

PETTICOAT REFUGE

By Elizabeth Anne Nelson



ILLUSTRATED BY C. PITTS

A 'HER TV' NOVEL

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Chapter One: Stage To Belton

Warm moist air hung from the sooty black clouds. Shafts of stark, glaring sunlight broke through and greeted the passengers getting off the morning train. The steam engine huffed and puffed dark, acrid billows of smoke as if anxious to be on its way.

“Burnside, Burnside!” the conductor shouted urging passengers off the train.

Paul stood to one side of the railway platform trying to determine where the stage coach luggage wagon was. He noted the blonde haired woman busily directing a man to unload her belongings from the train's baggage car onto a cart marked with a sign: BURNSIDE & CENTER CITY STAGE.

Crossing over to the stage coach baggage cart, Paul watched as several lady's traveling bags and hat boxes along with an array of wooden cases were piled onto the it. Seeing two more women approaching the cart followed by a porter pushing a cart almost as large as the stage coach cart, Paul dumped his two bags on the stage coach cart. He kept his artist portfolio case in his hand, and said, “Belton.” The baggage man nodded his understanding.

“Young man!” the blonde woman began to protest, only to watch Paul tip his hat towards her as he walked away. “Why I never saw...”

Paul walked back to the station to pause before a sign noting that tickets for the BURNSIDE & CENTRAL CITY STAGE could be bought at the Burnside Hotel. He glanced over to an old man sitting on the edge of the platform watching the passengers. “Burnside Hotel?”

“Down the street to your left. Tallest building in town,” the old man drawled, pushing back his blue GAR hat to reveal a shock of white hair. His blue eyes studied Paul's stature and brown checker plaid suit. “You a jockey? You know, old Sherman used jockey's as outriders in Georgia. I served with...”

Paul had not really thought of himself as being as small as a jockey. He was short at 5' 4", but not especially slight. The past six months in prison had left him with a cream white complexion and thinner than usual. Perhaps it was just what the elderly man said to anyone.

Paul nodded, and before the old man could launch into more conversation Paul made his way down the street. He reached a four story wooden structure with a large sign proclaiming that it was the Burnside Hotel. As he walked along the wooden side-

walk he half wondered if he might be that old man someday, telling tall tales about the Spanish War to anyone who might want to listen.

Finding the ticket office next to the registration desk he bought tickets to Belton.

"Might try lunch," the ticket agent suggested, as he shoved the tickets over the counter. "Stage don't leave until after two. It'll be right out front."

"I left my baggage with your man at the station."

The ticket clerk nodded and Paul walked across the lobby to the hotel dining room. It was already beginning to fill up with customers. As he entered the dining room the rich scent of fresh roasting beef assailed his nostrils. It was mingled with the smell of furniture polish that brought the mahogany walls to a glistening sheen, burning kerosene from the many mirrored lamps, and the various floral perfumes worn by the women.

The hostess was a tall Mexican lady dressed in a Harvey Girl style uniform. It had a stark white, starched cotton pinafore. A huge bow perched upon the bustle of her gray wool dress as if it were some giant white butterfly about to launch itself. "Are you in a hurry, señor?"

"I don't think so. I need to catch the stage to Belton."

"No problem," she answered as she handed him a menu and rushed off to attend to other customers.

Soon a waitress returned with the iced tea that he had ordered with his meal, and he sat back in his chair to watch the other customers join the luncheon crowd. It was clear that this was the place to eat lunch in this town.

"Pardon me, señor," the hostess interrupted. She stood before him with three women behind her, including the blonde haired woman he had seen at the train station. "I'm wondering if these ladies could join you, since you are all going to Belton on the stage this afternoon?"

"Certainly; the ladies may share my table," Paul agreed, stressing the *my*. He arose to greet the ladies, who did not seem at all pleased with these egalitarian arrangements. "I am Paul Brown, at your service, ladies."

He helped the matron of the three with her chair before he took his own seat and watched as the hostess handed the silent trio their menus.

The matron of the trio was dressed in a black sateen travel dress with a bolero styled jacket that revealed the expanse of her white shirtwaist blouse. Her hat sat upon the top of her black hair like an elaborate flower boat about to crest a wave. To her right sat a young woman of about eighteen dressed in gray wool, wearing a simple white rose decorated hat that clung to one side of her brown top knot as if it might fall off. The blonde that had taken charge of the stage baggage cart wore a beige wool dress with a beige toned bird feather hat that suited her small, avian eyes.

"I'm Mrs. Simpson," the matron ventured. "My daughter, Grace, and I have just finished Cook's Grand Tour, and we are returning home. Miss Addams is visiting Belton from Boston. We are hopeful that she will settle in Belton to teach."

"I have a cousin in Belton who owns the Yankee Dollar Saloon. I'm going to be his piano player," Paul said with a broad smile. "So I guess we will all be neighbors in Belton."

"I hardly think so, sir," Miss Addams stated with disdain. She turned to her menu as if the matter was dismissed.

"My husband owns the Belton Lumberyard and Construction Company," Mrs. Simpson managed after an awkward silence. "Your cousin must be Robert Brown. My husband built his saloon and most of Belton. It seems like everyday our little town adds new businesses. It's all because of the railroad, you know. Soon, we won't need a stage coach."

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The stage coach's movement reminded Paul of a rocking chair out of control. It occasionally pitched from side to side as the wheels rolled out of the dirt wheel tracks or bounced over a well embedded rock. After an hour the six horses settled into a steady pace and Paul felt that he might pass the time by working on a pencil sketch of the Simpson mother and daughter, who sat opposite him with the casualness of experienced wagon masters.

Miss Addams sat uncomfortably by Paul's side with her eyes closed, as if the blackness would somehow screen out the bouncing motions of the coach. Mrs. Simpson busied herself with a pair of knitting needles, maintaining a sense of calm while her daughter spent her time primly by reading from Letters To A Daughter by Helen Ekin Starrett. Paul knew the book as recommended reading at the Rose Oak College for Women, where he taught mathematics and the sciences for almost two years before his incarceration. It was filled with little homilies and model parental advice, such as:

"...The more refined the character and taste of any young girl, the more particular will she be in the matter of all articles of apparel that are private to herself, that they shall at least be daintily neat and clean...."

It was rather obvious that Grace Simpson had said or done something her mother did not approve of. She must have required her to make it up to her, showing how dutifully submissive she was by reading this rather goody-goody book.

With box of pencils in his lap and sketch pad held by his left hand against his knees he managed to sketch in the 'stick man' design that would serve as the framework of the actual picture. He sketched a series of basic shapes, triangles and ovals, that began to flesh out the drawing of Mrs. Simpson. The sharp triangle slowly took on the shape of a tightly corseted hourglass figure. Two ovals became the full sleeves, and a flowing bell turned into the billowing skirt. He did the same for Miss Addams. When tracing in the perspective lines of the coach interior he realized how large these two women were in their full clothing. Their great hats, ballooning sleeves and large dresses took up the space of a bench designed to sit three men comfortably.

As his mind wandered, he realized that young Grace Simpson and he shared the bench with plenty of room. It then dawned on him that his small boned frame was even tinier than he expected. Paul had spent a long session in the military hospital to recover from his wound and the illnesses that followed. While gradually recovering he

continued teaching, but the sudden return to a near starvation diet in prison had kept his weight down. He assured himself that a few months of good healthy western food and he would be back to normal with all this horror long forgotten.

He was tempted to sketch in their underclothes, but the confines of the coach was such that hidden pleasures best be kept hidden. Especially now that Miss Addams seemed a bit surprised by his activity and was watching him through half closed eyes.

His mind's eye imagined that Grace was wearing a white silken chemise under a well cinched white satin corset that brought her waist to a firmly held twenty inches. A garter belt waist pulled taut and smooth her pink silken stockings under the soft fullness of her white silken drawers. He could imagine that her little maidenly breasts were enhanced by bust pads worn under the tight confines of the chemise held firmly in place by the corset bustline. His eyes studied the daintiness of her feet in black patent kid leather button shoes, with just a hint of the pink silk-covered ankle. Over the firm, unyielding demands of the corset she wore a soft white silken corset cover with three full petticoats, each made of three yards of matching silk. Over these three petticoats there was a quilted petticoat designed to maintain the bell shape of the dress skirt while a pad was seated above her feminine rear by a little tie sash about her skirted waist to provide a fetching bustle. Almost in a dream state he imagined he could feel the pillow like fullness of the soft silken drawers and petticoats as they flowed between her legs.

Sensing his arousal Paul pretended to arrange his pencil box and tried to focus upon his sketch. He had just finished the basic design when he heard the driver yelling at the horses. He felt the stagecoach wobble as it began to pull in front of a way station where the passengers would be treated to a light lunch while the horses were exchanged for a fresh team. As Paul stepped from the coach to help Mrs. Simpson, he noted that it was already late in the day and half wondered if they would reach Belton by nightfall.

The way station was located in a slight valley lined by a little creek. On either side the rolling plains seemed a sea of fragrant spring grasses and flowers that stretched for miles and miles into the curve of the horizon. The sky was now darkened with billowing black clouds that all but hid the sun and seemed to add a chill to the afternoon. The distant, sharp scent of ozone predicted an oncoming thunder storm.

While the women retreated to the outdoor comfort station Paul considered his own needs and decided that a cool beer was in order, if the station master offered such additional comforts. He cautiously stepped inside the log structure with its shuttered windows and rifle firing slits.

"We have a light lunch and coffee," a roly-poly man dressed in farmer overalls and a flannel shirt announced as he pointed to a bench table. Next to the table a large stone fireplace dominated one end of the dirt floor cabin. The burning pine logs filled the building with a rich pine scent that mingled with the smell of the kerosene lamps and the tantalizing odor of bean soup. "Unless you prefer something from the bar," he added with a smile, indicating the direction towards a log bar built along one side of the room. "I have some Golden Grain Belt on ice, or whisky if you please."

"I'll take beer with my meal, please," Paul responded. He noted that the other half of the cabin consisted of a kitchen and a separate room that no doubt served as the inn keeper's office and bedroom. Over this space was a loft with four doors facing a balcony; travelers might spend the night at the way station if the weather turned bad. "How far are we from Belton?"

"Should make it by nightfall," the innkeeper said as he filled a tall glass from the tap and placed it upon the bar. "The meal is free, but the beer is ten cents."

"Right," Paul said, dumping a dime on the counter. The women entered the cabin and the inn keeper showed them to a wash basin by the kitchen water pump where they might freshen up.

"It's awfully primitive," Miss Addams noted in disdain as the Simpson women set about to wash the grime of the stage ride off of their faces. Almost fearfully she wondered aloud, "Does Belton have indoor plumbing?"

"Most of it is quite modern. We have a town water and sewer company, and there is talk about a water powered electricity plant being built on the Willow River for the Baxter Mines that will serve the town too," Mrs. Simpson countered. "I think that you will find that Belton is quite civilized."

Miss Addams was about to say something condescending, but her better judgment for the moment took over. She eyed the wooden bench table where the inn keeper was setting bowls along with a large blackened soup kettle that he had lifted from an iron holder over the wood fire.

"Oh, mommy, it's like that little Swiss chalet where we stayed overnight last winter," Grace Simpson exclaimed as she took her seat facing the fireplace, grateful for its afternoon warmth. "I hope that we get home before the storm."

"Yes, dear," her mother responded as she accepted Paul's arm for balance as she sat down at the table. At her gesture he took his place by Mrs. Simpson's side as Miss Addams elected to sit at the other side of the table while showing her disdain for the fact that he was drinking. Mrs. Simpson smiled and asked for a glass of wine causing Miss Addams to look away, while Mrs. Simpson filled her bowl with the thick bean soup, took two slices of thick brown bread, and dipped her knife into the butter bowl. "If the Lord can have a sip of wine..."

"My goodness, the butter is green," Miss Addams exclaimed in shocked surprise. "And the bread is made of unrefined rye. The doctors say that unrefined bread has too much roughage and causes cancer."

"It's spring butter," Grace announced with pleasure. "All the French chefs prefer it for cooking. Holsteins produce it in the spring when they are taken off of winter forage and allowed to eat certain spring grasses. In Minnesota and Wisconsin they actually ship it to France in ice packed tins. It ages like fine cheese. It is really wonderful."

Miss Addams sampled the bread and butter as if she were risking being poisoned.

'Chalk one up for Grace,' Paul thought as he tried the soup and decided that the cook would get by in any restaurant. When he finished the little meal he excused him-

self to locate the comfort station. By the time he finished and washed up he found that the ladies had already entered the stage and it was ready to continue their journey.

As the team picked up the pace and settled into a steady gallop, Mrs. Simpson gave a deep sigh and exclaimed, "I must say that I am glad to be back home in America. It has been almost a year of travel and I long to be back in Belton."

"Tell me about Belton," Paul suggested as he returned to his sketch work.

"It was a cattle town once. Settled first by Charles Belton at the Willow River crossing of the Holton Trail in 1868. My husband started a logging camp nearby in '73, the Hoggan's started their grain mill in '93 and the Baxter brothers opened their mine about a year later. We are the county seat and have about 500 people. And my husband has built most of the town," she nodded her head with a smile that showed her pride "The Panic of 1901 combined with the burning of Gaston Bridge Crossing wiped out the little railroad that was to connect Burnside with Capital City. We can ship our things to Burnside, but we have no real passenger service unless you to ride in the caboose with the railroad crew. Since the next freight is about a week away, we decided that the stage would be better. When the new railroad is finished I am certain that Belton will grow even bigger."

"Who is Mrs. Sawyer?" Miss Addams asked from her self imposed silence. "She wrote a letter to me concerning a teaching position."

"Miss Sawyer. She is our post mistress, school superintendent and county board of education chair woman. She was our school teacher before she went political and took the post mistress job." Mrs. Simpson glanced over towards Paul. "Can I move?"

"Yes, Ma'am. I'm just doing a casual sketch to pass the time."

"Where did you learn to draw?" Miss Addams asked with growing interest. "It certainly seems to be a strange talent for a saloon piano player."

"I had a minor in art at Princeton before the war. After the war I taught mathematics, the physical sciences and a little art at a small college for young ladies. I suppose I am going to play piano because it's a job and better for my health."

"Health?" Miss Addams pressed with growing curiosity.

"Out West, Miss Addams, we avoid asking too many personal questions," Mrs. Simpson noted with an edge to her voice that caused Paul to smile almost gratefully.

"During the Spanish War I was wounded and in the military hospital I caught a tropical illness," he offered with a shrug.

"So many of our brave boys fell ill during the war," Mrs. Simpson noted. "In fact, I hear that most of our boys died from disease in military hospitals."

"The price we pay to be imperialists and fight wars for the munitions makers and newspapers," Miss Addams announced in strident tones that showed that she had somehow been prodded to mount yet another hobby horse. "I have no doubt that the Maine was deliberately sunk by our own military imperialists and the facts show that Spain was more than willing to concede Cuba before a shot was fired."

When Paul and his troop of black cavalry from the famed 10th Mounted rode east by train they had heard the cheers. But the antiwar movement had grown quickly in some parts of the country, and by the time he had returned wounded from Cuba after a few short months he found that 'our brave boys' were less appreciated, especially by the so called 'intelligentsia'.

"I've never heard such an awful lie," Mrs. Simpson responded. "Our ill-fated Mr. McKinley would not have--"

"Frankly, ladies, I would rather not discuss the war," Paul interrupted, setting aside his sketch pad. "In fact, I think that I would prefer to take a short nap."

"Of course," Mrs. Simpson agreed as a somewhat frustrated Miss Addams turned her attention towards the window. The storm clouds gathered, leaving the skies a dark silver gray over the rolling green plains.

Although Paul sought peace and quiet from arguments about a war that was over, except for the guerrilla battles for 'liberation' that followed the Spanish War in the Philippines. He found that the beer and beans actually did make him sleepy and to the rocking motion of the coach he fell asleep.

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Miss Addams noted that Mrs. Simpson had returned to knitting while her daughter had returned to her book. Miss Adams, as a suffragette, found such books to be just another example of male bondage enforced by women upon their sisters. It seemed to be such a pity that the movement has found so many traitors among other females.

Trying not to think about such depressing thoughts, Miss Addams turned her attention towards the man called Paul, in hopes of starting a conversation to pass the time. The rocking bounces of the moving stage coach did not allow her any chance to relax. To her utter surprise she saw that he was actually sleeping!

To her mind's eye this was a very unusual man. His hair was long in the fashion so popular with the young athletic set in Eastern colleges, but she wondered at the lack of long sideburns and the traces of blonding towards the back. Was his hair color real, or dyed? His eyebrows were bushy enough. Still, there was a subtle high arch and long tapering of the brow line that suggested meticulous plucking in the past. His facial skin had the pallor of someone who assiduously avoided the sun rather than the weather beaten look so typical of western men and women. Of course, she noted that he had said he was a saloon piano player, an indoor job which might explain his peaches and cream complexion. But she doubted this because of his scrubbed look. The look of an actor, perhaps, who daily applied and removed his stage make-up. Whatever the case, his almost oval face would be the envy of any woman.

His hands were uncallused and well manicured, like the smooth hands of a gambling man. Yet there was a certain bleached pink glow that reminded Miss Addams of a servant woman, who might find her hands frequently in laundry tubs or dish water.

What caught her attention most of all was the way that he sat in the leather stage coach seat. Even asleep his body was erect. While most men sat sprawled with their elbows and legs open, his legs were together and crossed in a S curve to one side, while

his elbows and arms were inward towards the centerline of his body. A curious man, she decided.

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“Whoa! WHOA!” yelled the stagecoach driver, as he pulled back on the reins and rocked the brake lever. “What do you want, Charlie Grover? What are you and the boys doing out here!”

“Just shut up and throw the bank box out,” a voice yelled as the stage stopped and the side door was flung open.

“Git out!” a rider ordered.

“Now Nate Baxter, what is this silliness about,” Mrs. Simpson demanded of the rider as she stepped from the stage. She was followed by her daughter and Miss Addams. Paul had a dull, sickening feeling that caused him to wish that he had a gun.

Stepping from the coach he realized that a gun would be of little use to him with over ten unmasked men on horseback milling about the stage coach. Numbly he handed over his wallet to the rider Mrs. Simpson had identified as Nate Baxter, while his common sense told him that he was soon going to be dead. He heard the driver curse and the shooting begin.

The rider fired at near point blank with three slugs tearing into Paul's body. He sank into a total blackness without feeling the ground as it caught his limp form.

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He awoke to total pain, feeling his body pressed by an unknown weight. The smell of rancid blood, floral perfumes, wood polish and leather mingled with the sound of the slowly moving coach. Opening his eyes, he realized that it was night; moonlight made its way through a side window to reveal that he was on the floor of the coach where the stage robbers had tossed his body. Above him was the weight of other bodies!

Almost timidly he turned his head to look directly into Miss Addams' horrified, dead eyes. They glistened like glass in the faint moonlight. Absentmindedly he considered the fact that the dead eyes revealed no image of her killer, just terror.

“I got the reins, Doc,” a voice yelled as the sound of more horsemen came to Paul's ears.

“Jake, you and Doc check things out,” a deep voice ordered as the coach stopped its ambling motion and the door was opened. “Looks to me like they just tossed them into the coach after shooting them.”

“Poor souls,” a tenor voice murmured. “I should stay here.”

“Reverend, I'm going to need every member of the posse I can get,” the deep voice ordered. “Okay, head em' up, we have to follow the signs as long as the moon is with us.”

The rumble of distant thunder mingled with the sound of retreating horses.

“Jake, I'll check them for life signs as we dump them out of the stage. We might find someone still alive,” Doc explained as he struggled with the body of the stage

coach driver. Paul felt a growing pain that swelled upward into another pit of pitch blackness.

"Well, I'll be damned, we got a live one on the bottom," Jake announced as he saw Paul's eyes open while he pulled Miss Addams' body away.

"Charlie Grover, Nate Baxter," Paul managed, feeling his chest as it moved with each breathless word. The man called Doc placed a hand on Paul's neck. "Charlie Grover, the driver called him. Mrs. Simpson called the one who shot me Nate Baxter. There were ten of them... I..."

"You just rest," Doc warned as he swore something under his breath. "Jake, you stay here while I take him to the Belton Ranch. The Rocking B is only a mile away. I'll send the coach back with a few ranch hands. Then take the bodies to the undertaker."

Doc arranged Paul on the floor before he pushed some pills into his mouth and ordered him to swallow. He closed the door to swing up into the driver's seat and gathered the reins.

"It's a six in hand, Doc," Jake warned as he watched the Doc release the hand brake. "That's a lot of horses, Doc."

"Drove medical wagons during the Indian Wars, Jake," Doc answered as he folded his hands into the reins to be certain which controlled the lead. "Now this is important, I want you to tell the sheriff to see me when he gets into town, and there were NO survivors. They were all dead, you got that?"

"Okay, Doc, if you say so. You think he's going to die too?"

"That's my problem," Doc announced as he whipped up the team. Paul's mind exploded into an array of flashing colors that swirled around and around before the pain vanished into the black pit again.

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"Clear the kitchen table and soak it down with boiling water!" Doc's voice yelled as he entered the rear of the main house of the Belton Ranch. Mrs. Belton, her daughter Sarah and Mrs. Wong were eating supper.

Without pause he turned to the three ranch hands that had tumbled out of the bunk house at a dead run with their rifles cocked and ready.

"Get rid of those damned rifles and help me with the body in the stage. He goes into the kitchen, and the gear on the stage goes onto the back porch. Then the two of you take the stage back up the road towards Burnside to pick up the other bodies and Jake, whose alone out there."

Doc began shouting: "The Belton stage has been robbed, and there were no survivors, understand? No survivors! There were four passengers, the driver and a shotgun. All dumped into the coach, all dead. Take them to the undertaker and tell him the same thing and make certain that he keeps silent about our survivor. If the robbers find out that one survived, they may come to the ranch and kill everyone. Understand?"

