showing his badge to the kid. "Can we come in for a chat?"

"I—I'm alone," said Allenby. That surprised Givens. He would have expected the heir to the Allenby fortune to be better guarded than this, not living alone in a large apartment building.

Eventually the youth pushed the door shut, took off the chain, and let the detectives into his well-furnished apartment. He seemed red-eyed and tired. A hand on the warm television told Givens that it had recently been used.

"We got several addresses from your parents," said Givens to the pasty-faced youth. "We got the idea that they really didn't care where you were now."

Allenby shrugged. "They wouldn't ransom me now, that's for sure," he said as he moved a pile of clothing off the sofa. Most of it seemed to be women's clothing, to Givens' eye.

"My girlfriend's always leaving stuff here," mumbled Allenby, flushing and shifty-eyed, as he looked at the black panties Dwyer raised from an armchair and deposited in the pile.

"You had a tough time when you were kidnapped a year ago," said Givens.

The youth was startled. "You want to talk about that?" he asked nervously. "Didn't I tell you every-

thing the first time? You wrote it all down—or don't the city police and the FBI talk to one another?"

Givens ignored that. Dwyer had turned over a glossy magazine left on the coffee table. Dwyer lifted it up and showed it to Givens as Bobby Allenby gasped. Givens could appreciate the beauty of the scantily clad blonde on the front cover, but the caption 'a magazine about female impersonators' made him look again at the simply gorgeous blonde's frontal development.

On the chest of drawers were other magazines, just as glossy and with men in skimpy dresses, who looked nothing like men at all as they posed seductively as women. Without the captions, Givens could have been looking at any men's magazine. He felt a stirring inside himself as he looked at the photographs.

"You like this kind of thing?" Jim Givens asked, forcing a smile.

Bobby swallowed. "It's not against the law," he said hoarsely.

"No," said Givens, picking up a stocking from an armchair. "Yours, I take it. You still dress in women's clothing since you were kidnapped?"

Allenby looked quite shaken. His bloodshot eyes looked with shame at the detectives. "I don't have to answer questions," he mumbled. "I told you enough about them. You should have caught them all twice by now."

Givens ignored that as well. "You were dressing as a girl before you were kidnapped," he said slowly.

"No!" said Allenby, shaking as he looked from one stolid detective to the other.

Givens relented. "So it was the kidnapping that turned you on to all of this?" he asked.

Bobby Allenby hesitated before agreeing with a silent nod.

"You must have really enjoyed the time you spent with them," said Dwyer, picking up a long, slinky black dress that had been under the jeans and t-shirt in the clothes pile. The answer to that could be read on the kid's face before he spoke. "I would guess that you weren't entirely accurate in some of your previous answers to the Feds. Am I right, Bobby?"

"You could have told us a lot more about the people who held you and the places they held you in, couldn't you?" asked Jim Givens, feeling sickness in his stomach as he had to question the kid about drag queens again.

With a frightened nod, Bobby Allenby agreed. But the interview didn't go well. The kid kept glancing at Al Dwyer. At last the older cop had had enough. He stood up and left his partner with the young transvestite. Bobby had now admitted to being that, a tranny. He claimed it was a latent desire, brought on by the time he had been in captivity.

Jimmy Givens rose up and made sure that the door into Bobby Allenby's place was locked and secure from his partner. Al had agreed that Jim should be the one to tackle Bobby, one on one, when he could.

"Here," said Givens, picking up the female clothing from the chairs it was scattered over. "Why don't you go and make yourself comfortable for this interview, Gloria? I think you tore this pretty dress in getting it off so rapidly when you realized who was coming in here. Why don't you take these clothes into your bedroom and put on another dress, stockings that aren't

ripped, your usual makeup. Then come and sit beside me, and let's chat about you being the woman that you are."

'Gloria's' mouth hung open for a long time as 'she' stared at the man who called her by the name Belinda Lee had given her. "You—" she started in the normal, female voice she used.

"Dress up for me," said Givens, smiling and ignoring the shakes he felt that were about to break loose. "Show me what these kidnappers did to you. For background, you understand. I won't put anything of Gloria in my reports. It's something we're going to keep quite personal."

"You, you're one of ...?" Bobby began fearfully.

"A crossdresser like you?" Givens asked. "No, my darling Gloria. But I am an admirer of someone like you. Would you like me to come into your bedroom with you and help you to choose what to wear?"

"Oh, would you?" asked a quivering Bobby Allenby, a little smile crossing his smooth, almost feminine face. "I scrubbed myself so hard ... I feel awful!"

"I thought so," said Givens, forcing an approving smile. "Let's make you look and feel a whole lot better, shall we?"

