



*Reluctant Press presents:*

# The Rainbow School For Girls



E. B. Stevenson

---

A 'NEW WOMAN' E-BOOK

---

*Copyright © 2012, Reluctant Press*

***Mags, Inc/Reluctant Press TG Publishers***

This story is a work of fiction. Any similarity to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental. All situations and events herein presented are fictional, and intended only for the enjoyment of the reader. Neither the author nor the publisher advocate engaging in or attempting to imitate any of the activities or behaviors portrayed.

Persons seeking gender reassignment surgery, hormone therapy or any other medical and/or body-altering process should seek the counsel of a qualified therapist who follows the Benjamin Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder.

***Protect Professional Fiction on the Internet***

We need *your* help! We spend several hundred dollars to edit, illustrate and typeset *each story*. It is important, therefore, that everyone works to help keep professional fiction alive on the Net.

The civil penalties for copyright infringement can be severe, including substantial monetary damages, injunctive relief, and liability for attorneys' fees incurred in prosecuting a case. In addition, criminal penalties may be imposed if someone willfully infringes a copyrighted work for commercial advantage or private financial gain.

Mostly, though, we just want to be able to keep offering this service to our authors and our readers.

**Report stolen books by using the contact form at [reluctantpress.com](http://reluctantpress.com) or call us at 800-359-2116**

*Thank you.*

# **“THE RAINBOW SCHOOL FOR GIRLS”**

**by E. B. Stevenson**

## **One**

The middle part of June came around once again, and it was time to make plans for the next academic year, which would begin in late August. This was a routine I grew into during twenty years teaching in the New York Public Schools. For the past five years, I had been teaching Social Studies to a group of remedial education students at Buchanan High School. Before that, I spent eight years teaching regular middle school Social Studies in the Bronx. I taught in upper Manhattan for one year, two years each teaching high school Social Studies in Queens and lower Manhattan. I started

twenty years ago teaching middle school Social Studies in Brooklyn.

I had been living in a two-bedroom apartment in Greenwich Village since I came to New York. I have had six roommates in the twenty years I was in my apartment: four male and two female. The female roommates I had were two of my three sisters. My oldest sister, Ann, lived with me while she was studying pre-med at Columbia. My youngest sister, Rosemary, lived with me while she was in art school. Christopher Carson was my latest roommate; he had come to New York three years ago from Michigan, where he grew up and went to college.

It was a week before the end of the school year. I had just finished my last class for the day, and was preparing to leave for my apartment to grade papers and prepare the final exams for my classes. I heard a knock on my door just as I finished packing my briefcase and backpack. Robyn Carter, the assistant principal, was at the door. "May I come in, Eric?" she asked me.

"You certainly may," I replied before asking her what's on her mind.

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you've heard that the New York Public Schools are cutting back on teachers. Since you've been with us for twenty years, you're eligible for early retirement. There is one condition attached to your early retirement, though: you cannot accept another teaching position in the New York metropolitan area for the next four years. I'm sorry that we cannot extend another contract to you, but you've done a great job for us. I can give you an excellent reference when you apply for your next teaching job," she informed me.

The subway ride back to Greenwich Village was the longest I had been on. I had to let it sink in. I was finished as a secondary school teacher in New York. When I returned to the apartment, I found Chris sitting in a chair in the kitchen. He was grading his students' papers. When I walked in, Chris asked me: "What's with the long face, Eric?"

"I've been offered early retirement. I only have one more week as a teacher in New York," I replied.

"I got my layoff notice today. After next week, I will no longer be a teacher in the New York Public Schools," he added.

"That comes at a good time; the lease to our apartment is up on June 30."

"Where do you plan to go?" he asked me.

"I'm hoping to teach somewhere in the Midwest or in the Rockies," I replied.

"My girlfriend works at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul. She's pointed me to an English teaching opportunity in Pusan," he added.

"Yeah, you've been with that same girl since you two were in grade school back in Traverse City."

When my proctored my last exam, I began to pack my items from my classroom into four huge boxes. I decided to drive my minivan to work for my last day instead of taking the subway. As I was packing my last box, Robyn knocked on the door. "Eric, you have a visitor," she informed me.

The visitor turned out to be Ginger Davis, a former colleague from my days teaching in lower Manhattan. She was in a white summer dress and a matching pair of flats. "What brings you here, Ginger?" I asked her.

“Eric, I now teach at the Rainbow School for Girls on Long Island, and Robyn made me aware of your situation. I had the feeling you were looking for a job and looking to get out of New York, so I came here to tell you that we have an opening for a History teacher at our campus in Casper, Wyoming,” she informed me.

“I would be interested in interviewing for the job,” I told her.

“Jacqueline Avildsen, who heads up Human Resources for all of our campuses, is in town conducting interviews for vacant positions at all our campuses. She would like to meet with you Monday at two,” she informed me before asking me if I could make it.

“I’ll be there Monday afternoon at two,” I replied.

When I came back to the apartment, Chris had hauled the last of his boxes in. “Did you get any visitors on your last day?” he asked me.

“I got a visit from Ginger Davis. I worked with her when we were teaching together in lower Manhattan. She’s now at the Rainbow School for Girls on Long Island, and informed me that there’s an opening at their campus in Wyoming. I’m being interviewed on Monday at two o’clock for that position,” I replied.

“I also have an interview on Monday. A representative from the school my girlfriend suggested will be interviewing me at one o’clock at the South Korean mission to the United Nations,” he added.

“I’m sure South Korea is going to be an adventure, as far as teaching is concerned. One of my friends, who student taught under me at Buchanan, is teaching in Daegu now. He’s been able to find a church that has services in English; most of the people that attend

church with him are Filipino immigrants. I'm sure you can find a church with services in English in Pusan."

"There's so much to do in Wyoming. I hope you can ski."

"I prefer hiking and camping, myself. The last time I went hiking was in the Catskills; I last went camping in the Poconos in Pennsylvania."

"I must admit, camping is something I haven't done since Boy Scouts. I haven't been on a hike since I went with my girlfriend to Vermont last spring."

"If I get this job, I'm looking forward to the fresh Rocky Mountain air. I hope I can find a decent girl in Casper; I haven't been able to do so since I left Carbon-dale."

"I hope I can get this job in South Korea. At least I'll be closer to my girl and get used to a new culture."

## Two

It was a beautiful day as I made the trip from Greenwich Village to the Rainbow School for Girls' campus on Long Island. I left around twelve-thirty, after I had lunch. The campus was located on the shore of Long Island Sound about forty minutes from Greenwich Village. It was one-thirty when I arrived at the gates to the campus. I pulled out my driver's license, and showed it to a white-haired security guard.

"My name is Eric Bronson. I have a two o'clock appointment with Jacqueline Avildsen," I informed him. After he looked over the security list, he opened the gate. I drove through the gate, and drove along a mile and a half of winding roads before coming to the main campus. The main classroom and administration build-

ing was surrounded by a multi-purpose building on the west side, dormitories to the north, and visitors' quarters to the east. The administration building is the only one on campus without a view of Long Island Sound. I pulled my minivan into a visitor space in the parking lot, grabbed my briefcase, and walked into the



building. I took the elevator to the third floor, where the administration offices were.

I found the room I was asked to go to, number 311. It was the office of Janna Hawkins, the school's headmistress. I walked in, and informed the assistant on duty, a student named Denise Stone, that I had arrived.

"May I help you?" she asked me.

"I'm Eric Bronson; I'm here to see Miss Avildsen," I replied.

"She will be with you in a moment," she added, before asking me: "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you," I replied before I sat in a chair directly across from the reception desk. I opened my briefcase, and began reading that day's New York Times. As the clock struck two, a blonde-haired woman came out of the conference room next to the headmistress' office. She was five-ten, average build, wearing a blue dress, matching jacket, a pair of white stockings and a pair of blue and white flats. She looked directly at me. "Mr. Bronson?" she asked.

I immediately put my newspaper back in my briefcase, got up and walked toward her. "I'm Eric Bronson," I informed her.

"I'm very pleased to meet you. I'm Jackie Avildsen, Director of Human Resources for the Rainbow School for Girls," she said before she showed me into the conference room.

I sat down at a chair on the left side of the table, while Jackie sat in the chair at the end of the table, with her back to the video screen. I opened my briefcase, took out a copy of my resume and references, and handed them to her. Just as she was beginning to look

at my resume, she said: "Ginger Davis has told me a lot about you."

"She and I go way back; we spent two years teaching together about fifteen years ago in lower Manhattan. I taught Social Studies, she taught English," I informed her.

She looked over my resume, before asking a few questions about my background. "I understand that you have Bachelor's degrees in education and historical studies from Southern Illinois University Carbondale, and you got your Master's in historical studies and social work from Seton Hall. What did you do for your Master's theses?"

"I did my history thesis on the War Bond drives during World War II. I discussed how these drives were promoted in the community and the media. Part of my research included listening to many hours of radio shows from the period, and see how the writers of these shows wove promotional announcements for these drives into the shows' storylines. I also discussed, at length, efforts in eight different cities. The cities I selected were St. Louis, New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta and Denver. The entire thesis ran over seventy pages. For my social work thesis, I wrote on the emergence of transgender students in the general student population. For that one, I interviewed a group of transgender middle and high school students, and got a wide range of opinions on the subject. I also read several case studies of transgender students transitioning while in school," I explained.

"You did extensive studies on U.S. and world history when you were at Carbondale."

"I took a lot of world history classes in addition to U.S. history classes."

"You've been teaching in the New York Public Schools throughout your career, most recently teaching Social Studies to a group of remedial education students at Buchanan High."

"The students I had were what the administration called 'the unteachables.' My students didn't fare very well in a traditional classroom setting. Some of these students were even bullied in a traditional environment. I had only eight to ten students in my classes at any given time. The students I had came not only from New York, but also from all over the world. Each group of ragtag high school students I had got a complete course of study in history, civics and current events. Their favorite activities were their annual field trips to City Hall and the United Nations, and the stream of guest speakers that came into my classroom."

"You've taught at middle schools in the Bronx, upper Manhattan and Brooklyn, and at high schools in Queens and Lower Manhattan. This is the kind of experience we're looking for at Rainbow."

"It's too bad I wasn't able to teach on Staten Island. After twenty years in the Big Apple, I think it's time for a new challenge in a new city."

"You're going to love it where this job is. Casper, Wyoming is a nice town with a view of the Rockies. It is three hours' driving time from Cheyenne, and five and a half hours from Denver. There are a lot of places to go camping and hiking in and around Casper, along with plenty of historical sites. Within a day's drive are cities like Billings, Salt Lake City, Colorado Springs, North Platte, Rapid City, and resort towns like Vail, West Yellowstone and even Jackson."

"I already have lodging arranged there. My Uncle William passed away three months ago. He lived in Casper most of his life, where he owned a travel agency. He was ninety-three years old when he passed; he left me his house at the lake outside of Casper."

"Do you have any questions?" she asked me.

"I know that this is a girls' school. What kind of girls are among the student body at Rainbow?" I then asked her.

"The Rainbow School for Girls originally started as a school for troubled girls in grades seven through twelve. Many of the girls who fit into this category are wards of the court. They've been removed from their homes by court order for various reasons. Many have been removed due to one or both parents having a history of abuse, whether it would be abusing drugs or alcohol, or they have endured physical and/or emotional abuse at the hands of one or both parents. A few of the girls at this particular campus have also been dealing with serious emotional problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder. Other girls have been referred to us by psychologists or psychiatrists for behaviors that society considers to be unfeminine. We have also earned a stellar reputation for the education of transgender girls. This group is usually referred to us by a psychologist or psychiatrist following a diagnosis of gender identity disorder. These girls started life as boys, but realize that at some point in their lives that they are really girls, unfairly trapped in the bodies of boys. This school is a safe alternative to their local public school. Many of the girls in this group go through surgical reassignment prior to starting their freshman year of high school. Students from both groups have

gone on to become successful in adulthood; a few come back to teach at the school.”

“Where do you draw your students from?”

“We draw our students pretty much from all over the United States. The students you will be teaching come from the Rocky Mountain states; the Casper campus takes in the majority of its students from Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Montana, North and South Dakota, along with portions of Arizona, Idaho, Texas, Utah, Kansas, Nebraska and the Oklahoma panhandle. Occasionally, we’ll get a few students from the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan on student visas. The Long Island school takes its students mainly from New England, as well as northern New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania, along with the occasional student from Canada’s Maritime Provinces, as well as Ontario and Quebec. We’ve even had a few students come here from Europe.”

“Besides Casper and here on Long Island, where do you have campuses?”

“The Rainbow School for Girls has its home campus in San Francisco, with a view of the Pacific Ocean. Our branch campuses are in Los Angeles, Chicago, our Tampa Bay campus in Clearwater, Florida, our Missouri campus in northern Jefferson County, about forty-five minutes from St. Louis, our mid-Atlantic campus in suburban Baltimore, with a view of Chesapeake Bay, and our Seattle campus, which has a view of Puget Sound. We opened a new campus last August in the mountains of northern Georgia, about an hour north of Atlanta.”

“Who provides the funding for capital improvements, programs and social events?”

“We have a large endowment fund for all of our campuses, plus smaller funds for each individual campus. We have fund-raisers throughout the year in most cities with significant transgender populations; these fund-raisers help fund the operation of our campuses. We also receive corporate donations, mostly from companies with transgender-friendly policies, as well as from charitable foundations and individual donors. These gifts can be as small as ten dollars, as we get from some of our alumni, while other individual donations are larger. Last month, a San Leandro businessman donated four million dollars to our school.”

“What social events are planned during the year?”

“We start the social calendar with what we call the Kick-Off Dance for all grades. This is held during the month of September, the date depends on the campus. The Casper campus holds theirs the third weekend of September. Here at the Long Island campus, it’s the weekend after Labor Day. In late October or early November, again depending on the campus, we have our Homecoming Dance for the high school girls. Casper holds theirs the weekend before Halloween; Long Island usually schedules this one the weekend after Election Day. During November, the seventh and eighth grade girls hold a Pink Ribbon Dance to raise money for breast cancer research.

“This is the only dance, other than the Prom, that the Casper campus holds the same weekend as the Long Island campus; it’s the weekend before Thanksgiving. We have a Holiday Dance for all grade levels in December. Casper holds this the weekend before Christmas, while Long Island holds theirs the first weekend of December. During the second half of the year, we have a Heart Dance for the seventh and eighth

grade girls in late January or early February; this is where they raise money for heart research. The Casper campus holds theirs the last weekend of January; it's held the weekend closest to Valentine's Day on the Long Island campus.

"The high school girls hold their Valentine's Dance either on the weekend before or after Valentine's Day; it's the weekend before in Casper and the weekend after on Long Island. In the spring, the seventh and eighth grade girls hold Dance for the Cause when they return from their Easter/Passover vacation. Each campus selects a different cause to raise money for. The Casper campus raised money for autism research this past year; the younger brother of one of the transgender girls is autistic. Here on Long Island, the cause was domestic abuse; two of the graduating seniors were abused by a parent before the courts sent them here. The freshman and sophomore high school classes hold their Spring Dance the weekend after the seventh and eighth graders hold their Dance for the Cause. The final dance of the year is for the high school juniors and seniors, the Prom. All campuses have their Prom the second week of May. We also have fashion shows throughout the year, displaying the talents of the students in our Fashion Design program. We have three fashion shows a year; the biggest is the spring show, which takes place around the end of April or the beginning of May. Our bridal and formal fashion show is in February, around Valentine's Day, and our first fashion show is the winter fashion show, which takes place in mid-October."

"How long is the school year?"

"The school year for all campuses starts the last full week of August. It is divided into semesters; the fall se-

mester goes from the last full week of August until the week before Christmas. We're usually off from the Friday before Christmas until the second day of January. The only exceptions are when January 1 falls on a Friday or a Saturday; then we start either January 3 or 4. The spring semester starts on the first school day in January, and goes through until the Friday before Memorial Day."

"Do the girls usually go home, or do they stay with host families?"

"Some of the girls, mainly the transgender ones, go back to their hometowns for the December holidays. The girls who are wards of the court get to stay with a host family in the towns where our campuses are. These host families are usually in the Foster Parent program, and have had experience with handling troubled youth. During the Easter/Passover break, some again go back home, others stay with a host family, while others travel to other parts of the country to visit historic sites that are part of their studies. During the summer, a number of our transsexual students spend the time undergoing and recovering from gender reassignment surgery, or what the layman would call a sex-change operation. Many of these students go through the surgery after finishing the eighth grade with a 'B' or better in feminine deportment. Those who score lower than a 'B' in feminine deportment has their operations delayed; most by a semester or two. Other girls take part in the programs we offer at the school."

"And what are those programs?"

"For our girls over sixteen years old, we have a jobs program. This is where a student takes a summer job in their hometown or in the community around the campus. The jobs they do are also varied; some are candy

stripers at the local hospital, others work as clerks at department or specialty stores, some even work as receptionists for local doctors' and lawyers' offices. Some have even worked summers as fashion models, mainly in New York. Our younger girls go to our school-sponsored camps, where they learn about nature, horsemanship, hiking, orienteering, boating and other outdoor activities. Support groups are a big part of our summer programs; the younger girls have a daily support group, while the girls over sixteen years old meet every other week for support groups on campus. We feel that a well-rounded education is the best therapy for troubled and transgender girls."

"How long is the typical school day, and how many classes will I be teaching per day?"

"The school day usually begins at eight o'clock in the morning with breakfast. First hour starts at eight-thirty; each class period is fifty minutes in length. Second hour starts at nine-thirty, third hour at ten-thirty, followed by fourth hour at eleven-thirty. Two grade levels have a lunch period of thirty minutes, starting with the seventh and eighth graders. The high school freshmen and sophomores eat lunch at noon, while the seniors have their lunch at twelve-thirty. Fifth hour begins at one o'clock; each afternoon class is also fifty minutes in length. Sixth hour begins at two o'clock, and seventh hour, the last hour of the day, begins at three o'clock. The school day ends at three-fifty in the afternoon. You will be teaching five classes a day, along with co-facilitating a one-hour support group and an hour for lesson planning and coordination."

"This sounds like the kind of challenge I've been looking for."

“We’ll inform you of our decision in seven to ten days.”

Jackie and I both got up, and shook hands. “Thank you for the interview,” I said to her.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Bronson,” she added.

When I got back to the apartment, Chris was starting to pack his personal effects. “Are you going to ship all of this to Korea?” I asked him.

“Some of it will go to Korea; the other stuff will be sent back home to Traverse City,” he replied.

“How did it go at Rainbow?”

“The interview went very well, I thought. Jackie, the lady who interviewed me, was very straightforward with her questions and answers. The girls who are students there get a very well-rounded education; even more so than the students I’ve taught in New York.”

“What will you take from this experience in New York?”

“It’ll be the students that I’ve influenced over the years. Most have gone on to be successful in various fields; even a few returned to teach in the school system. I’ll be taking this experience wherever I go.”

“That’s the same thing I’ll take with me to Korea.”

“The program I’ve been teaching in has had its share of successes. One student who was in one such class over thirty years ago now owns a fixed base operation at JFK. One of his classmates from that period works for him as an airframe and power plant mechanic, while another is in charge of getting provisions for their customers. In other words, he orders the food

and drinks the customer requests, and makes sure they're put aboard the aircraft. Their former teacher visits them occasionally; he's been retired for ten years, and has become a champion poker player."