"Yeah," Chris Benton said as he flung open the stage coach door. The other two helped him with the body while Doc headed towards the kitchen with his medical bag to see that the wooden table was cleared of the supper things. Mrs. Wong was pouring steaming hot water over it from a tea pot.

"Save some, Mrs. Wong," Doc ordered as the men draped the body over the table. Doc wished that all the Belton hands were at the ranch, but he knew that Mr. Belton, the hands, and their trail cook, Mr. Wong, were moving the herd to the spring range.

"If we can save him we have to work fast. Undress him and wash him down with this," he handed young Sarah a brown bottle, which her mother took quickly from her hands as if to send the teenager from the room. "Get the girl to work undressing him, we haven't time for humility."

Without further protest Mrs. Belton helped her daughter to remove the young man's blood and dirt covered clothing, while Mrs. Wong hastened to remove his boots.

"God knows what kind of vermin he is infested with," Doc observed, brushing a fly away. "I want you to wash his body with the disinfectant and then shave all the hair off while I see if I can stop the bleeding and sew him up."

"Even his head," Mrs. Wong asked. She was looking at Paul's blond, curly hair as Mrs. Belton accepted a straight razor from Doc.

"No, just wash it with laundry soap. The wounds are not so close," Doc muttered as he took up a pad of gauze and began to wipe away one of the two chest wounds. Despite the dime sized openings in front, the exit wounds were only a little bigger, indicating that the youth was shot at close range. The lack of spurting blood, and the fact that he was still alive indicated that the bullets had missed any vital organs. Of course, he had no way to determine the amount of internal bleeding. The third bullet had grazed his right hip as his body was flung aside from the close impact of the first two bullets. Doc half watched as the two women wielded their razors with a deft touch and Sarah washed the body. He knew that the opiates would keep the youth still, and he feared that ether might be too much.

"Damn it, the bullet on the right busted a rib," Doc swore, feeling the bone move as he set the drain in the wound and began to stitch it closed.

"What's the problem?" Mrs. Belton asked with growing concern.

"I can't put these wounds under a cast. The drainage needs to be cleaned and the bandages regularly changed," Doc muttered in response. "Luckily he is thin enough for me to feel the set of the rib, but we need something to hold it in place. If we had a hospital nearby I could have a brace made for his ribs."

"How about a corset," Mrs. Wong suggested hopefully. "They are made to hold things in place while you can take them off and put them back on."

"Takes a woman to think of that," he noted as he attended to the next wound. "I guess we can make do with a corset. Why not?"

"Look, we will use one of my waists," Mrs. Belton stated as she left the room to fetch a chemise and corset. "It's a flannel chemise," she announced. Mrs. Wong had set about to wash the youth's hair after having shaved the his genitals and legs, leav-

ing him to look like a small pre-nubile boy. "The chemise may prevent the corset from chafing too much," she yelled from the other room.

"Oh, mother, look at his back," Sarah exclaimed allowing her fingers to trace the pale white welts that crisscrossed his back. "He has been whipped by somebody. And he has such fair skin."

"My guess is that he has been working indoors most of his life," Doc commented with a shrug. "He has a bullet hole in him from the past. Maybe three, four years ago. The whipping is three or four months old. He's probably been in a prison."

"A prisoner. You mean that he is a criminal?" Mrs. Belton demanded with growing concern. "He could be dangerous!"

"I seriously doubt that he will even be able to go to the bathroom alone for the next couple of weeks. I'm certain that he is quite harmless, for now. I'm going to leave him in your care while I ride into town to get some more medication and bandages," Doc stated with a smile, placing a bottle of pills into Mrs. Belton's hands. "Now you put him into bed and help him to get comfortable on his left side. If he wakes up before I return I don't want him fed or given anything to drink. Just make him take two pills, without water, and watch him so that he doesn't try to get out of bed or anything foolish like that. And if anybody asks you if you have a survivor from the stage coach robbery, say no."

"Why?" Mrs. Belton asked, as she worked the chemise onto the youth's body with Mrs. Wong's help.

"The stage was robbed by a gang from Belton itself. Charlie Grover and Nate Baxter, and eight others according to our stranger," Doc responded, pointing to Paul. "You make certain that the hands keep this quiet, understand?"

"I think so."

"Good." Doc turned from the women to see Chris Benton standing at the doorway watching silently. "That goes for you too, Chris."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll be back in about an hour if Chris can find me a mount. He can help you ladies to put our patient to bed."

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Sheriff Don Larson was angry as his part of the posse walked their horses through the rain towards Alex Town. He had released over half of his posse into the care of the deputy, who was apparently chasing most of the stage coach robbers back towards Belton.

He was left with three robbers headed towards Axel Town, the remains of a small railroad camp left behind by the moving of the section hands to a more permanent camp in Belton.

"I think we're riding with a dumb sheriff," Walking Bear noted out loud with a shake of his head to Broken Hand's grim laughter. "We ride in a big circle while the

robbers sit all cozy and warm back in Belton. Dumb sheriff, like a dog in a skunk hole.”

Bud Simpson was too wet and miserable to protest the Indian scout's rather blunt observations. He was well aware of the banter that went on between the sheriff and his two special deputies. Besides, his mind was still on the fact that his wife and daughter had been shot down in cold blood after God knows what else. A tear streaked down his wrinkled cheek as he walked his aching bones one step at a time.

“Look, Old Squaw Talk,” Don bantered, “I think that the ones headed this way have the money. They wouldn't take it back to Belton.”

“We'll ride now. Make Alex Town before thunder storm comes again,” Broken Hand announced as he swung casually back into his saddle.

Sheriff Larson nodded his agreement as he glanced back at the dark line of riders moving two abreast like a military column along the muddy road. First his two scouts, who brought their horses to a quick trot to move ahead of the column. Then he and Bud Simpson, who was far too old to be in a posse. Still, Bud had a right to be there. The next two were the Barnes brothers. At the rear was Reverend Thomas with, of all people, Hoyden Davies, the Calamity Jane of Belton, whose father was serving as shotgun for the stage. *At least she could shoot with deadly accuracy, if she had the nerve to fire at a live target. God only knows why the reverend was along.*

Sheriff Larson was not at all certain that eight was enough.

Far ahead in the dark misty night there was the brightly lit shape of Axel's Saloon. It stood out like a great gray hulk adrift on the flat plains. As they came closer they could see the remains of wooden framed shanties and heard the sounds of tattered rotting canvas roofs fluttering in the storm breeze like the beating wings of frightened birds. The cool drizzle brought the distant scent of ozone from the flashing lightening high above in the clouds. Here and there was a horse barn or abandoned maintenance shack. The squeaky sound of a crank operated gramophone player mingled with laughter drifted across the flats towards the silent posse.

“Could be a trap,” Walking Bear announced in a whisper as the group gathered about a mile from Alex Town in a shallow depression that hid them from view. “They could be waiting for us in one of the old sheds.”

“Maybe some sneaky red skin, but no comfort-seeking white man,” Sheriff Larson joked as Broken Hand pulled out his binoculars and moved to the edge of the wallow. “My guess is a lookout upstairs in the saloon. The place is lit like a Christmas tree. Look for a room with no light coming from it.”

“Yep. Second floor front,” Broken Hand noted. “One lazy sneaky paleface.”

“There's a little creek about a hundred yards from here,” Hoyden offered, “Yellow Creek. When I was a kid, the gang tried to canoe it. It cuts around the town. Probably flooded, but the river bed is quite wide with two tiers of banks. Plenty high for a horse and rider to go along the edge and not be seen. The scouts and I could try to get behind the saloon.”

"I'll give you Walking Bear, the Barnes brothers and the reverend," the sheriff agreed, outlining his plans before he dismounted saying, "I'll need Broken Hand to communicate with Walking Bear. No use getting too wet, let's move out."

As Hoyden and her posse members silently made their way to the creek, Broken Hand dismounted and slowly crept through the tall spring grass from bush to bush towards the saloon. When Broken Hand waved a white handkerchief back at the sheriff, Bud Simpson and the sheriff mounted and began to trot slowly towards the saloon. Meanwhile, Broken Hand climbed up the front porch column holding the saloon's second floor balcony.

"Two riders coming," a voice yelled over the night storm sounds, as Bud and the sheriff continued to allow their horses to trot the last hundred yards to the front hitching post. This warning shout was followed by the tinkling sound of glass.

"Hey, windows cost money," Alex Thompson shouted as he peered out at the night towards the riders using the door frame for protection. "It's probably just two guys looking for a drink. If it were the sheriff, he'd have a dozen men."

"How many do you think there is?" Bud Simpson whispered nervously to the sheriff as he gripped the shotgun under his rain gear.

"Alex has a bartender. A bouncer called the Nevada Kid, a fair hand with a gun who ain't no kid any more. And his common law wife. We were trailing three riders. That makes six or seven guns. My guess is that Broken Hand has trimmed that by one already."

"Who are you guys?" Alex shouted into the rainy night.

"We're hands from the Broken W," Bud yelled, pretending to be from a nearby ranch. "Saw your lights and thought we would get a drink and dry out. We were almost shot up by a posse from Belton looking for some stage coach robbers."

"Where?" Alex asked nervously, as the two riders dismounted. Their faces were protected from the rain by upturned collars. They began to tie their horses to the hitching rail in front of the saloon. "Where is the posse?"

"Headed back towards Belton," Bud responded.

"What the hell is that?" Alex shouted as he turned his attention to a noise back inside the saloon. "My God!"

Sheriff Larson stepped inside. Alex swung a shot gun towards the inside stairs as Bob Granger's grisly head bounced down them. A woman's screamed. Charlie Grover turned over the table in front of him while he and Frank Lund dove for the floor, drawing their revolvers. The bartender ducked for cover under the bar as he grabbed a sawed off shot gun, only to take a point blank blast from the sheriff's shot gun while Bud Simpson gave Alex both barrels.

The Nevada Kid tried to run for the back of the saloon but Hoyden was waiting for him with two rapid shots. By now Broken Hand with the Barnes brothers had managed half the stairs and were firing down through the table top at Charlie Grover and Frank Lund. They quickly realized that the flimsy table top was nothing against three .45's.

"You killed my husband!" Alex's wife screamed as she grabbed the bartender's shot gun. She froze in mid-motion as her legs crumpled under her like a broken doll from the shots fired by the reverend.

All was silent while the sheriff picked up the money bag that was thrown from a table during the fight. Bud Simpson suddenly fell to the floor. The posse members looked about the room to survey the carnage. The sheriff rushed over to Bud Simpson's body.

"Heart attack. Must have been too much for him," Sheriff Larson sighed, standing back from the old man's corpse. "Anybody search for others hiding out here?"

"I'll check it out," Hoyden suggested, as she and Walking Bear returned upstairs. Broken Hand elected to look at the back rooms on the first floor. "It's empty," he yelled back to the sheriff.

"We'll stay overnight and bury them in the morning," Sheriff Larson observed. "Then I'm for heading back to Belton with Bud Simpson's body so that he can be buried with his wife and daughter. We should make it in three hours. Frankly, I've had enough of Alex Town."

The distant rumble of thunder and the fresh scent of spring grasses on the wind announced that the storm was not over.

Chapter Two: The Hoyden Kid

Doc sat in the large, overstuffed easy chair in the Belton Ranch parlor as his eyes studied the others in the room. Soldier, the Belton's large calico cat had lost her place in the chair, so she calmly jumped up into Doc's lap. Soon she began to claim Doc as her own property by rubbing her cheeks against his arm while he scratched behind her ears to produce a steady, contented purr.

Sheriff Larson had taken to a rocking chair and lit his pipe after receiving a nod of permission from Mrs. Belton, who sat with her daughter on one of the small couches. Jake and the three ranch hands took the large couch, leaving a straight back chair for Hans Nordstrom, who owned the town's furniture store and funeral parlor. Mrs. Wong was upstairs watching over the patient.

"Okay, we've buried the dead, plus one box full of rocks," Doc announced after the group had turned its attentions away from the coffee and cookies served by Mrs. Belton and her daughter. "Our hope is that Nate Baxter and his six partners in crime will feel safe while our witness recovers enough to give us an idea who the other gang members were. Meanwhile, the sheriff will have time to keep track of Nate to determine who his pals might be."

"I could sweat it out of him," Sheriff Larson commented dryly as he took a puff from his pipe, releasing a sweet, rum-scented cloud of smoke.

"The minute you pick him up, six men will vanish. And we want them all," Doc countered. The *Belton Star* wasn't too flattering about your shooting up 'the innocent bystanders' at the Alex Town saloon. And your deliberate act of setting fire to the place."

Since most of the group knew that the newspaper owner had been related to the late Alex Thompson, there was a ripple of laughter through the parlor.

"It burned down two days after the shooting. And good riddance," Sheriff Larson protested angrily until he realized that Doc was just kidding him. "Besides, the newspaper owner was disappointed that he didn't inherit the place."

"He's welcome to it," Mrs. Belton added. "One less place for honest men to lose their hard earned money and to drink themselves to death."

"Not so honest," the sheriff added with a grim smile. "I want you to keep your men close at hand, Mrs. Belton. I can send one of my deputies out to fetch your husband and a few more hands if you want?"

"That wouldn't be smart. Might set folks to wonder," Hans Nordstrom noted with a shake of his head. "You might hire someone new for extra hands for something that you have been planning to do."

"And wind up with one of the robbers?" Sarah protested. Her mother gave her a dirty look.

"How about Hoyden Davies?" the sheriff suggested. "She may need work since her father's death. She is very fast and good with a gun."

"My goodness gracious, sheriff," Mrs. Belton exclaimed in disbelief. "I don't think that she even knows how to take a bath, let alone live in a house. I certainly couldn't put her in the bunk house with the men. She'd corrupt them."

A roar of laughter greeted her protest.

"She's not all that bad," Hans Nordstrom said. "And I do think that she could do better with your Christian civilizing influence."

"I wonder why people always use the word 'Christian' when they are trying to stick someone else with a dirty job," Mrs. Belton stated to their mild laughter. "Besides, the town will go crazy when they hear that I have brought *her* into my house."

"You do have work for her," Doc pressed while he scratched the black pattern on Soldier's head. It looked like the outline of a Union army cap.

"Well, there is always painting to be done in the spring. And spring cleaning," she had to admit. "Bud Simpson usually found a few men." She fell silent. "Well, I'll talk to her if you feel that she can be trusted, sheriff."

"Good, I'll tell her to come see you," Sheriff Larson stated with a half sigh as he looked towards Doc. "Anything else?"

"No. I'll just go upstairs and look at this Paul Brown fellow," Doc answered, displacing Soldier when he stood up. The others arose to chat a bit before they left. Soldier returned to her chair, hoping that the humans had finished their harassment.

The Belton ranch house had been built in the late '80's, just before old man Belton had fallen off his horse and died. Despite its bulk it was a simply designed stone and frame structure. It had a large porch that covered the front of the house with a second floor screen porch above it and an open balcony at the third floor.

As one entered the main house there was a little wind brake foyer with closets for storm gear on either side. This foyer opened into a larger lobby area with dual sliding doors to the right. Through the sliding doors there was a large living room. To the left of the lobby was the parlor, or "music room" as Mr. Belton called it, because it contained his pride a joy: a grand piano hauled by ship and freight wagon from Germany.

Straight ahead in the lobby there was a spiral staircase and hallway. The hallway passed under the spiral staircase by two more dual sliding doors. The doors on the right led to a formal dining room. The doors on the left opened into a library-study. The hallway ended at the kitchen with its pantry and wash room.

Back stairs led up to serve the second floor; and down to a huge cellar with its furnace, coal storage, root cellar, canning and preserves storage area, and basement storage room. The front spiral staircase came to a 90 degree turn at a sunken landing that served as the base for a few steps leading to the two front bedrooms' hall and a similar few steps leading to the two back bedrooms' hall. The master bedroom over the living room served as the bedroom for Mr. and Mrs. Belton. The bedroom over the parlor served as a guest room. To the left side of the front upstairs hall was an enclosed staircase that led to the great attic where the Wongs lived.

The back hall was flanked by Sarah's bedroom and another guest bedroom. The hall led to the backstairs from the kitchen that had another flight up to the attic for

the servant's use. To the right of the back staircase over the main part of the kitchen was a large bathroom. Above this, in the attic, there was a smaller bathroom, that served the two bedrooms, and living room of the servants' quarters.

Doc tried the railing where the spiral stairway ended into the landing for the front and back hall staircases. He worried a bit about his patient falling down these tricky little staircases while trying to make way to the bathroom.

"Even palaces have their pitfalls."

Doc knocked gently before he entered to see Mrs. Wong seated by Paul's bed. He knew that Lee Chan Wong had wandered from the Union Pacific railroad gangs, where he had served as a cook's helper, when the railroad began to lay off its Chinese workers. Wong was a small, wiry man. Mrs. Wong had been found half starved to death in the middle of winter trying to make her escape from slavery at the hands of a rival Indian tribe. Mr. Wong nursed her back to health, and here she was. Now in her forties, Mrs. Wong was quite a bit taller than her husband. The heavy housework combined with the good meals cooked by her husband presented her with an almost German matronly solidness.

Doc smiled when he remembered Mr. Belton's claim that she could swear better in Chinese than her husband.

'The West has some way to throw strangers together. I wonder how the Victorian Mrs. Belton will handle the town's Calamity Jane. I almost feel sorry for poor Hoyden. She'll need her six gun to stay out of corsets and petticoats. Poor Paul is in a corset already, and he is a man!' Doc thought to himself.

"How is our young man doing?" Doc asked as he drew down the bedclothes to see the pink satin corset. It had been cinched in to the point where the fatty tissue about his chest was pushed up by the corset bodice until they looked like a maiden's bust line under the chemise. The back lacing was nearly closed, allowing the hourglass shape to be completed by the curve of the seat and the fullness of unconstrained hips. "You might loosen this contraption. We want him to breathe."

"Missy Belton-," she began to explain, only to smile and help Doc as he undid the front snaps to reveal the blood stained chemise. Doc removed it and examined each wound.

He opened his medical bag and set about to clean his stitches and irrigate the drains with astringent before he checked the broken rib.

"It will be two months before that rib is solid," he murmured. Mrs. Wong furnished a new chemise by the time he had replaced the bandages with fresh ones. "He is sleeping well?"

"Like a baby most of the time," Mrs. Belton observed as she entered the room. "I think that he is having nightmares, though. We had to hold him down a good part of last night."

"Best we can do for now," Doc noted. "And go easy with the corset. He's not going to the Governor's ball."

The ladies giggled at his comment before Mrs. Belton observed, "He does have a good waist for a man. That corset has a twenty four inch waist and it's almost closed in back."

"You have plenty of time to train his waist," Doc countered with a knowing laugh, as he wondered at the young man's narrow waistline. "But for now I'm more worried about him cracking that rib even further."

"How long will he be like this?" Sarah asked, standing by her mother while Mrs. Wong and her mother replaced the chemise.



"Maybe another two weeks of solid bed rest, at the most. Then he needs to sit up in a hospital chair for another couple of weeks. Maybe, if things settle down, he can get some fresh air by being wheeled out onto the balcony. Within a month he should be able to manage things with crutches, although I do worry about that staircase. At least one more month until the rib is solid."

"When I was heavy with Sarah we put a ramp between the short stairs. I'm certain it's in the basement. Or maybe one of the hands could carry him. He isn't very heavy," Mrs. Belton suggested.

"Maybe Hoyden Davies could carry him about. I hear that she is as strong as an ox," Sarah stated with a little giggle. "Maybe she could teach me how to shoot a pistol."

"Bad enough that you ride astride, young lady," her mother complained with a little sigh. "No pistols for you."

"But you can shoot one! Father told me about your killing--"

"Your father talks too much," Mrs. Belton countered with a slight blush. She fussed with the replacement of the pink corset. Sarah was surprised as her mother lifted the fatty tissue of Paul's bust to be certain that the top of the bodice didn't pinch the flesh as she drew the corset closed in back. "I'll have to talk to him about *that*."

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Paul's opiate dream drifted through a van Gogh palette of bright glaring sunlit colors that shimmered in fever heated swirls. Suddenly he was in the crowded courtroom listening to Joyce Caldwell as she described how he raped her and her sister. He was screaming his innocence...

Mrs. Belton listened to his babbling delirium with growing concern as she looked through the papers that she had found in his luggage. She found a contract for his employment dated September of 1901 from the Rose Oak College for Women. This may well have been where he had committed his crime, she thought. She wondered why he was out of prison, and had to know. She would write to the school to find out the truth. She had no desire to have a rapist in her home, no matter how injured he was!

When Mrs. Wong came to Paul's room to relieve Mrs. Belton from watching over him, Mrs. Belton told her the horrible truth about Paul and her fears for the household.

"If he is some kind of sex fiend, what can we do to protect ourselves?"

"Well, Ma'am, he is hardly able to get out of bed, let alone attack us," Mrs. Wong observed, placing the afternoon tea tray upon the night stand. She checked their sleeping patient while she considered Mrs. Belton's fears. It was clear to Mrs. Wong that Mrs. Belton was overreacting. The man was as helpless as a baby. "However, there are rather simple solutions."

"What on earth can be so simple?"

"I could geld him, Ma'am. There are some fine castration knives out in the barn. I could make him as smooth as a baby's bottom. All he could do is pee sitting down from then on." Mrs. Wong picked up a table knife from the tea tray and pantomimed the operation with a delighted smile, causing the matron to look away in horror.

"Oh, heaven's no! What an awful idea!"

"Too bad," Mrs. Wong observed with hidden amusement, placing the knife away with a shrug. "It would be quick and efficient, Mrs. Belton."

"And, if it turned out that he were innocent?"

"He would still be innocent," Mrs. Wong countered with a chuckle. Sensing that her mistress was growing a bit impatient over her sense of humor she shrugged again with mock disappointment. "There is another solution. The women of my tribe chew the seed of the white bark pine to prevent pregnancy and to stay younger longer. And I have been told that it can also be used to make a man lose all interest in sex while his body and skin becomes as soft as a maiden's. As far as I know it is quite harmless, and when you stop taking it you can have babies again."