"Oh, yes," said Bobby, his smile and voice becoming more rapturously feminine by the minute. "I love having a man help me dress!"

VIII. INTERLUDE

“Yes,” said Tony, when the woman in the dress shop at the Paradise asked him what he thought of the pretty, feminine outfit on the mannequin. It appeared that it was in my size, as was most of the female clothing on display. “Put it on my bill and send it up to the Governor’s Suite.” He’d already ordered luggage sent to that suite.

“What about that model?” Tony asked, referring to a mannequin arranged in a lovely, black and white checked suit that looked suitable for a rich businesswoman. “Is she fully clothed, underwear, stockings, shoes? Oh, I can see those, and she is, isn’t she?”

“Yes, Mr Jackson,” said the smiling woman, glancing at me as I tried to be a fly on the wall. Tony basically bought out the shop and had everything sent up to ‘our’ suite. I was only consulted on a very cursory basis. He’d asked about nighties and makeup from the start. Yes, a week’s supply for fresh clothing every day had already been set aside and was ready to be sent to ‘our room’.

What happened to the two bedrooms? I asked myself bitterly, as Tony took my hand and had me stroke a sweater and skirt set. Then it was a black and silver cocktail dress. Yes, they were all headed to the Governor’s Suite, even over my protests that I didn’t need a new wardrobe. My luggage was sure to be found and it would be arriving within two days, the airline had said.

We rode up to the Governor’s Suite in an elevator reserved only for the penthouses at the top of the Paradise Inn. Tony’s arms were around me, constantly stroking me, making me feel so silly and feminine the whole time. I couldn’t tell Tony what an idiot he was and that I hoped that most of the dresses he’d bought

would fit him, because I wasn't going to be around tomorrow to be clothed like a store mannequin, a *female* store mannequin.

"The nightwear packages can go into the bedroom on the left," Tony instructed the three bellhops that had been assembled to take care of the order he had amassed down below. "All the dresses, coats and skirts can go into the right-hand bedroom. My wife will sort them out later, not tonight."

My face was on fire as the bellhops all glanced at me, one way or another, while taking the large tips Tony laid on them. I'm sure they thought that I was a girl whom he'd just picked up off the street. Well, it wasn't off the street, but I was definitely his pick-up for the night. His fondling, caressing, and kissing me never stopped. I was in a constantly anxious state as this man escorted me to the elevator, kissing me in front of everyone as the doors opened and my new female clothing was pushed in, while the women were cooing and telling me how delightful I'd look in my new dresses.

"Oh, darn, a wedding ring," Tony said as he closed the door on all the thank-yous being directed at him. "We should have stopped at a jeweller's somewhere ..."

"There wouldn't be any open at this time of night," I told him furiously. "And I wouldn't have worn a *wedding ring*, you idiot! I'm not your wife! Did you see the way that the woman in the shop was looking at me, and the bellhops ..."

"Which bedroom do you want?" Tony interrupted me. "The left or the right, my darling Mrs Jackson?"

"I'll take the right," I said, stopping the silly rant I'd been on, trying to be as sweet in speaking to a man as Barb had showed and taught me to be. "You can

sleep in any of the nighties you bought. Far too many for me. Have a splendid time in bed tonight.”

“Whoa,” said a smiling Tony as I tried to go past him to where I’d said I’d sleep. “Do you know what you sound like, darling Penny? I’d swear that you were Katherine Hepburn or some woman like that. Do you *practice* being all bitchy like that, or is that just the way you normally are?”

“This isn’t a normal situation,” I said to him, trying to get my hand free from his powerful one that gripped me so tightly. “N-not for a w-woman like me!”

“Ah,” said Tony, holding on to my hand, pulling on me, making me swish in my long dress against him. “You just admitted that you’re a woman, pretty Penny. Oh, is my sister ever going to be annoyed with you when she sees you again and finds out that you’re *really* a woman.”

I didn’t quite know what to say to Tony then. One of his arms was around my waist and I was being danced across the floor, from one twirl to another, towards the bedroom I’d said would be mine.

“I cannot let any girl I take out, or bring in,” Tony said with a smile, “go to her bed without a kiss. A goodnight kiss is how every wonderful date should end.”

“You think that this was ...” I managed to get out before Tony’s strong arms enveloped me and I was crushed against him. I shook my head, my earrings jangling as he tried to kiss me, catching my cheek and my ear, as I struggled.

“Relax,” Tony said to me. “Really, it’s not the end of the world to be kissed by your boyfriend at the end of your date.”

I didn't get the chance to tell him that he wasn't my boyfriend and that we weren't on any date. Tony had made that clear, faking his reluctance, a couple of times earlier, hadn't he?