"Many of my former students kept in touch with me after they were in my classes."

"By the way, how many of the laid off teachers have work lined up for next year?"

"Unlike the group that took early retirement, we can work for a school district in the New York area. Two teachers I know have already signed on in Westchester County. Another one is headed to Jersey City to teach. Three others are headed to Connecticut. One other is headed to Long Island. Most of us are headed out of New York, though. A young lady who taught in my department and was my closest collaborator is headed to England. Another friend of mine is going to Australia. Yet another one will be teaching English in Austria. One of my colleagues from my first year in New York has joined the Peace Corps, and will be headed to Liberia to teach school for two years."

"Of those I know who took early retirement, another remedial education teacher is moving with her husband, who just retired from the N.Y.P.D., to the Ozarks. He helped with the formulation of the idea for the all-female Lavender Team. They just had their new home built on the northern shore of Bull Shoals Lake, on the Missouri side of the state line with Arkansas. One of my colleagues who taught regular classes at Buchanan is retiring with his wife to Flagstaff, Arizona. His wife retired from the nursing profession three years ago. The former chair of the Math department at Buchanan also took early retirement; they're retiring to Seaside, Oregon. Her husband just retired from the Fire

Department of New York; he was assigned to a station on Staten Island. I'm not the only one who was interviewed by the Rainbow School for Girls who was let go by the New York Public Schools."

"That's right. I worked with Pamela George when I started teaching in New York three years ago. She interviewed for an open English teaching position at their school in Atlanta. That's home for her; she's originally from Roswell."

"I should know whether or not I get the position in the next seven to ten days."

It was a week after the interview that I got a call from Jackie, who was back at her office in San Francisco. I had a feeling deep inside that something positive will come out of it. After talking with her for ten minutes, I was excited at the new opportunity that awaited me. When Chris returned from a visit to the South Korean mission to the United Nations, he also had some news for me.

"What's the word?" I asked him.

"My living arrangements have been taken care of in Pusan," he replied.

"I got the job in Wyoming. I start July 15; I'll be traveling for a couple of weeks before I start the new job," I added.

"Where do you plan to go?"

"I'll be visiting a former college classmate in Millcreek, Pennsylvania, before spending the Fourth in Chicago. I also plan to visit relatives in St. Louis and Omaha before I plan to arrive in Casper on July 10 to settle into the house I inherited from my uncle. I won't have to rent a trailer; my minivan has stow-and-go seating."

“I’ll be going straight to Korea; I’ll be leaving June 15 on a flight from JFK to Incheon. I’ll be spending a few days with my girlfriend in Seoul before I move into my apartment in Pusan. My most important personal effects will be going with me to Seoul, like my books, video game system, television set and stereo system. The rest of my personal effects will be stored at my brother’s house in Traverse City.”

I drove Chris to JFK on the morning of June 15; he gave his car to his eighteen-year-old nephew, who was headed to college in East Lansing the following fall. I spent the last two weeks in the Greenwich Village apartment packing my personal effects for the move to Wyoming. Twenty years is a long time to spend in one apartment, not to mention one city. I felt that it was time for me to go to a new city and a new life. On June 29, I moved the last of my personal effects out of the apartment I had occupied since I took my first assignment after graduating from college. With my minivan packed, I left New York in the wee hours of June 30, headed for a new life and a new phase of my career in Casper.

### **Three**

Heading out on Interstate 95 to catch up with Interstate 80 in New Jersey, I spent a lot of time on the drive to my first stop in northwest Pennsylvania thinking about the challenges that lie ahead. I spent two days with a close friend of mine in Millcreek; she was working as a home care nurse and raising a six-year-old daughter alone after her husband was killed in Afghanistan. On July 3, I left Millcreek and drove more than half the day into Chicago, where I spent the Fourth with friends. The next day, I left for St. Louis to visit

with family and friends before leaving on July 7 for Omaha. As I was stopping for lunch at a truck stop outside Kansas City, I got a call on my cell phone from Jackie, who was in Omaha to attend a fund-raiser for the school the next day.

“Eric, I’m so glad I caught you. I’ve been trying to get you all day,” she told me.

“I’ve been driving since seven o’clock this morning; I’ll be in Omaha later this afternoon,” I informed her.

“Where are you right now?” she asked.

“I’m having lunch at a truck stop on Interstate 70 outside Kansas City,” I replied.

“When will you be in Omaha?”

“I’ll be in Omaha around two o’clock.”

“Great! How would you like to have dinner with me tonight?”

“I would love it. What time should we meet?”

“Would six-thirty be too early?”

“Six-thirty would be fine.”

I arrived in Omaha at two-fifteen in the afternoon, and checked into my hotel near the airport. I brought in my suitcase, and took a nap before I showered, shaved and changed into a maroon suit and a navy blue tie with navy blue socks and maroon dress shoes. I left my hotel room around six-fifteen, and walked down to a nearby restaurant. Jackie arrived eight minutes later, wearing a floral print dress and a pair of white sandal pumps.

“I’m so glad you could make it, Eric,” Jackie said with a smile.

"I'm very pleased to see you again," I said before she took my arm.

We walked inside, where we were shown to a table near the window with a view of downtown Omaha. She ordered a Caesar salad, while I ordered grilled salmon and rice. "What brings you to Omaha?" I asked her.

"The school is having a fund-raiser at a downtown hotel conference room. This is one of many fund-raisers we hold throughout the country. I wanted to ask you if you, as a new faculty member would come to speak to the group," she replied.

"What would you like for me to talk about?"

"Your experience as a teacher in New York, and what you're looking forward to at your new job in Casper."

"That will be easy to do."

I then asked her about her background. "I come from a family of educators. I grew up in Omaha. My father taught social studies for thirty-five years at Boys Town; my mother taught science at a public high school in Omaha for thirty-two years. I started my teaching career in Omaha twelve years ago, after I graduated from Iowa State. My first job was as an English teacher at a public middle school. After just two years, I was recruited by the Rainbow School for Girls to take a job as a middle and high school English teacher at their campus in Chicago. I received a Master's degree in education administration from Northwestern while working in Chicago; I spent six years in Chicago before being promoted to associate headmistress in San Francisco; I assumed my present position last summer. Both of my brothers teach physical educa-

tion; one is a football coach at a Catholic high school in Milwaukee, the other is a soccer coach at a public high school in Ainsworth. My sister is a social studies teacher at a public middle school in Falls City. Both of my brothers are married to elementary school teachers; my sister is engaged to marry a history professor who teaches at Creighton. I'm still single, although I have a son from one previous relationship, and a daughter from another."

"My education background isn't as strong as your family's. My uncle was a high school math teacher and elementary school principal for forty-two years in suburban St. Louis. One cousin teaches kindergarten at a Lutheran school in south St. Louis, another cousin teaches high school physical education in Spartanburg, South Carolina. I got my Bachelor's degrees in secondary education and history from Southern Illinois University Carbondale, and my Master's degrees in history and social work from Seton Hall. It was my M.S.W. that allowed me to work with the 'unteachable' students at Buchanan."

"At least it prepared you for your new assignment."

"By the way, who's the headmistress at the Casper campus?"

"Her name is Lorianne Lyons. She's been headmistress at Casper for the past four years. Before that, she was associate headmistress at our Los Angeles campus for three years, taught feminine department and English at our San Francisco campus for three years prior, and taught for nine years in the public school system in Kansas City."

"The last name sounds familiar. I remember a Larry Lyons, though. We grew up together in Creve Coeur, Missouri. We were top-notch athletes when we were in

high school. Larry ran cross country, and gave our high school a second place finish in the state cross country meet at Fort Leonard Wood during our senior year of high school. He also lettered in track and field and soccer. I lettered in just two sports; ice hockey and baseball. During my freshman year, I was the team's leading scorer, with twenty-one goals and thirty-nine assists. I was among the top scorers in my sophomore year before becoming a reserve defenseman in my junior and senior years. On the diamond, I caught and played first base, but I was mainly a designated hitter. During my senior year, I set the conference record by hitting forty-six home runs and driving in 102 runs. Larry and I were very good friends while we were in high school; we went off to separate colleges when we graduated. Larry accepted a track and field scholarship at the University of Missouri, while I went to SIU Carbondale on an academic scholarship."

"Lorianne is looking forward to meeting you when you start your new job."

I returned to my hotel room after having dinner with Jackie. The fund-raiser, which had a fashion show after the speeches, began at noon. I figured I had to dress up for this one, so I decided on my navy blue suit, burgundy tie and the same pair of dress shoes I wore the previous day. When I arrived at the hotel downtown, Jackie met me at the front door to the ballroom, along with a brunette woman, five-seven with long hair, wearing a bright yellow sleeveless dress and a pair of antique white high heels, and a bearded red-haired man, five-eleven, wearing a pair of khaki slacks, a short-sleeve button-down shirt, a navy blue tie and a pair of brown loafers.

“Eric Bronson, I’d like to introduce you to two of your new colleagues. The first is Amanda Kenton; she teaches in the social studies department. The young man is Matthew Runyon; he teaches English literature, with emphasis on Shakespeare,” Jackie said in an introductory fashion.

“I’m pleased to meet you,” Amanda said as we shook hands.

“Welcome to the team,” Matthew added as he shook hands with me.

The four of us walked into the ballroom, where a waiter showed us to a table. When we sat down, we discovered there were two other seats that were empty. “Who will be joining us?” I asked.

“Heather Johnson directs the Fashion Design program at our Casper campus. She apprenticed with a top Paris designer, and has worked for fashion designers in Milan, New York and Los Angeles before coming to Casper to teach her craft four years ago. Kevin Leeds is another new teacher at our Casper campus; he teaches foreign languages. He taught French, Spanish, German and Portuguese in the public school system in Washington before that school system laid him off at the end of this past academic year. Kevin’s wife, Josie, is a Casper native,” Jackie explained.

“Where do you come from?” asked Matthew.

“I was born and raised in Creve Coeur, Missouri. It’s about fifteen miles west of St. Louis. I got my Bachelor’s from Southern Illinois, and my Master’s at Seton Hall. I taught social studies in the New York Public Schools for twenty years before I was offered early retirement last month,” I replied.

"I don't know if you've heard of Buffalo, Wyoming," Amanda added.

"In fact, I've heard of the town, although the only Buffalo I've been to is the one in New York," I told her.

"It's about an hour and a half north of Casper, near where Interstates 25 and 90 meet. I visited there when I was in college," Matthew added.

"You grew up not far from our new colleague," added Jackie.

"I grew up in Clinton, Illinois. It's a small town north of Decatur, and south of Bloomington. I was an honor student the entire time I was in school; I went to Illinois State in Normal on an academic scholarship. I started my career in South Korea, teaching English to gifted students in Seoul. That gave me a chance to travel throughout Asia; I visited Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, and even spent a few weeks one summer volunteering at an orphanage in Kolkata, India; I'm still used to saying Calcutta. After three years in South Korea, I taught English literature in Lincoln, Illinois for two years. I joined the faculty of The Rainbow School for Girls in Chicago seven years ago; I took a transfer to Casper four years ago. While I was in Chicago, I got my Master's in social work from Loyola," Matthew explained.

"Where did you go to school, Amanda?" I asked her.

"I lettered in track and field in high school. I went to Minnesota on a track and field scholarship. I received Bachelor's degrees in education, history and social work. I came to Rainbow right out of college; I wanted to work close to home. I've been at Rainbow for the last three years; I just finished my Master's in

social work from the University of Colorado," she replied.

After the four of us ordered lunch, Heather and Kevin arrived. Kevin was in a short red button-down shirt, a pair of khaki slacks and a pair of burgundy dress shoes, while Heather was in a white blouse, pink slacks and a pair of pink and white flats. Both of them hovered around six feet tall. "You must be the other new teacher in town," Kevin said, trying to guess which one was new.

"I'm the other new teacher here. Eric Bronson, formerly of the New York Public Schools," I told him.

"I'm Kevin Leeds, formerly of the school system in the District of Columbia," he added.

"It's great to have both of you aboard. Mr. Bronson, I'm Heather Johnson, director of the Fashion Design program," she added.

"Kevin, Heather, Eric Bronson is originally from the St. Louis area. He'll be starting at Rainbow in Casper this month," Jackie informed them.

"I grew up not far from you, either," Heather added.

"Where did you grow up, Heather?" I asked her.

"I grew up in Hannibal, Missouri. I knew I had a knack for designing fashions from the time I was a teenager. I designed and made my own prom dress. When I graduated from high school, I went to fashion design school in Paris. After I graduated, I apprenticed with a top fashion designer. I spent eight years in Paris before heading off to Milan for two years. I worked for a costume designer in Los Angeles for three years, followed by four years working for a bridal and formal

gown designer in New York. I came to Rainbow in Casper five years ago to start the program," she explained.

"I grew up in San Bernardino, California. I was an honor student throughout; I went to Stanford on an academic scholarship. When I graduated with a Bachelor's in linguistics, I accepted the job in Washington. While I taught in the District of Columbia, I rented an apartment in Virginia. I taught in D.C. for eleven years before I was laid off. My wife, Josie, is from Casper. She's going to be teaching fourth grade in the public school system there this fall," added Kevin.

After lunch, we heard a series of speakers on how their experiences at the school shaped their lives. Some were students, others were faculty members. Jackie was the second to last speaker, talking about how her experience has enriched her life. After she finished her speech, she began her introduction.

"One of the newest members of our faculty this coming academic year is Eric Bronson. Mr. Bronson is a graduate of Southern Illinois University Carbondale, with Bachelor's degrees in historical studies and education. He also holds Master's degrees in historical studies and social work from Seton Hall University. For the past twenty years, he has taught social studies in the New York Public Schools; his most recent assignment was teaching a remedial social studies class at Buchanan High School. He will be teaching history at our Casper campus. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Mr. Eric Bronson."

I got up from my seat, and walked toward the podium. Jackie and I embraced before I stood in front of the podium, and faced the audience. "You may not know this, but public speaking is my strong suit," I said before they applauded.

I then started with my speech. “Just two months ago, I was teaching social studies to a group of students assigned to a remedial program in the nation’s largest public school system. These students couldn’t make it in a traditional setting. We were taught to give these students special attention, and they responded. I saw a vast improvement in their grade point averages. When they started in the remedial studies program, many students were getting either a ‘D’ average or a failing grade. The students I taught mainly came from broken homes; most lived in single-parent households. I had a pair of students who were being raised by an older sibling, and several who were in foster homes. Their stories were sad enough to make me shed a tear. Within one semester, they raised their averages by two or three letter grades. I really cared about these students; I wanted to bring out the best in students who the system considered to be ‘unteachable.’ Many of the students I taught went on to college or trade school. I’ve been proud to have a part in their academic turnaround.”

I got a round of applause before I continued. “My experience in the remedial education program in New York prepared me for the next phase of my career; I’m glad that the next phase will be in the mountain air of Wyoming. For the past twenty years, I’ve worked in a co-ed environment. This is the first time I’ll be working at a single-gender school; in this case, a girls’ school. I’ve worked with a number of troubled girls during my years teaching in the Big Apple. Last year, I even had one student who dealt with gender identity issues. It was the first time I had a transgender student in any of my classes, and it brought me a unique perspective. This student told me his heartbreaking story of being a girl, trapped in a boy’s body; I had not shed as many

tears for a student as I did for this one. I've been told that he's now started a new life as a girl, and has enrolled at our Long Island campus."

Another round of applause rang out before I continued. "It is the experience I've gained teaching in a big city school system that I bring to The Rainbow School for Girls. I'm very pleased to join the family at Rainbow, and I will never let you down." I got a standing ovation when I stepped down from the podium.

"You're really going to like it in Casper," Matthew told me.

"I'm sure of it," I added.

## **Four**

After spending the night of July 8 with friends, I left for Casper at eight o'clock the next morning. I drove for several hours along Interstate 80 through Nebraska, stopping for lunch in Lexington. It was just before five o'clock that I finally crossed into Wyoming. The only times I was held up in traffic was coming out of Omaha, and getting onto northbound Interstate 25 from westbound Interstate 80 in Cheyenne. It was just after eight o'clock that I made it into Casper, checking into a hotel for the night.

On the morning of July 9, I walked down the street to my young cousin Stephanie Felton's real estate office near downtown Casper. She was a real estate agent for my cousin John during her free time and in the summertime, when school was out. She also taught sixth grade at a local Catholic school. When I arrived, a high school girl named Emily greeted me. "Good morning," she said with a wide smile, before I was asked whom I had arrived to see.

“Stephanie Felton,” I replied.

“We’ve been expecting you. I’m Emily Green, the receptionist for John Felton and Associates,” she added.

Stephanie had slightly longer hair than I remembered her when I visited her at Carbondale during her junior year. She still looked like a college girl, even though she was already twenty-six years old. She was five-seven with an average build, wearing a white blouse, a pair of off-white slacks with white flats. “Eric, it’s great to see you again,” she said excitedly before we embraced.

“It’s great to see you again, Stephanie. It’s been four years since I spoke to your class at SIU Carbondale,” I added.

“Has it been that long?” she asked me.

“Yes, it’s been that long. I’m taking a job as a teacher at the Rainbow School for Girls.”

“I heard Uncle Will left his lake house to you when he passed away a few months ago.”

“I’ve wanted to get out of New York for several years; I was offered early retirement last month. I got offered a job teaching history at The Rainbow School for Girls here in Casper; I start in five days.”

Stephanie grabbed the keys to the house out of her office, and walked out to the minivan with me. While I was driving, Stephanie told me about the receptionist who greeted me. “Emily will be a senior at Rainbow starting late next month. She has worked for us the past two summers, and also fills in on the weekends.”

“How long has she attended Rainbow?”

“She’s been there since the eighth grade. She’s originally from Scottsbluff, Nebraska, and is a ward of the court. Her father is serving a fifty-year sentence at a federal penitentiary in Indiana for taking part in the firebombing of a mosque in Denver. Her mother is serving twenty years in the Nebraska state pen for manufacturing and distributing methamphetamines. She has been traumatized because of her father’s radical right wing activities and her mother’s involvement in the drug trade. She’s had a well-rounded life since she came to Rainbow.”

“What about the grandparents, and does she have any siblings?”

“Both sets of grandparents live too far away; her maternal grandparents live in Mississippi. They’re too poor to watch over her. Her younger brother, Hugh, lives with her paternal grandparents, who live in Germany. He’s in seventh grade at a school on a U.S. military installation, where their paternal grandfather is a Colonel in the U.S. Army. She has an older brother and an older sister; her older brother, Eric, currently attends college in Canada, where he is a senior majoring in education, while her older sister, Holly, attends college in Pittsburgh, where she’s a sophomore majoring in criminal justice.”

“What does she want to do when she graduates from Rainbow next spring?”

“She’s got college scholarship offers galore this past spring. She even has an offer from the college Eric is attending, Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario. She would like to attend college in Pittsburgh, but she prefers Pitt over where Holly goes to school: Duquesne.”

“What does she hope to major in?”

“For her, the sky’s the limit. She’s shown quite an aptitude in English, history, business and science. The school assigned her to us when she finished her sophomore year; she did so well, that we kept her on past the start of the last academic year as a weekend receptionist on an as-needed basis. She was so excited when she came back for her second summer with us. My dad really likes her work ethic.”

