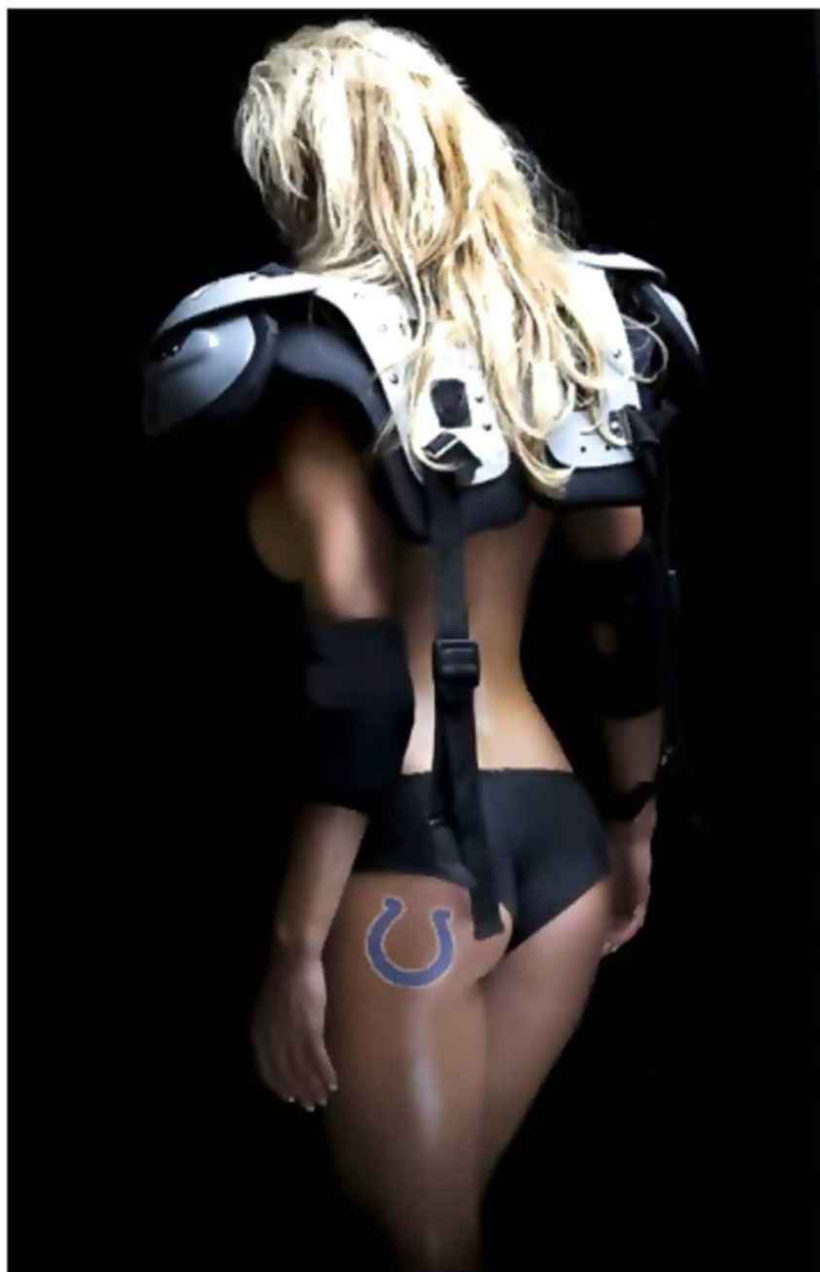


Sacrifice



**Star Quarterback Courtney Colt
would do anything to win.**

Surrender
Media

Sacrifice

by Cooper

Reporters jammed into the room, frustrated journalists stuck outside in the hall shouted, “Make room! Make room.” Everyone wanted to see.

At the front of the room, cameramen from all the major networks pushed and shoved trying to get in position to have a good shot of the podium. CBS, NBC, FOX and ESPN. Old time reporters with their recorders and notebooks-- The New York Times, Boston Globe, Dallas Morning News. And this time, they found themselves pushing and shoving with more international media than had ever covered a college football game-- Nippon News, the BBC, teams from Germany and Italy, China and India.

The banner behind the podium read “Mercedes Benz National Title Game” and featured the Princeton Tiger logo.

Erin Andrews, the ESPN reporter, stood in a corner with the camera practically in her face as she spoke live with the guys back at the studio. “We are still waiting for Courtney Colt to come out of the locker room and talk about his historic performance in the national championship game. We've

been told any minute now.” She put her hand to her ear piece, trying to make out the words being asked, struggling with all the background noise and chatter. “No, I don’t think it’s all that unusual,” she said in answer to a question coming in over her earpiece. “It’s a big night for him, and I am sure he just wants to look his best for the cameras. It takes a lot longer than guys think to put on make-up, and he is very fashion conscious. I think he’ll be wearing something formal, but ... wait! He’s coming out now.”

All the reporters turned, cameras flashed and all over the world reports went live as Courtney Colt, star quarterback at Princeton and the young man widely considered the best player in college football strode out onto the stage, stopped, put a hand on his hip and turning in his heels, posed for the cameras.

Erin Andrews looked him over and marveled at how hard he had worked to look so good so fast. His straight blonde hair hung down over his shoulders, and he wore his trademark bow in the school colors, while silver barrettes kept his bangs out of his eyes.. His face was perfect—his slender eyebrows penciled in, lashes thick and wet with mascara, soft, feminine pastels for eye shadow and blush. His lips glistened with a wet, bubblegum pink that was all part of his wholesome, All-American “girlboy” image. Cute diamond studs flashed in his ears, and he wore a pale blue blouse with a polka dot Peter Pan collar that perfectly complemented his pale skin.