"What happens to a man?"

“He changes back also, as far as I know,” Mrs. Wong replied with less certainty. “My first husband knew more about such things, but he never explained it to me.” She poured a cup of tea for her mistress before she did the same for herself, and then she smiled. “The beauty of it all is that we can safely drink coffee or tea with him, and he will never guess why he is without any of those awful male urges that you are so worried about.”

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Miss Sawyer collected the mail for the stage run to Burnside. She wondered why Mrs. Belton was writing to a ladies college out east.

‘Maybe she is planning to send Sarah there?’ she mused as she dumped the letter into the mail pouch. *‘It’s a long way to send a girl to high school. Who was there at the Belton ranch that would be writing a women’s college out east?’*

That was a mystery. But the greatest mystery was why Mrs. Belton had decided to hire poor Hoyden Davies. Miss Sawyer could not think of two people in town more different than those two.

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“Sheriff Larson says that you want to hire a shootist, Ma’am,” the dark image at the back door announced. She dumped a carpet bag on the back porch and looked straight into Mrs. Belton’s wide brown eyes that seemed half dismayed and half amused. She shifted the wad of tobacco in her mouth and continued. “I’m called the Hoyden Kid.”

“I can believe that,” Mrs. Belton responded, looking at the slim strong hand that had been poked in her direction for a handshake. She brushed the flour from her own hands onto her apron and accepted the girl’s hand. She had never met Hoyden, who was probably a couple of years older than Sarah. “But, the real job offer is for someone to help my hands do some spring painting, and to help with spring cleaning.”

“The sheriff told me what to expect,” the girl smiled. “Now, where do I bunk? I used to live over the livery stable with Dad, but old man Thompson ain’t too kindly towards folks involved in the Alex Town shooting. Been sleeping under the stars since.”

‘Poor child. No wonder the sheriff suggested that I hire the girl,’ Mrs. Belton thought as she considered the girl’s question and studied the image before her.

“I could do with a glass of water. Kind of warm standing here, Ma’am.” Hoyden pushed back her brown felt hat to reveal more of her Dutch boy cut brown hair. Her intense blue eyes retained their stare into Mrs. Belton’s eyes as if to wait for the older woman to look away. About the open collar of her shirt was a dirty red bandanna. She wore a man’s cotton shirt with a leather vest and a pair of tight wool trousers partially hid by leather chaps. Her clothes and boots looked like they had been worn dirty for weeks, but the leather gun belt and the tied down holster were well cared for. The double action Colt .45 looked oiled and ready.

“Certainly, my dear,” Mrs. Belton agreed as she shook her head in disbelief over her own poor manners. Yet she stood her ground until the girl’s eyes took in Mrs. Wong as she offered Hoyden a glass of ice tea.

"We have a spare room in the servants' quarters," Mrs. Wong suggested.

"No, you and your husband have been with us too long for such an inconvenience," Mrs. Belton objected. "If we can get her to take a bath and wash out her things, we should put her in the guest room near our patient. I think that is what the sheriff wants." *'At least I would feel safer, if she were closer at hand with a rapist in the house,'* she told herself.

"I ain't putting on no dress and such. It'll get in the way of my gun hand," Hoyden protested. "These are all the clothes I got."

"God forbid that we do anything to get in the way of your gun hand. Frankly, I don't really care about your running about looking like some gunslinger, just so long as you are dressed in clean clothes when you live in my house. I think that my husband may have left a few things for you to wear while we wash these clothes," Mrs. Belton offered. "Then I will give you a few dollars more against your wages so that you can buy some more men's' things to wear for work clothes."

"And if I don't?"

"You can find someone else who needs a *shooter*," Mrs. Belton responded, turning towards Mrs. Wong. "I'll fetch her some clean clothes and you give her a bath."

"I ain't no kid."

"I hope not, one little girl in the house is quite enough," Mrs. Belton countered with a hard edge to her voice. "But my hands know that when I say jump, they jump. Understand, Miss Davies?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"And I don't permit my hands to chew tobacco in the house. I'll ask you to dump that wad outside," Mrs. Belton insisted, causing Hoyden to spit a stream of tobacco well over the porch floor to spatter over the grassy lawn.

"Good," she sighed. "Better take some kerosene for her hair, I do believe that it is crawling with lice," she warned Mrs. Wong.

Mrs. Belton watched as Mrs. Wong showed Hoyden the way up the service stairs to the bathroom. Minutes later she heard the loud complaining, followed by shouts of outrage and screams that vanished into dead silence.

Satisfied that Mrs. Wong had things under control, Mrs. Belton went upstairs to fetch some things for a newly subdued Miss Davies to wear. She found an excited Sarah standing outside of the bathroom door.

"Now, dear, you're not suppose to leave our patient."

"I heard screaming, but Mrs. Wong won't open the door," Sarah complained in disappointed tones. "I think that she actually washed out some woman's mouth for swearing!"

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," Mrs. Belton said with a trace of amusement as she knocked on the door. "It is I, Mrs. Wong. I have clothes for her to wear to supper to-night."

"Yes, Ma'am," Mrs. Wong replied in near breathless tones. She shoved Hoyden's clothes and holstered gun out the door before taking the clothes that Mrs. Belton passed into the bathroom. "We'll be down in a few minutes."

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"I guess I ain't so bad looking," Hoyden allowed, as she half lifted her gun and watched in the mirror as it slid back into its holster. The image in the mirror was that of a youth in his late teens dressed in black boots, pegged slim black wool trousers, white shirt with a black string tie, and a black silk vest. Her hair was pulled back into a single braid tied by a black ribbon to reveal an oval face with bushy brows, long dark brown lashes, large blue eyes, a nose that must have been broken at least once, and almost feminine lips: "The Hoyden Kid."

Mrs. Wong looked at her handy work and said, "I'll take your measurements and we will make it fit better once you get some new clothes to wear."

"What did you do to my old clothes. They fit fine," Hoyden protested.

"I burned them," Mrs. Belton announced as she entered the guest bedroom. She noted with some amusement the contrast between Sarah, all dressed up in her fussy ball gown as she sat wide eyed in a nearby chair, and Hoyden's all black gambler look. "Besides, if you are to be my shooter, you should look the part. I think Mrs. Wong has done a great job in cleaning you up, hasn't she?"

"If she touches me just one more--"

Mrs. Belton placed her finger to her lips with a delighted smile. "Be careful. No swear words, or I'll have you treated to some more soap. I have worked hard to train my daughter to be a lady. Understand?"

"Well, she...", Hoyden began in protest, only to remember that Mrs. Wong was certainly capable of manhandling her as if she were a mere child. Worse yet, the housekeeper had snatched away Hoyden's gun before she could defend herself. Then she stripped Hoyden stark naked and damn near drowned her in boiling hot water. But at least they allowed her to dress in comfortable men's clothes, and seemed to accept the idea somehow. "I guess I do, Ma'am."

"Good."

Mrs. Belton led the way down the backstairs while Mrs. Wong attended to cleaning the bathroom. Once they were in the kitchen she turned to her shooter, saying, "If you want to parade about as a man, I'll accept it. But I'll expect you to keep your room nice and tidy, and help about doing chores."

"I don't cook or do maid's work," Hoyden said firmly.

"You'll do what I want you to do," she countered with a shrug. "But I will play your game, *mister*. Only chores that I might expect of my husband, or the hands. Agreed?"

"Yes, Ma'am, that is more than fair," Hoyden had to agree.

"Good, I need some kindling wood for the kitchen stove for supper. And be careful with your new clothes."

"Yes, Ma'am," Hoyden promised with a pleased smile as she caught a glimpse of her image in the kitchen window. She looked great! She had no intention of ruining these swift clothes. Checking the fit of her gun again, she picked up a hand ax and went out to the kitchen porch where there was a pile of dry wood. Before she set to chopping, she carefully hung her black silk vest on a wooden peg by the kitchen door designed for hanging storm gear before entering the house.

It was then that she noticed the pile of what appeared to be women's luggage, hat boxes, and boxes with printing on the sides. She could make out that the boxes contained books. She wondered why these things were piled on the back porch.

Shrugging away this mystery she set about her chores.

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"When the ranch hands are out moving the herd we usually serve the remaining men from the house rather than use the cook shed," Mrs. Belton explained to Hoyden as she stood by her seat. She began to sit down while Chris Benton held her chair for her.

"What you doing behind me!" Hoyden demanded angrily as she attempted to take her own place at the table. "I don't allow anyone to pussy foot behind me."

"He was only trying to be polite," Sarah observed as another hand helped her with her chair. "A gentleman stands until the ladies are seated and helps a lady with her chair. Since you elected to sit when the ladies did, he just mistook you for a lady."

"Now, Sarah," Mrs. Belton began with an amused smile.

"I just guess that I ain't housebroken properly," Hoyden exclaimed, causing a round of laughter as she stood up. "Well, I ain't. And that's plain enough. I'm sorry, Chris, I'd prefer to stand with the hands."

"Fair enough," Chris replied with a grin. "A man has got to do what he has got to do."

Sarah giggled until her mother stared her down while Hoyden sat down in silence with the other men.

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Mrs. Belton held the front of her bright blue cotton twill skirts and white silken petticoats aside with her left hand, revealing a dainty glimpse of the bottom ruffles of her white silk drawers. A hint of her black silk stockings at the ankle with her little dance style pumps could be glimpsed. Her right hand managed the silver tray that held a clean China chamber pot and her hot chocolate silver service while she stepped up the steep service stairs to the back hallway.

Passing the second floor landing and bathroom door she noted that the door to Hoyden's room was slightly opened and she could hear Sarah's voice.

Wondering what they had in common she paused at mid-hall to see Sarah in her nightgown sitting on the floor with Hoyden, who was actually wearing one of Sarah's nightgowns. Sarah was fussing with her French doll and pointing towards an open copy of a Sears catalogue from the winter of 1901.

"What kind of drawers are they?" Hoyden asked, exploring the doll's underthings in awe over the frilly tiers of lace and profusion of ruffles. "Women don't wear those things now?"

"They are called pettipants rather than drawers, because of the tiers and tiers of lace ruffles that go up the legs. They were worn years ago when ladies wore hoop skirts and crinolines. Back during the Civil War and the book Little Women. Have you read it?" Sarah asked.

"I can't read well. Just enough to get by."

"I'll teach you."

Mrs. Belton was not at all certain that she approved of this turn of events. Since Hoyden seemed to have initiated this course of self improvement, it did please Mrs. Belton to think that her daughter would help to civilize the girl.

"The only problem is what Sarah might learn in the exchange."

Mrs. Belton continued down the hallway to negotiate the little landing before she went down the front hall to the front guest bedroom. Knocking gently upon the door, she managed it with her left hand and walked into the room. Mrs. Wong was working on her knitting from an easy chair placed by the bed.

"I brought some hot chocolate. It's quite cool outside and in."

"Spring is slow this year," Mrs. Wong observed as she took the bed pan and replaced the old one from the patient's bed. "He's still spending most of his time asleep. But he did wake up a couple of hours ago. He told me that he had a clear view of most of the robbers and if we can find his sketch pad and pencils he could give us a sketch of those faces that he could remember. Then he drifted back into sleep after I gave him a couple more pills. He had that dream again, about seeing Mrs. Simpson and her daughter shot, and something about Miss Addams, the dead teacher, staring at him in death with no pictures in her eyes."

"Some people believe that at the moment of death the human eye can act as a camera, and you can see the image of the murderer in the dead person's eyes," Mrs. Belton noted with a shrug, pouring out two cups of hot chocolate from the silver pot and placing the pot back upon a little candle-like burner to keep it warm. "Both my father and my husband's father served in the Civil War and there was plenty of death for them to see, and neither one said anything about dead men with pictures in their eyes."

"Maybe only a medicine man can see the picture?" Mrs. Wong offered thoughtfully. "The medicine men in my tribe could see and do some wondrous things. I lived with one as his squaw before I married Mr. Wong."

"Did he say that he saw images in dead eyes?"

"No," Mrs. Wong sipped her hot chocolate with a slight smile. "He was a midwife. He specialized in helping sick women."

Mrs. Belton considered this piece of information with curious interest. She had never thought of Indian medicine men having specialties like regular doctors.

She was about to press for more information when the patient made a moaning noise and moved in bed. The two women arose from their chocolate to attend to his needs in fear that a nightmare might cause him to tear open his sutured wounds.

Chapter 3: Paul's Dreams

The September day of 1899 enjoyed the balmy warmth of Indian summer. Paul sat at the glass topped table of white painted wrought iron protected by a giant white umbrella. He sipped his iced tea and secretly watched the girls in their white lawn tea dresses playing an animated game of croquette punctuated with their squeals of delight or mock protests. The faint sound of military band music drifted within hearing range from a nearby park, causing him to think back to his brief moment of glory in July 1898, in Cuba, as a white officer in the famous 'Black Buffalo Soldiers' 10th Mounted Regiment. That was followed by months in a military hospital recovering from his wound and a tropical disease. Now his attention returned to the smiling face of Mrs. Dutton, the president of Rose Oak College for Women.

"We of the Little Sisters have moved the process of female education from its origins, as little more than meritriculous finishing schools for young ladies, to institutions of higher learning," Mrs. Dutton continued, feeling that she had his full attention. Her eyes studied the frail young man that sat before her dressed in a white suit and white straw hat that highlighted his porcelain white skin. The "Little Sisters" she referred to denoted a grouping of second tier women's colleges, such as Carleton, and their relationship to the bastions of female education, the "Big Sisters", such as Vassar. "We are proud to..."

The dream of that sunny fall day drifted to Mrs. Turner's faculty boarding house where he saw himself entering the front foyer. He was greeted by Cagney, the Irish maid, and placed his briefcase by the foyer social table while he automatically picked up his mail from among the others on a silver tray.

"Oh, it is you, Paul. I have wonderful news," Katherine James announced with full feminine delight as she burst from the parlor to give him a little kiss on the cheek. In the few short weeks since his arrival at Rose Oak he had met Katherine, who was an Associate Professor in the History Department, and now they were an item on campus. "I have decided what we shall wear for the Halloween Ball. We shall go as a couple."

"I'd hoped for that," he joked, looking at her bright red tailored cheviot wool suit and its tight fitting single breasted jacket. The jacket was trimmed with black silk embroidery at the small collar and lapels. The smooth skirt had a plait in back, well fitted to her lithe form despite the full petticoats she wore beneath it. Within the V of the jacket he could see the fine red and green striped necktie that ladies of the faculty had taken to wearing. With her black hair pulled back into a braided knot and her rather obvious square chin the overall effect was quite mannish. "Much better than going as a horse."

"Oh, you imbecile," she protested in mock disapproval. "I mean that we shall go as an ante-bellum couple. A beautiful southern belle with her handsome military escort. What do you think?"

“Well, not very original. But, I will be more than happy to escort my little southern belle, you all, and all that.”

She burst into laughter: “Oh, no, you have it all wrong. You shall be the southern belle. I have it all planned out with the ladies here. Mrs. Turner and Cagney will alter our rented costumes. Miss Donner, from our English Department, has volunteered to teach you a southern dialect, with appropriate elocutionary gestures and the language of the fan. And Mrs. Fisher has suggested that she will teach you how to display fine ladylike ante-bellum manners. She’s from Charlestown, after-all.”

“What on heaven's earth are you thinking of? What will Mrs. Dutton think?” he protested in disbelief that she might suggest such a silly charade with so many preparations. He had to admit secretly that it might be fun, but his manly vanities told him that he must protest.

“Oh, if she gives her blessing, then you might do it?” Katherine persisted. “Is that it?”

“I should say so. What on earth would she say to a man prancing about in a skirt?”

“A hooped skirt at that,” Miss Donner added as she entered the parlor to join in on the fun. “Why not, there will be many beautiful ball gowns there with hoop skirts.”

“Worn by women,” he protested, “not men.”

“Well?” she prodded. “You do love me, don't you?”

“Certainly, I'm not a spoiled sport. If she says I might do it, why not?” he replied with satisfaction, knowing that he was quite safe.

“Good,” Katherine exclaimed. “I asked her for her approval during the faculty tea Saturday.” She saw the trapped look in his eyes and burst into delighted laughter.

“Oh, you will be just perfect. The complete southern belle.”

The dream shifted through a tunnel of voices.

“It is most practical to use both hands when you are walking up and down stairs. A lady always tries to walk on the inside of the staircase, if possible, using her inside hand for support from the hand railing, and her outside hand to carefully enfold the fabric of her skirts and petticoats in front. To lift them so that her feet are free to properly negotiate the stairs safely.”

“A lady sits with her head erect and back straight, firmly set against the support of the chair, her legs and knees together and her ankles crossed with her hands folded palm to palm in her lap when her hands are not properly occupied.”

“Men and women use language differently. For example, I sometimes think that men seek to exclaim, while women question. Thusly, men tend to make flat statements as if to dare you to deny the facts. The gentler sex seeks advice and verification of the evidence as she understands it, and therefore she seeks to soothe matters by stating things with a mild, polite questioning tone.”

“The hands are used gracefully together in proper elocution to demonstrate how heart and mind work together in harmony,” the instructress stated as she gently moved her right hand from over her heart towards her head. “A lady never points with

her hands, she poses. She may demonstrate a feeling of vulnerability, seeking protection, by placing her hand gently curled below her neck."

"The open fan is positioned between the lower faces of two women so that they may speak in confidential tones."

"Like face powder, lip rouge is only used as a natural shade to conceal imperfections. In those cases when a woman's face is too pale, perhaps from illness or fatigue, she may use Indian earth as a face blusher to restore natural color."

On and on, the words drifted through his mind...

"The liquid precipitates through the filter at a constant rate," Paul explained to his chemistry class, while the women watched him pour the test tube's contents through a fiber filter. But his sleeve brushed a beaker from the chemistry table with a resounding crash!

"Oh, my goodness," he exclaimed in surprise, placing his hands side by side over his mouth in an all-too-feminine gesture of surprise.

A ripple of giggling laughter moved through the class, causing Paul to realize in horror that he had somehow adapted such feminine gestures to his day to day life. Until that moment it had been so natural that he had been totally unaware of how effete he must have appeared to those about him.

The dream faded, only to return...

"This is silly. Isn't it bad enough that half the campus thinks that I am some sort of effeminate already?" Paul complained. He turned to see his image in the dresser mirror clutching to the bed's canopy post while Mrs. Turner tugged vigorously upon the corset ties until he practically had to gasp for air.

He knew that under the shameful corset he was wearing a white cotton, embroidered women's vest and pettipants styled drawers with tiers of dainty ruffled lace. Under this there was a garter belt called a hose supporter that held taut a pair of black silken smooth lisle stockings. It took all his will power to conceal the guilt and sexual excitement that he felt. "I just can't wear these awful things under my men's clothes."

"Bu, Katherine is absolutely right," Mrs. Turner noted with a nod of approval as she released the embarrassed young man to complete his dressing for class. "If you are to fit the ball gown, we must train your waistline down by at least six inches."

"But I can't breathe," he protested as he buttoned his shirt and slipped on his trousers to discover that his belt was too large. Selecting a pair of suspenders he managed to complete dressing. He looked in the mirror again and realized that he could not remove his jacket or the feminine lines of the women's vest and corsetry would show. The mere thought of such a shameful exposure caused him to turn away from Mrs. Turner, also to conceal the arousal he felt.

"What will I say if anyone discovers the truth?"

"Oh, don't be such a cry baby, no one will notice what you are wearing, so long as you keep your coat on," Mrs. Turner observed with a little twinkle in her eyes. She noticed with delight how the firm waistline of the corset in back caused his hips to flare out the sides of his coat while his posterior was pushed upwards in a most female

fashion when he walked away from her towards the door to his room. “*My oh my, what will the ladies think?*” she mused to herself, wondering if she had tied his waist in too tightly. “No, Mr. Brown, you look just perfect.”

By the time that poor Paul had guessed the horrible truth about his all-too-female form, half the school had seen for themselves that their male teacher was indeed wearing a women's corset, and the other half had heard the rumors about him.

“It will just simply will not do,” Katherine exclaimed as she confronted poor Paul about the rumors throughout the college. “Everybody knows that you are parading about with ladies’ undergarments under your men’s’ clothes. It's scandalous!”

“But Mrs. Turner told me that you had insisted,” Paul countered in dismay over this turn of events. “Didn't you?”

“Well, yes, but...,” she replied only to shrug. “You will just confess to your classes the truth. That you are wearing female underthings.”

“Not on your life!”

“Silly. They already know. And if the ball gown is to fit, you will need to reduce your waist,” she stated with a wry smile. “You must tell everybody the truth. Mrs. Dutton was quite disturbed by the rumors.”

“Oh, boy!” he exclaimed, imagining what stories there must be about him. The perversity of his mind dwelled on the humiliation he would feel when he stood before a classroom filled with women to confess his secret shame. “Can't someone else tell the girls the truth? I would feel simply awful standing there before all those women and confessing that I wore corsets and things.”

“No, Mrs. Dutton felt that you should tell them the simple truth. That you were preparing your waistline in order to wear a dress for the Halloween Ball. As women, they would understand that.”

“Oh, boy!” he repeated. “I'll just bet.”

“But not one word about what you are going to wear. That is our little secret,” she warned.

Standing before the ladies of his chemistry class he managed to stammer out in blushing distress the shameful truth about his lingerie and corset to a little twitter of giggling laughter. That was followed by a wave of questions concerning the details of what he actually was wearing under his masculine clothes to pressing questions to discover the secret of his planned Halloween costume.

As the day went on he felt little pats upon his rear and heard many whispered compliments on his wonderful figure. It was horrible to endure, but strangely exciting to be the center of such attentions.

When he went to the faculty club for lunch he saw Mrs. Upton, his department head, sitting alone. So fearing the worst he felt that he had to confess the reason for why he was wearing feminine lingerie beneath his male clothing.

“May I join you, Professor Upton?” he nervously asked, receiving her matronly nod of consent as a student waitress approached the table to take their order.