When I pulled into a newly surfaced driveway, I saw the house the way I remembered it from my last visit with Uncle Will three summers ago for his ninetieth birthday. “The driveway was gravel until just last fall, when Uncle Will had a concrete driveway installed,” Stephanie told me.

“That will make it a lot easier to pull my minivan in from the road.”

Stephanie handed me the keys to the house I inherited from Uncle Will over to me, and showed me inside. “The furnishings are the same way he left them when they took him to the hospital for the last time,” she informed me before showing me around the house. The back porch has a view of the lake, as well as a view of Casper. The first thing I noticed while looking out from the porch was a stray moose walking through the back yard.

“You’ll get your share of wild animals come through your yard. Mostly, we get moose, deer and even the occasional buffalo around here. There have been a few sightings of mountain lions, foxes and even an occasional bear in this area. I was here the night Uncle Will shot a brown bear,” she told me.

When I returned to town with Stephanie, I asked about where the school is. “Oh, yes! It’s on U.S. 20-26-87 about five miles east of Evansville. It is in a se-

cluded area with a view of the North Platte River; it's under heavy security twenty-four hours a day," she replied.

When I arrived back at the real estate office, Emily asked me: "Which new teacher are you?"

"I'm Mr. Bronson," I replied.

"Oh, yeah... the history teacher," she added.

"I met Mr. Leeds, the new foreign language teacher, in Omaha a couple of days ago."

"There's another new teacher that hasn't arrived in town yet. Her name is Miss Hardy; she's coming in from Albuquerque tomorrow."

"She's the math teacher that just graduated from New Mexico."

"Mr. Leeds and his wife found their house through John; they bought one in town. Miss Hardy has a friend who lives in town."

As I was leaving the real estate office, I got a call on my cell phone from Kevin. He asked me to meet him and his wife at a restaurant in the downtown area. Kevin was just in a white Washington Nationals T-shirt and a pair of navy blue Bermuda shorts with brown loafers. The first time I took a look at Josie, I knew he made a great choice. A five-foot-five brunette, average build with her long hair tied back, she was in a red T-shirt and a pair of khaki shorts with a pair of white flats. "Did you find a place to live?" Kevin asked me.

"I just got the keys to the house I inherited from my Uncle Will," I replied.

"Eric Bronson, this is my wife, Josie. Josie Leeds, this is Eric Bronson; he's the new history teacher," he said to her.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Josie," I said with a wide smile.

"Likewise," she added.

The three of us went inside and was shown to a table by a middle-aged lady named Georgia. "Would you like anything to drink?" she asked us.

"I'll have unsweetened iced tea," I replied.

"We'd better make it a pitcher. We both drink a lot of tea," Kevin added.

While we were looking over the menu, Josie asked: "What kind of students have you been teaching?"

"I've been teaching mainly middle and high school students since I started in the profession twenty years ago. My student teaching was at a high school in Murphysboro, Illinois. After I graduated, I spent twenty years teaching in New York, living in the same Greenwich Village apartment. My last assignment there was teaching remedial classes at Buchanan High School in Brooklyn. Many of the students I had turned around their academic performance and changed their attitudes, not only toward their work, but also toward their teachers. This is the kind of experience I'm bringing with me to my new job at Rainbow," I explained.

Kevin and Josie both ordered steak dinners, while I ordered the fried chicken with mashed potatoes and gravy and a garden salad. After we ordered, Kevin asked me: "Have you ever been married?"

"No, I haven't. I never met Miss Right. As a matter of fact, I haven't been in a relationship since college," I replied.

"You've been married to your work, I'd take it," added Josie.

“To put it mildly, yes,” I said to her.

“What part of town is the house your uncle left to you in?” she then asked

“It’s on the lake, east of Bar Nunn, with views of both the lake and the city,” I replied.

“We’ve bought a house on the east side of Casper, just before you cross into Evansville. It’s a nice neighborhood. This is the first house we’ve bought, after spending the first four years of our marriage in a rented condo in Silver Spring,” Kevin added.

“The house we bought is close to my parents’ house; it’s also next door to my twin brother, Joe. He’s an officer with the Casper Police, assigned as a school resource officer; I’m very close with my sister-in-law, Annie,” Josie then added.

“We’ve also got a big surprise for you. Just before we left Maryland, Josie went to see an obstetrician. We’re going to have a baby,” Kevin informed me.

“Congratulations! Casper is a great place to raise a child,” I added.

When I returned to the house, just after two o’clock, I sorted through my boxes. I separated my personal effects between the house, the office I would set up in the finished basement, and my new office at the school. Later in the afternoon, I drove back into town for grocery shopping. On the afternoon of July 12, I had my cable television and Internet services installed. The only piece of furniture I took from New York was my twin-size bed; I used it to set up a guest bedroom. Most of the furnishings were inherited from Uncle Will, including a king-size bed. Another thing I inherited was his Amateur Radio station; I also got my license when I

was in New York. I would be able to relax the whole weekend before I started my new job.

## **Five**

On the morning of July 15, the alarm went off at six-thirty. I decided to wear my yellow polo shirt, a pair of khaki slacks, my usual pair of white socks, and a pair of white sneakers on my first day on my new job. It was a twenty-minute drive to the school. I drove along two miles of winding road, steadily going uphill to the front gate, where I was greeted by a middle-age security guard named Vinnie. I stopped at the gate, and told him I was a new faculty member. "I'm Eric Bronson, the new history teacher," I said.

He first looked at the New York plates on my minivan before checking the security list. "Proceed, Mr. Bronson; welcome to Rainbow Casper," he said with a smile. I drove another half a mile until I found a parking space reserved for me. It was in the second row from the front of the lot, facing the administration building.

The Rainbow School for Girls campus on the outskirts of Casper looks quite a bit different from the one I visited on Long Island. The three-story administration building is a retro design, based on the school buildings common in the 1940s. However, the sloped roof is really a huge solar panel. There are four classroom buildings on campus; the Social Science and Science/Math buildings are modern, four-story buildings. The two-story Fine Arts building is of the Art Deco style common during the 1930s. The Language Arts building is made entirely of limestone and granite; the design is more Roman-influenced. The fitness center,

where the physical education classes are held, is also of a modern design, but three stories tall. The eight dormitory buildings, all of them two stories, resemble mountain lodges; logs were used in the construction of the buildings, in tribute to Wyoming's pioneer roots.

I walked into the administration building, where I was greeted by a light brown-haired woman in her early forties, five-seven with an average build, wearing a bright yellow pantsuit with a white blouse and white flats. "Mr. Bronson, I'm Dr. Betsy Willis, the medical director for the school. I'm here to show you around," she told me.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Willis," I said before she began giving me the tour.

"This building is the administration building. The school's headmistress has her office in this building. My office is also in this building. We have our counseling center, enrollment management center, rooms for our support groups, and health services in this building. In the basement of the administration building is the school cafeteria. We have a wide variety of dishes throughout the year. Our entire cafeteria staff is among the best school food service staffs in North America; all of them have received their training at some of the world's top culinary schools. Our food service director, John Matthews, was trained at a top culinary school in Paris. I'm proud to be part of one of the top girls' schools in the country. Miss Lyons, our headmistress, will welcome you personally when she gets back."

"Where is she today?"

"Miss Lyons is at a headmistress retreat at a resort outside Atlanta. She should be back on Wednesday."

The first stop after the tour of the administration building was the Fine Arts building. I was shown the fashion design rooms first, followed by the music rooms, the visual arts, feminine department and graphic arts classrooms. The Language Arts building was next, where I took a look at the huge library, which occupies the entire ground floor. An auditorium was on the first floor; it seats 500 people. The offices for the Language Arts faculty occupy about half the third floor; half of the first floor is a computer lab, since computer classes are also taught in the building. The next place I was taken to was the fitness center, where they had stationary bikes, treadmills and weightlifting equipment. A velodrome, gymnasium and even batting cages were also in the building. The Science/Math building was next on the tour; the basement featured a weather center, where students can monitor weather conditions throughout Wyoming and around the world. Laboratory space was primarily on the fourth floor, although the weather and sound labs were in the basement. What I didn't know was that each building was connected by underground tunnels, so we took one to the last stop, the Social Science building. The basement houses a huge archive of historical texts, as well as the faculty offices. All of the offices had windows; the conference room was the only one that was entirely in the interior.

"Mr. Bronson, this is your office," she informed me. When I saw my nameplate on my new office, I walked in to find the department's textbooks on my desk. I was informed they had arrived on Friday. I was next to Amanda's office. We finished the tour at the cafeteria, where I got myself a one-pint carton of orange juice. After the tour was over, I went to my minivan, where I pulled out a dolly, put my two boxes of school books

on it, and hauled it over to my new office. Amanda had just stepped out of her office when I walked in hauling my boxes.

“I see you’ve found your office,” she said with a smile.

“Dr. Willis showed me here,” I added.

Amanda helped me with getting my books out of the boxes; I put them on the shelves in my office. “Approximately how many students do we serve at this school?” I asked her.

“We have 450 students at this campus. Of that number, 226 are troubled girls; most are wards of the court. Seventy-three of these girls have served time in juvenile detention, mainly in Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska and Montana. Sixty have been sent to us by the foster care system. Fifty-eight girls were removed from their homes because of histories of domestic abuse. Another twenty girls were removed from homes with histories of substance abuse, eight were removed from homes in which one or both parents are serving prison time, and the remaining six girls were referred to by a therapist or authority at the local school. The remaining 224 girls are transgender. They’re going through various stages of the transition from boys to girls. Of this group, seventy have started living full-time as girls within the past year. The majority of these are seventh and ninth graders. Eighty-eight are preparing for sex reassignment surgery; most have their operations after finishing eighth or tenth grade; a handful do graduate before having their operations. The remaining sixty-six girls have completed their transitions from boys to girls by having had sex reassignment surgery,” Amanda explained.

“How many men are on the faculty?” I then asked.

“You, Kevin and Matt are three of only eight men on the faculty of sixty teachers. Ryan Long has been teaching graphic art at our school for the past three years. He’s also taught computer science; he’s been with Rainbow for eight years now, having taught at our campuses in Chicago and San Francisco. He started in the public school system in his hometown of Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Jeff Vernon has taught science at this campus for the past six years; he taught meteorology at the University of Michigan before coming to Casper. He’s a native of Evansville, Wyoming. Juan Xavier has taught Spanish and Portuguese at our campus for the past five years; he grew up on the Isle of Youth, got his linguistics and foreign affairs degrees from Havana University, and worked in the Cuban diplomatic corps before he defected to the United States eleven years ago. He taught Spanish in Miami and Jacksonville before coming to Casper. His wife, Maribel, whom he met while teaching in Miami, teaches in our department. Keith Vincent has taught English literature, with emphasis on American literature, since our campus opened ten years ago. He taught in the Casper public schools for seven years before coming to our school. His wife, Heather, still teaches in the public schools. Both are from Bar Nunn, and both graduated from the University of Colorado. Walter Jones has been teaching earth science on this campus for the past eight years. He taught science in a high school in the Watts community of Los Angeles before coming to Casper. His younger sister, Wendy Fogarty, is one of the guidance counselors on campus,” Amanda replied.

Just as I was putting up another volume of my U.S. history encyclopedia on the top shelf, a dark-haired woman, five-three with a medium build and in her late

thirties, knocked on my office door. "I'm glad to see you helping one of our new faculty members," she said to Amanda in a mild Spanish accent.

"I'm Eric Bronson, the new history teacher," I said to her before extending my right hand.

"Mr. Bronson, I'm Maribel Benitez de Xavier," she said with a smile as I gently shook her hand.

"I'm very pleased to meet you. I met Amanda last week at the fund-raiser in Omaha," I added.

"What have you been doing all summer?" Amanda asked her.

"I was pretty much a baseball mom all summer; our younger son, Jose, played Little League baseball. His team won the state title in the nine-year-old group last week. Our older son, Juan, placed second in the state tournament in the twelve-year-old group. We did take a day to visit Mount Rushmore this summer, and spent the Fourth of July with my relatives in Denver," Maribel replied.

After moving all of my books and notes into my new office, I found a note on my desk with my new computer password and work E-mail address. I spent the afternoon setting up my new account at the school before going home for the day.

On the afternoon of July 17, I got a knock on the door while looking over the courses I would be teaching for the fall term. A woman in her early forties, five-six, slender build, with shoulder-length brunette hair, wearing a white floral print dress and white high heels, looked in my door. "Eric?" she asked me.

"Come in," I replied.

"I'm Lorianne Lyons, the headmistress on this campus. Everyone calls me Lori," she added.

"You look vaguely familiar to me; you look younger than you really are," I complimented.

"You do? How young do I look?" she then asked.

"I don't think you look a day over thirty," I replied.

"Why, thank you," she added, slightly blushing. She paused for a moment, before continuing: "I'd like to personally welcome you to the Casper campus of The Rainbow School for Girls. I'm very happy you came to join us. I look forward to working with you and with the other new teachers."

"I met one of the new teachers, Kevin Leeds, at the Omaha fund-raiser. You probably heard that he and Josie are expecting a new addition next spring."

"He told me that they will become parents next March or April."

"Our other new faculty member, Faith Hardy, started with us on Monday. This is her first job out of New Mexico."

"Emily Green told me about her. John Felton is my uncle; his daughter, Stephanie, is my cousin."

"Emily is one of our best students. She's taken an interest in a variety of subjects since she came to us four years ago."

"I've heard that the students here get a well-rounded education."

"Every year, we have a new faculty orientation on campus. I've already talked to Kevin and Faith, and they've indicated that Friday at one o'clock will be a

great time for orientation. What do you think?" she asked.

"One o'clock on Friday is fine by me," I replied.

"I'll see you in the main conference room at the Administration building Friday at one," she informed me.

## Six

I asked Kevin to meet me for lunch on Friday at eleven-thirty. Our other new colleague would be joining us for lunch. I decided to wear my red button-down shirt, a pair of brown slacks and a pair of brown loafers. The first person to arrive was a young woman, five-ten with an average build, long, strawberry blonde hair wearing a floral print sundress and a pair of white open-toed flats. "You must be Eric Bronson, the new history teacher," she said to me as if she was guessing my identity.

"I'm Eric Bronson," I said to her with a smile.

"I'm Faith Hardy, the new math teacher," she added.

"Kevin will be with us momentarily. I got a text from him; he's been looking over his class descriptions," I informed her.

Kevin arrived three minutes later, wearing a white golf shirt, a pair of khaki slacks and a pair of beige loafers. "I apologize for being late; I got a call from Josie before I left my office," he informed us.

"What's up with her?" I asked him.

"Josie went to see an obstetrician in Casper. You probably heard we're going to have a baby," he replied.

“When will she be due?” Faith asked him.

“We’ll be parents, hopefully, by the time Spring Break arrives,” he replied with sincerity.

We got into line to get our lunch. Faith chose to have a Caesar salad and a glass of iced tea. Kevin selected a double hamburger with an order of onion rings. I decided to have grilled salmon, butter herb rice and a side garden salad. We shared a table close to the stairwell. The conference room we were headed to was next to the stairwell on the first floor.

“The food here is the best I’ve ever had at any school,” Kevin complimented.

“I’ll agree with you. This is excellent chow,” Faith added.

“The cafeteria food in New York wasn’t that bad, although the cooks there weren’t exactly Cordon Bleu. The guy who was the cook at Buchanan High spent twenty years in the Army,” I then added.

“The food in the D.C. public schools wasn’t that bad either; the food wasn’t exactly gourmet, but the kids often gobbled it up,” Kevin said with sincerity.

“I had good food when I was in college. This food is excellent,” Faith complimented.

The three of us had time for dessert; Faith chose apple pie, while Kevin went for the blueberry cobbler. I decided to have a couple of bananas. We finished our dessert around quarter to one; the three of us grabbed a cup of coffee before going upstairs to the conference room.

We took our seats in the conference room, and remained quiet until Lori arrived at one o’clock. “I’d take

it the three of you are better acquainted," Lori said to us.

"We are," I told her with pride.

"This orientation is designed by our professional development staff in San Francisco. All of our first year teachers are given this orientation. This will familiarize you with the rules, regulations and policies of our school. We also have a video presentation that will familiarize you with some of the situations we encounter at our school," Lori explained before she asked us if we had any questions.

Since we had no questions, Lori handed out our policy manuals and rulebooks before she continued on with our lecture. "I'm sure you're familiar with the sexual harassment policies of your old school; the policies are similar at this school. We've been able to adjust these policies to the unique needs of our student population. You are here to teach our students the subjects they need to complete their education. We only have eight men on our faculty; of those, five are single, including Eric. While the single men on our faculty have been tempted, they avoid dating the students. They are keenly aware of the laws in this state; the policy manual spells this out clearly. Of the fifty-two women on our teaching faculty, just seven are married. One is divorced, and the remaining forty-four are single. Although we encourage our male and female faculty members to become better acquainted, very few have developed deeply personal relationships. We've only had to dismiss three male faculty members and one female faculty member for sexual harassment since we started allowing men to teach at Rainbow twenty-five years ago. The woman that was fired had taught English at our Dittmer campus; her teaching certificate was

later revoked by the State of Missouri. She's now a waitress at a diner in Durant, Oklahoma. Two of the males we had to let go for sexual harassment taught at our San Francisco campus; both had their teaching certificates revoked by the State of California. One taught foreign languages; he was deported to Brazil, where he's a bouncer at a nightclub in Rio de Janeiro. The other one taught science; he entered treatment for alcohol and sexual addiction. He's now flipping hamburgers at a fast food restaurant in Florence, Alabama. The third male we fired for sexual harassment taught math at our Tampa Bay campus; the State of Florida revoked his teaching certificate. He was the only one who stayed in the profession, although he's now teaching math at a school in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. He was treated for substance abuse before leaving the United States."

Then, she explained some of the regulations. "We usually don't allow more than eight faculty members and two administrators at our dances and other special events. We usually ask for volunteers within three weeks of such events. A faculty member can also bring a spouse or significant other, however. Faculty members may visit students in the dorms only upon that student's request, and only if that visit is in connection with her course work. They can also visit to talk about a personal problem, but only accompanied by a guidance counselor. We have a certified guidance counselor on duty at all times. We also encourage our faculty members to host students during holiday breaks at their places of residence, depending on how much room they have."

I asked her: "How many of the guidance counselors have had to work an overnight shift?"

“Eric, all of our ten daytime guidance counselors work at least one overnight shift a month. We also have a full-time and part-time evening counselor, and a full-time and part-time overnight counselor. The daytime counselors generally work from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon; the evening counselors work from four in the afternoon to midnight, and the overnight counselors work midnight until eight o’clock in the morning,” she explained.

“What about campus security?” Faith asked her.

“We have at least four security guards on the premises at all times, twenty-four hours a day, Faith,” she replied.

“What about the medical staff?” Kevin then asked.

“We have a nurse practitioner on duty twenty-four hours a day, with the same shifts and hours. A doctor is always on call, including our medical director, Dr. Willis,” Lori replied.

The three of us sat through the one-hour video on the school and its vision, taking notes as the video progressed. The orientation didn’t finish until after four o’clock. I went back to my office and made sure I had the policy manual, rules and regulations manual and my course descriptions in my briefcase before I left for the day.