As always, his wrists were festooned with all manner of girly bracelets, and his nails had been painted in the team's colors. He wore a tight little charcoal gray skirt that came to mid-thigh, and sheer leggings that drew attention to his soft round thighs and tone, slender calves, luring the eye right down to the black stilettos with silver football buckles Erin thought were to die for. He turned, giving different folks a chance to shoot his profile, and Erin noticed that his hips and butt had gotten rounder, while it also looked to her as if he had switched to a larger set of breast forms—certainly, in that blouse, his bust looked bigger than ever.

He walked like a girl. Maybe it would be hard for him not to. But Erin watched and wondered, because as perfect as his whole feminine demeanor seemed, she was just sure that deep down, he didn't like it. That he was doing it... reluctantly. Why? She couldn't be sure, but it just seemed to her that she was not watching a guy who loved to cross-dress and act girly, but a guy who was doing it because he had no choice.

Done posing, Courtney strode confidently to the microphone and tossing his long blonde hair he smiled, giggled and said, "Does anyone have any questions?" He spoke in a nasally, high-pitched voice-- like a cheerleader.

"You won 52-3 in one of the most dominating performances ever, beating a team that has been favored by three touchdowns. Did you expect it

to be so easy?”

“Easy?” Oh, my goodness, it wasn’t easy! Not at all!”

“But surely you expected a closer game?”

“I just wanted to have fun and be a good team mate!” Courtney said. “And I am so proud of my team and coaches. I mean, ohmigod, everyone loved and supported each other all year, and we just are such good friends, and tonight we all played our little hearts out! I’m just so proud of everyone, I mean, it’s bananas!”

“So what was the key to winning?”

“The key to winning? Work,” Courtney said in a pretty, sweet, but serious voice. “Sacrifice. This game was won last winter, spring, all summer long in the weight room, in the film room. And, for me at least, at the salon.” The crowd chuckled and Courtney giggled. “We all sacrificed so very, very much.”

“And what did you sacrifice, Courtney?”

“Oh,” Courtney said, raising a hand and looking at his long, painted fingernails. “Just-- everything.”

And standing there perched on his heels, feeling the weight of his breasts, the tight skirt hugging his rounded hips, Courtney Colt remembered what it had taken, what he had given up, to become the best.

One

Courtney Colt ran lap after lap on the high-school's corks track surface, trying to run himself tired, to run himself so tired he couldn't think or feel anything. But he kept thinking, and he kept thinking about two words: Too slow. Too short.

Courtney Colt had heard them from the time he started playing organized sports. The first day of the first practice for Pop Warner football the coach had watched him for a play or two and mumbled, too slow to play quarterback. Too short. He'd always been a little smaller than the other kids his age, and it had always pissed him off. Once, a kid had called him a runt and shoved him. Only once. The kid went home with a broken nose, and Courtney's mom had bought him ice cream as a reward for standing up for himself.

So, when the Pop Warner coach had tried to move him to another position, both Courtney and his mother had refused. So they made him third string. He rode the bench for the first three games. The team won once and lost twice. Meanwhile, Courtney led the scout team in practice, and he made throw after throw, scrambled around the bigger, faster kids and scored touchdowns, praised and motivated his fellow back-ups and made them all

believe they were not just as good as the starters, but better. Way better. And the third time the scout team beat the starters in practice, the coach had announced that Courtney would move from third to first on the depth chart. He became the star of the team, and they won the Pop Warner title.

His mom came to every game. Picked him up after every practice. She organized the little girls into a cheerleading squad, and she held bake sales and stood outside the Acme Drug store in blizzards with a little metal can, raising money for the team to get new uniforms. His dad? Courtney didn't know or care.

Then Pop Warner ended, and he showed up for tryouts for the Middle School team. He was 12, and he'd grown, but the other boys had grown faster. New coach. Same old story. Too slow. Too short. How about trying out for kicker?

Courtney had just smiled and shook his head, no. "Can't do that, coach," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because I'm the starting quarterback."

This time he won the job before the first game. For good measure, he also played safety on defense. He studied the game. Had great football smarts. He could see what the opposing offense was trying to do, get himself

and his teammates in position to make plays before the ball was even snapped. It didn't matter if the opposing receivers were faster because he knew where they were going and would always be right there, waiting for them. Opposing coaches accused him of stealing signals. He drove opposing players crazy. His team went undefeated.

Too slow? Too short? Those would not be the things that defined him. He had his own list of toos.

Too determined. Too focused. Too tough. Too much.

Courtney Colt had to win. Needed to win. He needed to win more than he needed food, sleep or water. And over the course of 60 minutes, he wore down every opponent because when their lungs were burning from all the running, and their muscles aching and sweat was pouring down their faces, they could stand losing. They could live with themselves knowing that in the end that he decided to take a play off, to run just a little slower, to listen to their bodies and try just a little bit less.

But not Courtney. Not Courtney. He didn't get tired. He just got stronger.

But he didn't get taller or faster. At least not taller or faster enough.

His middle-school was one of three that fed into the massive, football crazy institution known as First County High-School. The stadium held

20,000 people and sold out every game. To be the starting quarterback there made you a local star, and colleges from all over the country came looking for talent.