Tony's hand steadied the back of my head as he kissed my lips.

Now, I've gotten used to kissing men on occasion, as a result of this stupid assignment that I'd taken on. I'd reckoned that no one would ever kiss me as sweetly as Barb did. Tony was safe. I wouldn't kick or stomp on Tony with my high heels as he pressed me to him. I'd kissed a few men before. One more wouldn't make any difference.

Tony didn't kiss me as if he wanted to force himself into me, as the men I was kissing often did to me. No, he kissed me gently, his arms making me sway and swish against him. Oh, how strange I felt. It was so nice to have his lips on mine, moving softly, romantically, while my body swished in the same way against him. Ooo, yes, I was a girl, for a moment, kissing her man.

"Wow," murmured Tony. "Did you get the bolt of electricity running through you, too, when our lips met? I don't think I've felt that in years, since I was in grade school, and Alice ..."

"I didn't feel a thing!" I lied hotly, shuddering in his arms. "Why don't you let me go, to my own bed!"

Tony stared down at me. "You have to have a nightie to sleep in, my darling," he said. "And they're all in my room, with your new panties and stuff. Come and get what you need, as a woman, to fall asleep quickly. And no, I won't stop you from sleeping."

Tony released my hands. “Th-thank you,” I managed to gasp. I should have just told him that I didn’t sleep in a nightie. I could have told him that I slept in the buff, as I had, but that wasn’t so true lately. It seemed right for me to keep my panties on, and the last few nights I’d kept my bra on as well. I had to get used to wearing one, I told myself, with what I was probably heading for.

Tony chose a red nightie, and searched among the packages for me until he found red panties that matched the nightie.

“Thank you,” I murmured with a shudder, as I saw all the women’s underwear that had been bought for me to wear.

“You know what that means, your thanking me,” said Tony, smiling—no, leering, I think—at me in my long dance dress.

“I don’t need another kiss,” I said shakily, as Tony moved to block the exit from what would be his room.

“You don’t,” said Tony as he put his arms about mine. “But I do.”

Oh, that second kiss! It wasn't gentle. Well, it wasn't rough, either, but it was firm and demanding. It demanded that I respond to him—and I did. I'd meant to toss the nightie aside and push him off me, but it didn't happen. I think he pushed my arms up, but suddenly I had my arms about his neck and I was burying my lips into his. I swayed my hips against him, loving how my long evening gown restricted my girlish movements.

Ooo, I was acting as if I was a real girl! And yes, the lightning bolts and electricity were shooting through me! No, I didn't want to stop kissing Tony's so warm and caressing lips. Ooo, I wanted to kiss him more when Tony's arms closed around me, hugging my female-shaped body against him. Oh, it was just like kissing Barbara and pressing against her, but all that perfume, the swishing of a dress, the caressing of my tush and my breasts against Tony. Yes, I wanted Tony, I mean Barbara, to go on kissing and fondling me, making me feel a little like a woman, as she sometimes did.

"Oh, yes, be my woman," I think Tony whispered to me before he kissed me with real, exciting passion, that I seemed to want to respond to more and more. I kissed and kissed my boyfriend—well, what else could I call him?—as he pressed and caressed me to him.

This is what it feels like for a woman, I told myself, quivering with the feminine feelings overwhelming me. *This is like when she kisses her boyfriend and goes to bed with him*. Ow! Where did that last thought come from? No, I wasn't going to bed with Tony, Belinda Lee's brother! I wasn't going to bed with any man—even if his kisses made me writhe all over and against him as if I was a woman in the throes of love and passion.

"I'm, I'm ..." I gasped at the man kissing my neck and shoulders.

"Going to change into your nightie," muttered the man, stroking my hips and tush, his lips finding mine again, passion flowing through me again as I once more raised my arms about his neck and enjoyed, really enjoyed, being kissed and touched, my skin on fire at his caressing my bare skin which I didn't want to end. Quivery, female feelings roared through me as I kissed and kissed Tony in ways I had never kissed another man.

What's wrong with me? I asked myself. Ooo, I felt Tony sliding the zipper of my dress down my back. He kissed my neck again, even as he slipped the shoulder straps down my arms. It took only moments before I was wriggling and wiggling against this man who was kissing me so forcefully, making me want him never to stop with the feelings and passion he aroused in me.

What am I doing? I thought in panic, as Tony held me by just one hand and began to take off his clothing as well.

"My—my nightie!" I gasped. I meant to say that I'd retreat to my room to put on my nightie and sleep there, away from the maelstrom of emotions whirling around inside me—but it didn't happen.