## **Seven**

The first day of the new academic year at Rainbow was August 26. Just two weeks before, I transferred the title to my minivan from New York to Wyoming, and replaced my New York license plates with Wyoming plates. It would be the first morning in three months

that I got up at five o'clock in the morning, although Casper is two hours earlier than New York. I decided to wear a white short-sleeve button down shirt, a pair of khaki slacks, my brown tie, a pair of white socks and a pair of brown loafers to my first day teaching at Rainbow. I left the house at ten minutes of seven, and drove twenty minutes from my home to work. I arrived at my office at seven-fifteen. Looking over my schedule, I would be teaching two American History classes, one at first hour and one at fifth hour. My two World History classes would be at second and seventh hours. I would also teach America in the Twentieth Century at third hour; and The World in the Twentieth Century at sixth hour. My planning period would be fourth hour. I was also given a post-class support group, usually after the last class of the day finished, to help facilitate with another faculty member and a guidance counselor. The first thing I noticed coming out of the office was that all the girls were in white blouses with red plaid skirts that extended down to just above the knee.

My first class was on the third floor; room 317 to be exact. On my way to the elevator, a familiar voice greeted me.

"Mr. Bronson?" the girl asked me. It was Emily from my cousin's real estate office.

"How's everything, Emily?" I asked.

"I'm really looking forward to this school year. I've got one of your classes today," she replied.

"Which class?" I then asked.

"America in the Twentieth Century," she replied.

"I'll see you at ten o'clock," I added as I got aboard the elevator to the third floor.

One thing I learned was that on the first day of classes, each teacher has to spend much of the class period getting to know his or her students before reviewing the class syllabus. Each girl's story was very compelling. In the third hour class that Emily was in, which was in room 208 on the second floor, I heard a very heart-wrenching story from a girl with long, dark hair, five-eight with a slender build.

"My name is Denise Foster. I'm a junior originally from Aurora, Colorado. I've been a student at Rainbow since the seventh grade. I was removed from my household after I finished the sixth grade. I was abused by my parents, along with my brothers and sister. What made it worse is that I'm also a transsexual. My parents were addicted to methamphetamines, or what we know as 'meth'. One night, I told my parents that I hated being a boy, and wanted to become a girl. Both parents beat me so bad, that I landed in the hospital. I told the police the next morning, after I regained consciousness, and the State of Colorado had me and my siblings taken away from them. When the Division of Family and Children's Services came to my parents' house, they also smelled meth cooking. They're now serving a fifty-year sentence for the manufacture and distribution of methamphetamines, assault with intent to kill in my case, and assaulting my siblings. My kid brother, Chuck, now lives with my wealthy Uncle Ed in Los Angeles. My older brother, David, and my older sister, Cathy, were sent to Jackson, Wyoming to live with my Uncle George and Aunt Karen; they also helped me with tuition to get into this school and with my transition from boy to girl. I started living as my true self when I started the seventh grade; I changed my name from Dennis to Denise. After I finished the eighth grade, my aunt took me to Montreal so I could

have my sex-change operation. This school saved my life," she tearfully explained.

I even shed a few tears as I heard the story. "I'm glad we were there to save your life," added Emily.

"By the way, which support group are you in after classes today?" I asked her.

"I'm in the high school transgender support group," Denise replied.

"I'm one of the facilitators for that group," I added.

After I finished teaching my third hour class, I went straight to my office to prepare for my fifth, sixth and seventh hour classes. On my way to my fifth hour class in room 118 on the first floor, I stopped by the cafeteria to have baked chicken and a garden salad with Italian dressing for lunch. Just as I was sitting down, Lori approached me. She chose a navy blue pantsuit and a matching pair of high heels for the first day of the new academic year. "How are your classes going today?" she asked me.

"They're going just fine. I did have a real tear-jerker in my class last hour," I replied.

"We have the occasional tear-jerkers on the first day of classes. On my first day teaching at Rainbow in San Francisco, I had one girl who was a ward of the court in Nevada. She was an eighth grader in my English Composition class who had transferred from a middle school in Reno. She told me a tearful story of having a three-generation history of abuse in her family; the part that really got me was the story of the night she witness a severe beating of her developmentally disabled sister by their father. She was emotionally distraught as their father continued to punch her; she tried to get him away from her. She was punched in the eye; she ran to

the house next door to call the police. By the time her father was subdued by police, her sister was in a deep coma. Her mother was a drug addict, and was serving time for possession and distribution. She and her younger brother were removed from the household by the State of Nevada. Her sister now lives in a nursing home in Las Vegas as a ward of the state. Her harrowing story sticks with me to this day," she explained.

"What happened to their father?"

"He was sent to the state pen for assault with intent to kill. He's serving a life sentence."

## **Eight**

My fifth, sixth and seventh hour classes were uneventful as I got to know my students better. When I came to the after class support group in a conference room of the Fine Arts building, I was greeted by two women. One was five-two with short blonde hair, slender build, wearing a red cotton dress and white pumps. The other was five-eleven with long brunette hair, average build, wearing a baby blue dress and white flats. "You must be Mr. Bronson, the guy who's helping us with this group," the blonde said, guessing my identity.

"Eric Bronson," I told them.

"I'm Susan McCormick; I'm the guidance counselor in charge of this group. The brunette with us is Stella Richards, one of our feminine department instructors," she added.

"I'm very pleased to meet you, Eric," added Stella.

"How many of these groups does this school have?" I asked them.

“We have thirty such groups in this school; each group has fifteen students. This is one of six high school transgender support groups. This group consists of transsexual girls from the ninth through the twelfth grade,” Stella replied.

“I teach one of the girls from this group in my third hour class,” I added.

“Which student?” asked Susan.

“Denise Foster; she’s in the America in the Twentieth Century class,” I replied.

I took a seat next to Stella, while Susan was seated directly across from us on the other side of the room. The girls took their seats before group started at four o’clock. Unlike with the rest of the groups scheduled, those on the first day of school were scheduled for up to three hours. Susan got the group started at four o’clock, after I closed the door to the conference room.

“Good afternoon, ladies. My name is Susan McCormick; I’m a counselor in the Guidance department. I’ve been at The Rainbow School for Girls here in Casper for the past six years. I’ve worked as a math teacher in the public school system in Denver for eleven years before becoming a guidance counselor while still in Denver. I spent two years as a counselor in Denver before I moved to Casper. I live in Casper with my husband, David, a firefighter, and our three children. Dave, our oldest, is in the seventh grade, and our twin girls, Megan and Michelle, are both in the fifth grade. I’m originally from Fort Morgan, Colorado.”

Stella was next. “I’m Stella Richards, I teach feminine department. I’ve been with The Rainbow School for Girls for the past ten years; I’ve been in Casper for the past two years. I’ve also taught at the San Francisco

campus for three years prior to my arrival in Casper, and started with a five-year stay at the Los Angeles campus. I'm originally from San Bernardino, California. I have one thing in common with all of you girls. I also went through the transition from man to woman. I was born a boy named Sterling; I began my transition while working as a makeup artist for a major Hollywood studio. I also modeled for a top bridal and formal fashion designer while I was transitioning. I came to Rainbow in Los Angeles after I had my sex-change operation in Philadelphia ten years ago. I have transformed many rough-and-tumble, tomboyish girls into proper young women by teaching them how to act like women, and have also taught transsexual girls the finer points of being feminine. I also live in Casper, with my roommate, Sophia Preston, who teaches modeling at the school."

After Stella finished speaking, I spoke. "My name is Eric Bronson; I'm the newest member of the Social Science faculty at Rainbow, specializing in historical studies. I'm a native of Creve Coeur, Missouri; it's a suburb of St. Louis. Before I came to Casper, I taught in the New York Public Schools for twenty years. During the last five years of my tenure in New York, I taught remedial classes in Social Studies at a high school in Brooklyn. I taught at middle and high schools in all New York boroughs except for Staten Island. While I taught remedial classes, I encountered a student who was about to go through the transition from boy to girl; she's now attending our Long Island campus. I live by myself in a house east of Bar Nunn; my place has a view of the lake and the city."

"We're very happy you've joined us, Eric. I'm sure you're going to learn a lot from the girls," added Stella.

The first student who spoke was Denise. "Even though I have Mr. Bronson for my third hour class, I'd like to introduce myself to the rest of you. I'm Denise Foster; I'm sixteen years old and a junior at Rainbow. I'm originally from Aurora, Colorado, and came to the school when I was taken from my drug-addicted parents. My aunt and uncle, who live out in Jackson, helped me with my tuition and transition. I began living full-time as Denise in the seventh grade, and underwent a sex-change operation after I finished the eighth grade. Since then, I've helped my classmates with their troubles; I hope to become a counselor one day."

A red-haired girl spoke next. At five-one, she was the shortest girl in the group. "My name is Natalie Warren. I'm fourteen years old, and a freshman at Rainbow. I'm originally from Goodland, Kansas; this is my first day here. I'm in the process of transitioning from boy to girl. I've grown up slower than most people my age; I was small for a boy. Last year, I was a boy named Nathan. Before the end of last academic year, I told my parents, two brothers and my older sister that I hated being a boy, and wanted to become a girl. I must admit to being teased for my feminine ways. My therapist in Goodland referred me to this school. I hope to find supportive friends here; I have recently had a legal name change to Natalie. I hope to have my sex-change operation by the time I start my junior year."

After Natalie was a dark-haired Asian girl, five-nine with a slender build. "I'm Annie Ng. I'm seventeen years old and a senior at Rainbow. I am a second-generation Vietnamese-American; my parents and grandparents came to this country from Vietnam during the terrible war there. My family now lives in Colorado Springs, where they run a Vietnamese restaurant. For



the first thirteen years of my life, I lived as a boy named Andrew. I was made fun of and bullied for my girlish ways; when I finished the seventh grade, I told my family I really wanted to be a girl. My parents told me about this school; I was referred here by my therapist. I've been here since the eighth grade; I had my sex-change operation two years ago. I hope to go into the Foreign Service."

Next was a girl with her frizzy medium brown hair tied back with a bow tie, five-seven with a larger than average build. "My name is Gabrielle Harper. I'm fifteen years old and a sophomore here at Rainbow. I'm originally from Deming, New Mexico. I came here in the seventh grade, after I got a diagnosis of gender identity disorder from my therapist, who referred me. My parents wanted me to have the best education, so they went along with my therapist's recommendation. I was not a happy camper in the twelve years I lived as George. This school is where my new life as Gabi began. I had my sex-change operation last summer; I hope to be a photographer when I graduate."

After Gabi was an African-American girl, six-one with dark, curly hair and a slender build. "I'm Felicia Cunningham; I'm sixteen years old and a junior at Rainbow. I came from a well-to-do family in Littleton, Colorado. My father owns a restaurant, while my mother owns a dress shop. I was pushed around too much when I was younger; I often wondered why. It was because when I was living as Philip, my older sister, Darlene, dressed me up as a girl. When I finished the eighth grade, I told my family I wanted to become a girl. I have a very supportive family; even my basketball-playing brother, Dré, is supportive. I had my operation this past summer, and spent much of the summer recovering at my parents' home before returning to

school. I hope to be a model and dress designer when I graduate.”

A long-haired Hispanic girl, five-four with dark hair and an average build, spoke next. “My name is Marisol Natrona. I’m fourteen years old and just started my freshman year. I’m originally from Fort Stockton, Texas; my family now lives in Trinidad, Colorado. My parents came to this country from Mexico to escape drug violence; they now own a Mexican-American restaurant with my cousins. My parents and older brother and sister just became U.S. citizens this past spring. This past summer, I was diagnosed with gender identity disorder after spending the first part of my life as a boy named Miguel. I am now two months on hormone replacement therapy, hoping to have my operation when I finish my sophomore year. I had been bullied for my feminine ways while I was in middle school before I went to see a therapist; she referred me to this school.”

Another African-American girl spoke after Marisol; she had her hair, dyed a golden blonde, five-ten with a slender build. “My name is Jemima Robbins, but everyone calls me Gem. I’ll be eighteen years old on September 3, and a senior at Rainbow. My family lives in Flagstaff, Arizona, but I’m originally from Harlem. I’m from a similar background as Felicia; my mother owns a restaurant, while my father owns a men’s clothing store with my uncle. I was never happy when I was a boy named Jason. As much as I could, I put on my sister Bonita’s old dresses. When I was thirteen years old, I had the feeling I was gay. Finally, after I finished the seventh grade, I told my parents that I was a girl, trapped in the body of a boy. My therapist referred me here, where I got all the support I needed for my transition from boy to girl. My parents and sister were very

supportive throughout the whole time. When I finished my freshman year, I went with my mother and sister to Montreal so I could have my sex-change operation. I hope to be a psychologist one day."

She was followed by another Asian girl, this one with her short, dark hair done in a bob, five-three with a slender build. "I'm Heather Hashimoto; I'm fourteen years old and a freshman at Rainbow. I came to this school from Mile Forty, Saskatchewan, north of the U.S.-Canadian border, where my family runs a Japanese restaurant. My parents, along with an aunt and uncle, came to Canada from Sapporo, Japan before I was born. I spent the first twelve years of my life as an unhappy boy named Hikaru. I didn't like the rough-and-tumble games other boys played; I enjoyed more gentle pursuits. As time went on, I identified myself more as a girl. As much as I could, I put on kimonos that my older sister, Winnie, once wore. When I finished the sixth grade, I told my parents, Winnie and my brothers, Hideo and Daisuke, that I loathed being a boy. They were very supportive of my decision to become a girl. My therapist helped me with the paperwork to get me to come to this school, including my student visa. This past summer, I visited my grandparents in Tokyo; it was during that visit that I underwent my sex-change operation. I hope to be a teacher when I'm older."

A girl with long auburn hair done in a ponytail, five-seven with a slender build, spoke after Heather. "I'm Stephanie Hall from Laramie, Wyoming. I'm now fifteen years old, in my sophomore year, and this is my second year at Rainbow. I'm a ward of the court here in Wyoming. I began life as a boy named Seth. My older sister, Sarah, and my brothers, Steve and Shepard, whom we call 'Schlep', were taken away from our par-

ents last spring because our father was a drug addict, and our mother was a drug dealer. During the whole time we lived with our parents, I had the feeling I should have been a girl. I was very close to Sarah. We used to dress up together when I was younger. When a social worker was talking to me about finding alternative living arrangements, I told him that I felt that I really should be a girl. He referred me to a therapist, who gave me the diagnosis of gender identity disorder. A judge sent Steve and Schlep to live with my maternal aunt in Sheridan, while Sarah left to attend Harvard on a scholarship. I was sent here to Rainbow. I hope to have my operation when I'm finished with this academic year; I may consider being a social worker someday."

Another Hispanic girl, this one with shoulder-length dirty blonde hair, five-five with a larger than average build, made her introduction. "My name is Laura Monterrey; I'm seventeen years old and a senior at Rainbow. Like Stephanie and Denise, I'm a ward of the court. I come from Amarillo, Texas. My parents and older brother were Christian missionaries in Central America. They were killed by hit men from a drug cartel in Guatemala three years ago. I was not happy in the fourteen years I spent as Lorenzo. I lived with my uncle for a while before he was arrested for drug trafficking and ordering the murder of my parents and brother. The State of Texas made me a ward of the court; it was at that time I told them I wanted to be a girl. I started my new life here in Casper; I had my sex-change operation last summer in San Francisco. I hope to be a counselor one day."

The tallest girl in the group had shoulder-length dirty blonde hair, six-three with a slender build. "I'm Alicia Merton; I just turned eighteen last week, a senior

at Rainbow, and originally from Bozeman, Montana. For the first twelve years of my life, I was a boy named Allen. I'm from a well-to-do family; my father made his fortune in real estate, while my mother owns a bridal shop in town. I had three older sisters to play with when I was younger, along with two older brothers and a younger brother. I was very close to my sisters; my parents sent us all to private schools. When I finished sixth grade, I told my family I wanted to become a girl. They were very supportive of my decision to become Alicia; I had my sex-change operation in London after I finished the eighth grade. My parents are now among the school's biggest fundraisers; they helped raise the money to get this campus constructed."

After Alicia spoke, a red-haired girl, six feet tall with a heavy build, would speak. "My name is Monica Horton; I turned seventeen years old two weeks ago, and I'm a junior at Rainbow. My family now lives in Billings, Montana; I was born in St. Louis. I came to this school as an eighth grader after I was diagnosed with gender identity disorder. I was clearly not happy in the fourteen years I spent as a boy named Michael. Just as I was finishing seventh grade, I told my parents, older brother Martin and older sister Adele that I was a girl, trapped in a boy's body. My younger brother, Aaron, was eight years old at the time, and too young to understand what I was going through. My parents own a high-end fashion store in downtown Billings. With the help of my cousin, Melissa, a bridal consultant in St. Louis, they sent me to Rainbow, where I could get an education and transition. Last summer, I had my sex-change operation in Philadelphia. I'm hoping to be a psychiatrist someday."

The next girl had her long, auburn hair tied back with a pink ribbon; she was five-six with a slightly

larger than average build. "My name is Melinda Elk; I'm fourteen years old, a freshman at Rainbow, originally from Window Rock, Arizona, and I'm of Navajo, Lakota Sioux and English heritage. My family runs a curio shop and restaurant in Window Rock. Two years ago, I was diagnosed with gender identity disorder after spending twelve unhappy years as a boy named Moe. My therapist on the reservation sent me to Rainbow when I started seventh grade. I spent this past summer recuperating from my sex-change operation in San Francisco. Someday, I hope to be a social worker, helping my fellow Native Americans."

A girl with shoulder-length blonde hair, five-seven with a slender build, spoke next. "My name is Patricia Freira, but everyone calls me Patti. I turned fifteen earlier this month, a freshman at Rainbow, and originally from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. My family now resides in Sturgis, South Dakota, where they run the only Brazilian steakhouse in all of the Dakotas. I was diagnosed with gender identity disorder last year, after I finished the seventh grade. The thirteen years I spent as a boy named Paulo were not happy ones at all. My therapist referred me to Rainbow, where I began transitioning. My parents and older sister, Roberta, have been very supportive of my transition. I'm awaiting a recommendation for surgical reassignment; if I get it, I should have my sex-change operation after the school year is over. My dream is to be an actress, but if that doesn't work out, I would love to own a high-end boutique for teenage girls and young women."

The final girl to speak had strawberry blonde hair, five-eight with an average build. "Many of us know the old cliché, 'last but not least.' I'm Jennifer Stevens; I turned sixteen years old in July, and a sophomore at Rainbow. My father is businessman and philanthropist

Joseph Stevens; he owns eight fixed base operations for private planes, headquartered in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He also gave of his time and money to help get this school built. My mother is socialite Gretchen Stevens; she married my father when he was in the Air Force, stationed at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. I was diagnosed with gender identity disorder four years ago while I was attending a boarding school in Vermont. I was pushed around and bullied a lot by my male classmates for my feminine ways. Before I started the seventh grade, my parents hired the best attorney to handle my name change from James to Jennifer. I was called Jimmy as a boy, and, as a girl, also like to be called Jennie. My therapist in Santa Fe agreed with my father's recommendation to attend Rainbow. Two years ago, my parents took me to San Francisco for my sex-change operation. I've stayed at Rainbow to help the other girls with the transitional phases of their lives; I hope to be a psychologist in private practice."

We paused for a moment before Stella asked me: "What's your first impression of these young ladies?"