When Courtney went to high-school, he stood 5' 9", and he weighed 165 pounds. The other freshman quarterbacks stood over six feet tall, and they all weighed around 200 pounds. They all knew Courtney, and they respected him, but everyone from the coaches to the other players believed the same thing: reality had finally caught up with the little quarterback who could. There was simply no way someone his size could compete with guys who had been blessed with such superior physical talent. Everyone knew that.

Everyone except Courtney and his mom. They sat down and made a list of goals. They created a chart that showed how much progressed he'd made in certain areas, how much he needed to make in others. He got better and better and better at using the ability he had, because he had no choice. Meanwhile, the other quarterbacks spent their time chasing girls, drinking beer, eating pizza.

It took two years. Two years of hard work. Running. Hitting the weights. Karate class. Film study. He went to Doug Flutie's quarterback camp so he could learn from another less tall quarterback. Two years, and then once again when the team broke huddle on a chilly autumn evening,

Courtney strode to the line of scrimmage as the starting quarterback, light glistening on his helmet, his trademark sweat bands on his wrists that read LOVE and MOM.

He'd led the team to the second round of the state playoffs that year, and they'd lost a heart breaking game to the eventual champions.

The next year, his senior year, they gone undefeated and won the state title, and he'd been named all-state and Player of the Year. That had only been a couple of months ago, but it seemed like a lifetime. It was his senior year, his last year of high-school football, and national signing day had come and gone.

Not one school had offered him a scholarship. Not one. There were over a hundred schools in America that fielded football teams, and each one of them had 2-3 scholarship quarterbacks on the roster. But not one had offered Courtney.

Not even one. Too slow and too short had now been joined by too little arm. People said he couldn't throw a lot of the longer, high-velocity passes a quarterback needed to be able to throw in college, that his arm wasn't strong enough. Defensive players would be able to react and knock down or intercept passes he'd been able to throw past less athletic high-school kids.

Courtney had written letters and made his own phone calls, sent tape of his games and bombarded coaches with emails. He would find a way, he assured them. He always had. It didn't matter how tall or fast he was, how strong of an arm, he would always find a way to win.

But the answer had always been the same. You're free to try out for the team if you can get into school and pay your own way, kid. We'd love for you to come and compete. But we can't offer you a scholarship because we don't think you can play on this level.

But Courtney didn't have the money, of course, and his mom didn't have the money, and no one, it seems, had the money. And so for the first time in his life, Courtney knew failure and frustration, and he did not know how to handle either of them because his whole life the answer had always been TRY HARDER, and that didn't seem to matter anymore. He'd been talking to the Marine recruiter, the Army recruiter. He didn't have a whole lot of options.

Courtney heard footsteps on the track behind him, and glanced back to see Diana Moon running behind him. When she saw him look back, she picked up her pace and ran up alongside Courtney, giving him a punch on the shoulder. "I can help," she said simply, eyes forward.

"What?"

“Get you into college.”

“Bullshit.” He glanced over at her. She kept her eyes forward, running, no hint of anything but serious intent.

“Starting quarterback, Court. How does that sound?”

Courtney stopped running. “What is this?”

Diana stopped running as well. She was tall—he had to look up to her. Kids around school called her Wonder Woman, or Amazon Princess. She was just over six feet tall, with a long, lean athlete’s frame—like a volleyball player. A serious volleyball player. She had a face like a super-model—big eyes, full lips, but a mature, woman’s face. There was nothing girly about her at all. Since freshman year she’d been serious, focused, and tough and competitive in the classroom and on the volleyball court, the basketball court, track and field. She had her black hair tied back in a ponytail. They’d known each other, been to a few sports banquets, but no one really knew Diana—she spent all of her times training and studying, and if she had a social life outside the occasional team dinner, no one knew about it.

“You can get faster. Stronger. In fact, you can be the fastest player on the field. Any field. How does that sound?”

“Too good to be true.”

“College football star. NFL quarterback. Guaranteed. “

“No one make that guarantee.”

“I can.”

“How?”

“So, you’re interested?”

“Who wouldn’t be?”

“Then, before we go any further, I need to ask you a question, and I need for you to be complete honest when you answer.”

“Yeah?”

“What are you willing to do to get what you want? What are you willing to sacrifice? “

“That’s two questions.”

“Do you want to be a smart aleck, or you want to be a winner?

Now, answer the question, because it is the same question just worded two different ways.” Diana stepped forward then, standing so close their bodies were almost touching, and she looked down, right into Courtney’s eyes, and she said, “what will you give up to be a winner?”

Courtney stared back, and the answer came easily, and truthfully, because it had always been the truth, and so he whispered, “everything.”

“Louder.”

“Everything.”

“Say it in a sentence.”

“I will give up everything to be a winner!”

“LOUDER!”

“I WILL GIVE UP EVERYTHING TO WIN!”

“Hell, yes, you will,” Diana said, punching him on the chest.

“Hell, yes,” Courtney said, punching her on the arm.

Diana made a quick, judo type move, sweeping Courtney’s legs out from under him, and she landed on top, grabbing his wrists and pinning his arms above his head. Her face was close to his, he could feel her breath on his face, smell her body lotion, and she smiled and kissed him, and said, “you ready to get started, tiger?”

“Yeah,” Courtney said, surprised and not sure if she was talking about sex or something else. “Hell, yeah.” He could feel her small, firm breasts against his chest, her thighs against his ribs.