“Ah, yes, Professor Brown. I was meaning to speak to you about your wardrobe,” Professor Upton began, causing poor Paul almost to faint in fear, only to hear her add in confidential tones, “Don't you feel that it might be more suitable if you wore a skirt? I really do not approve of ladies wearing trousers in public.” She smiled up towards the waitress, “Don't you agree, my dear?”

“Oh, yes, Ma'am,” the waitress agreed with a little giggle as she handed out menus to Professor Upton and Paul. “And what would you ladies like to order?”

It was clear that the whole campus waited to see their effeminate teacher in all his feminine finery at the Halloween Ball.

Paul considered it to be like the condemned man being required to tie the hangman's knot as he donned his lingerie over the smoothness of his shaved fragrant nakedness.

He had no idea why Katherine had insisted that he have a manicure and pedicure before he bathed in a tub filled with hot water and fragrant bubbles of a heavy floral scent that filled the bathroom. Nor did he like the idea of actually shaving his body from the neck down until he looked like a hairless child.

Worse still, he had to sit wrapped in a woman's flannel robe while a giggling Cagney applied hot wax to his light blond beard and actually ripped the hairs from His upper lips and chin line looked as if he had a severe sunburn.

She then scrubbed his hair with a foul scented chemical. After it was wrapped in a heavy towel the house maid handed him a box of white fragrant body powder that smelled of a floral bouquet even stronger than the bubble bath perfume.

“Pat this talcum all over you from your little toes to your swan like neck, Miss. It will brighten your lovely white skin. And when I return we can see to rinsing your hair and brushing it out until it is dry.” With this advice, the giggling maid, dressed in her afternoon uniform of gray twill, spread her white apron and gave a little curtsy before she withdrew.

And now he stood alone, after powdering his body and enduring the shocking discovery that his dish water brown hair was now golden blonde. He set about to prepare for his execution knowing that his hair would remain a shining reminder of his effeminization to the entire college for months to come.

Some wag had affixed a Venus napkin into the sanitary belt hooks of the white satin hose supporter which was hooked about the waist, causing a slightly embarrassed Paul to arrange the thick padding over his maleness as he adjusted the fit. Sitting upon the bed he gently rolled the yellow silk stockings up his scented white legs and attached the garter clips to hold the stockings smoothly taut.

The white cotton sleeveless chemise was a mere band that buttoned up the back to serve as a corset liner. Next came a pair of white cotton ladies' slit crotch drawers that reached the upper calf and were adorned with tiers of white lace ruffles in the fashion of Pettipants that tied by ribbons at the waist.

Slipping on the golden yellow satin topped slippers with two inch spool-heels, referred to as “baby French”, and a ladies' flannel robe he nervously made the trip from his room to Mrs. Turner's. On the way he passed a giggling Miss Donner and a very

amused curtsying Cagney, who followed him into Mrs. Turner's room, where she awaited with the rest of his costume.

Since he had been following the first part of the ritual every morning before going to work he meekly stood before the bedpost. He held the corset about his waist as Mrs. Turner wrapped the new, white satin covered, heavy canvas and whale boned torturer's device in place.

Once she had started the top lacing she added to his embarrassment by lifting the fatty tissue of his bosom so that it was braced by the top curving lines of the bodice-shaping corset, creating the image of little maidenly breasts.

"When I was a child, a young debutante longed for a waist that a large strong man could fit his hands about," Mrs. Turner observed as she continued to draw taut the 'pull' loop laces along the tapered back of the corset.

"Your 36 inch bustline had a huge 31 inch waist. Much too much for a young lady. But with proper training we have reduced your bustline to a proper 34 inches, with lovely bosoms," she noted with an amused smile, "and a well trained 22 inch waist that has been the envy of the campus. This new corset will give you a dainty 20 inches."

"But," he began to protest in horrified disbelief that such a new torture was possible, when Mrs. Turner handed a pull loop to Cagney and they both tugged as he grasped the bedpost for support and almost fainted.

The viselike corset squeezed his waist, braced his spine into a ramrod straightness, pressed flat his loins, and forced his posterior upwards to add a long S curve to his



body's profile. His bust and rear seemed to protrude almost equally, while imposing an hourglass shape from bustline to waist, to a 36 inch hipline in front and an obviously female pear shape in the rear.

"It fits her perfectly," Cagney exclaimed happily while she lifted each fatty pad that mimicked a breast and pushed a satin covered bust pad into the top of the corset bodice. Paul tried to breathe with little gulps of air that gave the illusion that his `breasts' were heaving almost sexually. In fact, Cagney noted in his wide eyed stare that the corset's grasp had caused him to respond with sexual urgency, but the tight Venus pad prevented any sign of his response.

Seeing his distress she giggled and helped him to a chair where he sat down. The corset's downward pressure made him dash to the bathroom in panic.

A few minutes later a shamed face Paul returned to Mrs. Turner's bedroom, realizing that he had dashed off to the bath room in his lingerie only and obviously female breasts bouncing nakedly past a rather astonished Mr. Bates, who taught English Literature at the college and now wondered even more about his strange colleague.

As he stood in shame over being seen so nearly naked in lingerie, Cagney helped him into a silken vest-like corset cover that left the upper half of his naked breasts exposed.

Next came what was properly called the `patent tilter', a half pound bell-shaped cage arrangement that hooked below the pointed bodice of the corset at the waistline. It consisted of graduated rounds of resilient steel wire dangling from satin cloth tapes, that provided the hooped framework for a huge, smooth, white slipper satin over crinoline petticoat with a lace ruffled hem to match the ruffles of the petticipants.

The pale yellow satin gown presented three visual sections sewn into a single ball gown, the hooped bell shaped skirt, the smooth fitted bodice, and the draping of the neckline and sleeves.

From the floor to the front pointed waist of the bodice the great bell shaped skirt consisted of ten overlapping ruffled tiers of pale yellow silk each trimmed with ruffling white French lace. At each side by the hipline in front of this skirt, about a third of the way up from the hem, was a silken bouquet of yellow tea roses intermingled with green fern and dainty little white fairy bride flowers on a golden yellow satin bow.

The pale yellow satin over stiff muslin bodice laced in the back with yellow satin cording to fit tightly over the basic lines of the corset. IT had a pointed base in the front and a firm waistline to add to the flounces of the ruffled skirt. At the center of the bustline of the bodice there was a third silken bouquet on a yellow bow.

The gown's strapless, off the shoulder neckline appeared to be secured in front by this lovely bodice bouquet. It consisted of a single tier of the ruffled pale yellow satin trimmed on its top and bottom with matching ruffling of white French lace wrapped about the shoulders like a little shawl. It met in front to provide a discrete concealment for lovely, womanly breasts. The three matching ruffled sleeve tiers came from beneath this shawl to just above the elbow.

A five button pair of tight yellow satin, short dainty gloves trimmed at the cuffs with white lace, to match the decorative satin bows and shoe tops, were slipped on to his

hands to be carefully smoothed and buttoned at the wrist. These were followed by an elaborate gold hoop bracelet for his right wrist and the golden draw strings of a little gold mesh draw purse for his left wrist to match the gold fan he was to carry.

In the purse he carried a dainty ladies handkerchief, a small lip rouge compact, a little wooden powder box with mirror and puff inside, his house keys, change for the ladies' room attendant, and trolley fare home to remind him of a lady's honor, in case her date should be too bold.

"It was quite natural for a southern belle to wear a simple black velvet ribbon about her neck with a golden cross dangling from it, to mourn the French royalty guillotined during the French Revolution. There was much sympathy in the South for this monarchy," Mrs. Turner noted, as she tied the little ribbon and cross in place.

Cagney parted his golden hair down the center and drew it smooth over his temples to emphasize his high forehead, while she used a French curling iron to set his almost dry hair into corkscrew curls about his ears and the back of his neckline. She pinned a matching chignon from ear to ear on the back of his coiffure with long dangling golden curls draping above these little curls from ear to ear in back to almost reach his bare white shoulders.

"My grandmother wore these yellow tinted diamond earrings," Mrs. Turner announced, holding a large needle in her hand as she held the tip to the flame of a candle.

Before he knew what she was doing he felt a sharp pin prick at his earlobe and realized, to his horror, that the diamond pendant earrings were being fitted by the determined woman into his newly pierced ears!

"I'm marked for life!" he protested angrily.

"Silly child, they are hanging from gold earring posts and the little holes will quickly heal closed. Unless you decide to keep on wearing ladies clothes, or become a pirate," Mrs. Turner chided, placing her hand upon his chin and gazing into his eyes. "I swear that Katherine was absolutely right, you are most certainly a natural beauty with that ivory white skin, heart shaped face, doll like eyes, and dainty upturned nose."

Still smarting from his ear piercing, he had little to say about this new compliment as she sat him before her little vanity table. She took out tweezers to shape his brows into a more feminine arch despite his protests. But he knew that it would be useless to resist as Cagney held his daintily gloved hands.

Mrs. Turner took a kohl pencil and used the soft black liner to outline each eye. After this came a mascara called Fard Indien used to shade the eyelashes by coloring each lash above and below his eyes a soft brown. She used a light oil like preparation to highlight his eyelids.

She then applied a clear face powder to his face to conceal any blemishes before she dabbed a reddish rouge to his lips to give them a rosebud shape.

She completed his make-up by using a little powder puff containing a reddish Indian earth from a clay pot to add a soft blush to his high cheek bones, brought into

prominence by his thinness, and to highlight his face here and there to provide contrast for the soft glow of evening gaslight.

The last items were a fancy golden mask to conceal the eyes with a matching golden fan...

"My goodness, Ma'am, she is absolutely beautiful," Cagney exclaimed as she released his hands and held up a hand mirror for Paul to see.

In the mirror Paul saw the image he half dreaded, half delighted in, seeing as the beautiful golden haired woman smiled back at him. He felt an instant of sexual arousal held softly in check by the Venus napkin between `her' legs.

"No one would ever guess..."

Despite her words poor Paul knew to his utter shame that everyone would recognize the handsome southern officer in his prewar militia uniform and his beautiful golden southern belle with her perfectly corseted debutante waist as they danced at the Halloween Ball.

"And here is our beautiful Paula, out of her ugly trousers," Mrs. Upton announced happily as she greeted Katherine and Paul in the foyer to the faculty club. Two students dressed as maids took their wraps.

"The men are in the smoking lounge," she continued with a knowing smile towards Katherine, who gave Paul a little kiss on the cheek before she retreated to the company of the other `men'. Paul was left in the clutches of Mrs. Upton, whose bright blue eyes matched the sky blue taffeta of her early Victorian ball gown.

As they mounted the stairs towards the powder room, Mrs. Upton's eyes fixed upon the obvious charms displayed by *Paula's* décolletage as she noted with satisfaction how well *Paula* managed her skirts ascending the stairs.

"I must confess that I had my doubts, but Katherine is right, you are an absolute beauty."

"Why, thank you, Professor Upton," Paul responded in feminine tones, remembering the graciousness of returning compliment for compliment. "I love the way that your ball gown compliments the sparkle of your eyes; it must be a Parisian original."

"In fact, it was once worn by my grandmother, and it was made in New York," Mrs. Upton countered with an amused little laugh. She slid open the double doors leading to the powder room, revealing most of the faculty and staff women of the college in last minute preparations for the ball,. The heavy floral scent of their various perfumes hung in the air.

"You have passed my test. Let us see how you do with this mob, Professor Brown," she whispered. She stood aside almost as if she fully intended to block any retreat from this feminine group and their excited chattering and giggling.

Paula held her head erect while she made her entrance into this sea of fragrant perfumes. She made her way towards Mrs. Dutton, the President of Rose Oak College, and executed a deep curtsy in a cloud of pale yellow skirts. Under all this feminine finery and bravery, poor Paul was totally humiliated, and the lovely glow in his cheeks that the ladies noted was his blushing shame.

“Oh, how lovely you look, my dear Paula!” Mrs Dutton exclaimed in surprise, as she extended her arms to accept Paula into a matronly hug followed by a little kiss on the cheek. “Paula is our dear Professor Brown, who teaches our young ladies such matters as chemistry. Might I present her to you, ladies,” she continued with satisfaction, addressing the circle of matrons about her who were, mostly alumni of the college: Mrs. Simms, who was the wife of a noted text book publisher; Mrs. Barker, the wife of a leading state politician; Mrs. Arthur, the wife of the Chief Warden of the State's prison system; and Mrs. Weston, who was the Headmistress of a well known exclusive girl's school before she married.

Much to Paul's relief Mrs. Dutton appeared content to leave the his true identity a secret as she introduced the ladies about her. A maid slipped an orange satin ribbon about his wrist that held a dance calendar containing the evening's program, a little pencil, and a list of the dances to be played by the orchestra along with a place for her dance partners to sign their names.

Just as he politely disengaged himself from Mrs. Dutton's little circle to permit a new guest to be introduced to this informal reception line, a little bell tinkled to announce that the grand march was about to start. Taking a quick glance into a nearby mirror he tucked in a stray curl before gathering his skirts in order to join the ladies walking to the top of the stairs to be joined by their escorts.

Katherine accepted Paul's arm with a rather superior looking smile as she announced rather matter-of-factly, “I must say that I have the most beautiful girl at the ball.”

“Where?” Paul half teased as he pretended to be looking for the ‘girl’ that Katherine spoke of. He did note that his military escort had already partaken of a cigar and brandy while he hadn't even been offered a glass of punch. No wonder the modern feminists were so down on the “evils” of alcohol and tobacco, it wasn't considered lady-like to be offered, or accept, either.

“Remember to save the first, intermission, and last dance for your escort,” Katherine noted as polite applause greeted the ladies and gentleman in the grand march. They descended the staircase to cross the ball room floor in step to the orchestra's string rendition of Sousa's *Liberty Bell March*, which faded into a waltz version when the couples reached the end of the line. They peeled off arm in arm into the dance. As Katherine led Paul through the first circle of the waltz, she stole a little kiss during the double turn and watched Paul as he tended to his hoop skirts.

“You certainly don't intend for me to dance with some other, um... man?” Paul protested. She swept him back into her arms, causing him to realize that Katherine was completely into the role of being a man, perhaps more so than he was into being the belle of the ball.

“Why not? Ladies adore dancing. And who knows, you might find your real Prince Charming tonight. You have no idea how many handsome young men have been staring at you as we dance by. And you certainly do not want to attract unfavorable attention towards yourself by insisting that you are a man,” Katherine teased. She spoke with an amused little masculine chuckle that brought a blush to Paul's cheeks. “I would not think of denying you the pleasure of being the center of masculine atten-

tion. It is only natural that a beautiful woman like yourself would attract such interest. Besides, I have already promised a few of the ladies my own company.”

Just as he was about to comment on her plans for the evening, the music finished. He found himself temporarily abandoned before a wave of men dressed in various costumes. They surrounded him; all attempting to attract his feminine interest as they begged for a chance to dance with the ‘southern belle’.

To his utter amazement he found himself picking and choosing partners from the college male staff. He was like a giggling schoolgirl until he had to beg to be released from their attentions because his card was filled. As the men about him retreated in triumph or in disappointment, he noticed with some alarm the envious glare of several of the ladies.

Then the music began and Professor Farnsworth stepped forward to claim his dance; the ‘southern belle’ was swept into a Strauss waltz.

Paul could not believe that he was dancing in the arms of a man, who appeared to have no idea that Paul wasn't a woman. He could smell the man's after shave lotion and feel the strong masculine muscles of his partner's body as they moved onto the dance floor. As Paul followed Farnsworth's lead, his mind was filled with the mechanics of the dance. His partner was insisting upon closing the ‘polite distance’ with each sweeping turn while his massive hand rested on a tiny waistline. He tried not to think about how weak and feminine he felt in the man's strong, possessive arms that commanded his dainty high heeled slippered feet to move quickly to the waltz beat. His bosom was heaving in an all too feminine need to breathe from the excitement of the dance and the tightness of his corset.

Suddenly Paul began to realize that the swirling motions of his hoop skirt, the tightness of his corset pulling against his silken covered thighs, and his efforts to breathe brought about an intoxication of sensuality. It sent a flush of urging warmth from his frictioned loins to maidenly eager little breasts with their tight nipples.

Farnsworth whispered something about how beautiful Paula was, and the man's deep masculine voice sounded wonderfully possessive.

Paula could not understand it, to his total shame he felt strangely attracted to his partner's maleness, and for the rest of the evening Paula's mind was filled with fantasies too humiliating to repeat as each partner claimed *her* for a dance.

Paula felt the world swaying beneath her little slippered feet while the mirrors about the ballroom reflected her obvious smiling delight over being a woman possessed by a man...

0-0-0

“Oh, oh! Why am I in a corset?” Paul moaned as he turned in bed, fearing that somehow someone had discovered his shameful past. “Who are you?”

“Mrs. Belton,” came the crisp reply, as she looked uncertainly at her patient. Having pieced together enough of his delirious dreams to understand his concerns about the corset, she realized that properly dressed and coiffured he would indeed make a

very pretty woman. Certainly prettier than most of the rather plain looking women in Belton.

"You are not going to a Halloween Ball," she continued, seeing by his blush that she knew of his secret shame. She added with a little smile, "A bullet broke a rib and we had to use a corset as a medical brace. Although I must add that my corset only provides a rather matronly twenty four inch waist, now that you have been wearing it for almost two weeks. But who knows what we could do in the months ahead."

"I'd rather not find out, Ma'am," he countered with a little laugh. He stirred in bed realizing, that his rear end had been propped up to accommodate a bed pan. "Do you think that I could sit up and have some of that hot chocolate? I'm starved."

"Certainly," she responded, knowing that Doc had decided they could feed their patient now that he was certain there was no longer fear of internal bleeding from the wounds.

She removed the empty bed pan and allowed him to move himself slowly into a seated position as she arranged the pillows for back support.

"The chocolate is only warm, but I will go downstairs and bring you some leftovers from supper."

"Thank you, Ma'am," he managed. He looked about the dimly lit room remembering the other times that he had briefly awoken to see the same room. There was a young girl of high school age and an oriental woman watching over him then. Although his mind was not totally clear, he was aware of the fact that he had been on opiates for almost two weeks, and he knew from his past hospital and prison experience that he would have to go through withdrawal all over again. He remembered a promise to sketch the robbers, and he wondered what had happened since he had been shot.

Mrs. Belton returned with a covered tray. After she had positioned a little eating table before him, she placed the tray upon it and removed the cover to reveal a chicken dinner complete with mashed potatoes and gravy and green beans.

"I promised a young girl that I would sketch the bandits," he stated as he took another sip of the hot chocolate and began to eat some chicken. "My sketch pad and art supplies were in an artist portfolio in the stage coach."

"I suspect that they are on the back porch with your other belongings," Mrs. Belton suggested, sitting down in the straight back chair by his bedside. "We really haven't paid much attention to such things because of our constant need to watch over you."

"What has happened since the robbery?"

"Well, technically Paul Brown perished with the others," she began explaining. She told him of the events that had happened since the stage coach robbery and their concern that the surviving robbers might find out about his survival. "Now, what is this about your raping a girl and being sent to prison?"

He looked at her in shock, only to look away from her hard stare to say, "When I was a teacher at Rose Oak College for Women I was falsely accused, by two girls, of raping them. I was sent to prison for twenty years. About six months after I went to prison the mother of one of the girls found her diary which detailed the truth. They

thought that it was the perfect revenge for having received a failing grade in chemistry. I was granted a pardon. It is in my artist portfolio along with my teaching certificates and other papers.”

“Wait,” she announced, as if he were able to crawl out of bed while she went to search for the portfolio. In a minute she returned with it in her hands.

As he watched and ate his meal she anxiously searched the leather case. She produced from an inner compartment the documents that he talked about. However, she also discovered with these papers an English Passport, issued in Dublin, made out for a ‘Maggie Kelly’, and a marriage license for a John O’Hare and Maggie Kelly. Although curious about these additional documents, she was satisfied that he was not the rapist that she feared.

“Well, that settles that nightmare. So why didn’t you go back to teaching?”

“Rose Oak would not have me back, and frankly I’d had enough of spoiled little girls. I was quite happy to receive a job from my cousin, Robert Brown, who owns the Yankee Dollar Saloon.”

“This town needed the poor young lady who was riding with you as a school teacher more than it needs another bartender,” Mrs. Belton complained angrily.

Chapter 4: Paul's Recovery

"What on earth is that?" Mrs. Belton exclaimed. She looked at the tall crate on the back of Doc's wagon, noting that the sheriff was riding with him.

"A hospital chair," Doc announced as he set the brakes and hitched his horse to the kitchen hitching post. He dismounted from the wagon while the sheriff arose to help unload the wagon from his end. "Hoyden dropped by and told the sheriff that your patient was awake."

"Well, I'll send Hoyden to help you," Mrs. Belton offered as the two men struggled with the crate. She went back into the house to find Hoyden white washing the basement walls.

With hammer in hand Hoyden soon had the crate open and helped to remove a large wooden chair.

The wicker, high-backed hospital chair with arm rests and a foot rest had two large bicycle type wheels and a set of smaller wheels supporting its frame. A fold back tray designed like a toddler's high chair tray was for feeding. Judging by the straps at the waist, on the arm rests, and on the foot rest the chair was designed more to be pushed by someone else than to be operated by the patient. The seat of the chair lifted to reveal a removable chamber pot.

Hoyden eyed the large chair with uncertainty as she observed, "It would be easier to carry the poor critter."

"You may have a point there," Doc responded with a laugh and pushed the chair into the kitchen. Between them they managed to make the back servants stairs with the chair and soon they got to Paul's room, where he was sitting in bed sketching while Sarah watched.

"We brought you a chair to sit up in. Mrs. Belton has promised to build a ramp between the two stairways and soon you can use a regular bathroom."

"What, and give up all this wonderful hotel room service?" Paul joked, feeling the shaking uncertainties of his withdrawal.

"One can get spoiled by too much of a good thing," Mrs. Belton observed as she looked at the sketch. "Why, that is Bill Jefferson. He was one of our hands for a while."