"This is, quite possibly, the most diverse group of girls I've had the pleasure of associating with. When I was teaching in New York, most of the students I had were from working class or middle class backgrounds. I only had a handful of students who were wards of the court, and only one student who was a transsexual. This is the first time I've had students, whether it be in a class I teach or, in this case, a support group I help facilitate, that have come from a wider variety of socio-economic backgrounds, and the first transsexual support group I have been associated with. I'm looking forward to getting to know you and to help you, in any way I can, with what's troubling you as the year progresses," I explained.

“These girls seem to have warmed up to you right away. It’s not often that they get a group in which one of the facilitators is a man,” added Susan.

## **Nine**

I was on call in case of an emergency on campus for Labor Day weekend. On the Sunday of Labor Day weekend, I was on my riding mower, giving the ten-acre expanse known as my lawn a good cutting. I had just pulled the mower into the garage, looking forward to grading the last batch of papers for one of my World History classes when my cell phone rang.

“Eric Bronson,” I said when I answered the phone.

“Eric, this is Jennie Stevens from the support group. We have some trouble in the dorms at the school,” she told me.

“What’s going on?” I asked her.

“It’s one of the troubled girls. She’s been screaming and acting strange for the last hour and a half,” she replied.

“Have you notified anyone else?” I then asked.

“Her guidance counselor is on duty this weekend; a doctor has been called.”

“Jennie, I’ll be over in fifteen minutes.”

After I got off the phone, I got into my minivan, and drove over to the school as fast as I could. When I arrived, Betsy was waiting for me in her Lincoln MKZ. “Where’s the patient?” I asked her as I arrived.

“She’s in Dormitory Number Eight; follow me,” she replied.

I followed her to the parking lot for the dormitory buildings. Jennie was in a mauve bodysuit, a white linen skirt and white sandals. Betsy was in a red top, a pair of white shorts and a pair of white sneakers. "I'm so glad you could come, Mr. Bronson and Dr. Willis. The patient is in room 8102," she informed us.

"Who's with her?" Betsy asked.

"Bob Mitchell, her guidance counselor," Jennie replied.

"What's the lowdown on what's happening?" I asked.

"Her name is Katie Roberts. She's thirteen years old, born female, in the seventh grade and a ward of the court from Helena, Montana. For the past three years, she's been dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder. When she was ten years old, she saw her older brother, Ken, who was then fifteen, get severely beaten by four members of the junior varsity football team for dating a girl they were trying to court. The trouble was that she has been his sweetheart since he was nine years old. Three months later, she came home from a day camp, walking into the living room where her older sister, Dee, then seventeen years old, being raped by an ex-boyfriend. Her oldest brother, Don, who was then nineteen and home on summer break from the University of Utah, was slashed in the face, just below the eye, trying to pry the rapist off Dee. Just before starting the sixth grade, she was on a trip to Mexico with her family, and witnessed the murder of her mother by members of a drug cartel; her father was paralyzed from the waist down and blinded in the attack. She came back to Helena having nightmares; her bachelor uncle took custody of the children. The nightmares got so severe, that she couldn't continue in a reg-

ular school. She missed one year of school before coming to Rainbow last fall," Jennie explained.

The three of us walked into Room 8102, where Bob, in a white Colorado Rockies T-shirt, a pair of blue Bermuda shorts and a pair of black sandals, was trying to get her to calm down. "Where were you when you got the call?" Betsy asked me.

"I had just finished mowing my lawn. I have a big one to take care of; ten acres, to be exact. I had just turned off the riding mower, and was about to get back into the house to finish grading papers from one of my World History classes when Jennie called me. I was surprised, to say the least," I replied.

"I was having a barbecue at my place; my husband had just put the pork steaks and ribs on the grill. Kevin and Josie Leeds are over at our place; Kevin was shooting baskets with the kids when Bob called me. She's had one similar episode since she started here last week. Her treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder kept her out of school all last academic year," she added.

Bob came up to us, with several scratches on his face. "Who did that to you?" Jennie asked.

"Katie did this to me. I can't get her to calm down," he replied.

"Have you evacuated her roommates?" Betsy asked her.

"They're in my room, safe and sound," Jennie replied.

"Would you like a crack at this, Eric?" Bob asked me.

"I'll give it a try," I replied.

I walked slowly toward Katie's bed. She was in a black camisole and a pair of pink shorts. She was still screaming, laying down on her bed in the fetal position. When I sat down at the edge of the bed, she turned around and looked at me. I had never seen such a frightened look in all my life. Her look suddenly turned from major fear to a more quizzical look as she took one look at me. "Who are you?" she asked in a very loud and frightened tone of voice.

"I'm Mr. Bronson from the Social Science department. Don't be frightened; I'm here to help you," I assured her.

"How do you know you're here to help me?" she asked in a less frightened tone.

"We're all here to help you. Jennie Stevens told me about you. You've been through much more than a typical person your age can tolerate," I replied, trying to assure her.

"How do you know?" she asked me, her tone of voice changing to that of skepticism.

"Before I arrived here, I handled girls and boys who were worse off than you. I taught in New York City. I had students in my classes who were affected by gang activity in their neighborhoods; for these students, witnessing a murder, rape, robbery or assault was a daily occurrence. Some of the students I had also suffered from PTSD; I had a couple of students who acted out the way you did, but it happened in the middle of the school day instead of the weekend. Believe it or not, one student I had accidentally nicked me in the arm with a piece of glass; I have the scar to show for it. Katie, your counselor, Mr. Mitchell, wants to help you. Dr. Willis wants to help you. Jennie wants to help you.

Even your roommates want to help you. You've got to let us help you," I explained.

Katie then got up, put her arms around me and cried on my right shoulder. I slowly put my hands around her, and whispered: "Katie, everything is going to be all right. Just trust us."

Outside the room, Bob asked Betsy: "What would you recommend?"

"Move her to the infirmary in 8217 overnight for observation," she replied.

I took her in my arms, and carried her to the dormitory's infirmary on the second floor. She would be kept in an observation room, with her condition constantly monitored by a nurse, for the overnight hours. I came out with Bob, while Betsy was in with the nurse practitioner and the nurse on duty. "In this case, we recommend that she miss at least one day of classes. But, since tomorrow is Labor Day, she may not lose any class time," he explained.

"Is she seeing a therapist for her PTSD?" I asked him.

"She's seeing a therapist on campus for what ails her," he replied.

"Has her roommates been told?"

"They haven't yet been told about Katie's affliction with PTSD. I'll be sure to tell them."

Bob and I returned to Katie's room; her roommates were joined by Jennie. "Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Bronson, these are Katie's roommates: Paula Fulton, Callie McCabe, and Jane Caldwell," Jennie informed me.

Bob asked them: "Have you noticed anything unusual about Katie's behavior, other than the nightmares she's had over the past week?"

"She was really nervous after class on Friday. Callie had to carry her backpack when we returned from our seventh hour math class while I had to comfort her. Paula was with one of her transsexual classmates in the library, preparing for Tuesday's quiz in feminine deportment class. When we returned to our dorm room, she was really shaking. We talked to her for almost an hour, and she seemed to calm down. She was calm through the night and yesterday," Jane replied.

"She's not used to being back in school, after missing a whole year because of post-traumatic stress. This is the first school she's been to in which she has classmates who are transsexual. She has been having a hard time recovering, after all she's been through the past three years," Callie added.

"I hope she can eventually adjust to this school," I then added.

"I hope so, too," Bob said with concern.

Betsy returned five minutes later. "Katie is in good physical condition; we're going to have to monitor her mental and emotional state tonight," she informed us.

"Will you need me anymore?" I asked her.

"I don't think we'll need you for now, Eric. If she has any more problems, we'll let you know," she replied.

On my way home, I picked up a couple of hamburgers and an order of fries. I was able to finish grading papers for the second World History class section, and spent a relaxing evening at home. I had no other emergencies that weekend; Jennie reported that Katie

had been calm through the remainder of Labor Day weekend. I was able to relax on Labor Day before returning to work the day after.

## Ten

On the afternoon of September 12, I had just finished facilitating the high school transgender support group. I was in my office, getting the papers from my classes ready to be taken home and graded, when Lori knocked on my door. She was in a blue dress and matching high heels.

“Eric, may I have a word with you?” she asked me.

“Come in, Lori,” I replied.

“I’ve just got word that Jeff Vernon has had to pull out of his assignment at Saturday’s Kick-Off Dance. His older brother lost his battle with cancer this morning; he has to be with his family. I was wondering if you will take his place,” she informed me.

“Have you asked the other members of the faculty?” I asked her.

“I’ve asked three others if they wanted to take it; they turned it down. One teacher has family coming in from out of town. Another has a friend coming in from out of town. The third person I asked is headed to a science teachers’ conference in Salt Lake City. I wanted to see if you were available,” she replied.

I immediately checked my calendar. “I’ll be there Saturday night,” I assured her.

What she asked me next surprised me. “When was the last time you were out on a date?”

“To be honest with you, Lori, I haven’t dated since I was living in New York. My last date was twelve years ago; I took my date to see a play on Broadway, and out to a nice restaurant afterwards. The last time I went out on what was supposed to be a date was ten years ago. I had planned to take a woman I met through an online dating site to see a play on Broadway, and dinner afterwards at the famous Village Vanguard, where I had planned to listen to jazz. I had waited for her for over an hour at the subway station closest to the Great White Way. When she didn’t show up, I got back on the subway to Greenwich Village, and went to the Village Vanguard alone. There weren’t enough quality single girls in New York who would want to date a teacher. That’s why I haven’t dated in a while,” I explained.

“To tell you the truth, I’ve never been out with a man before,” she added.

“Would you care to tell me more?” I asked.

“Eric, I don’t know if you have heard, but I was once Larry Lyons. Despite the fact I was doing more manly things when I was in high school and college, I was really hiding behind a façade. It began when I was four years old, when my older sister, Lauren, dressed me in a flower girl’s gown she wore when my aunt got married. I dressed as a girl as much as I could while growing up; I shed the feminine desires for a while to run cross country in high school and get my teaching degree. I was teaching in Kansas City when I realized that I was a woman, unfairly trapped in a man’s body. I spent the first nine years of my career as a man, teaching high school English in Kansas City. Even after earning my Master’s in education administration from Kansas State, I knew I really wanted to be female. I

learned feminine deportment while I was working weekends as a fashion model, modeling women's clothes. When my last contract in the Kansas City school system expired, I decided to relocate to San Francisco. I told my family that I was becoming a woman. I have a very supportive family. Before I left for San Francisco, I had my name legally changed from Lawrence Michael Lyons to Lorianne Michelle Lyons. I transitioned on the job by teaching feminine deportment and English at Rainbow's home campus in San Francisco. After my second year at Rainbow, I underwent my sex-change operation not far from the campus. After my operation, I became a top teacher at Rainbow in San Francisco; I was offered the position of associate headmistress in L.A. one year after I was operated on; this led to the job here in Casper. Eric, I hope you understand why I became a woman," she explained.

"I never thought that one of my best friends from high school would become this beautiful, classy and fashionable woman. I mean it, Lori; you're quite an attractive woman," I added sincerely.

"You're still a handsome man, even after all these years," she said with a smile.

"Would you like to be my date to the Kick-Off Dance?" I asked her.

"I would be honored to be your date," she replied.

I decided to pull out my black tuxedo for the event. I had not worn it since I worked the Buchanan High Prom four months before, and had it altered to fit me before I left New York. It was around five o'clock on the afternoon of September 15 that I left my house on the lake, and drove into Casper to pick Lori up at her town home. On my way over, I stopped at the florist to

pick up a dozen roses for her. When I arrived at her town home, I pulled my minivan in the space two places down from Lori's Mini Cooper. I walked up to her front door, and rang the doorbell. When Lori answered the door, she was in a peach-colored cocktail dress, beige stockings and a matching pair of satin high heels, dyed peach. She smiled when she saw the dozen roses I was holding.

"For me?" she asked me, pleasantly surprised at my gesture.

"They're for you, Lori," I replied before she invited me in.

"This is the first time a man has given me flowers. I mean it, you're really a gentleman. I often wondered why no girl would put her claws in you after we graduated from college," she added as she set a vase full of water on the kitchen table.

"Many of the single girls in New York were spoiled rotten rich girls. Most of the girls I dated were from Queens, the Bronx or Brooklyn; I even dated a few Jersey girls," I said with more concern than anger.

Lori took my arm once she locked the door to her town home; we walked together to my minivan, where I unlocked the passenger side door for her. Once she stepped in and I closed the door, she hit the button to unlock the driver's side door. We got caught up with our lives during the drive from her place to campus. When we arrived on campus twenty minutes later, I decided to park in my regular parking space instead of a space closer to the gymnasium, where the dance was being held. We took a long walk, holding hands, from my parking space to the gym. We were greeted by Kevin, in a navy blue suit, and a five-ten, heavy set woman with short brunette hair wearing a pink pant-

suit. "I didn't know you were coming with Lori," Kevin said to me.



"I asked him to volunteer just a couple of days ago; he agreed to make it a date," Lori added.

"Where's Josie?" I asked him.

"She's helping out with the food and drink," he replied.

"You must be the new history teacher, Eric Bronson," the young lady said to me.

"I'm Eric Bronson," I informed her.

"My name is Lyndsay Irwin. I teach in the Fashion Design department," she added.

Lori and I walked in to find a group of girls gathered around a table, and another group in a corner. A number of boys and young men would be coming in for the dance, many from within the Casper area. Most of the girls were in party dresses of various colors and lengths. We would also be celebrating the fifteenth birthdays of three of our transsexual students; they would be wearing quinceañera gowns. Lori walked over to the table where one group of girls was gathered; I went to the food service stand to pick up two Styrofoam cups of unsweetened iced tea and three hot dogs. I got one cup of tea and a hot dog for Lori, and a cup of iced tea and two hot dogs for myself.

I approached the table Lori was at. "I thought you might be hungry, so I brought you a hot dog," I told her.

"Thanks a bunch, Eric," she said before inviting me to sit down. The first girl I noticed was Emily, dressed in an orange strapless party dress. "Is Miss Lyons your date for the dance?" she asked me.

"Yes, she's my date," I replied.

Jennie was seated next to Emily, in a violet party dress with spaghetti straps. "Miss Lyons, I think you and Mr. Bronson make a cute couple," she complimented.

Lori and I smiled at each other and let out a little giggle. When it came time for the dance to start at six o'clock, I went to the door to the gymnasium to pull door duty with Lyndsay. While there was a long pause after a group of local boys walked in, I asked her about her background.

"I've been teaching Fashion Design and Business of Fashion at this school for the past three years. Before that, I worked in the fashion industry. Like your date, I am also a transsexual. I grew up in Vinton, Iowa; I became interested in fashion when I was in high school. After I graduated from high school, I studied fashion promotion at a community college in Cedar Rapids and education at Iowa State. After getting my degrees, I went to New York to study fashion design. It was there that I transitioned from man to woman. Just before I started an apprenticeship with a top fashion designer, I went to Montreal to have my sex-change operation. I worked for designers in New York and Milan for ten years before I was offered this job at Rainbow," she explained.

"Was your family supportive of your becoming a woman?" I asked.

"They were completely supportive. In fact, both of my sisters helped me pay for my sex-change operation," she replied.

Twenty minutes after the dance started, Emily came to the door from the gym. "Miss Irwin, could you help the birthday girls get into their gowns?" she asked.

"I'll be more than happy to," she replied before Emily sat down next to me.

"Do you have any of the birthday girls in your classes?" she asked.

"I have two of them in my classes. Cherie Edwards is in my first hour American History class. She's really a history buff, due in part to the fact she spent the first twelve years of her life in the Badlands of South Dakota as a boy named Charlie. She came to Rainbow in the seventh grade, and had her sex-change operation this past summer. Heather Rand is in my seventh hour World History class. She came to this school as an eighth grader from the resort town of Aspen, Colorado. She spent the first thirteen years of her life as a boy named Heath; she's scheduled for her sex-change operation as early as the winter break. If she has her operation after Christmas, she has permission from Lori to take time off to recover from the operation," I explained.

"I know the third birthday girl. Her name is Susan Marie Rasmussen. She's a high school sophomore at Rainbow. She was born a boy named George Melvin Rasmussen in Vermont. When he was four years old, after his parents divorced, he moved with his mother and sisters to Vail, Colorado. At the age of eleven, after dressing in his sisters' old clothes off and on since arriving in Colorado, he told his mother and sisters he wanted to become a girl. She was a year ahead of most people her age, so she came to us as an eleven-year-old seventh grader. She finished the eighth grade shortly after turning thirteen; her oldest sister, Vicki, took her to San Francisco for her sex-change operation. Susan is now a mentor to the other transsexual girls just getting started at this school," added Emily.

It was just after eight o'clock that Kevin and Josie came to relieve me and Emily. "I didn't know you asked Lori to be your date to this dance!" Josie said with surprise.

"She persuaded me to, Josie. She found out I hadn't dated in a long time," I added.

"Have a good time," Kevin then added.

Emily and I walked into the gymnasium, and headed straight for the food service stand. She picked up a hot dog and a cup of lemon-lime soda, while I picked up a bag of potato chips and another cup of unsweetened iced tea. We found our way to a table close to the dance floor, where Lori was sitting with a group of girls. "I'm glad you could join us," Lori said to us with a wide smile.

"We were wondering where you were sitting when Mr. and Mrs. Leeds relieved us," Emily added.

It was around eight-thirty that the three birthday girls were introduced. The first one to come into the gym was Susan. Five feet, seven inches tall with an average build and long, blonde hair done upward, she wore a pink gown with an open-shoulder neckline and a pick-up skirt revealing tiers of white lace. Heather entered the gym next, wearing a strapless red gown with white lace heart designs on the skirt and red lace adorning the bodice. She was five-six with a slender build, her auburn hair done in a bob. The last one to enter was Cherie, wearing a baby blue gown with a sweetheart neckline, puffed sleeves, white lace trim along the waistline and skirt, and a bodice adorned with baby blue lace and clear sequins.

"These birthday girls are so pretty in their gowns," Josie complimented.

“They are quite beautiful. They look like princesses,” added Lori.

“How did this tradition started?” I asked.

“It actually started in San Francisco two decades ago. In Latin American culture, a girl’s fifteenth birthday is a very important day. The birthday girl usually wears a gown similar in style to a ball gown and a rhinestone tiara on this day. The first girl who celebrated her birthday in this fashion was a troubled girl named Juanita Jimenez. She was born in Colombia, but came to San Jose when she was three years old. She was traumatized by her parents’ involvement in the drug trade; when one of her aunts came to visit, she was appalled at what she saw. She was removed from a household immersed in the drug culture when she was twelve years old. She really wanted a special party to celebrate her fifteenth birthday, so her feminine department teacher got her fitted for her gown. Her classmates threw her this special party, called a quinceaZera party. That party was a success; we decided to make it a point to have all girls celebrating their fifteenth birthday to have such parties, even in conjunction with one of our dances. It’s a night where the birthday girls are princesses,” Lori explained.

After we sang “Happy Birthday” to the three girls who were turning fifteen, the girls got the first pieces of their birthday cake. When they finished eating their cake, they picked three boys who were sitting at a table close to where I was sitting with Lori, Kevin, Josie and a group of students, and brought them out on the dance floor for some fast dances. When a slow song came on, I asked Lori: “Would you like this dance?”

“I’d love it,” she replied before I took my hand and walked her onto the dance floor. We started with a

ballroom style dance; we started holding each other closer as the song went on. As the song was ending, we were holding each other, closely and tenderly. "I feel so feminine when I'm dancing with you," she whispered.