“Well, tiger, the good news is you can have it all, and I do mean it all, and you actually only have to give up one thing.”

“What’s that?” He leaned his head forward, hoping for another kiss,

but she shifted position, putting her hands on his chest and sitting up on him, looking down with a big smile, her brown eyes flashing with mischief.

Then, she laughed and said, “Your masculinity.”

“This is bullshit,” Courtney said as he slipped the charm bracelets onto his wrists. They were girly, to say the least. Girly girl, with sparkling hearts and unicorns. Diana had him slip one on each wrist.

Steel rang on steel as Diana slammed more weights onto the barbell. “You’ll see. That’s 285 pounds now.”

“I’ve never benched more than 255.”

“Try now.”

He got onto the bench and gripped the cold steel. Diana straddled the bench to spot him in case, and looking up he saw her strong legs, and the V shape where her spandex shorts hugged her sex. He lifted the weight up off the bar, lowered it to his chest and then pushed it back up, straining, but managing to put the weight back up on the supports. “Fuck,” he said, looking up at Diana. “Just from wearing this?”

She smiled. “Stronger. Just like that.”

“Are these things fucking magic or something?” Courtney asked,

looking at the flashing hearts at his wrists.

“Or something,” Diana explained. She smiled. She could see it in his eyes. The hunger. And she knew it was only a matter of time before she had him in a skirt.

Two

They got subs at Wawa. Found a spot in the shade at Riverside Park, right next to the monument to the volunteer fireman. “So, how does it work?”

“You, me, we all have energy. Jung called it anima and animus—male and female, masculine and feminine. You burn a lot of your masculine energy every day, Court. A lot of it. And you use it up just doing things like walking down the hall, getting attitudes with other guys, being...”

“... a dude?”

“Yes. Exactly.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“You see? See how you are turning this into an argument, not listening and getting all pushy and assertive right now?”

“I am listening.”

“No, you’re not. I never said there was anything wrong with it, for example, but you responded as if I had.”

“Well, what IS wrong with a dude being a dude?”

“Nothing, if you want to just be any ordinary dude.”

“So, what? I’m supposed to start wearing girls’ bracelets all the time?”

“Right now, I want you to do two things: listen and agree.”

“But...?”

“Listen and agree.”

“I don’t...?”

“Have you ever pressed 285 pounds before?”

“No.”

“Then listen to the person who helped make that happen.”

“I... fine. Okay.”

“As I was explaining, you burn up a huge amount of your masculine power doing things like arguing for no reason. A huge amount. Right?”

“Yes,” Courtney answered through clenched teeth.

“But, if you save your masculine power, you will get stronger and

stronger. The more you let go of your need to burn that masculine energy, the more you allow your anima to express itself when you are not on the field, the faster and stronger you will be when you need your masculine energy. Understand?”

“Not exactly. And I am not being argumentative, but I really don’t.”

“The more you allow yourself to be a girl off the field,” Diana said, holding up the bracelets, “the more of a man you can be on it.”

Courtney shook his head, a sick feeling in his stomach.

“Listen and agree.”

“No,” he answered. “No. I can’t... if I go around wearing bracelets and acting like a girl, if I even could, everyone would laugh at me, and the guys on the team? They won’t play for a quarterback they think is some kind of sissy. Even if it worked, it wouldn’t work.”

“All I hear is fear, Court.”

“Well... yes!”

“So, you’d rather be a failure?”

Failure. How he hated that word.

“You said you would sacrifice anything. You said you would do anything.”

“What if it doesn’t work?”

“It will work. But you will have to make the sacrifice. Some people will laugh at you. Some people will. But are you doing this for them?”

“Can I think about it for...”

“No! Right now. Get in or get out.”

Court thought about the bench press. 285 pounds. Just by wearing a couple bracelets. How much stronger and faster could he get? If he really committed? Went all in? What would he need to do? How far would he have to go? And yet, what did he really have to lose.

“The army will be still be there, Court. That job at Costco. You can always settle for less.”

Courtney looked up and met Diana’s eyes. Her eyes were hard and glassy, like a shark, and she was smiling, showing her teeth. “I see a champion sitting in front of my, Courtney. A winner. Someone willing to do whatever it takes to be the best. Don’t disappoint me now.”

“No,” Courtney said. “No. I am in. 100%. Whatever it takes.”

“Even if it means wearing a dress?”

Courtney swallowed. He’d always done whatever it took. It was a line from a book he’d read, his mom had given it to him. “If you want to be

better than the rest, you have to do what they aren't willing to do.

He nodded. "Anything. Everything."

Diana held out her hand. Courtney reached out and they shook hands, their grips as hard as steel. "You are a fucking winner."

"Thanks," he said, his head spinning, feeling like he'd both won and lost, but also sure that he was making the right decision, that he could trust Diana, and if he listened to her, she would know just what to do.

"Good and bad news, then. The good news is that you won't be needing to slip into a dress for now. At least not in public. The bad news is that you need to get waxed, so you can have nice smooth, soft skin."

"Okay. In the next day or two, I guess I can probably ..."

"Nope," Diana said, taking the last little piece of Courtney's sandwich out of his hand and popping it into her mouth. She stood and reached down, taking Courtney's hand and pulling him to his feet. "Right now. Let's go girlfriend."

She led. Courtney followed.

"For now, we'll do things that you can keep pretty much hidden," Courtney explained as they walked through Red Bank to the salon. "Let you ease in to this a little. See the results. But we need to get you ready to impress some scouts this summer and get you into college."