"Well, one by one, I'm getting quite a portrait gallery," Sheriff Larson observed with satisfaction.

"Well, I think that our patient needs a bit of rest," Doc said, taking the sketch pad away as he noticed Paul's shaking hands. He said that the young man's arms had been shaven, no doubt when he had been bathed in bed by one of the ladies. "You been through this before?"

"Yes, when they took out the sniper's bullet they fed me opiates for weeks. Will it be worse this time?"

"Probably a week or so," Doc noted casually. "The newest medical word is that we cut the medication totally. No smaller doses to wean you from it."

He turned to Mrs. Belton and Sarah to explain that Paul was going to be very sick from withdrawal symptoms caused by denying him any more opiates.

"In a week, it might be a good idea to get him into the chair and get him someplace where he can breathe fresh air, like the upstairs porch. It's pretty close in here."

"It's a lot closer in a coffin," the sheriff observed. "I'm not sure that we can risk wheeling him out into plain view of the front road."

Doc shrugged and patted Paul on the head. "I'll leave you to the women and Hoyden. I've got other patients."

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"Well, Mrs. Belton, if you expect me to paint the kitchen porch, you will have to tell me where you want me to stick the luggage and crates you have stored there," Hoyden announced as she set her breakfast cup of coffee aside.

"Oh, my goodness! I have forgotten all about those things," Mrs. Belton exclaimed. "The luggage should be unpacked and the clothes cleaned if we intend to give them away to the annual charity clothes drive this fall. And you can have one of the hands haul the book crates to the school house basement for now. Check with Miss Sawyer for the key to the school house."

Mrs. Belton took a sip from her coffee cup. "Since I have volunteered to sit with Mrs. Pearson for the weekend, now that she has had her baby, I will expect that you, Sarah, will help Mrs. Wong with cleaning the clothes and things in the luggage of those unfortunate women."

"Oh, mother," Sarah complained, but seeing her mother's frown she sighed. "Where shall we put them all after they are cleaned?"

"Well, there is the front bedroom where Paul is. It has a nice empty closet, lots of drawer space and that large divided wardrobe. I doubt that his few clothes will take up much space," Mrs. Belton said with a smile. "Heaven only knows, he may amuse himself by trying their clothes on."

"Mother," Sarah protested, only to hear about Paul's dressing as a southern belle for a Halloween Ball. She tried to picture the poor man in bed dressed in an elegant ball gown and wondered, "Do you think that he was all that beautiful? I think a man would look comical in a women's dress."

"There are some men who are quite pretty as women," Mrs. Belton noted. "There is a very famous female impersonator out east called Julian Eltinge, who is absolutely believable. I saw his picture in Post Magazine. Who knows? Our patient is petite enough."

"Do you really think so, Mother?"

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Paul was swimming in a pool of warm red blood that moved like a slow whirlpool in a vast red river. The harder he tried to swim, the faster the blood swirled about him until he was gasping for breath.

Suddenly it was a lovely spring day in 1900. Paul delighted in the bicycle ride along the paved streets of the campus from his classroom building to his boarding house. Everywhere there was the scent of burning leaves while the spring roses and lilacs added their sweet aromas to the air. Dismounting, he locked the wheel into the bike rack and removed the bicycle clips that prevented his trouser cuffs from becoming entangled in the chain or gears. He had just entered Mrs. Turner's boarding house to be greeted by the curtsying maid, Cagney.

"Good afternoon, Professor Brown," Cagney announced with a bright amused smile. She took his top coat and fedora hat, which she placed in the foyer closet before he stuck his umbrella into a nearby umbrella stand and placed his briefcase by the social table.

"And the top of the day to you, my fair maid," he greeted her, picking up the bundle of letters from the silver tray on the social table to sort through it for his own mail.

"Oh, Paul, come join us, dearest," Kathrine's excited voice called from the parlor. She arose from her chair to rush to his side and gave him a dutiful kiss on the cheek. He could smell the hint of floral perfume she wore. "I have a wonderful surprise for you!"

It was almost six months from that eventful Halloween Party, and her last "wonderful surprise". In the parlor over the fireplace mantel hung a portrait, executed in pastels by Miss Donner from a photograph, of the *Southern Belle* in her yellow ball gown. This conversation piece was a constant reminder to Paul of Katherine's last "wonderful surprise". Fortunately, his masculine pride had survived the ordeal; and, except for the portrait, the campus seemed to have forgotten the incident.

"Surprise?" he asked, returning the kiss. He half wondered if she had decided to accept his proposal. *It was about time*, he thought.

"The Faculty Drama Club is planning to compete in the Spring Drama Festival," Kathrine responded with feminine enthusiasm, leading him into the parlor. Mrs. Turner, the owner of his rooming house; Miss Donner, from the English Department; and Mrs. Fisher, from the Drama Department were taking afternoon tea. "Join us, dear, and we will tell you all about our wonderful plans."

"Just for a little while, ladies, I have some tests to grade before supper," he noted as he joined the ladies by taking a seat in an overstuffed chair and accepting a cup of tea from Mrs. Turner. Gingerly, he took a little sip of the hot tea, enjoying its orange scent in the midst of the floral perfumes and the fresh smell of Spring flowers that decorated the tea tray. Balancing his napkin, teacup and saucer, he picked up a little fudge brownie from the tea tray. "So what play are you going to stage?"

"The Importance of Being Earnest," Miss Donner exclaimed happily, only to bow her head in retreat from Katherine's frown. She added quietly, "A naughty little comedy by Oscar Wilde."

"Professor Jack Robertson has agreed to play Jack, one of the male leads. As you know, the girls consider him to be quite handsome," Mrs. Fisher offered eagerly, "with his Barrymore profile."

"Quite a catch," Paul noted, using the feminine phrase with a wry smile. He set aside his tea things to stretch in the easy chair and arise. "Sounds great to me. Now, I have some tests to grade."

"Oh, but Paul, there is so much more," Katherine protested in frustration over his abrupt efforts to flee. "For instance, we have been looking for a talented, beautiful blonde to play the part of Miss Gwendolen Fairfax, one of the female leads in the play. Who would you suggest?"

"Well," Paul began, thinking of Mrs. Teasdale, when the Cheshire Cat smiles of the women before him sent a cold chill to the back of his neck. "Oh, no you don't! No, never again!"

"What?" Katherine responded with a surprised look. She glanced towards the other ladies to exclaim, "Oh, what a wonderful idea! Our Paul can be Miss Fairfax!"

"Just like the Shakespearean Stage, with a man playing a female part," Mrs. Fisher agreed with enthusiastic delight. "It will be the hit of the festival!"

"Oh, Paul, you are just full of surprises," Mrs. Turner chortled appreciatively of their little trap and the look of fearful anticipation on Paul's face. "I'm certain that Mrs. Dutton will agree that it is a wonderful plan." She paused after mentioning the college president's name to look critically at Paul. "Our leading lady will have to stop eating sweets, and get back into a proper figure."

"Of course, I forgot Mrs. Dutton," Miss Donner observed with a knowing nod. "It is getting near the time that our contracts are renewed. I believe that Mrs. Dutton was talking to Katherine about your contract at the faculty tea."

"Why should Katherine be talking to her about my contract?" Sensing that the trap had been sprung long before he entered the parlor, he turned to Kathrine. "Well, what did Mrs. Dutton say?"

"Well, it is only natural that I be concerned, with our forthcoming wedding and all," Katherine responded with a little pout of disappointment. "She is quite pleased with how well you fit in with our women's college faculty. Of course, she agrees that if you were to accept the role of Miss Fairfax in our little play, you would need considerable practice to be believable. The play is to be staged in two months."

"Have you ladies ever thought of picking up the trade of being blackmailers? You are much too clever to be mere women," Paul countered submissively as he sat back into the easy chair. In defeat he accepted another cup of tea from Cagney.

"Mere women, indeed. What an awful thing to say," Mrs. Fisher said with amused thoughtfulness. "We shall soon see what you think about being a 'mere woman', Professor Brown."

"Yes, indeed," Katherine agreed, joining the other ladies in laughter. "You will learn a great deal about being a mere woman when next week you will begin your acting career, Mistress Brown."

To Paul's horror, Saturday and Sunday was dedicated to the creation of 'Miss Gwendolen Fairfax'.

First, there was the foul smelling depilatory paste applied to his body from the neck down that left his skin bright pink and quite hairless.

Second, his longish brown hair, which had barely outgrown the results of his last experience in skirts, was bleached and dyed a soft golden blond. Mrs. Turner used a razor to remove his sideburns and give a feminine shape to his hairline at the back of the neck.

Third, his little mustache was waxed away in a sea of tears while his eyebrows were reshaped into feminine arches. A pedicure was followed by a French manicure. Then his body was treated to lilac scented powdering that left his skin with a creamy white feminine smoothness.

He was spared any fanatical efforts to corset his waist to twenty inches. But from Saturday morning until Monday morning he discovered that they were determined to recover a naturally suitable twenty four inches!

By Monday morning the ladies were prepared to present 'Miss Fairfax' to the campus world.

It all started with a curtsy Cagney drawing the drapes in Paul's room to announce the new day and the need for 'Gwendolen' to remove *her* nightgown and sleep corset so that Mrs. Turner could help *her* to dress for morning convocation.

"Miss James has brought a lovely new dress and hat for you to wear, Miss," she added with cheerful amusement while she set about opening the windows even further for the cool spring breezes. "It is absolutely perfect outside for a walk to the auditorium, and Miss James is waiting to have a light breakfast with you."

"The condemned man was treated to petticoats and breakfast before they hung him," Paul muttered. He turned back the covers enough to realize that it was more than cool in the room, despite the glare of the morning sun rising in a cold cloudless blue sky.

"Let me undo your laces, Miss," Cagney offered knowing that the tight corset over the flannel gown could not easily be removed by poor Paul. After placing Paul's shaving gear by the steaming hot pitcher of water by a wash basin, she hastened to his side to untie the lacing enough so that he could release the steel eyelets in front.

She selected a fresh corset and lingerie for him while he set about to shave and wash up for the day. She was always quite amazed by how little facial hair he did have, for a man. In fact, she knew women who had a thicker little mustache than the one they had waxed off of him Saturday morning.

"I'll put your chemise, garter belt, hose and drawers upon the bed for you to put on while I fetch Mrs. Turner to help you with your new corset."

"New corset?" he asked anxiously, setting his straight razor aside. But seeing nothing to gain by further protest, he continued to shave what little there was.

When he finished this little chore he submissively slipped on the white satin garter belt and sat on the edge of his bed. There, he unrolled up each leg a white silken stocking until each was secured to the snaps on the belt. Seeing little choice, he mod-

estly secured a sanitary napkin in place over his turgid sex, knowing the truth that the excitement of wearing feminine clothes was too much to control.

Once this shameful napkin was in place, he slipped on his satin chemise and crotchless satin drawers.

As if on cue, Mrs. Turner entered the bedroom carrying a long pink box, which she placed upon his bed while Cagney removed a white satin corset cover from the lingerie bureau.

"This is a wonderful new corset from Paris," Mrs. Turner announced, holding a white satin finished corset from the pink box. "It is long waisted with a short hip line for a divinely slender form."

Silently he looked down at the corset front as she attached in place the six hooks that secured the ramrod straight front of the corset. He obediently held on to a bed-post while she began to pull in the white kid leather laces in back. An amused Cagney slipped in two little bust pads under the soft, maidenly breasts formed by the tightening corset.

Mrs. Turner took in the bottom loop about half way to hand it off to Cagney as she began to pull in the waist loops. Slowly the laces inched the back of the corset closed, until he realized that his hips and rear appeared to balloon out in an obvious female shape. His waist grew smaller and smaller as his bustline moved upwards and outwards, revealing two beautiful breasts barely concealed by the chemise and corset.

"Now take a deep breath, Paula," Mrs. Turner urged as she drew the lacing cords at the waist. His tummy vanished into a smooth, flat line from wide female hips and an ever narrowing, long waistline. She tied off the laces and picked up a tape measure she had placed in the corset box. "Let's see, 34 inches," she mused as she measured the bustline. "A perfectly acceptable 20 inch waist, and a rather well proportioned 36 inch hip. By the time of the play we should have your waist to a lovely 18. Men like their women to have tiny waists and wide hips, it means she can have lots of babies."

"Swell, that's all I need," he swore under his breath.

"Well, you need a husband first, Mistress," Cagney exclaimed as she helped him into a white silk corset cover. She had him step into a figure fitting, slim, white taffeta petticoat trimmed at the hem with four inch lace ruffles. Tying the waistline of the petticoat she had him sit on the bed while Mrs. Turner laced his feet into white leather boots with one inch heels.

He then meekly sat down at his vanity table while Cagney supervised his hint of make-up consisting of kohl eyeliner, mascara, lip rouge, and light blush. While he worked with his face powder Mrs. Turner brushed his blonde hair into a matching hair piece, creating a pompadour in front on top of his head. The balance of the hair was rolled into a figure-8 twist down the back of his neck. This was secured by little ivory combs to maintain the smooth hairline. Then a finishing touch of rose perfume at the ears, neck and wrists.

"We will expect you to dress yourself from now on, but for your first day we felt that you might need some moral support, so to speak," Mrs. Turner suggested as she held up a white silken blouse with full sleeves and a high collar trimmed with lace. Button-

ing the back, she had him step into a slim, yellow linen skirt that buttoned tightly at his waist before following the lines of his petticoats to flare out at the ruffled hemline. It modestly concealed the hems of his petticoats, except when Paula might need to lift his skirts slightly to walk up and down stairs. The slim skirt had a pleated fold down the back, but was in fact designed for little, ladylike steps. A wide, white leather belt was cinched about his narrow waist. The formfitting yellow linen long-sleeved suit jacket matched the tapered V of his waist with an equally deep V at the collar line to reveal the bustline of his white blouse.

A little gold watch was slipped into the jacket pocket while a golden heart shaped pendant was hung about the neck. Then came a gold charm bracelet complete with a little lock to secure it about his wrist.

Into a small, seal skin hand bag was placed a folded fan, handkerchief, notebook, pencil, money, lip rouge, powder compact, folded fan, keys, and a polished hazel nut with a silver stopper top which contained smelling salts.

To complete his costume Cagney very carefully pinned a little black, felt, wide brim sailor hat behind his pompadour. She carefully arranged the wide, yellow satin ribbon bows that spilled over the crown of the hat to flow over to the edge of the brim. Securing the wisp of yellow silk veil in front, she stood back to survey their creation.

"It is clear to me that Katherine is quite right when she says that God intended you to be a woman," Mrs. Turner observed with satisfaction. "We must go down for breakfast; she is waiting for you, to take you to morning convocation after the meal."

"Convocation?" he asked fearfully, causing the two women to laugh.

"Of course! Where better to introduce Professor Paula Brown to the faculty and students," Mrs. Turner announced matter-of-factly with an amused shrug. She led the way down the hall to the front stairs where a somewhat subdued Paul lifted his skirts in front and carefully followed her down, revealing the modesty ruffles of his petticoats with just a hint of his pretty white shoes.

When they entered the boarding house dining room the gentlemen politely arose to greet 'Miss Paula', while the ladies nodded their greeting and approval.

"Thank you, Reverend Green, for your thoughtful warnings. We are pleased to open our first Sunday Convocation for Spring Semester of 1900, in this twentieth century of Our Lord at Rose Oak College for Women," Mrs. Dutton, President of Rose Oak began. She followed a rather lengthy 'fire and brimstone' prayer by Reverend Green of the First Baptist Church, who seemed to think that mere fiery words would stem the tide of puberty and potential sin hiding among the lovely ladies of the college.

Poor Paul sat primly in one of the captain-styled oak chairs that lined the stage, just one of several women awaiting their turn to address the ladies. The only man seated on stage was the handsome Professor Robertson, who no doubt was to occupy the podium when the truth about Paul in the height of feminine finery would be announced.

Mrs. Dutton continued her opening words without pause, indicating among many items of importance: Mrs. Arthur, the wife of the Chief Warden of the State's Prison System, would address the ladies on the subject of the need for prison reform; a Dr.

Alice Frank, of the newly formed Psychology Department, would give a demonstration of Mesmerism; and Mrs. Fisher, of the Drama Department, had a very special announcement.

Mrs. Arthur spoke on the new reform idea of turning prisoners into trained factory workers by encouraging the prisons to go into business at special manufacturing plants. Her well received speech was followed by a rather amusing demonstration of hypnotism by Dr. Frank, who transformed various young ladies into chirping birds, barking dogs, and other peculiar creatures.

Mrs. Fisher excitedly announced that the Drama Department was to compete in the Spring Drama Festival by presenting Oscar Wilde's social comedy, The Importance of Being Earnest, and in the classic tradition of the English stage. One of the male members of the faculty would play the lead female role opposite Professor Robertson. "Professor Brown will be living full time as a woman to totally immerse himself in the role, and he, or should I say 'she', asks for your assistance. Perhaps our Paula and Dr. Robertson might join me at the podium?"

A titter of whispered chatter swept through the school's auditorium, causing Paul to realize that he had been recognized. A burst of applause greeted him as he gracefully took his place by his leading man.

The scene became blurry, and then refocused in a different room. Paul set aside the new chemistry text book that he was discussing with Professor Upton while they were sharing a table in the faculty club lounge for high tea in the late afternoon.

Quite casually he turned to face the wall mirror. He raised his left hand to adjust a golden curl that had slipped from the smooth curve of his high forehead pompadour, out from beneath the pink silk boat-like hat filled with roses. It was perched upon the pompadour as if it were riding a wave. Satisfied that the curl was tamed, he turned from the mirror retaining in his mind's eye the image of a beautiful woman dressed in a pale pink silk chiffon tea gown embroidered with tiny red tea roses. By now he had grown accustomed to seeing the image of a beautiful woman every time he looked in a mirror. Yet, no matter how casual he appeared to be about campus or before the amused young ladies in his classes, he was still humiliated by the idea of being required to parade about in skirts as some sort of effeminate.

What bothered Paul most of all was the constant public rehearsal of his lines in the play expected by Katherine and the other ladies. It broke into what little reserve he could muster while he tried to accept as normal his petticoated existence.

"I quite agree that the German citations in his footnotes are bothersome and certainly not useful to our average student," Professor Upton noted in reference to the text book, before she took a sip of tea. Her eyes studied Paula with delighted interest over how well her assistant suited the role of a natural woman. Having a man on her staff had always irked her. Paula was such an amiable substitute that she almost dreaded the return of Paul after the play. "I do wish we could do away with such pedantics."

"It is all part of the idea that the only scientists in the world are German. Especially in the field of chemistry. I sometimes feel that I am expected to have a long white beard and speak with a heavy German accent," Paula responded with a little laugh to

be joined by his department head. He happened to catch a glimpse of Professor Robertson entering the lounge and heading for their table. "Oh no, not here."

"What is it, dear?" Professor Upton asked, turning her head to follow Paula's gaze. "Oh, it's that nice Professor Robertson. And I do believe that Jack is heading our way. Excuse me, I shall leave you with your gentleman friend..."

"Oh, please, don't leave me," Paula begged, only to fall silent in fear that someone might overhear the plea.

"Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax," Professor Robertson announced in his deep baritone stage voice. Several of the ladies and gentlemen paused in mid-conversation to see what was happening.

Paula mentally reviewed the script to Wilde's play to remember the cue for Miss Fairfax's response. Nervously he placed his right hand to his throat beneath the high lace of his collar in a gesture of vulnerability, while looking up with a warm smile of greeting towards the handsome professor. "Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr. Worthing. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else. And that makes me so nervous."

A polite wave of appreciative applause filled the faculty lounge as those present realized that they were being treated to a preview from the Drama Club's play, The Importance of Being Earnest.

Paula and Professor Robertson went through the scene admirably. They traded quips with practiced timing, and the makeshift audience enjoyed themselves. As the scene drew on, however, it became more heated. Finally, "Mr. Worthing" proposed to "Lady Farifax".

"My own one, I have never loved anyone in the world but you," Professor Robertson murmured.

"Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girlfriends tell me so," Paula teased. But 'she' was surprised to see Jack move closer and she continued her lines uncertainly. "What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present..."

Whatever Paula may have added was smothered by Jack passionate kiss. It stunned the audience by its obvious sexuality as poor Paula tried to break free only to faint to the sound of applause and cheers....

As he went under the whirlpool of swirling blood gasping for breath, he discovered to his horror that the body of Alice Addams intertwined with his and the loose folds of her voluminous gown entangling his arms. The weight of her body and clothes were pulling him down, down, down!

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Suddenly he broke free for air feeling a crystal clarity!

The slow rocking movement of the State Prison wagon was reassuring, as it rolled through the cold fall 1891 night. But it was bringing back through his delirium memories that he least wanted to relive.

Paul was chained to a bench shoulder to shoulder with other men awaiting to serve out their terms. His mind tried to blot out the unfairness of his trial and the total hysteria caused by the Caldwell sisters when they screamed out in vivid detail how he had raped them.

“Number 666932!” a voice shouted when the wagon stopped. The double doors on the wagon flew open to reveal a cold, dark gravel courtyard. “Wake up, you bastards! 666932!”

Paul remembered his number: “Here, sir!”

“Damn!” the voice shouted as two men in guard uniforms fussed with Paul’s chains. They dragged him from the wagon and pushed him to the ground. One of the guards re-closed the wagon and the other amused himself by kicking Paul in the ribs until he managed to stagger to his feet.

“Maybe next time you will remember your number,” the guard warned. Two large men in white jackets appeared from a basement side door of the great Victorian stone mansion. “He’s all yours!”

“Come on,” another voice in the dark ordered. Paul could hear the sound of the wagon continuing its journey, leaving him alone with his white jacketed guards. They guided him across the gravel courtyard as he struggled with the short steps forced upon him by the leg irons.