"No woman has made me feel so masculine in a long time," I whispered in her ear.

When the song ended, we shared a smooch before we began dancing the fast dances, accompanied by several students and the invited male guests. We danced to a pair of fast tunes before we sat down. Kevin brought a plate full of hot dogs, while Josie brought a pitcher of lemonade to our table.

"After all that dancing with the kids, I thought you two might be hungry," he said as he placed the plate on the table.

"We thought you might be thirsty, too," added Josie.

While Lori and I were eating hot dogs and drinking lemonade, we were keeping an eye on the dance floor. All three of the birthday girls were dancing with the Jones triplets. They were invited by their older sister, Tanya, an eighteen-year-old senior who's also a transsexual. Susan was dancing with Joey; Cherie was dancing with Johnny, while Heather was doing the same with Jeff. All three were over six feet tall, sixteen years old, with short, dark hair and wearing tuxedos. The three couples were holding each other close as they were dancing to a slow tune. Lori and I overheard the girls whispering to the boys how feminine they felt. In the middle of the song, we saw Susan and Joey engaging in a long, tender kiss. Johnny then swept Cherie off her feet, while Johnny and Heather exchanged several smooches. When the song finished, they walked toward the table Lori and I were sitting at.

“You had to be very amorous,” Lori said with a twist of sarcasm.

“We have never danced with such cute guys before, Miss Lyons,” Cherie added.

“Did you ever see something like this when you were in New York, Mr. Bronson?” Susan then asked.

“A few times, but not very often,” I replied.

“You girls are such beautiful princesses,” Josie complimented.

“The guys are handsome, too,” Kevin added.

The dance finally ended around eleven o’clock. I hadn’t had this much fun at a dance since some of the formals I attended in my college days. Lori and I helped with the cleanup; we finally left for Lori’s town house around eleven-thirty. When I pulled up to the parking spot two spaces down from Lori’s Mini Cooper, she asked me: “Would you like to come in for a night cap?”

“I would certainly love it,” I replied.

I walked around to the passenger side of my minivan, and opened the door for Lori. I gently took her hand as she stepped out. Once we were both on the sidewalk, I locked the van with the remote. Lori and I held hands as we walked into her town house. When we got in, she asked if I preferred red, white or blush wine.

“Blush wine would be perfect,” I replied.

She walked into the kitchen to get a bottle of blush wine from the refrigerator. She walked over to the bar to get two wine glasses. She poured one glass for herself before I poured a glass for myself. “I had a wonderful time tonight. I haven’t had such a good time

with a beautiful woman in a long, long time. This is the most masculine I've felt in years," I whispered.

Lori then sashayed to the other side of the bar. When she approached me, she looked amorously in my eyes. We clicked our glasses, took a drink out of them, and set them on the bar. "Eric, I don't know how to say this, but this is the most feminine I've ever felt. Every time you held me, you made me feel so safe, so wanted," she whispered before we moved our lips closer together. We hesitated for a second before engaging in a long, tender kiss. After we broke the first kiss, we looked amorously at each other before we engaged in a deep, passionate kiss.

"I'm so tempted to make love to you," she whispered.

"I have that same temptation. I prefer kissing you," I whispered before engaging in another deep, passionate kiss. The farthest I went was planting wet kisses on both sides of her neck. We shared one more deep kiss as I left her town house around one o'clock. "I'll see you Monday," I whispered.

"See you Monday morning," she whispered before we parted with a kiss.

## **Eleven**

Just two days before school broke for the Thanksgiving holiday, Lori came into my office after I taught my third hour class. "May I come in?" she asked me.

"Please," I replied.

"Eric, I have to ask you a favor," she added."

"What is it, Lori?"

“Three of the girls need a host for the Thanksgiving weekend. I’m already taking in two girls for the weekend. Would you like to take them?”

“Who are the girls?”

“Heather Rand needs a host for the weekend. Her family will be out of town for the holiday, so she’s going to have to stay here in Casper. Wendy Roberts is a ward of the court; she’s an eighth grader who’s also preparing for a sex change, just like Heather. Chantal Edney is also a ward of the court; she’s a freshman who just went through her operation this past summer.”

“I’d take it they’ll be doing some maintenance work on the dorms over the Thanksgiving weekend.”

“During the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, the dorms are maintained.”

“I’ll take the girls; I’ll make sure they do their homework.”

When classes ended the day before Thanksgiving, Heather arrived at my office. She was still in her school uniform and a faux fur coat with her backpack still on her back. “Mr. Bronson?” she asked me.

“I’ve been expecting you, Heather,” I replied as she set her suitcases and makeup case down.”

“When will Wendy and Chantal arrive?” she then asked.

“They should be here in a few minutes. They went to their dorm rooms to pick up their suitcases and makeup cases,” I replied.

Wendy arrived first. Five-four with long blonde hair, she was still in her uniform, wearing a leather jacket, carrying a suitcase and a makeup case; her back-

pack was still on her back. "Thanks for taking me in for Thanksgiving, Mr. Bronson," she said.

"It's my pleasure," I returned.

Heather, Wendy and I waited another fifteen minutes for Chantal to arrive. A five-seven willowy blonde, she was wearing a pair of blue designer jeans, a pink top and a pair of pink flats. "Are we ready, Mr. Bronson?" she asked.

"We're ready to go, Chantal," I replied as I led the way to my minivan.

This was the first time I arrived back at the house with a group of girls. While my office and bedroom were in the basement, I let them take the guest bedrooms upstairs. While they settled into the bedrooms, I prepared a sausage pizza, spaghetti with meat sauce and garlic bread for dinner. I also made a pitcher of lemonade for me and the girls. Heather had changed into a white linen dress and a pair of white flats; Wendy changed into a pair of pink sweat pants and a white T-shirt with a pair of white ankle-high socks and a pair of pink and white running shoes.

While we were eating, Heather asked me: "Is this your first time teaching at an all-girls school?"

"This is my first time teaching at an all-girls school. In fact, this is my first teaching assignment outside of New York," I replied.

"How long did you teach in the Big Apple?" Chantal then asked.

"I taught in New York for twenty years before I came to Casper," I replied.

"I was wondering about that; I was born in New York as a boy named Charley. I spent the first four

years of my life in the Bronx. That was before my father was sent to prison for armed robbery. He isn't due to be released until after I graduate. My mother divorced him, and brought me to Murray, Utah. She wound up in this polygamist cult; she was arrested just after I finished sixth grade for attempting to kidnap a twelve-year-old girl. I was diagnosed with gender identity disorder about the same time I became a ward of the court. I transitioned for two years here at Rainbow before I had my sex-change operation in June," she added.

"Has your mother been tried?" Heather asked.

"She's been convicted on the charges; she's awaiting sentencing," Chantal replied.

"My situation is somewhat different from yours. I was given the name Wendell when I was born in Las Cruces, New Mexico. My parents were alcoholics; they used to drink to excess. Since they were boozers, I always looked up to my older sister, Desiree. I used to dress in her old dresses while our parents would booze their brains out. I finally told an aunt that I was a girl, trapped in a boy's body, just before my parents were busted for possession of cocaine and heroin, and attempting to sell same to an undercover federal agent. Desiree is now at a boarding school in New Hampshire, on my aunt's tab, while I became a ward of the court and sent to Rainbow to transition," Wendy added.

"When do you plan on having your operation?" I asked her.

"I'm scheduled to have my operation after the end of the school year," Wendy replied.

"I'm now looking toward having the operation next summer," Heather added.

After dinner, the girls helped me with the dishes. After we finished cleaning the kitchen, the girls went to the dining room table, located near the door to the back patio, and started on their homework. I went downstairs to begin grading the exams from my classes. I had finished grading the exams from both of my World History classes when I walked upstairs to check on the girls. They had finished most of their homework, and were working on a group project for their American Literature class.

"Now, who's telling the story?" Wendy asked.

"Scout's telling the story," Heather replied.

"What are you discussing?" I asked them.

"It's a project for our American Literature class with Miss Mathews," Chantal replied.

"We're doing a presentation on the novel 'To Kill a Mockingbird' for our final project. It isn't due until the last day before Christmas break," Heather added.

"When I was teaching in New York, the novel was required reading for the high school students I taught. I also read the story in high school; it's a very compelling story. I also have the movie in my collection," I told them.

"Where did you go to high school?" Chantal asked.

"I went to high school in the suburbs of St. Louis," I replied.

"The first draft is due on Monday," Wendy added before the phone rang.

"Hello?" I asked as I picked up the receiver. It was Lori on the other end.

"How's it going with the girls?" she asked me.

"They're working on their project for Laura Mathews' American Literature class. They're doing their final presentation on 'To Kill a Mockingbird'," I replied.

After talking things over with Lori for a few minutes, I got off the phone. "What was that all about?" Heather asked.

"Miss Lyons will be coming over tomorrow for Thanksgiving dinner. She's bringing Cherie and Susan over," I replied.

I went back downstairs to finish grading the exams from my two American History classes. It was almost eleven o'clock when I finished grading. I went upstairs to check on the girls. They had neatly put their books and materials in their backpacks, and set them on the coffee table in the living room. I could hear them giggling in one of the rooms. The giggling came from the bedroom I assigned to Chantal; they were looking at pictures of fashionable teenage boys on her laptop. Chantal was in a pink baby doll nightie; Heather was in a white sleep shirt with a picture of the cartoon character Lucy and the caption "World's #1 Fussbudget" on the front, while Wendy was in a lavender nightgown.

"Isn't this guy dreamy?" she asked the girls, pointing to a picture of a teenage boy in a suit and tie.

"He's so cute; I'd have to wear a dress to go out with a guy like him," Heather replied.

"I agree with you; I'd have to wear one of those lace overlay dresses to date a guy like him. I think he would splurge on dinner," Wendy added.

“Girls, it’s eleven o’clock. We have a long day tomorrow,” I informed them.

“I can’t believe I lost track of time!” said a surprised Chantal.

“We’d better be hitting the sack, too,” Heather added.

“Good night, girls,” Wendy said to them.

“Good night, Wendy,” Heather said to her.

“Pleasant dreams, Wendy,” added Chantal.

“Good night, girls,” I said to them.

“Good night, Mr. Bronson,” they said in unison.

The next morning, I got up around eight-thirty to prepare a pancake breakfast for myself and the girls. I got into a blue flannel bathrobe, a pair of gray sweatpants and a pair of blue slippers. The girls came into the kitchen just before nine o’clock; Heather was in a pink robe, Wendy in a lavender robe, and Chantal in a fuchsia robe, all wearing fuzzy pink slippers. After breakfast, the girls helped me with the dishes and dusting the furniture. Around ten o’clock, I decided to take a shower before the girls did. I selected a red flannel button-down shirt, a pair of brown pants, a pair of white socks and a pair of running shoes. It was around ten-thirty that I added some seasoned salt, basil and oregano to the turkey before putting it in the oven. Just as I was putting the turkey in the upper oven, Heather took her shower. Chantal took hers around eleven o’clock, while Wendy took hers around eleven-thirty. Heather changed into a pink T-shirt with the word “Princess” on the front, a pair of designer jeans and a pair of pink flats. Chantal decided on a white T-shirt with the phrase “I’m Beautiful, Face It” on the front, one of her uniform skirts, a pair of white ankle-length

socks with Kelly green pom-poms, and a pair of white sneakers. Wendy decided on her baby blue shirt dress with a skirt that extended down just below the knees, a pair of white ankle-length socks with baby blue pom-poms, and a pair of baby blue flats. The girls continued on their project for their American Literature class until two-thirty, when Heather came into the kitchen to help me prepare Thanksgiving dinner.

“How much progress did you make on your American Literature project?” I asked her.

“We’re finishing an outline for the project, and getting to work on the first draft,” she replied.

I started to prepare the mashed potatoes and gravy, while Heather got started on the garden salad. She also prepared the sweet potatoes, while I put two pumpkin pies in the lower oven. “Mr. Bronson?” Heather asked.

“What is it, Heather?” I then asked.

“I should have told you this before; none of us like cranberries,” she replied.

“We’re having applesauce instead,” I added.

Just after three o’clock, Wendy and Chantal entered the kitchen. “Would you like for us to set the table?” Wendy asked.

“That would be fine,” I replied before pointing them to where I stored the dishes.

“Remember, Wendy, we’re setting the table for seven,” Chantal added.

Lori, Cherie and Susan arrived around three o’clock. Lori was in a white blouse, a pair of blue slacks and a pair of blue pumps, while Cherie was in a pink shirt dress, a pair of light brown thigh-high stockings and a pair of pink flats, and Susan was wearing a lav-

ender T-shirt with the phrase "I'm a Sweetheart" on the front, a pair of designer jeans and a pair of white flats. "I'm so glad you girls could make it," I told them.

"We're very happy to be with you today, Mr. Bronson," Cherie added.

Cherie and Susan went into the living room to engage in girl talk with Wendy and Chantal, while Lori and Heather followed me into the kitchen to get Thanksgiving dinner ready to be put on the table. "How long has it been since you cooked Thanksgiving dinner?" Lori asked.

"When I was in New York, I helped a homeless shelter with their Thanksgiving dinner. We would serve literally hundreds of meals to those who are down on their luck. That experience made me realize how thankful I was to have a good job," I replied.

"How long has it been since you last spent Thanksgiving with your family?" Heather asked.

"It's been three years since I last spent Thanksgiving with my family. I'm the oldest of eight; five boys and three girls. This was five months after my kid sister, Rosemary, got married. She got laid off as an art teacher in suburban Chicago after the last academic year. Her husband works for the railroad as a freight agent. My oldest sister, Annie, is a physician in private practice in the small town of Creston, Iowa. She's been married for eight years; her husband is a realtor. They have a set of twin boys and two daughters. I shared my Greenwich Village apartment with Annie while she was in medical school at Columbia, with Rosemary while she was in art school," I replied.

"What do your brothers and middle sister do?" Lori then asked.

“My oldest brother, Patrick, and my kid brother, Phil, are both in the Diplomatic Corps. Patrick is presently assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw, Poland, while Phil is assigned to the U.S. Consulate in Rio de Janeiro. Patrick met his wife, Caroline, while he was assigned to the U.S. Consulate in Sydney, Australia; she’s originally from Brisbane. Phil is engaged to marry a girl named Eloise; he met her while he was assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Paris. She’s originally from Bordeaux. My number two brother, Eddie, is a customer service agent for a major U.S. airline; he’s presently based on the island of Guam. He’s married to a California girl named Fawn; they have a set of boy-girl twins who just turned two. My number three brother, Rob, is a radio announcer; he presently works at a radio station in London, Ontario, Canada. He couldn’t find a job in the U.S. after the industry was deregulated. He’s still single, although he stopped being a playboy when he left the States. My middle sister, Bridget, works as an interior designer. She owns her own business in Peoria,” I explained.

“What about your parents?” Heather then asked.

“My parents still live in Creve Coeur. My father is a heart surgeon at one of the St. Louis area’s top hospitals, while my mother is a psychologist practicing from home. They just celebrated fifty years of marriage this past summer,” I replied.

We sat down to Thanksgiving dinner around four o’clock, just as the sun was getting ready to go down. I was asked to lead in the pre-meal prayer. “Most Heavenly Father, we thank you for bringing us together to give thanks for our many blessings. We thank you for the friendships we have formed, and for education and the opportunity to further our education here on Earth.

We hope for a world that will love us, no matter what or who we are. We ask this in God's Precious Name, Amen."

After we finished with Thanksgiving dinner, the girls were in the living room, watching a movie. Lori and I were in the kitchen, loading the dishes into the dishwasher. "This is a nice house you have, Eric," she complimented.

"I inherited this from my Uncle William. I'll tell the story to you and the girls later," I added.

Lori and I relaxed in the downstairs office, reading several books. "I'd take it you really enjoy history," she said inquisitively.

"I've been a history buff since I was a kid," I told her.

Around five-thirty, I sliced the pies to serve to the girls. I put the slices on plates, and put the plates on a tray. Lori poured seven glasses of milk for us, and put them on another tray. We walked into the living room, and set the trays on the bar. I served the pies to the girls, while Lori served them the glasses of milk. I took a piece of pie and a glass of milk for myself, while Lori took a piece of pie and a glass of milk for herself. "This is a nice house you have, Mr. Bronson," Heather complimented.

"I inherited this house from my uncle, William Felton. He was married to my Aunt Alice, my father's big sister. He passed away this past spring in his ninety-third year. He came from Maplewood, another St. Louis suburb, and served in the Army Air Force as a radio operator during World War II. He served in the European Theater until V-E Day, and moved to the Pacific Theater, where he served at an air base on Guam.

When he came home from the war, one of his war buddies invited him to visit Casper. He settled in Casper; he and his buddy, William Hudson, opened their own travel agency, called Wild Bill's World. Both of them were well-respected in the community; they sponsored trips for local high school students for over half a century. It was on a visit to St. Louis eight years after the war ended that Uncle Will and Aunt Alice met. Despite the fact Alice was sixteen years younger than Will and had just graduated from high school, she visited Casper, fell in love with the scenery, and settled there, where they married a year and a half after they met. Uncle Will and Aunt Alice raised six sons; he bought the land this house sits on fifty years ago. It was originally built forty years ago as a weekend house; they lived in the house full-time for twenty years until Aunt Alice passed away five years ago. John and Bill had their own houses built near Casper. Their other four sons, Paul, Ron, Wally and Alan, all settled in Montana. You may have met my cousin, John Felton; he's a realtor in Casper. His younger brother, Bill, owns Wild Bill's World now; it's one of the largest travel agencies in Wyoming, with customers in five states. I spent parts of eight summers out here with my aunt and uncle; they let me use the house when I traveled here during summer vacations from New York. When Uncle Will revised his will after turning ninety, he bequeathed the house to me," I explained.

"Why have you never married?" Cherie asked.

"Well, Cherie, that's a long story, but I'll give you the Cliff Notes version. I have not had a steady girlfriend since college; that was over twenty years ago. I did date while I was in New York, but the girls there were more interested in climbing the social and economic ladder than settling down with the right man. I

was relegated to dating working class girls from Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx instead of the intelligent girls. When I visited my family in St. Louis, a date was virtually impossible to get. I planned to marry my college sweetheart; however, when I asked her to be my wife, she turned me down because she had reconnected with her childhood sweetheart. I started to get stood up on dates when I got into my thirties; I hadn't dated in ten years before I took Miss Lyons to the Kick-Off Dance a couple of months ago," I told her succinctly.

"You were quite the gentleman that night," Lori added.

"In other words, you haven't had a girlfriend since before all of us girls were born," added Heather.

"In those words exactly," I told her.

"What are your plans for Christmas?" Lori asked us.

"I plan to spend Christmas with my family in St. Louis," I replied.

"Wendy, Chantal and I will be spending Christmas with Lisa Larkin," added Heather.

"Lisa Larkin is one of the wealthiest women in Wyoming. She's a fashion designer who grew up in Casper, but started her career in New York. When she opened her own design house eight years ago, she decided to set up shop in Casper instead of in the big cities. Her design and photography studios are on the outskirts of town; her fashions are made at a facility outside Cheyenne. She has shown her fashions at our fashion shows, has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to our school, and has hosted our students for

Christmas, New Year's and takes part in our jobs program," Lori explained.