Courtney just nodded, relieved that no dresses would be in his future, at least for now.

“We’ll get you waxed, and then you’ll maintain.”

“Maintain?”

“Shave your legs and arm pits. Your chest and belly.”

“My girlfriend...?”

“You may want to take a break. Focus on football for now.”

“You’ll get a mani-pedi, but no polish. No one will notice, but you’ll need to stop biting your nails. It’s gross anyway.”

Courtney looked down at his mangled fingernails, and couldn’t argue. The thought made him feel a little uneasy, as it seemed like the kind of thing people might notice, word could get around, but, truly? If it worked? Who gave a shit. Mafia guys in movies were always getting their hands worked on like it was some kind of symbol of success. “What else?”

“The last thing is the biggest one for now. It’ll be the true test of how badly you want to be a winner.”

Courtney pictured himself in high heels or a skirt. “What is it?”

“Later,” Diana said giving his hand a squeeze. “I’ll show you.”

“But...”

“Listen and agree, tiger.”

Courtney clenched his teeth and said, “okay.”

It became a day of clenching teeth and an introduction to the sweet and sour of the feminine life he had agreed to accept. The warm, soothing feeling of the wax being spread, and then searing pain as the hair was ripped from his body. Courtney had run marathons, played with sprains and bruises, and he knew how to push through pain. He breathed and started to mentally run through his team’s old playbook, thinking through all the reads and progressions, the blocking schemes, the receivers that would be open versus different coverages. They ripped the hair from his chest and back, turned him over and even waxed and cleaned his ass, and then his legs. Diana watched him, watched him tuning it all out and enduring, and she smiled. It was a big step, and a painful step, and she knew that each step he took would make the next one easier. Soon, the girl rubbed him down with baby oil and then dusted him with lavender body powder. “For healing,” she said.

“Thanks,” Courtney said, sitting up in a daze, the towel on his lap.

“How do you feel?” Diana asked.

“Sore.”

“Get dressed. It’s already after 2, and we still have a lot to do.”

He followed her to the nail place, and stood by her side as she

explained to the girl there what he wanted.

“I feel a little ridiculous,” he said to his technician, Maria, as he soaked his nails.

“No, no,” she said with a slight Peruvian accent. “Many men come and get manicures.”

“Yeah?”

“You’d be surprised. Rich men. They come in all the time.”

Courtney wasn’t sure he believed her, but he liked the idea.

“You’re him, right?” Maria said, giving him *that look*.

Courtney smiled. “Yeah. I’m him.”

“A football star!”

“Pretty much.”

“And will you be getting into, I don’t know what it’s called? The Giants?”

“You know,” Courtney said, looking at Diana. “I could definitely see that happening.”

He finished and paid. Gave the girl a nice tip. She asked for a picture, and he stood next to her smiling as Diana used the girl’s camera to snap a picture. “Can you send it to me?” Diana asked as she handed the

camera back to the girl.

“Sure,” the girl said.

Courtney felt great, better than he’d felt in years, as he walked from the salon. “I better get home,” he said, checking the time with his own phone. “Just about dinner time.”

“Oh, but there was the one more thing.”

“What? But isn’t this enough for now?”

“No. Call your mother. Tell her you’ll be home in an hour.”

“I don’t know...”

“One hour, and you’ll be on your way to famous.”

Courtney smiled and dialed. “Mom? Yeah. I’m running a little late. One hour. Tops.”

“Good,” Diana said. “Let’s go.”

“Where?”

“My place.”

Diana lived in a big, 19th Century farm house overlooking the Navesink River, and Courtney felt excited as she led him up to her bedroom. Usually, this could only lead to making out, but when he got up there, Diana had him sit down. “Close your eyes,” she said excitedly.

“Why?”

“Just do it!”

“Okay. Okay.”

Courtney closed his eyes. He heard the scraping sound of a drawer opening and closing, and he let his eyes open a little, but he couldn't see what she was doing. “Can I look already?” He said.

“Yes. Now.”

He opened his eyes, and Diana pointed to the bed. There sitting on her emerald green quilt was a black sports bra and a pair of underwear.

“What? No.”

“Court...”

“No. No way. I am not wearing a bra and girl's underwear.”

“You said you would wear a dress.”

“I knew you were bluffing.” He started to get up, but Diana grabbed his hand and put a hand on his shoulder, pushing him back down onto his seat.

“Okay. Listen. I am asking you to try it. Just for tonight. Wear them to bed. No one will see or know. And in the morning, let's run your metrics, and we'll see how much stronger and faster you are. You never have

to wear them again if you don't want to, and no one will know..."

"You'll know."

"And I'll think you're a badass for having the balls to do whatever it takes to win."

Courtney looked into her eyes, her big, wide, green eyes, and those thick, long black lashes. He felt himself getting lost in those eyes... and he wanted so badly to trust her, to win. "I don't know."

Diana smiled and whispered, "you want to be a winner."

He found himself holding the bra, turning it over in his fingers. He saw the label—Under Armor, the same brand of shirt he usually wore when he trained, and the material felt the same. It would be just like wearing a tank top, right?

"Take off your shirt," Diana said, taking the bra from his hands. Courtney grabbed the bottom of his shirt and pulled it over his head.

"Lift your arms."