Between the clumsy short chain of the shackles and the sharp pain in his ribs from the kicking, it seemed like half an hour before the two men in white brought to the basement where they had come from. A small, 7 by 7 cell lighted by a hall gas lamp awaited him. Through the iron bars he saw an iron cot, a toilet and a mirrored wooden sink complete with a wash cloth and towel.

“You can clean up, use the toilet and get some sleep.” The white jacketed guards removed his leg irons and handcuffs before pushing him into his cell.

In the last few weeks of ongoing brutality, Paul had learned to take advantage of any hospitality he could find. On the cot was a white denim pajama set with a pair of black cotton slippers placed nearby on the floor. After taking advantage of the toilet, he turned his attention to cleaning off the road dust. Removing his clothes, he quickly used the bar of soap and wash cloth by the sink full of hot water for a quick, standing wash down. He took time to hang up the wash cloth and towel at the foot of his bed before he put on the pajamas.

A minute later he fell into a deep sleep, thinking that it was as good as any military cot after such a long journey.

A guard in a white jacket entered Paul's cell to check that he was asleep. Satisfied, he took Paul's clothes and shoes before he relocked the cell and turned off the hall gas light. Carrying Paul's clothes, he walked down the darkened hall.

Paul was wakened by the sound of a bugle blowing Reveille, followed by an explosion of men's voices and running feet. For a moment he thought that he was back in the army, and he jumped from bed with racing heart. He realizing that he must be late

for formation and had better get into uniform to report to his company. This delusion did not last long.

His dusty clothes were gone, and he was alone in a basement prison cell. The only light was coming through a little barred window high over his cot. Using the toilet he wondered why no one came to process him, or whatever they did to new prisoners.

Outside, the sound of marching men and shouted military drill commands faded with the morning sunshine from his room. Paul realized that he hadn't eaten in over twenty hours, since his disembarking from a train to enter the prison wagon.

He thought about yelling out to demand breakfast, but he doubted that he had been forgotten. He was intelligent enough to know that he was no longer in charge of his life.

In the past month he had been beaten senseless twice, for little reason, by sheriff's deputies. They had no time for a man accused of raping two teenage girls. He had no desire to add to these memories by receiving the ire of his new guards. He could just as well skip their attentions and a few meals.

His day passed slowly, only punctuated by the prison sounds outside, away from his view. All he was left to do was to use his toilet, drink water and sleep.

One day turned to five days. His body stank to high heaven despite his frequent sink baths, but the good news was that he was no longer hungry. Except for an occasional piss, he had little use for the toilet.

From his short year in the cavalry as an officer he had learned many things about human endurance. Once, as troop commander leading a patrol, he discovered a small band of Apaches in New Mexico territory. They had died of thirst because their destination well had dried up. They looked as if they had died in their sleep.

"A strong man can live about a week without water, sir," Sergeant Washington offered, as the troop moved back towards the fort to report.

"How long can a man live without food, sergeant?" Lieutenant Brown asked, as he eased back in his saddle.

"Several weeks, as long as there is plenty of fresh water about, sir. Probably the Biblical ninety days and nights. A lot depends on how fat you are to start. But my dad, who was a preacher back in Illinois, said that a fast should last no longer than a lunar moon," Sergeant Washington answered. He glanced over his shoulder to see the troop column tagging along like a giant tail, two by two, followed by four wagons and the rear guard patrol. "The first week you stink to high heaven. Then the body has no hunger, and you begin to gradually smell sweeter, until the third week when you actually feel refreshed and clean. By the twenty third day your appetite returns and you feel wonderfully healthy and happy. Then you had better take juices and break the fast for a few days. Then you can start all over again for another month."

"How on earth did your father learn about fasting?"

"He was a prisoner of war, back in 1865. That's how he survived. He was so thin when he was released that he claimed you could see daylight through his hands..."

Paul sat on the wood floor for his morning exercise. He followed the cadence coming from his window that announced that his fellow prisoners were at drill. By his own count of the days, he knew that he was reaching the limits of a fast as described by his troop first sergeant.

“Good morning, 666932,” a deep voice said from the cell door. “It's time for your breakfast.”

Uncertainly, he stood up at attention and saw a man dressed in a white coat. He entered the cell carrying a large glass of orange juice.

Accepting the juice, he slowly drank it down. The man in the white coat smiled and drew from his pocket a hypodermic needle with a little bottle of brownish fluid.

“Place the glass in the sink and roll up your right sleeve.”

“How come I'm not with the other prisoners?” Paul managed to ask from what little courage he had left. The man injected the fluid into his arm and Paul realized that he had just been given a powerful opiate. It was similar to the stuff that they had filled him with at the military hospital, before they took out the sniper bullet that had felled him during the charge at San Juan Hill.

It felt like pure heroin, as fiery traces flooded the capillaries of his arm. He unsteadily placed the empty orange juice glass in the sink, only to feel the man's arms about his body as if to catch him. Another man took the other side and guided him from the cell down a long, stone walled hall. They passed through a double iron gate into what appeared to be the servants' quarters of the great house.

Barely conscious, he watched the hallway swirl in and out of his mind amid the colors he remembered from the past.

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In the Belton home, Paul awoke from his withdrawal fever in surprise. He could hear the sounds of pounding, women talking and furniture being moved on squeaky wheels. In disbelief he discovered that the guest bedroom had been turned into a woman's bedroom.

Mingled with the scent of furniture polish and the ever present odor of burning kerosene, there was added the sweet smell of floral sashays and feminine perfumes. Paul thought he could make out the crisp, clean smell of starched, air-dried clothes.

The entrance wall faced his bed. To his right was the bedroom door. To the left was a door that led to a large closet built under the upstairs staircase. In the center was a huge cherry-wood dresser with a dressing mirror.

The wall to his right had a lingerie chest near the entrance door, a large window, a vanity table with mirror, another large window, and then a marble-top ladies' wash-stand.

To the right and left of his four poster bed was a bookcase-styled night-stand, both flanked by a window. Each window in the room had lace curtains framed by dark green velvet drapes.

The left wall was centered by a huge, divided double wardrobe. Under each of the four mirrored closet doors was a drawer for shoe and boot storage. On top of each mirrored door was a cabinet door where hats were stored.

The opened closet and wardrobe doors revealed an array of women's dresses, gowns, skirts and coats. While the vanity displayed various cosmetic items, perfume bottles and a large jewelry case.

The bookcase night stands by his bed were filled with the books that the ladies had carried in their personal luggage for light reading as they traveled, as well as some instructional books that the late Miss Addams had elected to pack among her things.

"What is all this?" Paul asked Mrs. Wong as she appeared with his lunch tray.

"Mrs. Belton said that we should store the dead women's things here until we give them away. We have cleaned and stored your things here too," she noted with a happy smile. "Are you well enough to eat lunch?"

"I think so," he replied, in wonder over this turn of events.

"Good. Then we shall dress you up and let you enjoy the spring weather in your new hospital chair on the screen porch." Mrs. Wong placed the bed table over his lap and set the lunch tray upon it. "Then we can finish our spring cleaning of your room."

"That sounds pretty good," he admitted, as she removed the bedpan and helped him to sit up by adjusting his pillows.

It was then that he noticed that someone had put him into a flannel nightgown over the chemise and ever present corset. For some strange reason they had completely shaved his body when they last gave him a bath. Maybe the doctor had required it for sanitary reasons, perhaps to prevent bedsores, he thought. He preferred the touch of cool sheets upon his naked body more than the feel of the soft flannel, but he had little choice in the matter.

He helped himself to the roast beef sandwich and found it tasted quite good, despite the rumblings of his stomach denied the drugs it so craved. As he ate he became drowsy, realizing that his withdrawal symptoms were not over. "How long was I delirious?"

"A good week of crying and screaming," Sarah announced, as she entered the room to see that he was finally eating. "You thought that you were covered with bugs one night, and we had to strap you into bed. That night was just awful for you. But most of the time after that you had a fever and we had to give you a cool bath. Do you feel better now?"

"Why did you shave my body?"

"Doc said that we should to prevent infections," Sarah answered with a little shrug. She watched the tremor in his hands and the way that he seemed to be slowly passing into a stupor again. "I suppose that we don't need to do that anymore, now that your wounds are healed. Unless you are going to dress up as a woman for a while. Then it might be more feminine to shave everything. Some women have to do that, you know."

“Dress up as a woman?” he asked uncertainly, feeling the churning of his stomach and a return to drowsiness only to laugh at the girl's joke. Obviously her mother had told her about his experience at the Halloween Ball. “I hope not.”

Sarah glanced towards Mrs. Wong and smiled, as he half closed his eyes and rested back against the pillows.

“Well, we have a real problem. The sheriff has said that we must keep you out of sight, to protect you from being seen by the stage coach robbers. But the doctor says that we should air out your room and allow you to sit up in the hospital chair on the upstairs porch. So Mrs. Wong and I have decided to dress you up as a woman, so that nobody will be the wiser.”

“He's asleep, missy,” Mrs. Wong noted, taking his wrist into her hand. “Are you certain that your mother will agree to this?”

“What else can we do?” Sarah countered, as she lifted the bed table and tray away from his sleeping body.

“You can remove the nightgown while I find a pair of hose supporters, lisle stockings and a heavy sateen petticoat to put on her. I believe that her feet are small enough for a pair of dance pumps. Since she will be sitting on her potty all day we can forego her drawers and such, for now. I think that Miss Addams' pink percale wrapper will do quite nicely for a dress, don't you, Mrs. Wong?”

“We should cover her hair some way,” Mrs. Wong suggested, as she removed his nightgown and accepted from Sarah the hose supporter. She secured it about his waist after she had turned him to a sitting position on the edge of the bed. Sarah helped hold him up. Taking a pair of black lisle stockings she rolled them up each leg and secured them to the garter snaps of the hose supporter. Soon she had him into a black sateen underskirt trimmed at the hem line with three tiers of ruffles. While Mrs. Wong took charge of holding him, Sarah fetched the hospital chair.

“Why not a large-brimmed summer hat?” Sarah suggested eagerly, lifting the seat flap to reveal the potty hole.

In a minute they had him seated in the chair with the skirt of the black satin underskirt lifted so that he could sit over the pot and still protect his modestly.

The corset vest wrapper was a floor length gown designed to be put on like a nightgown. This casual house dress of pink percale was lined with a white cambric corset vest and the gown itself was richly trimmed with lawn white ruffles over the shoulder in the classic Dutch apron style, extending to the back. The lawn ruffles finished at the flare cuffs of the gown's long sleeves, and similar trimming was on the collar and belt in the back. A wide ruffle of the dress' pink percale decorated the hem line. The V shaped bodice was fitted tightly about the corset waist by buttoning the belt in back.

Once this gown was secured and draped like the black sateen underskirt, Mrs. Wong buckled him into the chair's waist and wrist straps so that his corset made him sit quite erect.

Sarah amused herself by applying perfume and painting his lips with lip rouge before she dashed to the huge divided wardrobe to find a hat. She found a big, Lazarre



styled hat with fluffy Chinese, wide-striped pink and white silk bows. There was a whipped cream of silken bows all over the top, cascading to one side in streamers. Across the front was a delicate white silk veil. "Just perfect for our lady's spring outing."

"It is a bit much for a house dress," Mrs. Wong said as she pinned the hat in place. It was canted to one side so that the hat looked natural as his head rested against the side of the wicker sun hood of the chair. "Now that your big dolly is dressed, we can get back to our spring house cleaning and pray that your mother approves of all of this."

Sarah took charge of the chair and pushed it out the second floor front door on to the screened porch. After setting the hand brake, she joined Mrs. Wong to help with the housework.

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Poor Paul awoke from his uncertain sleep to realize that he was completely dressed in a pink gown, with his naked rear sitting on a potty hole like a little two year old. The spring breeze

toiled with the wide brimmed women's hat he wore, brushing its white silk veil back and forth over his face. To his added distress the fluttering of his soft cotton dress and sateen underskirt were caressing and teasing him into a frantic arousal. He could not attend to it because his hands were strapped securely to the arm rests of the chair.

Then to his horrified shame Sarah entered the porch carrying a glass of ice tea. She paused and observed the effects of the satin-like material that taunted his sex until it looked like a little tent pole under the soft fabric.

"Well, well. You do love your pretty things," she giggled. "Your little puppy is all excited by your pretty skirts and things."

He was about to say something when he saw a woman looking up at him, driving a mail cart down the circular drive in front of the house.

“For God’s sake, don’t let someone see me like this!” he begged.

“Only if you promise to be a good little girl,” Sarah teased. She too saw the approaching mail cart and placed the tea aside to attend to the front door.

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Miss Sawyer paused by the mail box and was about to lean out of her horse drawn cart when she noticed the woman in pink. Since she had planned to thank Mrs. Belton for delivering Miss Addams' new school books, a social call was in order to thank her, and perhaps to meet her house guest.

It was clear now, to Miss Sawyer, that her original suspicions were right. She guided her horse up the circular driveway sheltered by giant oaks. She stopped before the house.

Taking the mail in hand, she dismounted from the cart and tied the horse to a freshly painted, white hitching post before she made her way up the front steps to ring the doorbell.

“Oh, Miss Sawyer,” Sarah greeted with a slight curtsy. “It was so nice of you to bring the mail to the door.”

“I actually was wondering if your mother is at home,” Miss Sawyer countered. She handed the mail to Sarah, who was dressed in the traditional school girl uniform of a white middie blouse over a dark blue skirt. “I wanted to thank her for sending over Miss Addams' books. We did so wonder what had happened to them.”

“*Actually* mother is not at home. She is helping Mrs. Pearson with her new baby,” Sarah replied, accepting the mail.

“And who is your mother's house guest?”

“A Miss Johnston, from Capital City,” Sarah responded quickly with a bright smile, half tempted to introduce her hapless prisoner in the chair upstairs. But she knew better, because his disguise was not complete enough to stand close scrutiny. “She is really quite fragile, and mother thinks it best that she not have visitors for now. I do hope that you understand, Miss Sawyer.”

“Of course, dear,” a very disappointed Miss Sawyer said with a polite smile. “I’ll call again. good-bye, Sarah.”

“Miss Sawyer,” Sarah responded with a half curtsy. She began to wonder about her impulse to display poor Paul in all his feminine finery.

‘How was I to know that busy body would see him? It will be all over town that mother has a visitor,’ Sarah thought as she waved good-bye to the mail cart. *‘Mother will have a fit.’*

Chapter Three: Our Miss Addams

“What in God's little green acre is buzzing around in that fluffy haired empty school girl head of yours?” Mrs. Belton exclaimed in boiling anger. She turned her wrath from poor Sarah towards Mrs. Wong. “And you're an adult, not a silly child!”

“Well, Mother,” Sarah managed in a near whisper. “The sheriff said that he couldn't be seen, and Doc said that he should have fresh air, so...”

“So you dressed him up in pink and put him on public display on our screen porch? Where everyone and his uncle could see him!”

“He really looked like a woman, not a man,” Mrs. Wong protested, looking at Sarah for support. “No one would think he is a man.”

“Well, you should look at your ringleader for this disaster,” Mrs. Belton shouted. “Don't you realize that there were three women on that stage coach, as well as Paul? Now the stage coach robbers will think that one of the women survived and we will all be murdered in our beds by bandits. Whatever caused you to think that I would approve?”

“Well, you did have him half dressed in that chemise and corset,” Mrs. Wong countered lamely. She almost bit her tongue off in regret as soon as the words left her mouth.

“I-” Mrs. Belton began, as if she were about to explode, only to go deathly pale as she saw Miss Sawyer through the corner of her eye. She had her mail bag over her shoulder and was talking to Hoyden, who was painting the back porch railing. “My goodness, that noisy bitch is back already. Whatever can I say to her now?”

Both Sarah and Mrs. Wong had never heard Mrs. Belton swear. Mrs. Wong dashed to the back door to answer Miss Sawyer's knock.

“Good afternoon, missy,” Mrs. Wong greeted with a broad smile. She bowed in Chinese fashion as Hoyden followed Miss Sawyer into the kitchen. “Mrs. Belton is expecting you.”

Sarah was about to retreat, but her mother held her by the shoulders. Miss Sawyer entered the kitchen and placed her leather pouch in triumph on a seat by the kitchen table.

“I know your secret,” she exclaimed with self satisfaction, ignoring Mrs. Belton's greeting and Sarah's half curtsy. “So I brought you all her mail.”

With this announcement she dumped from the leather carrier pouch a pile of letters, rolled up newspapers and magazines. They scattered upon the kitchen table while Mrs. Wong poured her a cup of black coffee and the others looked on in stunned surprise.

“Who? What secret?” Mrs. Belton stammered.

“Why, that mysterious house guest dressed in pink is none other than Miss Alice Addams, our new school teacher from Boston. I just knew that it couldn't be Mrs. Simpson or her daughter Grace. I would have recognized them, even at that distance. And I quickly meet all newcomers, since I'm the post mistress. No, your guest is a

young woman that I have never seen, and only a proper Boston lady would wear a hat while resting. The delivery of the text books only added to my certainty. So, Miss Addams is a survivor of that awful stage coach robbery?"

Mrs. Wong, Hoyden and Sarah exchanged shrugs, only to restrain their desire to laugh because of Mrs. Belton's frown of disapproval.

"So when do we get to talk to her?"

"We?"

"Why, the School Board members, of course. We want to assure her that this really isn't the Wild West anymore, and that we are anxious to help her settle down in Belton. We've even replaced the old teacher's cabin that I lived in with a nice, new frame house with indoor plumbing and three bedrooms," Miss Sawyer explained eagerly. "Well?"

"How many people know that Miss Addams is here?" Mrs. Belton asked. She must get word to the sheriff about this turn of events, she thought.

"Why, most of the School Board and some of my close friends. Why have you kept this secret, Mrs. Belton? Certainly you are aware of how important our new teacher is to the townspeople?"

Mrs. Belton waited to answer this barrage of questions by pretending to look over the mail upon the kitchen table. There were several letters, the latest fashion and education magazines, other popular magazines and weeklies, and copies of the Boston Globe. It would appear that Miss Addams, or someone back east, doubted that Belton had such magazines available.

"Why not, for now?" Mrs. Belton exclaimed half aloud. She turned her attention towards Miss Sawyer, who was sipping her coffee with a grin of satisfaction.

"Well, Miss Sawyer, Sheriff Larson was concerned about the possibility that the remaining robbers might decide to kill the only surviving witness to their crime. That is why we hired Hoyden to be an extra gun about the ranch, now that my husband and the rest of the hands are moving the herd to the spring range. But I fear that it is too late to keep our little secret any longer."

"And so we can meet her?" Miss Sawyer persisted, as if she hadn't heard Mrs. Belton's explanation. "I'm certain that the *Belton Star* will have the story in this week's edition."

"I can imagine," Mrs. Wong whispered, causing Mrs. Belton to smile.

"Miss Addams was gravely wounded and assaulted. She has a broken rib and is quite ill. Perhaps in a month's time Doc will allow her to have visitors." She saw Miss Sawyer's look of disappointment over this news. "She is resting now, but I will tell her all about your kindness and concern. I'm certain she will be thrilled to get her mail."

Sarah looked at her mother in awe as she managed to politely exit Miss Sawyer. Then Mrs. Belton turned to Hoyden and said urgently, "Get into town and tell the sheriff and Doc what has happened."

"What are we going to do, mother?" Sarah asked with deep concern. "I am ever so sorry that I caused this mess."

"Not as sorry as poor Paul may become," Mrs. Belton said as she watched Hoyden run towards the stables to fetch a horse. *'She is trying all the time to be like a man, and she still runs like a woman,'* she mused thoughtfully. *'there is too much difference.'*

"What are we going to do?" Sarah repeated.

"We are going to wait for Doc and the sheriff," Mrs. Belton responded as she surveyed the pile of mail. She wondered why Miss Sawyer had not returned it to the senders earlier. It had been almost a month since the stage coach robbery and the funeral. She then remembered her letter to Rose Oak, the women's college.

'Of course. The letter was written to find information about Paul, but what if Miss Sawyer thought that it might be Miss Addams secretly writing a letter to a dear friend, to tell her that she wasn't dead?' Mrs. Belton tried to piece it all together as she looked through the letters to Miss Addams, which seemed to be mostly from a woman in Boston: Mrs. Laura Monroe. *'But why did she wait so long to confirm her suspicions? Because until she actually saw "Miss Addams" she couldn't be certain. It was a cat and mouse game, with Miss Sawyer as the cat.'*

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About an hour later Sheriff Larson arrived. He told Mrs. Belton that he would discuss things with Doc, who was out delivering another baby.

"Well, we must act quickly," Mrs. Belton began. She explained her suspicions about Miss Sawyer having guessed long ago that 'Miss Addams' was a house guest at the Belton Ranch and her sighting of 'Miss Addams' on the screen porch. She told him that they might have another month before Miss Sawyer demanded access to 'Miss Addams'.

"And you told her why you were trying to keep it all secret?" Sheriff Larson asked, looking hard at young Sarah. She swallowed and turned away in shame, feeling that she had betrayed the family.

"It was as if it were my problem, not her's. She is fixed to the idea of finding her teacher for this fall, sheriff. And she thinks that she has found her 'Miss Addams'," Mrs. Belton said.

"Well, we are into a different game," Sheriff Larson mumbled. He took out his pipe and accepted Mrs. Belton's nod of approval, as he loaded it from a small leather pouch and lit it with a kitchen match. "What we have now is bait to draw out the wolves. Is he good enough to fool everybody into believing that he is Miss Addams'?"

"I don't see why not," Sarah ventured, causing her mother to sigh audibly. "He has been a teacher, and he does look the part."

"And where are we going to find the hunters, Sarah?" her mother observed, turning towards the sheriff. "We can hardly lay out the bait without a dozen men to await the wolves. And you can hardly swear in a posse when half of the men might actually be the wolves that we are looking for. Frankly, we need time to identify the other bandits."

“Actually, I think that the wolves are a cautious lot too. Who is to say that if Paul can remember them, that they cannot identify your ‘Miss Addams’?” Mrs. Wong stated matter-of-factly as she served coffee. “I doubt if they will try any raids on the ranch until they see the sheriff trying to arrest members of the gang, or they’re certain that ‘Miss Addams’ survived. After all, at least one of them did kill her.”