Tony lifted the nightie over my head, letting it fall about me like my dress, only stopping where his hands were at work to undo my corset. Oh, what a relief to be out of that, and then to have a man's hands about my waist, caressing the tops of my panties, as he loosened and released my garter belt.

"No, no!" I gasped. But the lips on mine awakened more femininity in me. Oh, I had to kiss my boyfriend back with as much passion as I could. I had to wrig-

gle about him as his pants fell away. Ooo, and then I had to wiggle my thighs uncontrollably as I felt his manhood there, thrusting against my body.

My stockings slid away. I was almost nude as Tony lifted me and placed me on the opened bed. He followed me, laying heavily on me. I could scarcely breathe as he kissed me and kissed me, as he stroked my thighs and my hips.

“No, I’m not ...” I squealed at the man pressing my legs apart.

Oh, what a disappointment Tony is going to get, I thought, when he takes down my panties. Oh, but he was doing that—and he didn’t care! No, he was stroking between my legs, freeing the device that I had there that kept me from bulging out.

Oh, it hurt so much to be free of the *cache-sexe*, as the French called it! I knew it was all up with me. He’d stop now and maybe, I hoped, not start hitting on me and cursing me for how I had deceived him. Oh, I had my arms about his neck as I kissed him again as I felt his hand caressing my male appendages.

Tony didn’t seem appalled at all. He lifted my legs about his waist and I felt his manhood then on my tush. I know I squealed then. I jerked and writhed all over his bed as Tony kept driving at me until at last he entered me. He caressed my thingie, not as big as his, as he penetrated me, stopping every now and then to kiss me and stroke me. *This is how drag queens do it*, I wept inside and out.

I was a drag queen and a man was fucking me in my tush, and, strangely, calling me his woman as he drove so forcefully into me. And yes, as he kissed and caressed me, stroking my bra as well as my little man, I loved the feeling of him pumping into me. I



bounced and wriggled beneath my lover, who kept calling me *Penny darling*, and *my woman now*.

After I'd come to my first, earth shaking, climax, I couldn't believe what I'd done with another man. It wasn't that I'd let a man fuck me. It was that I'd been a willing participant in everything that Tony did to me. So, after he'd relaxed for a minute or so, I thought that I'd get out and get moving, away from the scene of the horrible defilement that I'd endured.

I couldn't believe it when Tony rose over me again, kissed me and started to do me again, in basically the same way.

"Oh, Oh!" I gasped, meaning to tell him to get lost—but his stroking of my hips and thighs, then my tush, was so unbelievable. I kissed him back, holding him to me, as he lifted my legs again. In minutes, thanks to me gyrating and co-operating with Tony, yes, I couldn't believe how feminine and girly I was trying to be, writhing everything I had to gain pleasure and loving from the man who was caressing me, I had a man inside me again.

Oh, and I was the one rocking and writhing in pleasure, squealing like a little girl as he penetrated me so lovingly, in my bed with him. Oh, I had to keep kissing my boyfriend, pulling him about me and into me, my mouth unbelievably girlish in everything that I was doing to another man. I had to extract all the feminine feelings that suffused me in making love to Tony, who seemed to want me as passionately as I wanted him.

Tony drove into me again, whispering that he loved me, and that I was his woman, forever. Oh, how I kissed him to prove what he said was true. I was a woman. I could be a woman for any man, dressed and caressed as I was. Yes, it was scary and frightening, but that was so lovely in each dainty and delicate feeling passing through my female body, my boyfriend locked into my tush with his masculinity.

“Oh, what a woman you are!” whispered my lover. Oh, how I kissed him so much more and spread my legs so wide for him so that he could have me again, as a woman. Yes, I think that I whispered that I loved my man, too. I would marry him if he wanted me to. And I meant it. Yes, I was Tony’s wife all night long and into the next day.

Even when I arose and tried to take a bath, who should come in with me but Tony. Yes, he had me in the bath, making me erupt as well from my clit, as he said I was to call mine, a girl like me.

Silently, I called myself all kinds of names for what I let a man do to me. I wasn’t gay, was I? I shuddered. Barb had said that it was all right to enjoy my dresses and stockings. I still did, but Tony seemed to enjoy me in them, even more than I did.

Yes, he had to have me yet again before we went out to dine that evening. I leaned over a table to let him possess my tush. But still, we had to go back to our bed and let Tony pay me all kinds of compliments as he made love to me again, and then again.

“You’re on something, aren’t you?” I asked him as he stroked my bra, making me feel that I had something more than I did. “No man could keep on as you have ...”

“It’s my beautiful wife,” Tony told me with a grin. “Every time I look at her, in her lovely, feminine clothing, I have to have her. If you were a man, my darling Penny, you’d understand how I feel, and how I want to make love to you every hour of the day and night.”