He raised his arms over his head, and Diana slipped the bra over his arms and slid it down. He pulled it on, letting it slide over his shoulders, and then Diana helped him pull it down over his pecs, adjust the straps over his shoulders. He closed his eyes and just felt it, the feeling of that stretchy fabric tight across his chest and the straps on his shoulders, the strap across

his back.

Diana helped him put his shirt back on, and then she led him to the mirror. He looked at himself and noticed—nothing.

“You see? No one will even know. But you will get so strong, Court. So strong.”

“I’ll know,” he whispered, feeling the strange feeling of the bra- his first bra—the strange feeling of his bra hugging his body, and a chill went through him as he sensed he was feeling something that girls feel, something they know, and it already seemed to be changing him.

“These are called boy shorts,” Diana said. “Because they are designed pretty much just like the ones guys wear.”

She handed them to Courtney. He held them in his manicured hands and shrugged. They did look a lot like guy’s boxers, but shorter with some sort of essence of cute about them. Still, they were black with white stripes, not too girly, not at all. And he was already wearing a bra. They were something a tomboy would wear, and he found the thought funny. “Let’s do it.”

Diana watched as Courtney came out of her bathroom, tugging at the tight little boy shirts, and she high-fived him. “You are a badass,” she said.

“Well, I am not a comfortable one.”

“You’ll get so strong you won’t even care.”

“A winner, right?”

“Right. Tomorrow. Meet me at the track at 6:00 am, and we’ll see the results.”

When Courtney got home, he felt like he’d come out of some strange, surreal dream, returned to reality but with fragments of the dream lingering. His mother had dinner ready, and she made him sit right down and eat. He found himself sitting there in his bra, with his manicured nails, worried, waiting for her to say something, but they just talked about school and what had happened at her job. “The recruiter called looking for you,” his mother said as she started to clear away the plates.

“Recruiter?” Court thought, excited, wondering if a college had reconsidered, would offer him a scholarship after all.

“Yes. Captain Murphy, from the Army.”

“Oh.”

His mother caught the change in tone. “Is something the matter?”

“What? No. I just decided to go to college after all.”

“How?”

“I’m going to get someone to give me a football scholarship.”

“Courtney, I mean, I love the confidence, and I think...”

“Mom,” Courtney said. “You taught me never to give up. Never to quit. And today I started a new... program... to get stronger. To get faster. And I know it’s going to work.”

“Well, that’s amazing,” his mother said, smiling brightly. “I love seeing you so confident!”

Courtney got up and took the dishes out of her hands, giving her a quick peck on the cheek, but making sure not to press his body against her in case she would feel his bra. “I do feel confident,” he said. “Very confident. More confident than I have felt in a long time.”

That night he kept his bra and boy shorts on, pulling on his usual sweat pants and old t-shirt over them. He glanced at his phone and saw three texts from Amber, his girlfriend. He thought of her—her red hair, brown eyes, her freckled breasts, and it made extra aware of his own bra, and the fact that he would need to break up with her- or else stop wearing a bra. He sighed and put down his phone. He’d talk to get at school tomorrow. Maybe.

He began what would become his regular ritual, then, covering his face in lotion, and then doing the same for his hands, and the rest of his body.

Diana had pulled out the stuff for him, and it promised to not only make his skin soft, but to give him a “glow.”

Neither of those things seemed all that desirable, but the idea of shaving more time off his forty yard dash did, so he dutifully rubbed the lotion over his hairless skin and told himself it was only just for now.

Sinking back into his pillow, he rubbed his smooth, hairless arm, looked again at his nails. This morning he’d been--- him. Just his normal self. And then Diana had shown up, and now he was wearing a bra. How had she gotten him to agree to this? He started to get up, peel off the bra and boy shorts, but then he thought about being on the bench, on pressing 275, of being stronger.

And he decided to give it a night. To see just how much difference it would make. And if it worked? If wearing a bra and shaving his legs would make him a better athlete, give him the skills he needed to play college and even professional football, would he do it?

“Yes,” he decided as he drifted off to sleep. “Yes... yes... yes....”
Winning is everything.

The next day, Courtney woke up early pulled a pair of sweat pants and a slightly baggy sweat shirt on over his girl’s under things and drove to the track. He found Diana there, and she was stretching, wearing a pair of

tiny little gray shorts that hugged her tight little ass, and a sports bra very much like his that held her firm little breasts and showed off her flat, tight tummy. But most of all he found himself looking at those legs—so long and tone, impossibly gorgeous. She caught him looking and smiled. “See something you like?”

“Yeah, I do, hot legs.”

“You look like a marshmallow,” she said, plucking at his baggy sweat shirt.

“Yeah, well. You know.”

“How’d you sleep?”

“Not too well. I was... itchy and sweaty.”

“Sleeping in a bra will do that.”

Courtney glanced around nervously. There were a few other runners circling the track, but none near enough to the two of them to hear. Probably. But he still cringed. “Quiet.”

Diana smiled. “Okay. Don’t get your panties in a bunch.”

“Funny.” Courtney found himself nervously plucking at his bra and underwear as they talked, trying to adjust them, not used to the tightness of them or, of course, the feeling of his bra. “Should we test out the results?”

“I’m ready when you are.”

Courtney stretched and warmed up a little, then took a position on the track and got down in a three point runner’s stance while Diana went down to the 40 yard mark and took out her phone. “Go!” She yelled.

Courtney got off quickly and accelerated, finding a quick, fluid pace, and when he shot by Diana she yelled “Yes!”

He jogged back. “How’d I do?”

Diana held the cell phone to her chest so he couldn’t see the display and said, “What was your fastest time before?”