“And Paul, too,” Sarah reminded everyone. “He was left for dead.”

“Well, I’ll be damned. If it isn’t like a darn poker game,” the sheriff swore. He took the coffee cup from Mrs. Wong, knowing that she was absolutely correct. “I think that we might be able to have both ‘Miss Addams’ and Paul Brown to use might give us a great hold card. We can switch them like a pea under three walnuts, if you think that he can fool the School Board.”

“I don’t see why not,” Mrs. Belton answered.

“For now, we can play out our hand as it was dealt by Miss Sawyer, to stall for time. The town and our robbers can wait a month to meet the new school teacher, while she recovers. Meanwhile, you can train Paul on how to be a proper Boston lady. Then, if we decide to use her as a staked out calf, we can introduce her around. During that time we can find out how many of the bandits Paul can pick out for us with his pictures. So far, we have two out of seven. I can get some special deputies from Capital City to stake out the ranch, just in case Mrs. Wong’s wolves decide to take a closer look at our little school marm.”

“Sounds reasonable to me,” Mrs. Belton responded with a nod of approval. “Of course, if this takes too long, poor Paul might be stuck as our school teacher.”

“Could do worse,” Sheriff Larson observed with a laugh. He arose and said his good-byes.

When the sheriff had left, Sarah asked her mother, “What are we going to do now?”

“Why, darling, we are going upstairs to tell our Miss Addams the wonderful news that her mail has arrived,” Mrs. Belton replied with a deep sigh. She gathered the mail from the kitchen table. “I’m certain that she will be absolutely thrilled.”

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“I’m who?” Paul exclaimed, watching the rain of mail falling from Mrs. Belton’s arms onto his bed covers. Soldier, with ears back and tail wagging, angrily dashed from her place on the comforter to seek more peaceful quarters.

“Miss Sawyer, our town post mistress, and all the people on the School Board think you are Miss Addams, and they are dying to meet you,” Sarah announced almost gleefully. “All because she saw you dressed as a woman.”

“And I wonder who I have to thank for that,” he sighed, vividly remembering his shame over what Sarah had seen. “Speaking of dying to meet me, you are all quite crazy if you think that I am going to prance about in this jerk water town pretending to be a woman for some trigger happy robber to shoot at! Especially Miss Addams. She was an absolute prig.”

“Ah, you’re not being truthful. We both know that you love to wear women’s clothes,” Sarah insisted. Her mother began to wonder just exactly what had transpired

that afternoon, as he looked away and blushed in response to her daughter's taunting words.

Mrs. Belton calmly recounted the conversations that she had with Miss Sawyer, and later, Sheriff Larson. "So we need those sketches, while we try to convince the town that 'Miss Addams' is living here at the Belton ranch."

Paul looked at the women's bedroom and belongings that surrounded him and sighed. Suddenly he had an awful thought.

"If you identify all the robbers by my pictures, who will have to testify against them?"

"You."

"Who am I?" he countered with a nervous laugh.

"Miss Addams," Sarah answered matter-of-factly.

"Oh, boy. And if one of the robbers says that I'm not Miss Addams?"

"Then he is confessing to murder," Mrs. Wong suggested with a bright smile.

"Then I could be stuck here as Miss Addams," he complained.

"As the sheriff said, we could do worse," Mrs. Belton replied. She was glancing through the personal letters that were piled upon the bed. "Of course, that is a problem that we may never face. But for now, I do believe that I must write a letter to a Mrs. Laura Monroe. She appears to have a special interest in our Miss Addams."

With this announcement, she gathered the personal letters from the bed and headed for the door.

"Can we start now, Mother?" Sarah asked in anticipation.

"Start what?" Paul countered, not liking the school girl's amused eagerness.

"Of course, darling," Mrs. Belton replied as she paused at the door. "I think that our Miss Addams should start her morning toilette as soon as possible."

"Start her-? Don't I have a say in this matter?" Paul protested. He watched as a delighted Sarah picked up the newspapers and magazines from his bed and stacked them on his nightstands. Mrs. Wong rushed from the room. "What are you planning to do to me?"

"Transform you into our Miss Addams. And I don't want any trouble from you," Sarah warned, placing a large fluffy towel along with other smaller towels into the towel rack of the washstand. She made certain that the bowl was set into place in the center of the washstand marble top.

"And what if I don't want to be Miss Addams?" he complained, realizing that things were beginning to get out of hand. "I have certain rights, also."

"You are being silly, Alice Addams. Why are you talking in that boyish voice, when you should speak in your normal, sweet, womanly voice?" she replied. Sarah gave a little giggle before she turned towards the bed to place her hands upon her hips. "I know that you enjoy being dressed up in women's clothing. Remember what I saw when you

were all dressed in pink on the balcony? So why don't you take this wonderful excuse to be Miss Addams and indulge yourself. It will make everything so much easier."

"Yes, I understand." Paul shifted uneasily in bed. They had already decided his fate, because she had displayed him as a woman on that balcony; now she planned to carry things even further. "What are you going to do?"

"Well, our Miss Addams is suppose to have blonde hair. We shall have to start there." Sarah drew back the bedcovers to reveal the blue floral patterns on white flannel of his nightgown. "Mrs. Wong and I will bleach your hair and brows with Blondine until they are a golden blonde, to set the color. And as we work upon your hair you will practice speaking like a woman. We only have a month, you know."

"My hair is far too short for a woman's coiffure," Paul responded, trying the feminine voice that he had used at the Halloween Ball.

"Oh, your natural hair is quite long enough for a graceful little pompadour and curls. You can learn to style it yourself for cool summer wear about the house," Sarah said. Mrs. Wong entered the bedroom with a pail of hot water, which she balanced upon the marble top of the washstand. Opening a double door medicine cabinet over the washstand, Sarah removed the brown bottle of Blondine and read the label. She continued, "But Miss Addams had several hair pieces, as did the other ladies on the stage coach, along with hair pads, or rats, as they are called. When we dye the other hair pieces a matching blonde we can provide you with a formal hair style that even Miss Addams would be proud of."

"What are you going to do to my hair?" Paul asked with uncertain fears as she began to pour the liquid into the wash stand bowl.

"Well, first we shall rinse out your hair with Blondine, which is basically a hydrogen peroxide bleach combined with a dye. We then time the rinse before we wash out the chemicals. By then, your hair should have a straw color when wet," Mrs. Wong explained. "Then we shall shampoo your hair to be certain that the dyes are set and nothing is left of the bleaching agent. A hair curling fluid is applied, and the hair is parted from ear to ear and from the middle of the forehead back to the neck. The hair on the left side front is to be used for the pompadour. The rest of the hair is separated into rows of locks which will be rolled tightly into little strips of cotton tied with square knots to create angelic golden curls. The pompadour is stiffened with Olive Wax Pomatum as it is layer combed into a left to right wave from the left ear and forward over the left brow. A little pomade is then used to add glistening shine to the tight little curls."

"Very feminine. Just perfect for our Miss Addams," Sarah giggled.

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"Look, the paper says that a Miss Addams survived the stage coach robbery," Nate Baxter announced in hushed tones to Bill Jefferson.

"That's crazy. Bob Granger raped and killed her," Bill Jefferson swore, as he pushed his beer mug aside and poured a refill. "Of course, he ain't around to tell tales. He's wandering around looking for his head in hell."

The men joined in grim laughter.

"Speaking of looking for a head. Would you recognize her, if you saw her?" Nate Baxter asked, looking about the table towards Jefferson, Sam Kellog and Al Frank. All were shrugging or shaking their heads.

"What about Sam King, Hank, or Dan?" asked Al Frank, from behind his beer.

"Those boys have much larger problems than some old school teacher," Baxter grumbled while fixing his mustache.

"Actually," Frank began, "she wasn't old at all. The paper here says she's only--"

"Dammit, shut the hell up! I don't care how old she is," Baxter erupted. "All I mean is that those three are out of the picture. They got arrested in some little town about fifty miles from here."

"Stealing horses again?" Frank asked.

"Old habits die hard," Baxter said, shaking his head.

"Thank God we haven't split the loot from the bank job yet," Sam Kellog stated bluntly. "But what's more important, did the teacher see us clear enough to identify us?"

"I told you guys that we should have covered our faces. We shot all those people and didn't get anything because of the sheriff and those two Indians of his." Al Frank gulped down his shot of whisky. "I still have to shovel shit at the stable because of that robbery. And now that damned sheriff has a witness, because Bob was better at fucking than shooting."

"Where is she staying?" Jefferson asked. "We can just ride out there and make sure this time."

"The paper says that she is at the Belton ranch."

"Well, that's it. Let's go out there and shoot up the place," Sam Kellog said, pushing his chair away from the table

"I know of four guns there, and two of them are damned good. Chris Benton and that girl that calls herself the Hoyden Kid. She's the one who outdrew Nevada," Nate said, causing Kellog to sit down again. "My guess is that this Miss Addams hasn't identified any of us, or the sheriff would have us in jail by now. I smell a trap, and she's the bait. After all, every one of the people on that stage are dead and buried. I went to their funeral."

"So what can we do?"

"Find out if she is for real," Al Frank said.

"Right, but that can wait. I'm not going to waste time trying to find some dead teacher," Nate Baxter agreed, as he passed out four little sketches. "Now this is the layout of the Burnside City Bank. I'll brief you all at my place, tonight."

The other three drew closer around the table. Al Frank leaned in and knocked a beer over, drenching the plans. Kellog and Jefferson clenched their teeth in anticipation of Baxter's outburst; but to their surprise, he spoke in hushed tones.

"That reminds me, Al. Be at your place around six, this evening. I got something important to tell you."

Little did Al Frank know this would be his last time sitting in the saloon with his criminal friends.

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"Today I have a special treat for you," Mrs. Belton announced, entering Paul's bedroom. He was seated in bed with his sketch pad upon the bed table. She was quite pleased to see how her daughter's efforts to turn him into a golden blonde had succeeded. In the morning light his lovely pompadour and golden Grecian curls presented a nice summer coiffure, while his eyebrows had been properly shaped into feminine arches. "You are to join us for breakfast."

"I really don't think I can manage the stairs," he said with a sigh. He used the soft, careful words in a womanly voice that sounded very nice to Mrs. Belton; she detected Sarah's insistent efforts and his earlier training. "I can get about the room much better. I even used the ramp that Hoyden put in between the stairs to get to the bathroom. And, Friday, Mrs. Wong has promised to help me to draw my first bath in almost a month."

"You have no idea how happy that makes us all," Mrs. Belton replied with a knowing nod, remembering all the chamber pots that they had carried from his bed. "Let us get you dressed."

With this she set about to open drawers in the lingerie chest and produced a pair of white silken drawers to match a clean chemise and corset cover. The heavy, white satin-covered corset was selected from another drawer along with its attached stocking suspenders and Venus napkin holder.

"My daughter has a difficult time keeping little secrets," she observed as she attached a sanitary napkin in place. "We spoke a bit about your balcony delights. As a married lady I am well aware of male spontaneity, but I do think that we should not needlessly embarrass a proper lady like our Miss Addams. So, while I fetch some hot water from the bathroom for your morning toilette, you may dress yourself and secure yourself."

He nodded his agreement as she untied the lacing of the corset he wore. As its grip relaxed, Paul realized that the dull pains from the wounds had been hiding the greater pain of the cracked rib. The release of the corset caused him to sit down in weakened uncertainty.

"Doc feels that you must begin to do this for yourself, to build up your strength. Even if it does hurt in the beginning. Do you think that you can manage?"

"I'll try. Although I fear that the corset might be a bit much," he responded. She retreated with a porcelain pitcher from the nightstand.

First came the white silken chemise. It was designed to be thick enough to protect the skin from being pinched by the corset as it was laced closed. He slipped the corset hooks in front closed and then turned it about his body to locate the four draw loops on each side of the back opening. He drew these loops out from the tangle of lacing

and carefully rotated the corset back into position. He noted that it was designed for a matron: Mrs. Simpson, he assumed.

Adjusting the heart-shaped curves at the top of the bodice to his bosoms, he saw that Mrs. Belton had placed a pair of fairy bust pads upon the corset cover. He used these pads to push up the soft, fatty mounds that created the illusion of little breasts under the chemise top. He drew tight the top loops to discover that the corset was going to be quite snug. The next two loops drew the corset back closed to just above his waistline. The next loops closed the waist into a tight little vise that relieved the pressure on his ribs, reducing the pain he felt. Before he drew the last two loops closed he finished attaching the Venus shield, finding that the napkin held his masculinity in between his legs quite comfortably. He then drew in the bottom loops, realizing that the month of wearing a corset night and day had molded his body into an all-too-feminine hourglass shape with a waist of about twenty-four inches.

The red lisle stockings rolled up his long legs neatly and were drawn to a satiny tautness by the suspender snaps on the well braced corset. Slipping on the white silken drawers, he tied the waist and adjusted the open crotch so that it would be comfortable for a feminine seated toilet. By the time he slipped on the corset cover, the sound of Mrs. Belton's arrival with the hot water pitcher drove away any desire to attend to the sexual stirrings he felt. He had to secretly confess to himself that he adored the feelings of firm confinement from the corset and the sensual softness of his lingerie.

"Ah, all laced up like a proper lady," Mrs. Belton announced. She set the pitcher on the washstand and checked the lacing under the corset cover, before locating a Parisian hip pad and bustle cage to tie about his waist. "I must say that, for a man, you are certainly proficient in such interesting things."

"I'm not at all certain that I should thank you for that compliment," he laughed. She lifted a white satin taffeta underskirt from a drawer and held it at the waist for him to step into. She buttoned the waist for the tightly fitted garment that hugged his flat front and clung to his bustle-shaped hips and rear. It narrowed about his legs to end in a flair of wide ruffles. "But as a man, I must confess that I am absolutely amazed at all the stuff that women wear."

"Ah, all to catch the roving masculine eye," she sighed with a little wink. She buttoned the back of a white lawn cotton blouse that had a high lace collar, mutton sleeves trimmed at the cuffs with lacy ruffles, and a smooth bodice line that came to a V at the waist. It revealed through its soft fabric the lace corset cover.

The bright red skirt fitted the bustle in back, while following the form fitting lines of the underskirt with a wide flare at the hemline to accommodate the ruffled petticoats.

"I do believe that you can wear Miss Addams' shoes. I put a pair in shoe stretchers last night."

She drew a pair of black, felt lace shoes from under the bed. She had him sit as she slipped them on to his feet and laced them up to his ankles. She saw that it was a tight squeeze, but the felt leather had yielded to his feet like a pair of snug gloves.

“Try to stand up and walk about. And then I want you to sit at the vanity and practice your make-up. I do not intend to be your ladies maid everyday, my dear.”

“Oh, I can never thank you enough for what you have already done to help me,” he replied. He stood to discover that the shoes pinched something awful, but he knew that with time and regular wear they would do until he could put on his own masculine shoes.

As he walked from the bed to the vanity, he discovered that the taper of the skirts continued the graceful inward curve from the hips to below the knees for a near pencil-line sheath. It confined his legs to short cross steps, which made a soft swishing sound as the satin taffeta brushed against his legs. It also accentuated the feminine rotation of his rear under the swaying bustle.

“All I ask is that you attempt to be a perfect lady in dress and deed,” Mrs. Belton said, as her eyes approved of the feminine walk and image that Paul presented. “Our very lives may depend upon how well you carry on this little charade. You are not Huck Finn trying to convince some farm woman that he is a girl. At some point in time, you will have to convince several women that you are our Miss Addams.”

“As much as I hate the idea, I shall try my best.”

“We will try our best to see to it that you receive all the help that we can give you,” Mrs. Belton replied, and left the room.

Automatically he lifted the front of his tight skirt. It revealed taffeta ruffles like whip cream over his tiny feet as he sat down. Paul felt a chill of feminine delight over the sensual feel of his clothing and the image of the young woman who sat before the vanity mirror. Glancing down at his fingers he noted the French manicure that Sarah had helped him to complete; the whitened top half of the oval nails had been polished by a nail buffer until they glistened.

Using both hands, he very carefully outlined his eyes with a kohl pencil before dampening the little mascara brush and highlighting his lashes. Draping his neck and shoulders with a towel, he applied a light face powder and completed his image with lip rouge and Indian earth rouge. He selected a soft, floral perfume and then completed his toilette by placing a cameo broach in the center of his high lace collar, matching it with a pair of cameo earrings and a ring.

As he arose from the vanity he realized with embarrassment that Chris Benton was standing in the doorway, staring at him in disbelief. The cowboy swallowed down his own embarrassment over staring so intently with masculine interest.

“Miss Adams, Mrs. Belton says that I might carry you to the dining room for breakfast?”

As Paul nodded, he was surprised at how easily the man swept him up into his strong arms. Chris Benton looked down at him cradled like a small child.

“Comfy, Miss?” Chris asked with an amused smile. “You are hardly bigger than a stray calf,” he said, moving down the hall. “But a lot prettier.”

Paul might have protested this masculine flattery, but he knew that Chris was teasing him. He had no desire to give the man an opportunity to complicate matters any more than they were.

"Why, thank you, kind sir," he managed with a little laugh as they moved down the stairs. He noted with a slight shiver that the ranch hand seemed to be caught up in the idea that Paul actually was a woman. He was not at all certain if this was a result of Mrs. Belton's instructions to the ranch hands on how Paul was to be treated as 'our Miss Addams', or if it reflected other feelings that Paul would prefer not to explore.

"Ah, here she is!" Mrs. Belton announced as Chris swung Paul on to the dining room chair. "Do you think that you might help Mrs. Wong in the kitchen, Alice?"

Paul sat there a moment, trying to understand his inner thoughts. He suddenly realized that Mrs. Belton was talking to him. Arising, he rushed to the kitchen as fast as the tight skirts would allow.

"It would appear that our Miss Adams has taken an interest in you, Chris," Mrs. Belton noted casually. She took her place at the end of the table as Mrs. Wong, Sarah, and 'Miss Addams' entered the dining room with the breakfast platters. "It is good for a woman to feel wanted."

Chris glanced about the room to see the smiles on the faces of the other hands and Hoyden, who seemed the most fascinated by Paul's transformation into a woman. Chris was not at all certain that he appreciated that fascination.

"I have read all the letters from your aunt, Alice. I have taken the time to drop her a little note to tell her that you were in a stage coach robbery and seriously injured. Your aunt, a Mrs. Laura Monroe, is very worried about you. Her husband appears to have spent the family fortune on some sort of new automatic typesetting machine," Mrs. Belton stated as she poured herself a cup of coffee and passed the serving pot on. "She mentions that you have taken to writing letters with a machine called a typewriter, and she wants to hear from you, even if you must use the machine."

"Oh, I know where that is," Hoyden announced eagerly. "I put it on the upper shelf of the divided wardrobe cabinet. It is a strange metal machine packed in a wooden case. Do you want me to fetch it for Miss Addams?"

"I think that we can wait until after breakfast, Hoyden, but thank you for the kind offer," Paul managed with an approving smile. "Do you want me to write to her?"

"After you read her letters, you might try the machine. It is easier to forge a signature than it is to write a whole letter. And she does sound like a very nice woman in her letters."

With this, Mrs. Belton reviewed the work about the ranch and noted with pleasure how Hoyden and the ranch hands had progressed on repainting the bunk house.

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"You might consider their horses," Hoyden said, as she placed the typewriter case upon the library-study table. Paul was working on a pencil sketch of the stage robbery as a whole. "A cowboy's horse is almost as important as the man. If you can't remem-

ber what the man looks like, you might try to draw his horse. I worked in one of the stables, and I can place lots of horses better than I can their riders.”

Paul looked up from his work to see the strong woman smiling at his drawings. Though they were polar opposites, he felt some kind of connection to her; they were both misfits. He closed his eyes in hope that he might be able to picture their faces better. “Do you recognize this quarter horse?” he asked Hoyden.

He quickly sketched out the calico pattern he remembered the pony by, even if he couldn't picture the rider's face.

Hoyden studied the calico pattern that Paul drew by looking over Paul's shoulder. She could smell the delicate perfume that Paul wore, and wondered at how natural Paul seemed to be as a woman. “I think that’s Sam Kellog's horse, Rose. See how the hide marking on the front shoulder looks like a rose?”

“I never really thought about their horses,” Paul admitted.

“Yep, that Sam's Spanish saddle and spurs. He worked for a Mexican outfit across from the big King Ranch in Texas, something about the Sun in Spanish,” Hoyden commented. “He has a drinking buddy called Al Frank, who rides a big Morgan bay gelding bought from the army. It’s called Lightning because of the thunderbolt blaze on his forehead.”

“It cantors like a show horse?”

“You have it,” Hoyden agreed as Paul began to sketch in the other horse and rider on a separate page. Then he paused and placed his pencil aside. “Are you tired? Want me to carry you upstairs?”

“No, it's just the memories of what happened,” Paul said, pushing the sketch pad aside to look at the typewriter case. Opening the wooden box he saw an instruction book for the Sun typewriter.

Mrs. Belton entered the library, causing Hoyden to rush back to her work with a guilty blush on her face.

“I see that you have found the machine,” Mrs. Belton noted. She opened the library desk to produce Mrs. Laura Monroe's letters.

“Here are her letters,” she said, “but don't push yourself too hard, my dear. Let me know if you want to take a nap.”

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Sarah and Cynthia Finch, just in from town, sat at the kitchen table with a copy of the Sears catalogue between them. Sarah asked Mrs. Wong, “Do these things really work?”

Mrs. Wong paused from stacking the pots and pans to look at the catalogue page. She smiled, seeing that the top of the page was for a depilatory while the bottom displayed a Princess Bust Developer complete with a bust cream. “The depilatory works.”

“Oh, Sarah,” Cynthia complained as she tried to conceal her embarrassment.

“The machine, Mrs. Wong,” Sarah persisted, ignoring her friend. “And the bust cream?”