Lori, Cherie and Susan wouldn't leave until almost ten o'clock. I spent the remainder of Thanksgiving weekend grading papers and preparing study guides for upcoming exams, while Heather, Wendy and Chantal continued to work on their project for their American Literature class. I drove them back to the dorms on the Sunday after Thanksgiving; I was looking forward to the final four weeks of the fall session.

## Twelve

When I returned to work on the Monday after Thanksgiving, I got word that one of the art teachers was retiring at the end of the session. Two weeks after I got word of the retirement, I had a surprise waiting when I finished teaching my third hour class.

I had already asked Amanda to be my lunch date. We started to show more than just a professional interest in each other right after Thanksgiving. Just as I was getting ready to leave the office to go to lunch, a familiar sight was outside my office door. She was five-nine, average build, with her blonde hair extending down to her shoulders, and wearing a T-shirt with a Van Gogh painting on it, a pair of blue jeans and a pair of white sneakers. It was my kid sister, Rosemary.

"I didn't know you taught here!" she said with an air of surprise.

"It's great to see you again, Rosemary. I have been teaching here since August," I informed her.

"I'm taking the art teacher's position here in Casper, beginning next month," she added.

Amanda walked in shortly thereafter. "Are you ready to go to lunch, Eric?" she asked me.

"I'm ready when you are," I replied.

"Who is this young lady?" she then asked.

"Amanda Kenton, this is my youngest sister, Rosemary Bronson Perkins. Rosemary, this is my colleague and friend, Amanda Kenton," I informed her.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Rosemary," Amanda said before asking her to join us for lunch.

"I would be happy to join you for lunch," Rosemary replied.

The three of us walked to the cafeteria, where I ordered baked chicken, stuffing and salad. Amanda ordered the same thing, while Rosemary ordered a hamburger and onion rings. When we found a table and sat down, I asked her: "When did you find out about this school?"

"Well, Eric, I had been looking for work as an art teacher in the Chicago area. One of my former colleagues told me that there were a few job openings for art teachers. Just before I went to interview for one of the openings two months ago, the railroad transferred my husband, Ryan, to Casper. I was lucky that one of the openings was in Casper, so I interviewed for that position. I found out from Jackie that I was perfect for the job. Ryan and I rented an apartment on the north side of Chicago; when the railroad transferred him to Casper, we terminated our lease. I'm starting when the spring session starts next month," Rosemary explained.

"What does he do for the railroad?" Amanda asked.

"He's a freight sales agent. He takes care of arranging rail transportation for customers who have to find a

quick, but inexpensive, way to ship their products to distant markets. When I met him after I graduated from art school, he was working in St. Louis. Just after we got married, he got transferred to Chicago. He started in Casper last week," Rosemary replied.

"Have you found a place to live?" I asked.

"Ryan and I have found a nice place off Wyoming Boulevard; we're moving in this weekend," she replied.

"This place will be an adventure, that's for sure. This is my fourth year here. Half of the students here are troubled girls; many are wards of the court. The other half of the student population consists of transgender girls; we provide a safe environment for them to earn an education and transition from boys to girls at the same time. Many of this group have their gender surgically reassigned when they finish either eighth, ninth or tenth grades. A few have their operations in the seventh grade, while others wait until after graduation to complete the transformation into girls. They're among the best students in the entire state, let alone the entire country," added Amanda.

"I've really enjoyed my first session teaching here. The girls are quite interesting, to say the least," I added.

Rosemary and Amanda accompanied me when I returned to the office to get my materials ready for my fifth hour class. Rosemary looked at her watch, and realized she had to be somewhere else. "I have to meet Miss Lyons at her office to go over school policies," she informed us.

"I'll see you later," I said to her.

“Thanks for taking me out to lunch,” Amanda said whisperingly.

“It’s my pleasure, Amanda,” I whispered back.

“Oh, Eric, I’m so tempted,” she cooed as she wrapped her arms around me.

I wrapped my arms around her, and whispered; “I can’t resist the temptation.” We smiled at each other for a moment before we shared a tender kiss.

“We both have to get to our classes. I don’t know how to say this, but I’m in love with you,” she whispered lovingly.

“I’m in love with you, too, Amanda,” I whispered before we broke our embrace.

When I came out of the support group late that afternoon, Lori was waiting for me. “I’d take it you have fallen in love with Amanda Kenton,” she told me as I was walking back to my office.

“I didn’t realize it until after we had lunch with my sister, Rosemary,” I informed her.

“Amanda talked to me after her class; she told me that she never thought she would meet such a nice man until you became interested in her. I’ve known several couples who have wider age gaps than the one between you and Amanda.”

“She may be sixteen years younger than I am, but I think she may be a good match for me.”

“I think so, too. She does have one advantage over me; she was born female. I couldn’t give you children, since I was born male. I’m happy for both of you. I’m also very happy your sister has decided to join us.”

"I'm very pleased that I'll be working with her. She was my roommate when she was in art school in New York."

"I'll catch you tomorrow," she informed me as I was headed to my office. When I came to Amanda's office door, she called me in.

"Do you have any plans for dinner?" she asked me.

"No, I don't," I replied before asking her to my place for dinner.

"I would love it," she replied before I gave her directions to my place.

I arrived home around five-thirty, and prepared a chicken and rice casserole and a garden salad for myself and Amanda. She arrived around six-fifteen, toting a backpack full of her students' work. I invited her inside, where we exchanged a smooch. "I thought we would work together on our students' assignments," she whispered.

"Why didn't I think of that?" I asked with a slight twist of sarcasm.

I showed her into the kitchen, where I had the table all set. "What did you prepare?" she asked me.

"A chicken and rice casserole, garden salad and a pitcher of unsweetened iced tea," I replied.

"That looks yummy!" she added with a twist of excitement before I pulled out the chair for her.

After dinner, she helped me clean up the kitchen. After we finished cleaning up the kitchen, I showed her downstairs to my office, where we started work on grading our students' papers. While I was grading the pop quizzes I gave my students in my World History

classes, she asked me: "Did you ever date a transsexual woman before you took Lori to the Kick-Off Dance?"

"All of the women I dated were born female. When I was living in New York, I was keenly aware of the kind of scorn and ridicule I would face if I had dated a male-to-female transsexual. Most school systems, including New York, don't think too highly of their teachers dating transgender folk, let alone be married to such a person. While I had a transgender girl in one of my classes and several transgender women among my circle of friends in the Big Apple, I never went out on a date with one," I replied.

"I was wondering about that. I didn't make contact with my first transgender until I visited my Aunt Stephanie in St. Louis while I was in college. She's a part-time bridal consultant; she owned her own bridal shop at one time. Her boss is the young woman she sold the shop to, a post-op transsexual named Stephanie Thomas. She's married to a well-known romance novelist," she added.

We continued grading our students' work until we were finally done around nine o'clock. I walked her to her car, a red Ford Fusion. "I forgot to tell you this, but this is the first time I've graded papers at home with a teacher in my own department in six years; that was the last year I taught the regular students," I told her.

"This is the first time I've graded papers with a male colleague," she whispered back before setting her backpack in the front passenger seat. The next thing we both knew, we were in each other's arms, holding each other tenderly. "I've never felt this way about a woman in a long time," I whispered to her.

"Eric, I've never felt this way about a man, period," she whispered while we were looking each other in the

eyes. The next thing I knew, we were engaged in a deep, but tender, kiss. When we broke the kiss, she whispered: "I love you, Eric."

"I love you, too, Amanda," I whispered before we broke our hold on each other.

## **Thirteen**

When the spring session started the day after New Year's, I got a different schedule. The only things that didn't change was that I would continue to be a co-facilitator for the transgender support group, and that I would still have fourth hour for planning. I would teach American History at second and seventh hours, World History at first and sixth hours, The World in the Twentieth Century at third hour, and America in the Twentieth Century at fifth hour. All of the students in my classes got either an "A" or a "B".

The first Friday of the New Year would be an interesting day. I was in my office around twelve-thirty, after having lunch with Rosemary. I was preparing my lesson plans for next week when Lori came to the door.

"Eric, may I have a word with you?" she asked me.

"Come in, Lori," I replied.

She shut the door behind her, pulled up one of the chairs in my office, and sat down. "Have you ever seen a sex-change operation performed?" she asked me.

"No, I haven't. I've only seen diagrams and post-operative pictures on the Internet," I replied.

"Each of our teachers who come here to teach has to observe the sex-change operation of at least one of our transsexual students or faculty. Heather Rand, one of the students you hosted over Thanksgiving, will be

having hers a week after the school year ends. She has asked that you observe her operation. This will give you the chance to see the final stage of the transformation from boy to girl," she explained.

"Who was with you when you had your operation?" I then asked.

"My mother and older sister, Lauren, were with me when I had my sex-change operation. My whole family was supportive through my transition; I may have lost a few friends because of my transition to Lori, but I'm very happy to be the woman I was meant to be," she replied.

"Amanda told me about observing sex-change operations just before our third hour classes. Three years ago, she observed the operation of one of her students; this summer, she'll be with Stephanie Bryant from the English department when she goes to San Francisco for her operation," I added.

"Amanda and Stephanie have been very good friends for the better part of four years now," Lori told me.

After the after school support groups let out, I met up with Amanda. She was co-facilitating one of the support groups for the troubled middle school girls. "Honey, I heard Lori is sending you to observe a student's sex-change operation," she told me.

"I got the assignment for Heather Rand's operation, darling. She's having it the week after the end of the school year," I informed her.

"I observed the operation of one of my students after the first year I taught here. That was quite an experience for me. Gender reassignment surgery is major

surgery which takes quite a while to be fully healed," she added.

"I understand you're going with Stephanie when she has her sex-change operation."

"She's asked me to travel to Montreal when she has her operation the week after the end of the academic year. Her mother will be joining me there. Her family has been very supportive of her transition from man to woman."

"Heather will be having hers in San Francisco. Her mother and two older sisters are going with her. She also has a supportive family, although it took her father and three brothers some time to adjust to it."

"I also came to ask something of you."

"What is it, Amanda?"

"My roommate, Sarah Hill, has been transferred out of Casper. She works for one of the airlines; she's moving to Salt Lake City at the end of this month, when our lease is up. I was wondering if you would take me in for a while."

"I'll be more than happy to take you in. I haven't shared my living space with a woman since Rosemary was in art school."

Just as Amanda and I were getting ready to take the stairs to the underground walkways, Kevin approached us. "How are your classes coming?" I asked him.

"Quite well, thank you. Last session, I had several students become fluent in a second language; one student was learning her fifth language," he replied.

"How's Josie holding up?" Amanda asked.

"We found out just before Christmas that we're expecting twins. She was so excited when we went out to California to visit my folks for Christmas," he proudly told her.

"I spent Christmas with my folks in St. Louis, and New Year's with her folks in Buffalo," I added.

"My father and big brother really took a liking to him," added Amanda.

"The big news for us is that we're going to be living together for a while," I informed him.

"I knew you two have been an 'item' since after Thanksgiving. What made you two decide to try cohabitation?" Kevin asked.

"My roommate got transferred to Salt Lake City; our lease is up at the end of the month. So, at least until I can find another place, I'll be living with Eric at his place," Amanda replied.

"This is the first time I'll be sharing my place with a woman since Rosemary was in art school in New York," I added.

"By the way, what are you two doing this weekend?" Kevin asked us.

"Neither one of us have anything planned other than grading papers," Amanda replied.

"Josie and I wanted to ask you two if you wanted to come over for dinner," he added.

"Amanda and I would love it," I replied.

"That would be sweet," she added.

The next evening, Amanda and I went over to Kevin and Josie's place for dinner. Kevin was preparing a steak dinner for four. We sat on the living room

loveseat; Josie was in a rocking chair; she looked very pregnant. "When are the twins due?" Amanda asked her.

"They're due sometime at the end of March or the beginning of April," Josie replied.

"That's going to be another adventure; raising a set of twins," I added.

"No kidding, Eric. Kevin's already thinking ahead to the first trip to Twinsburg," Josie told us with a twist of sarcasm.

"That's the Cleveland suburb where the International Gathering of Twins is held every summer," added Amanda.

"How do you know this?" Josie asked.

"My youngest brothers, Aaron and Darren, are twins," Amanda replied.

"Did you get an assignment to observe a sex-change operation?" Josie then asked me.

"Yes, I did. I'm going to San Francisco after the academic year is over to observe Heather Rand's operation," I replied.

"Kevin and I are both going to be observing one. Kevin was assigned to observe Wendy Roberts' operation in Philadelphia in mid-June; he asked me if I could go with him. His younger sister, Karen, will be coming up from L.A. to help my mother watch over the twins," Josie added.

Amanda helped Josie up from her rocking chair when Kevin called us to the dining room table. When we sat down, Kevin led us in prayer before we started in on a dinner of New York strip steaks, baked potatoes and garden salad. Kevin also prepared a pitcher of iced

tea. "I hear you and Amanda are dating now," Josie said as we were preparing our plates.

"We started dating just after Thanksgiving. I never thought I would meet such a sweet girl. We were friends at first; however, as time went on, I began to realize that she could be more than just a friend and colleague. She's much different from the young women I met in New York or back home; she's pretty much everything I dream of in a woman," I informed her.

"Most of the guys I met prior to meeting him were either Class-A-Number-One jerks or scared of commitment. Eric is much different. He really knows how to treat a girl with respect. When he first arrived, I helped him get settled into his new office. As time went on, we started to confide in each other. I began to realize that he could very well be the man I've dreamed of. We would soon realize that we were both looking for the same kind of relationship. After we came back from Thanksgiving break, we both knew the inevitable; we were falling for each other. We've spent a lot of time together since; he met my folks over New Year's," Amanda added.

After dinner, Kevin showed us the layettes that he and Josie were putting together. "Have you found out what genders your twins are going to be?" Amanda asked him.

"One boy, one girl," he replied.

"That means you'll have one wedding to pay for," I sarcastically added.

"You're not kidding! Josie's parents just finished paying for our wedding," Kevin added with a slightly stronger tone of sarcasm.

“My parents have set aside a lot of money for my wedding, regardless of when it is,” Amanda told us.

We met Josie back in the living room. “When do you go on maternity leave?” I asked her.

“I go on maternity leave at the end of January; I don’t plan to be back at work until the latter part of April,” Josie replied.

“I go on three weeks’ paternity leave around the time the twins are born,” Kevin added.

“Did you hear Eric and I are going to be living together, at least for a while?” Amanda asked them.

“Kevin told me about it,” Josie replied.

“My roommate, Sarah, has been transferred to Salt Lake City. The lease we have on our apartment is up at the end of this month. I asked him if he would take me in for a while, and he said he could,” Amanda added.

“It’ll be great to live with a woman again; I haven’t lived with a member of the opposite gender since I shared my Greenwich Village apartment with my kid sister,” I then added.

When I got back to my house after taking Amanda back to her apartment, I decided to turn in for the night, and wait to grade the quizzes my students took until the next afternoon. It was quite an eventful week for the first week of a new calendar year and a new academic term.

## **Fourteen**

It was the second week of April. At this point, Amanda and I had been living together for two months; we were enjoying every moment of our cohab-

itation. When we returned from spending our Easter/Passover break taking a group of our history students to Mount Rushmore, Devils Tower and Little Bighorn, Kevin and Josie were hosting a group of his students. It was two-thirty on a Saturday afternoon when we returned from the trip. We had just set down our bags when the phone rang.

“Eric, Josie has just gone into labor,” Kevin told me.

“Who’s helping you?” I asked him.

“Two of my students, Chantal Edney and Cherie Edwards,” he replied.

“Did you call 911, or did one of your students?” I then asked.

“Karen Ling called 911; the ambulance will be here shortly,” he frantically replied.

When I got off the phone, Amanda asked me: “What was that all about, sweetheart?”

“Josie has gone into labor. Chantal, Cherie and Karen are with them,” I replied.

“I have Karen Ling in my Asian History class. She’s come a long way since she was removed from her mother’s substandard surroundings in suburban Denver,” she added.

“I think we’re going to have to work the Spring Dance next weekend,” I told her.

“That’s going to be fun; I worked the Spring Dance two years ago,” she added.

While my minivan was in the shop getting its brakes done, Amanda and I made our way to the hospital in her car. When we arrived at the waiting room around three-fifteen, we saw Chantal, Cherie and Ka-

ren waiting for us. Karen was an Asian-American girl of five-four with a slender build, wearing a white blouse, a pair of blue slacks; a pair of blue flats, with a brown faux fur coat. "Mr. Bronson, Miss Kenton, we're so glad you're here," Karen said.

"When did Mrs. Leeds go into labor?" I asked them.

"According to Mr. Leeds, she began having labor pains last night. They intensified this afternoon," Chantal replied.

"We're waiting to hear from Mr. Leeds," added Cherie.

"I should know about this kind of thing; I worked in the maternity ward at this hospital last summer," Karen told us.

"Aren't you scheduled to graduate this summer?" Amanda asked Karen.

"I don't graduate until next summer. I'm thinking about becoming a doctor, specializing in obstetrics," Karen replied.

A tired Kevin emerged two hours later. "It's a boy and a girl," he told us.

"How are Josie and the twins?" I asked him.

"Mother, son and daughter are doing just fine," he replied.

Amanda and I took the girls back to the dorms so that Kevin could get some rest. "I haven't experienced a woman going into labor before; I'm glad this happened," Cherie said.

"I went through the same thing with my older sister before started living full-time as a girl," added Chantal.

Susan was waiting when the girls got back to their dormitory around six-thirty. "So, what happened?" she asked them.

"Mrs. Leeds went into labor around two-fifteen this afternoon. Chantal and I helped keep her comfortable, while Karen called the paramedics. We went to the hospital with them; Mr. Bronson and Miss Kenton arrived about half an hour later. Mr. Leeds was very tired when he came out of the delivery room; they're now the parents of a set of boy-girl twins," Cherie explained.

As a result of the birth of Kevin and Josie's twins, Amanda and I were asked by Lori to fill in for them at the Spring Dance the following weekend. It gave Amanda the opportunity to pull out her prom gown. It was a baby blue, open-shoulder prom gown with a full skirt that needed a crinoline to fill out. I decided to wear the tuxedo I wore to the Kick-Off Dance the previous fall. When I came upstairs to the living room, I was in awe at how she looked.

"You are so beautiful and romantic, darling," I complimented.

"You're quite handsome, sweetie," she whispered lovingly before we shared a kiss.

When we arrived at the school around six-thirty, Lori was waiting for us. She was in a lavender evening gown. "Eric, Amanda, you look gorgeous!" she complimented.

"You look beautiful, Lori," Amanda said, returning the compliment.

"Have you two met my new boyfriend yet?" she asked us.

"I don't believe we have," I replied.

She turned toward a man who had blonde hair, six-two with a larger than average build, wearing a navy blue suit and tie. "Johnny Davis, this is Eric Bronson, and his girlfriend, Amanda Kenton. They both teach in the Social Studies department," Lori said in an introductory manner.

"It's a pleasure to meet you two," Johnny said to us with a smile.

"The pleasure is mutual," I added.

"How did you and Lori meet?" Amanda asked him.

"We met at a fashion show in New York over the Christmas holidays. Lori was with one of the fashion design instructors. I'm a photographer who's just opened my own studio in Casper. I worked for some of the top fashion photographers in the world. We got to know one another; when she told me she was born a boy, I told her that I worked with numerous women like her. I was looking to strike out on my own after my wife was raped and murdered in upper Manhattan while I was out on an assignment; I checked out other cities, and found that Casper was the best place for me to raise my fourteen-year-old son, Jonathan, and my ten-year-old daughter, Kayla. Just two months after we met, Lori invited me and the kids to come out here. I have a town home in the same complex Lori lives in," he explained.