“A 5.4,” Courtney answered. It was slow, even for high-school, but he’d compensated by being smarter than other players, using angles and changing speeds. In college, though, there were 240 pound defensive lineman who moved faster. Hell. There were 280 pound lineman who ran faster.

“A 5.4?” Diana said, raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah.”

“God, you were slow as hell.”

“I know. But what about now?”

“You ready for some good news?” She held the phone out toward

him. The screen read 4.95.

“No way!”

“Yes.”

“That’s ... I’ve been trying to break 5... well...”

“Forever?”

“Yes!”

They hugged. Courtney wasn’t sure who initiated it, but they hugged and he found himself being twirled around by Diana, whose own face was now filled with a smile that matched his own. “This is real,” he said. “It’s going to happen.”

“I told you.”

“Fucking A,” Courtney said. “Fucking A.”

“It’s not enough yet.”

“What?”

“You still need to get stronger, Court. And faster.”

“Yeah. Sure. I mean, but how?”

“I’ll tell you more later. I need to get a run in and then we both need to get to class.”

“Sure. Okay.”

“But the basic idea is what I explained to you yesterday. The more time you spend saving your masculine energy, the more powerful you will be when you need it.”

“So what does that mean?”

“I want you to think about it some. About ways you could be more girly. Whatever that means to you. Right?”

“Okay.”

He started to walk away, excitedly thinking about the possibilities that would open for him if he could run—what? A 4.4? A 4.3? And what if he got that much stronger at the same time? If he had the strength, the power, and the speed?

“Watch the girls today,” Diana —called. “What can you do to be more like them?”

Courtney went home, took a quick shower, and then he slipped back into his bra. It felt different now to pull it on, to feel it hugging his chest, the straps on his shoulders. It felt like—power to him. Security. Of course, the bra was a little sweaty, so he sprayed on some extra Axe Body Spray and then dressed and hurried to school.

Of course, Amber found him at his locker before homeroom. “Why

didn't you answer any of my texts?" She said.

He looked at her, feeling awkward facing his girlfriend for the first time wearing a bra, and feeling embarrassed at – everything, but especially not answering her texts. He knew she was very insecure, and he felt bad that she's probably been super upset. "I just got really busy with stuff."

"Like what?"

"Stuff. What difference does it make?"

"All the difference. I couldn't even sleep last night," she said. "I was worried. Don't you understand what it's like for me?"

"Well, listen, this might not be the best time to tell you this, but..."

"Oh no. You're not? I mean..."

Her eyes seemed to instantly fill with tears. Her lower lip trembled.

"Oh no," Courtney said. "Don't cry."

"Are you cheating on me?"

"No."

"Then why? What did I do?"

"You didn't do anything. It's just that I'm busy, and..."

"Courtney," Amber said, stepping close, her voice low, though he could feel people watching them. "Prom is coming up, remember? Don't do

this to me now. Not now. Let's just wait. Until after."

"But, prom..."

"Please. For me?" Amber had pushed up against him now, and he could feel her soft body against his, smell her perfume. She was looking up at him, and she put her hands on his shoulders. Courtney quickly took her little hands and squeezed them.

"Okay," he said. "Yes. For sure."

"Thanks!" Amber said, just as the bell rang, and she quickly scurried off. "See you at lunch!"

Courtney watched her go, her sweet ass in those girly jeans with the crazy pockets, and slammed his locker shut in frustration. What the hell? Why didn't he just stick to his guns? How was he going to keep all of everything a secret if they were still going to see each other?

Somehow, he decided. He would just have to find a way. It was that simple. Because he could see it all happening now, all his dreams—college football glory, the NFL, a big pay day. He'd find a way. Somehow. He had to.

He watched the girls. Not like he didn't always watch the girls. But now he watched them slightly differently, thinking about what they did, ways they dressed or acted he could use, use to get stronger, things that he could do

on the sly.

Amber met him for lunch at the cafeteria, and as usual after any of their fights she was all smiles as if the incident in the morning had never happened. She was always pretty happy when she got her way, he thought. He watched Amber and took note of her earrings, her bracelets, her clothes and even the way she sat and ate.

Earrings? He wondered. Some guys had them. And he could get away with wearing a necklace or a bracelet that seemed a little girly, couldn't he? And maybe... just maybe...

Hmmmnnnn. Amber had a belly ring. Could he get away with that? Who would ever see it, anyway? All the ideas seemed intriguing, possible, and yet—fear. What if someone saw the belly ring? What if the earrings, what? Gave him away? Revealed his secret? What was his secret, anyway? That he was wearing women's underwear, waxing?

Was it that big a deal?

Yes, he decided. Yes. It was that big a deal.

He was willing to do things that seemed, well, flat out were, girly, but he didn't want anyone to know. Couldn't let anyone know. He picture himself in the locker room with the guys. He in his bra, a little belly ring flashing in his belly button, earrings sparkling in his ears.

“You seem so out of it,” Amber said, drawing him out. “What are you so preoccupied with anyway?”

“Football,” he said, pushing the image of his bejeweled self out of his mind.

“Of course,” she said, rolling her eyes. “It’s not even football season.”

“Yeah, well, what should I be thinking about? Gossip Girl?”

“Yeah, that’s totally you.”

And then, of course, it hit him. It could be totally him, and another way to get stronger. “Thanks, babe,” he said.

“For what?”