Cynthia looked wistfully at the ad, saying, "Elizabeth Gray bought one. The machine is like a vacuum pump that sucks the breast inside and serves as a massager. Elizabeth says that it has helped her. And I do so need bigger breasts."

"Most women have small breasts, thank God, until they start having babies," Mrs. Wong stated. She looked at the girl's long, thin torso, realizing that despite her age, she was as flat as a boy. Her child's corset did nothing to add to her shape. "You might try a different corset and bust pads. Many girls wear bust pads. That is why they sell them."

"Mother is against pads. She says that I can wait until Mother Nature provides." Cynthia responded with a deep sigh of despair.

"Yet she approves of this machine and these creams, which are most likely to do nothing?" Mrs. Wong asked. She glanced over the ad.

The Princess Bust Developer
Is a scientific help to nature.
Combined with the use of the bust cream or food,
forms a full well developed bust in a few days' use.

"Although it might cause some fatty development like a corset does. And I suspect that the machine might actually help to develop muscles under the bosom," Mrs. Wong continued. "It's not like bust cream that my first husband made. It worked."

"Oh, could you make some for me? Sarah said that you know all about such creams and stuff," Cynthia urged with little girl enthusiasm.

"Especially, 'stuff'," Mrs. Wong countered with a hearty, delighted laugh.

"What is it made of?" Sarah asked, remembering the awful tasting medicine Mrs. Wong gave her when she caught the flu last winter.

Mrs. Wong's eyes lit up with mischievous delight. "Oh, the organs of a pregnant buffalo, female bear grease, pine bark sap, mare's urine. Stuff like that."

"YUCK!" Cynthia protested in shocked disbelief. "I'd never drink that!"

"I hope not," Mrs. Wong said as she shook her head. "You dab it all over your nipples, and in a few weeks you will have breasts. Best thing my late husband ever made. A real hot seller among the women."

"How much?" Sarah asked, causing Mrs. Wong to look at the catalogue for her calculations.

"It may take some time to put it together, I'll have to use a cow instead of a buffalo," Mrs. Wong explained. "One dollar. Fifty cents less than Sears. But you don't get a fancy breast pump."

"Okay," Sarah agreed, causing Cynthia to look at her doubtfully. Mrs. Wong removed her apron and retreated from the kitchen.

"I'm not going to smear my chest with that awful stuff," Cynthia protested.

"I will test it first," Sarah promised her friend.

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Hoyden paused in mid brushstroke and stepped back to survey the Cook's Shack kitchen. She rolled a cigarette in one hand and lit it with a kitchen match. It had taken the better part of a week to scrape and sand down the stoves, stove flues, pipes and other equipment. She had to remove all the grease, carbon grime and vermin. And several days to do the same for the kitchen and dining room ceiling, walls, and floors. The ceilings and walls glistened white, while the pine floors shone like wooden mirrors.

The other hands had moved on to clean out and paint the great Pennsylvania style barn that Mr. Belton had built a few years before for his small dairy herd.

Hoyden knew that Chris Benton had convinced the other hands to accept her as if she were just another Belton hand. As a result there was a little teasing at first, but this faded when they discovered that she wouldn't get angry or burst into silly feminine tears. It had been tough, but Hoyden had undergone worse treatment when she lived with her dad over the Thompson Stable.

Pa Davies was a man whose only contribution to life was Hoyden. His farm vanished with the dust storms and grasshoppers of 1884, the same year that his beloved wife had died. Pa drifted through odd jobs and many bottles of booze to arrive at Thompson Stable with the job of riding shotgun for the stage coach line.

Home for Hoyden and her father was a one window corner room built in the hayloft of the Thompson Stable. It had served as an office before Mr. Thompson bought out the *Belton Star*. Two folding cots, an old cane chair, two wooden army footlockers and a wood burning stove completed her home. The cots were placed where the roof didn't leak, and the stove barely kept the room above freezing. Many a winter morning Hoyden found ice on the floor from the snow melting on the roof from the heat of the stove. When the world wasn't wet or cold, it smelled of overheated horses, manure and old fodder. Yet it was a home.

Hoyden knew how to avoid her father when he came stumbling home from a night's drinking. He showed her how to shoot a gun, manage a six in hand coach and to enjoy a lazy day of fishing. Her last dress vanished at six, when her father took to calling her Hoyden to make a little girl into the boy he always wanted.

Her only feminine characteristic was her lithe frame, but years of sunlight and rough weather had left her with the look of a hardened teenage youth. Her first sign of maidenhood almost frightened her to death, and caused her to talk to a prostitute at the local brothel. From what she learned, she stayed a determined virgin.

At eight she could ride, by fourteen she could break a horse, and by sixteen she could draw faster and shoot straighter than most. At seventeen she killed her first man with a clean shot through the forehead. The sheriff decided that it was a fair fight, but Hoyden should learn that a body shot was much safer against a really fast draw. Hoyden nodded but insisted, "It always goes where I point."

Like her father, Hoyden left school at fourteen, just finishing the sixth grade. Most of what she learned seemed to have vanished the minute she stepped out of the school house. There was little need. Like her father, she drifted from job to job.

The job that she liked best, until now, was working for old man Nordstrom, digging graves. He paid her well and spent some time teaching her how to do woodwork. She liked to make furniture until she learned that the `real' furniture, that he sold in his store, was mass produced out east somewhere. *'At least grave digging was local work. It slowed down in the spring, except when someone takes to killing Pa and five other innocents,'* she said to herself.

Finishing her cigarette, her thoughts turned away from the bitter past to the present.

Hoyden had never associated with women. In the twenty years of her life she shunned women and knew that they envied her freedom to do what she damn pleased. She knew from what the men said that women lived confined lives that bound them to housework and babies like their corsets restricted their waists. Men and other women controlled them. Even the prostitutes and dance hall girls had someone to tell them how to dress, what to do and how to behave. She had no understanding of the idea that women dressed to please men, and seemed to erect all sorts of barriers to keep them at bay. She knew that all she would need to do was to open the fly of her trousers and she could reel in any man she wanted. Perhaps that was why men stared and women always seemed shocked into `prayers' when they saw Hoyden in trousers.

Men seemed simpler, with more practical clothes. She liked the fit of men's clothes, the feel of long johns against her skin in the winter, and nothing except her outerwear when the sun got too hot. She had always wanted to be born a boy, to please her pa; yet, she accepted the fact that she had pretty well lived a boy's life, wearing male clothing. Up until now she had never needed to wear a Sunday best suit with a tie. The idea of dressing up for supper didn't make her all that happy, but since Mrs. Belton didn't clap her into skirts and such, she accepted this suit and tie business as a part of the territory of being allowed to wear trousers and work shirts during the day. At least she was spared corsets, useless lingerie, and impractical skirts. She couldn't understand why Paul let himself be dressed up like that.

The ranch hands accepted her at face value and liked to have her around because she did her fair share of dirty and hard work. She knew that they tended to defer to her judgment as to what to do, and from time to time she would look the other way when one of the hands might move her paint gear from site to site, or offer to lift something too heavy. She had seen the same respect offered to Chris Benton, who was acting foreman.

They liked to practice target shooting after work with her. And when the shooters arrived from Capital City to increase the sheriff's posse, they held a `fast draw' contest to stun the professionals with her Annie Oakley skills. Hoyden knew that the respect paid to her was because of her handiness with a pistol. She liked that just fine.

The hands collected their winnings and actually waited until she put on her Sunday best black suit before taking her into town. They bought her a glass of beer at the Yankee Dollar; followed by a meal at Ma's Place. To complete the night out on the town, they went to the new ice cream parlor, where they treated her to her first sundae as the other customers stared in disbelief.

When she undressed in her room that night, she slipped on her flannel nightgown out of deference to Mrs. Belton. She crawled into the clean cool bed and heard a tapping sound from the next room. `Miss Addams' was practicing on `her' typewriting machine. `Miss Addams' was a total enigma to her, and Hoyden envied Paul. Hoyden knew that she might be thought of as a youth, but no matter how she behaved she would never be accepted as a man.

Hoyden certainly didn't put the effort into it, like Paul. She was satisfied with things as they were. She certainly had no desire to be a lady like `Miss Addams', nor could she quite understand why everyone seemed so anxious to keep `our Miss Addams' as a lady. And, although Paul played the game, Hoyden wasn't certain that `she' understood what sort of plans they had. Hoyden thought that she should probably keep an eye out on his behalf. These ladies with nothing to do all day could get all kinds of crazy ideas in their heads.

She decided to take a break, and walked back to her room. She saw the copy of Little Women by her bed and picked it up to read from where she had left off the night before. It was a chore worse than cleaning an old outhouse, but she knew that the world was rapidly changing, and she had to change with it if she were to survive.

As she began reading she wondered if she could talk old man Nordstrom into helping her to buy into the Belton Lumberyard and Construction Company. Now that Mr. Simpson was dead, and had left no heirs, she figured it couldn't hurt to ask. She had talked to several of the men laid idle by Mr. Simpson's death, and she thought that she could run things as well as any other man.

With Pa gone, it was up to Hoyden to plan for the future.

Chapter Four: Miss Addams and the Cowboy

Paul sat before the vanity, arranging his morning curls one by one. He had carefully restored the sweep of his golden pompadour using comb and brush. Without the light wax and pomade his hair would stick out like a straw stack.

He remembered a poor girl in his chemistry class who had used lacquer to set the style of her pompadour, until it grew so stiff that her house mother had to use nail scissors to cut the hardened mass away and to remove the vermin that had settled there. At the time he had been caught up with how stupid the girl had been, but now he began to understand a little bit about the poor girl's motivation.

As a man it had taken a few minutes to prepare for the day. As a woman it took almost two hours to dress, to do his makeup, and to style his coiffure. Anything that would reduce the time required would have been appreciated.

When he had been in 'petticoat training', as Katherine delighted to call his preparations for being presented as a lovely southern belle, he had learned how the physical constrictions of a corset would affect his body shape and movements. He could remember the humiliation of being required to wear such feminine things beneath his male clothes. But what was most disturbing was the all too female walk and other movements that such things required.

When this physical shame was combined with the careful feminine voice and gesture training that he received, he began to realize that there was a subtle link between mind and body. It patterned his humiliating behavior to the point that others were amused at the effeminate identity that he presented, even though he came to feel completely natural in the new identity.

It took months to break free of Katherine's petticoat training and his prison ordeal as 'Maggie



Kelly'. Now here he was reaching back to recover all that he had learned to be 'our Miss Addams'.

Mrs. Belton and the other ladies of the Belton ranch had expanded upon Katherine's 'petticoat training' by directing his efforts towards living a total female life each day, from morning toilette to preparations for bed at night. Again he found himself living full time as a woman, but not as Maggie. Instead of being a maid servant, he was now to be a proper Bostonian school teacher.

His first instinct was to put his own stamp of individuality upon this 'Miss Addams'. He would define her on his own terms. The problem was that he knew the 'southern belle' was actually an individual shaped by her parents, relatives, teachers, strangers and peers as much as she was shaped by her clothes, manners and speech. In order to be accepted by others as a southern belle, he had to become her, not himself.

Once he had submerged himself into her identity and began to look out at the world through 'her' eyes, he realized that he had little need to change her into his identity. In essence, he had reached a certain 'soul' that was the womanhood of a southern belle. It was like diving nude into cold water, he became totally aware of his situation as his senses adjusted to the new reality. Somehow, 'Miss Addams' was beginning to take over his day to day life, by requiring him to see the world through her 'soul' of womanhood.

It was like an image in the mirror becoming reality. Was there something about a mirror that shaped a woman, more than a man? As a man, his mind was shaped by his looking out through his eyes at the world about him. As 'Miss Addams', he spent hours looking out through his eyes into a mirror. Every detail of 'her' surroundings, face, hair and dress was reflected back, making him aware of the slightest flaw that needed to be corrected. For some reason, even the scent of perfume and the tactile feelings of silks and satins seemed to be a part of that mirrored image.

He had always wondered why women seemed to be so preoccupied by their looks. Now, he seemed tied inexplicably to the need to see that image in the mirror, to be certain that 'Miss Addams' existed. Or perhaps that he existed as Miss Addams.

He was also beginning to understand more about the 'mirror' that others held up for him to see Miss Addams as they did. The slightest glance of disapproval by the ladies of the household, who expected that he be at least as ladylike as they in such matters, would send him in a flutter to the nearest mirror to correct matters. They could cause him to change his behavior, so as to win their approval of 'Miss Addams'.

Paul didn't know what to think. Plus, he was finding it difficult to concentrate on both the meaning of femininity and his hair at the same time.

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Hoyden had just finished work on the outhouse for the day. She put her buckets away and walked slowly across the grounds. She decided to savor the descending evening.

Usually she would go down to the creek and take target practice for half an hour, but it had been a surprisingly warm day and she wanted to rest. She also knew that if she didn't finish the novel soon, Mrs. Belton would get on her back about it.

As she passed by the house, she saw that 'Miss Addams' was sitting out on the back balcony. As she drew closer, she could tell that Paul was asleep in the rocking chair. Hoyden wondered what it must be like to do nothing all day, and then get rewarded for it with a nap in the evening breeze.

Hoyden could see that Paul was really starting to feel comfortable in all that frilly feminine garb. And she had to admit that the corsetry and padding gave Paul a very pleasing shape. It's just not for everybody, she told herself. She realized that she hadn't really gotten to know him yet. He was supposed to be staying another whole month. *There's something about that strange man...*

"Oh! Hoyden," shouted Sarah from around the side of the house. "Please come here a moment. I need your help."

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Paul was awoken by the sound of shouting. He took a moment to remember where he was. He'd been having trouble with that ever since the carriage robbery. At least he wasn't surprised by being in a dress anymore.

He stood to stretch his legs. Sudden movements still made his ribs ache, but he was beginning to be able to get around without help. The stairs were still troublesome, but that would come with time.

When Paul looked over the balcony, he saw Hoyden and Sarah speaking. With nothing better to do, he decided to eavesdrop a little. *What harm is there in being nosy*, he wondered.

The girls weren't speaking loud enough for him to hear well, but he got the gist of the conversation. Sarah had a friend visiting who had accidentally stayed too long. As it was getting dark out, Sarah wondered if Hoyden would be so kind as to escort the young lady home. It didn't seem to be too far. Hoyden grudgingly accepted.

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Cynthia was effusive in her thanks, and Hoyden was becoming annoyed.

"Hey, it really isn't any trouble. I'm done for the day, and I've got nothing better to do," she mumbled.

"That Miss Addams seems like a nice lady, wouldn't you say?"

"Yeah," Hoyden chuckled. "She's a real lady's lady."

"And her clothes are so lovely! One day I hope to look as beautiful as she does," Cynthia continued.

"Don't we all," Hoyden said. It was clear to her that Cynthia didn't like silence.

"Sarah and I have an idea..."

Hoyden knew this was going to be a long walk. Cynthia felt the need to tell Hoyden all about their attempts to fill out a dress “like that lovely Miss Addams”. Apparently Cynthia thought Hoyden might like to hear about it.

“You should consider trying it with us. It looks like you could use a little help in the bust department as well.”

Hoyden began to think that target practice may be a good idea after all, and she tried imagining all the different places she could put neat little holes in her walking companion.

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Nate Baxter returned to the hollow log where he left Bill Jefferson and Sam Kellog.

“This will be easy. The hands, including Benton, have gone into town. That Hoyden Kid must be with them.”

“That’s a relief,” Kellog sighed.

“I poked around the yard a little. I’d bet that the teacher’s room is upstairs. There’s a hospital chair out on the balcony, and the state we left her in I’m sure she’s not up to taking the stairway anywhere.”

“Who else is there?” Jefferson asked.

“No one we need to worry about. If the sheriff has already finished checking out the bank we hit earlier, he’ll be getting the message I left him. He’ll have to go out to Al’s place then.”

“And it’ll take him all night to sort through the mess you left there,” Kellog said.

The three men checked that their pistols were loaded and began to creep towards Belton Manor. It was dark enough out that they had no trouble getting to the back of the house. Through the window they could see Mrs. Belton, her daughter and the maid chatting in the parlor. Satisfied that Miss Addams must be alone upstairs, they continued. One by one, they climbed up the porch to the upstairs balcony.

The door was unlocked. Baxter figured this would be one of the easiest hits he’d ever done: a crippled lady in a house where no men were home.

Jefferson stepped up to the only door that had light shining out from under it. He looked back to Baxter, who stroked his mustache calmly. He nodded to Jefferson, who then lightly knocked on the door.

“One moment,” Paul said. He was lying on the bed, fully dressed, mentally practicing his feminine speech patterns. *This will be a good opportunity to practice out loud*, he thought. When he opened the door, there was no one there. He peeked his head out the doorway, where he was grabbed by a huge gloved hand.

Jefferson covered Paul’s mouth so that he couldn’t scream. Kellog grabbed his legs so that he wouldn’t kick anything over and raise a ruckus. They carried him back into the bedroom.

Baxter spoke: “Hello again, miss. We’re here to take care of some unfinished business.”

Paul tried to protest but couldn't even move. A searing pain shot through his ribs as he struggled.

0-0-0

Hoyden had never looked forward more to a quiet evening alone. As she neared the house, she cursed under her breath once more. *If I never see that damn girl again it will be too soon*, she told herself.

Something caught Hoyden's eye. She expected to see Paul sitting out on the porch, but instead it was empty. The wicker chair he rested in was on its side. She drew up closer to the porch and saw muddy footprints tracking up the tiers of balconies.

Something funny's going down here.

Hoyden's small frame made the climb up a breeze. She silently pulled herself up to the second floor balcony and carefully drew her pistol from its holster. Peering into the window to Paul's bedroom, she saw three figures gathered about the bed. They were strangers. Paul was being held down, and he looked to be in pain. There was not enough time to get Mrs. Belton. *Besides*, she thought, *what good would that old lady be?*

She knew she had to work quickly. The criminals had left the porch door open, so as to make a quick getaway. Hoyden slipped inside and crept up to the bedroom door. She was disappointed to find it closed. She knew that would make things a bit trickier.

Her thoughts were all in a jumble. She tried to make a plan on the spot, but being outnumbered three to one was a huge disadvantage.

She decided the direct approach would be as good as any. *I'll just make it up as I go.*

Knock knock

She stepped away from the door and listened carefully. No one answered. She knocked again.

Knock knock

This time she heard some mumbling and the sound of shuffling feet. The door's hinges began to creak as it opened just a crack.

"...Yes?" Paul whispered weakly. He and Hoyden made eye contact through the sliver of open doorway. She could tell he had been crying from the streaks of makeup down his face. She flashed him a confident smile.

His eyes grew huge as she brandished her gun. She put the barrel up to the center of the door and squeezed off two rounds.

The huge noise echoed through the house. The door blew open just in time for Hoyden to see the body of Bill Jefferson fall to the ground from where he was standing behind the door. She quickly fired another shot at the two surprised men in the far corner; at the same time she grabbed Paul by the sleeve and pulled him out into the hallway.

Paul fell to the floor in tears. Hoyden wanted to make sure that he was all right, but she heard the sound of breaking glass and knew the two men were trying to get out to

the porch through the window. Sure that they would expect to see her coming through the open door back to the porch, she instead stepped into the bedroom.

One man was pulling his leg through the window, moments from escape. Hoyden fired, hitting him in the back. The force of the blow spun him around. He stood, stunned, outside the room staring in. She put another bullet right between his eyes. Sam Kellog crumpled like a rag doll.

Hoyden heard the rustling of bushes and the dull thud of the last crook jumping from the balcony. She slipped through the window. Nate Baxter was running toward the woods behind the house. He was limping fiercely, as if the fall had broken his leg. Hoyden calmly sighted the man, knowing she only had one bullet left. *Like shootin' a big, clumsy rabbit*, she thought as the gun fired its last round into the darkness.

Epilogue

By the time Mrs. Belton got to the scene, Hoyden had already helped Paul to his chair on the porch. She was trying to console him, stroking his hair and whispering in his ear.

“What in God’s name-!” Mrs. Belton began, only to stop short at the sight of Sam Kellog’s bloody corpse.

“Mrs. Belton, there’s been a little trouble here. Everything’s fine now, but you should probably go get the sheriff. And Paul here could use a visit from Doc. I think he may aggravated his injuries.” Hoyden spoke in calm tones.

“Well- I- oh!” was all she could say, before turning around and heading back into the house. She was trying to get a grasp of what was going on. Her anger at the large hole in Paul’s bedroom door quickly turned to horror when she saw Bill Jefferson’s body just behind it.

Stumbling down the stairs, she was intercepted by Sarah and Mrs. Wong.

“What’s going on, Mother?”

“There’s been a crime! Paul and Hoyden are upstairs. They seem to be fine, but there are dead people in the house!” Mrs. Belton screamed. “Mrs. Wong, please go get the sheriff, or at least one of his deputies. Anyone you can find!”

Mrs. Wong nodded and promptly left.

“Sarah, I’m going to find the doctor. Do exactly as I say. Lock yourself in the pantry, and do not come out until I am back. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, Mother.”

“Good. Now go, go, go!”

Sarah slowly walked back to the kitchen. She paused at the pantry door and listened for the sound of Mrs. Belton closing the front door. Satisfied that her mother had left, Sarah tiptoed back to the stairs.

If there are dead people in my house, I ought to be able to see them! I’ve never seen a dead body before, she thought.

As she crept up the stairs, she couldn’t hear anything from above. She wondered if Paul or Hoyden had been hurt by the attackers. *If they have been injured,* she justified to herself, *I’d better be nearby to lend a hand.*

Sarah stepped gingerly down the hallway, past Paul’s bedroom, to the door leading out to the porch. It was ajar. She stuck her head out just enough to get a peek at the dead body she’d hoped to see. And there it was: Sam Kellog’s lifeless body collapsed in a slowly growing pool of blood. But this is not what surprised Sarah the most; for in the wicker hospital chair were Hoyden and Paul, sitting atop one another, delicately kissing. They were oblivious to the world.