"He knows how to treat a woman with respect, just like you do with Amanda," Lori added before she and Johnny stole a kiss.

The boys began arriving around seven o'clock; they were all in either a tuxedo or a suit and tie. The girls started to arrive around seven-fifteen, all wearing party dresses. Two girls who were turning fifteen years old

that weekend showed up in quinceañera gowns. One was a five-foot slender girl named Isabelle Young; she was born female and has been a ward of the court since she was in the seventh grade, after being removed from an abusive household in Dickinson, North Dakota. She had her long, blonde hair in a bun, and was in an orange sleeveless gown with a rhinestone tiara. The other one was Melissa Johnston. She was five-foot-eight, slender build, with shoulder-length auburn hair, wearing a mauve strapless gown. She spent the first thirteen years of her life in Rock Springs as a boy named Melvin; she began living full-time as a girl when she started the eighth grade. She was preparing for her sex-change operation during the coming summer. Amanda and I worked the door for the first half hour of the dance.

Emily showed up around seven-thirty. "First, you were fresh with Miss Lyons, now you're dating Miss Kenton," she said as she was showing her student identification.

"We've been dating each other since Thanksgiving, Emily," Amanda reminded her.

"Have you met Miss Lyons' new boyfriend yet?" I asked her.

"Yes, I have. Mr. Davis was looking at places to set up his photography studio with Mr. Felton earlier this month," Emily replied.

After we finished our shift, Lyndsay, wearing a purple evening gown she made herself, took over with Heather, who was in a white party dress. "You two look handsome tonight," Lyndsay complimented.

"You look gorgeous, Lyndsay," Amanda said, returning the compliment.

“You’re looking real pretty tonight, Heather,” I complimented.

“Mr. Bronson, Miss Kenton, you look great!” Heather said excitedly.

Amanda and I walked into the gymnasium; we walked straight to the concession stand to get a couple of hamburgers, two bags of potato chips and a pitcher of unsweetened tea. We sat down at a table near the dance floor; we were watching several of the girls dance gracefully with the boys. “It’s hard to believe that some of these girls were born boys, while others came from such abusive environments,” Amanda whispered.

“It just sickens me that a family would expose their children to physical, emotional and even substance abuse. It seems these families are taking away their childhood and their sense of femininity. I’m glad we fill that gap; teaching these young ladies how to be feminine,” I added.

“At least many of our transsexual students get support from their families. Nowadays, they get more support from their families than they did even ten or fifteen years ago,” Amanda informed me.

After we ate our meal, a slow song came on the sound system. “May I have this dance, Amanda?” I asked her.

“Yes, you may, honey,” she replied.

While we were on the dance floor, Emily and Heather were sitting at a table with a group of girls. “It’s hard to believe; we thought Miss Lyons would win Mr. Bronson over, and now, we see him with Miss Kenton,” Heather said.

“I think Mr. Bronson looks better with Miss Kenton than Miss Lyons,” Susan added.

“Miss Lyons’ new boyfriend is handsome,” Emily told them.

“If she marries him, she’ll be an instant mom. Her new boyfriend has two kids,” added Cherie.

While the girls were whispering back and forth, Amanda and I held each other close as we continued to dance. Once the song was over, we looked at each other’s eyes. “Eric, I love you more than any other man in the world,” she whispered.

“I love you more than any other woman in the world, Amanda,” I whispered before we shared a tender kiss.

We came home from the dance around midnight, none the worse for wear. “After tonight, I think I’m going to stop looking,” I whispered to her.

“That’s exactly the same thought I have,” she whispered back.

## **Fifteen**

The Friday before Memorial Day was the last day of the academic year. All of the faculty and the graduating seniors gathered in the auditorium for graduation. There would be seventy-six girls graduating from Rainbow; thirty-five girls who came from troubled backgrounds, and thirty-one transgender girls. After our first look at Kevin and Josie’s twins over Memorial Day weekend, Amanda left for Montreal to be with Stephanie for her sex-change operation, while I headed off to San Francisco to observe Heather’s surgery.

Two days after Memorial Day, I arrived with Heather in San Francisco. Her mother, Michele Rand, and her two sisters, Holly and Michaela, met us when we arrived in Oakland by train. The ladies embraced one another before Heather introduced her mother and sisters. "Mr. Bronson, I'd like for you to meet my mother, Michele Rand, and my sisters, Holly and Michaela," Heather said in an introductory manner.

"I'm very pleased to meet you," Holly said with a smile.

"It's great that one of her teachers came along to observe her operation," added Michele.

"What classes did you teach her?" asked Michaela.

"I taught her in World History last fall," I replied.

"It was also kind of you to take her in for Thanksgiving. We didn't have the funds to bring her to visit my family in Indianapolis. We did come out to Casper to spend time with her over Christmas," Michele added.

We took a cab across the bay to San Francisco, where we checked into a hotel near the hospital. During the ride over, I asked Michele about her family background. "It's just me, Holly, Michaela and Heather. Their father was killed by a drunk driver when Heather was eight years old. I'm now a psychologist in private practice in Helena, Montana, working with transgender children. In fact, I referred Heather to Rainbow," she explained.

"You did what was best for her," I added.

"She tells me you're one of the best teachers she's ever had," Michaela added.

"I just finished my first year at her school. I really enjoyed my experience teaching what I know to a class entirely made up of girls," I said with pride.

When we checked in, I took a room across from the ladies. When my cell phone rang, it was Amanda, calling from Montreal.

"Did you make it safely, honey?" she asked me.

"I made it in safely, sweetheart," I replied.

"I'm sure Heather made it in safely, too."

"She did. When does Stephanie have her operation?"

"She'll be having it at eight o'clock tomorrow morning."

"Heather will be having her operation at nine o'clock tomorrow morning."

"When will you be returning home?"

"I should be home in time for the weekend."

"I should be home on Thursday."

After we finished our phone conversation, I went downstairs to the hotel restaurant to grab some dinner. I had steak and salmon with herb and butter rice and unsweetened iced tea. I thought about my relationship with Amanda while I was eating my dinner. I decided that before I left San Francisco, I would buy her an engagement ring. I returned to my hotel room after dinner to get some rest before I had to be at the hospital in the morning.

I woke up at seven-thirty the next morning, ordering a plate of pancakes and a glass of milk from Room Service. I was at the hospital at eight-fifteen, where I met up with Dr. Maria Bey, who would be performing

Heather's surgery. She was a dark-haired woman, five-nine with an average build, wearing a white sundress. "I'd take it you're Mr. Bronson from Heather's school," she said, guessing my identity.

"I'm Eric Bronson; I'm from the Social Studies department at Rainbow in Casper," I informed her.

"I'm Maria Bey, the surgeon who will be performing Heather's surgery today," she added.

"It's a pleasure to meet you. I've been assigned to observe her operation," I then added.

She showed me down to the dressing room, where I changed into surgeon's scrubs. She went down the hall to another changing room to change into her scrubs. I arrived in the operating room just before nine o'clock; all of the instruments were laid out, ready for the operation. Heather was brought into the operating room five minutes later. She was under general anesthesia. She was moved from a gurney to an operating table generally used in maternity cases, but this one was being used for gender reassignment.

"All of the incisions we are going to make have been marked. We will be using skin from the penis to line the new vagina; the scrotal skin will be used to form the labia. The operation will take three to five hours; it will take several weeks for the wounds to completely heal. She should be fully recovered by the time she starts back at school," Maria explained.

I observed closely as Maria was performing Heather's operation. The surgery took four hours to complete. While it didn't look all that appealing, Heather's operation was a success. She had her entire life as a complete girl to look forward to.

That evening, Heather woke up, and looked straight at me. "Mr. Bronson?" she asked me, groggy from the anesthesia.

"Heather, the operation was a success," I replied.

"I feel a little pain down in my genital area," she added.

"You're now a girl, Heather," Michele told her.

That evening, Amanda called me on my cell phone. "How was Heather's operation?" she asked.

"Her operation was a success," I replied before asking her about Stephanie's.

"Stephanie's operation was a success," she replied.

After I got off the phone, I returned to my hotel room. I visited Heather twice more at the hospital before I had to come home to Casper. Before I boarded the plane back to Casper, I bought an engagement ring for Amanda. When I got home, Amanda was eagerly awaiting my return.

"When does Heather get out of the hospital?" she asked me.

"She should be out in another week and a half to two weeks; she'll be recovering at home in Helena until the fall session starts," I replied.

"Stephanie will be spending three weeks in Montreal, and finishing her recovery here in Casper," she added.

"I observed her operation; it's amazing to see such an intricate and complex surgery done in so short a time."

"I found it amazing that modern medicine could turn a boy into a pretty girl."

“When I was in San Francisco, I thought about us. While I saw the final stage of Heather’s transformation, I also thought about how you’ve transformed my life over the past six months. Before I became interested in you, I was a romantically frustrated man. You showed me that I could love again, even after being without love for over two decades.”



"I thought about us when I was in Montreal with Stephanie. I looked back at my life before we met, and now, I can't imagine life without you. I was romantically frustrated, too, before I started to show interest in you. I'm very happy I found you."

"Let's make the happy times we've had go on forever."

"I'm with you on that one, Eric."

"Amanda, will you marry me?"

"Yes! I'll make a wonderful wife for you." Once she said that, I pulled a white plastic box out of my suitcase, and opened it. "It's beautiful!" she exclaimed, with a tear of joy running down her cheek. After I put the ring on the ring finger of her left hand, we shared our first kiss as an engaged couple.

## **Sixteen**

Amanda and I chose the weekend before the Prom the following year to tie the knot. We would be getting married in the chapel on campus. The school encourages the students to get involved in planning for the wedding of a faculty member as part of their learning experience. The girls in the fashion design class would design the bridesmaids' gowns and the flower girl's gown. Amanda and I decided on pink gowns for the bridesmaids, and lavender for the flower girl's gown. Lyndsay took it upon herself to design Amanda's wedding gown. I had a tailor in town do the tuxedos for myself, the groomsmen and the ring bearer. We had already gotten Johnny, who was by that time Lori's fiancé, to do the photography for the wedding.

We asked many of our family members if they wanted to be part of our wedding party; they all turned us down. They felt that our students and colleagues would be more qualified to share in this day, since we spent more time with them than with our own families, despite the fact that Amanda's family was just a couple of hours' driving time away. They wanted to be part of our special day, nonetheless.

It was a beautiful spring Friday evening. Amanda and I gave our students their assignments the day before; we called off our classes Friday morning and afternoon so we could rehearse for the wedding. Lori and Johnny hosted an afternoon luncheon for us at a nearby restaurant. Late that afternoon, I returned to my house to change into my tux. It was around four-thirty that Kevin arrived, joined by Matthew. Kevin would be best man for the wedding; Matthew one of the groomsmen.

"I knew this day would come, Eric," Matthew said with pride.

"When you became interested in Amanda, I knew it would come to this," added Kevin.

"I've been looking forward to this day all my life. I'm really happy that she's becoming my wife tonight," I said with a big smile.

"Josie's matron of honor for the wedding; Stephanie's also in the wedding," Kevin informed me.

"Who's going to watch over the twins?" I asked.

"They're with my mother and father-in-law," Kevin replied.

Just before five o'clock, the limousine arrived at the house with the junior groomsman, my nephew Eddie Bronson, the fifteen-year-old son of my brother Patrick

and his wife, Caroline. The ring bearer, Carl Bronson, Patrick and Caroline's seven-year-old son, was waiting at the school chapel with my parents. It took us fifteen minutes to get to the campus; the limousine pulled up in back of the chapel, which had just opened three months before. The four of us walked into the back room, where we were greeted by Johnny. He took several pictures of the groomsmen and ring bearer before going over to the Fine Arts building to do the candid pictures of the bridal party.

At ten minutes to six, the school chaplain, the Reverend Ken Leeds, arrived. He is Kevin's older brother, and had arrived in Casper in time for the fall session. Before he came to Casper, he was a youth pastor at a more progressive church in New Orleans, where he met his wife, Cathy. The first couple he joined in marriage was Kevin and Josie, just after he graduated from divinity school. "Eric, I know you've waited a long time for this. Please be assured that this will be the start of a new life for both you and Amanda," he said with assurance.

"I am really looking forward to my new life," I said with a huge smile.

"Uncle Eric, it's time," added Eddie.

Ken led me and the groomsmen out to the chapel sanctuary. It was packed with our families, friends, colleagues and students. Even my last roommate in New York, Chris Carson, came all the way from South Korea with his girlfriend, Kari LeMond, who spoke to students earlier in the day about careers in the Diplomatic Corps. Carl came down the aisle first, holding the hand of the flower girl, Alison Kenton. She was wearing a sleeveless lavender ball-style gown; she's Amanda's five-year-old niece; the daughter of her older brother,

Andy, and his wife, Amber. Coming down the aisle next was the junior bridesmaid, Heather Rand, wearing a sleeveless pink ball-style gown. She was enrolled in Amanda's class on the Cold War by that time; she had long recovered from her sex-change operation. She took Eddie gently by the arm, faced Ken for a second, before taking their places at the altar. Next was Stephanie, whose sex-change operation Amanda was there for at the same time Heather had hers. She was in an identical sleeveless pink ball-style gown. When she arrived at the altar, she gently took Matthew's arm, went up to face Ken, and took their places at the altar. Josie came down the aisle next, in an identical gown. She had lost all the weight she had gained while she was pregnant with the twins, Kevin and Kayla. She took Kevin by the arm, faced Ken for a moment, and took their places at the altar. A hush fell over the chapel as the doors opened.

I had never seen a sight more beautiful than the one that I beheld. Amanda came down the aisle, on the arm of her father. She was in a white, sleeveless, ball-style gown, with a lace bodice, a lace heart design on the lace-trimmed skirt on her left side, and a bow in back at the waistline. Her ensemble was topped with a bridal tiara, from which a fingertip-length veil and blusher cascaded. She was carrying a bouquet of pink and yellow roses and lilacs. When she approached where I was standing, her father lifted her blusher to give her a smooch. When he replaced the blusher over her face, he told me: "Eric, take good care of my little girl."

"I will, Drew," I assured him before Amanda took my arm and walked toward the altar, where Ken was eagerly awaiting the start of the ceremony.

“Dearly beloved family, close friends, fellow colleagues and students. We’re gathered here today, in the sight of God, to join this man and this woman in the sacred bond of Holy Matrimony. It is a very special moment in the lives of Amanda and Eric; they’ve decided to join in wedlock in front of not only their families and friends, but also in front of those they teach. It is a testament to how much of an influence they have had on the lives of our young people, especially the girls who attend this school,” Ken told those gathered.

We lit a unity candle; a symbol of two people joining together as one. Carl approached the altar just as we were preparing to exchange rings. I was asked to give Amanda her ring first. I gently slipped her wedding ring halfway down the ring finger of her left hand, and repeated after Ken: “Amanda, with this ring, I thee wed.” I gently slipped the ring all the way down her finger.

We both had wide smiles as she picked up my wedding band off the ring bearer’s pillow. She slipped the ring halfway down the ring finger of my left hand. She repeated after Ken: “Eric, with this ring, I thee wed.”

Amanda and I faced each other as Ken asked her: “Amanda Catherine Kenton, do you take this man, Eric Seth Bronson, as your lawful wedded husband; to have and to hold from this day forward, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, until death do you part?”

“I do,” she replied lovingly.

“Eric Seth Bronson, do you take this woman, Amanda Catherine Kenton, as your lawful wedded wife; to have and to hold from this day forward, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, until death do you part?”

"I do," I replied with commitment.

"With the power vested in me by the State of Wyoming, I now pronounce you man and wife," he announced. Amanda and I looked at each other for a moment, with the widest smiles we ever had in our lives. "You may now kiss your bride," he told me. I removed her blusher from her face; we wrapped our arms around each other as we shared our first kiss as husband and wife.

"I love you, now and for all eternity," she whispered.

"I love you, now and forever," I whispered to her before we embraced.

We turned toward our family, friends, colleagues and students, as Ken announced: "I now present to you, Mr. and Mrs. Eric Bronson."

After we greeted our guests and had pictures taken with our families and the wedding party, Amanda and I took a walk on campus as the sun was getting ready to set. "You're well worth the wait, dear," I said to her before I kissed her right hand, which I was holding with my left hand.

"Sweetheart, I've got a question to ask you," she informed me.

"What would you like to ask?" I asked her.

"What would you do if we have a child, and that child has a gender identity disorder?" she then asked.

"Give that kid all the support I could give. If there's one thing our jobs have taught us, it's that we should be supportive of our transgender children, whether or not they want to become the opposite sex. I know that many of the transgender students we've taught have

loving, supportive families. I think we should be an example for our children, regardless of whether or not they decide to become the opposite sex," I replied.

"I strongly agree. Our jobs have taught us to be empathetic toward all transgender people, not just to our students. It's a great feeling to see all of those students attending our wedding and lending their support to our union. We've set an example for our students, and I hope our influence can have a positive impact on the lives of our girls, both troubled and transgender, throughout their lives," she added.

"When I came to Casper over a year and a half ago, I wanted a new and unique experience; one that was different from the experience I had in New York. Little did I know that I would have such a good job that exposes me to students from a variety of social and economic backgrounds; the one thing I didn't expect to happen out here was to meet the love of my life."

"I also wanted a unique experience when I graduated from college; I didn't know I would get it so close to my hometown. The variety of social and economic backgrounds our students come from gave me a far different perspective than the kind I would have gotten had I taught in a regular public high school. I never knew I would meet the man of my dreams until we met. I hope my students have an easy time starting to call me Mrs. Bronson, after being called Miss Kenton all this time."

"Amanda Bronson. I like the sound of that."

"I love it, too."

Just before the sun disappeared behind the mountains, Lori walked up to us. She was in an antique

white dress with black lace overlay. "Isn't it about time to get to the gym?" she asked us.

"We've been talking so long, we've lost track of the time," Amanda replied, suddenly remembering that it was seven-fifteen.

"We'll be down shortly," I added as Lori started toward the gymnasium.

Amanda and I shared a kiss as she took my left arm with her right hand, and began our walk toward the gymnasium. When we arrived inside, we saw four picture montages of students in our classes and our colleagues. One montage had the words "Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. Bronson" in the middle. Another one had on the top: "We love you, Mr. and Mrs. Bronson." Yet another one had on the bottom: "Good luck in your new life, Mr. and Mrs. Bronson." The last one was put together by our colleagues. A heart was in the middle with the words "Amanda and Eric" in the middle, and the words "We love you" on the bottom. When we finally stepped into the gymnasium, we were met with a standing ovation; the applause was very thunderous.

I must admit, Casper is literally a whole world away from New York, just as teaching troubled and transgender girls is a different world from teaching regular middle and high school students, especially the "unteachables". Amanda and I are grateful for each and every girl that has come into our classrooms to be taught by us, and for each girl who has received support from the groups we have helped facilitate. While I was open to the possibility of marrying a transsexual woman, I am very lucky and very happy to have a genetic female come into my life, and bring out the loving man in me. Teaching at an all-girls school, especially

one like Rainbow, can give any teacher, male or female,  
a new perspective on life.

###