He picked up his tray and headed to the kitchen. “Giving me a great idea on how I can get better.”

Right before last class, he texted Amber that he couldn’t meet her, but that they could maybe meet up sometime over the weekend. She just texted back OK.

He met Diana, and they decided to run some laps together and talk.

“I couldn’t break up with Amber,” Courtney said.

“Couldn’t? Or didn’t want to?”

“Couldn’t. She started crying. It’s so close to prom.”

“Are you going to be able to keep it all a secret from her on prom night?”

“I’ll have to.”

“It won’t be easy.”

“I know.”

“So, did you give some thoughts to how you can get stronger?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

“Well, one idea right away is that I can start to... how do I say it?” He paused, fighting to say the words. “Start watching, like, girl shows and movies.”

“Yes. Yes. Good. And listening to girl music.”

“Sure.”

“How often?”

“Well, whenever I can.”

“Nope. Set a specific daily goal, and make it reflect your degree of commitment.”

“I’m pretty busy.”

“Set a goal.”

“One hour a day?”

“If that’s all you got.”

“Two hours?”

“Better. Now say it.”

“Okay. I will watch television shows I think are girl shows or listen to music that mostly girls like two hours a day.”

“Great. What else?”

“I don’t know.”

“Yes, you do. I can see you had other ideas. Tell me.”

Courtney had that strange feeling again, like he was in some kind of waking dream. He couldn’t say no to her, and so as his cheeks flushed, he fought to get the words out, fought to keep them in, because he knew once he said it, he would have to do it. Diana would make him. “I could get a belly ring.”

Diana punched him on the shoulder. “Fucking, yes, you can. That is an awesome idea.”

“I figured you’d think so,” Courtney said, rubbing his arm, but

grinning at the same time, relieved he'd gotten it out, said it, and feeling a small thrill that he'd made Diana proud.

“I fucking love that you are committed enough to go that far, Court. You are such a badass.”

“Thanks. Is that enough?”

“For now. Almost.”

“Almost. You can't keep wearing the same bra every day, so we need to take care of that for you. Also, have you given any thought to sleep wear?”

“Not really.”

“It's one of the best times for you to build up your power. To get stronger. You can do it in your sleep, so how perfect is that? And I know you don't want to sleep in your bra again.”

“So, what are you thinking?”

“Let's go by my place after our run, and then we can find something for you.”

And so, a little over an hour later, Courtney found himself holding an old, sea foam nightie with a picture of the Little Mermaid across the chest, and lace around the hem and collar. “You were into the little mermaid?” He

asked, holding it up and away from himself like it was radioactive.

“I was only thirteen,” Diana said. “It was a phase.”

“So, why’d you keep it?”

“Oh, I don’t know, so I could give it to a girlfriend someday.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“Stop busting my balls, then,” Diana said.

Courtney looked at the nightie, the picture of the smiling red-haired girl, and he felt his stomach turn. Was it worse than wearing a bra? No. But it was more. Something more girly, something more feminine, another change that would take him a little further from being normal.

“Getting cold feet?” Diana asked.

“You sure can read me,” Courtney said, laying the nightie down on Diana’s bed.

“It’s not all that hard. What guy wouldn’t be scared to put on a nightie?”

“I’m not...scared.”

“Of course you are.”

“No, I’m really...” he looked at Diana, met her eyes, and then he shrugged. “It’s totally normal,” Diana said, giving him a hug. “What you’re

feeling is totally normal. Want me to help you through it?”

“Yes,” he said softly, not sure what that would even mean.

And Diana, holding him tight in her arms, pulled his head to her chest and kissed him on the head. Then, she said, “When you get ready to slip into your nightie, think about your bench press, your forty time, think about how much stronger and faster you can get. Think about your goals, your dreams, about being the best, being a winner.”

“I will,” he said, and she broke the hug and put one hand under his chin, tilting his head back, and then she kissed him.

And so that night, Courtney locked his bedroom door and put on a nightie for the first time, feeling it slip down over his shoulder and over his smooth, hairless body. The hem came down to his knees, and he felt a flush of femininity as he adjusted the sleeves and tugged at the skirt to get it loose around his hips. On his bed were several bras Diana had given him—white, cotton bras now, rather than sports bras, as well as several more pairs of boy shorts. He stashed his new under things in the bottom drawer of his dresser, where he knew his mother—probably-- wouldn’t find them, and then taking a deep breath, he forced himself to take a look at himself in the mirror.

Whatever it takes, he thought, turning to check out his profile, and then turning and looking back over his shoulder to see how,, as he looked

from behind. Whatever it takes to be a winner. And when he crawled into bed and curled up in his Little Mermaid night gown, Courtney Colt felt strong and brave; he felt like a champion.

Diana put on her headphones and punched up the Metallica playlist on her Ipod. Thrashing guitars and thundering drums filled her ears as she picked up her sketch pad and a charcoal pencil, and began to draw, slowly at first, and then more and more rapidly, each stroke bringing more and more life and reality to the image she was creating—it was Courtney in his nightie, but Diana had drawn him with firm young breasts, and slender, girlish arms reaching up to masses of wavy, curly hair gathered into a regal updo. His mouth was a cute little circle of surprise, his slender eyebrows raised in shock.

Diana felt her cheeks flush, her nipples harden, and she sighed and squeezed her knees together, her eyes playing joyfully over the image as she wrote across the top, in big, round letters, “Dream Boy.”

The belly ring was a big step. A huge step. It was the first thing he’d chosen for himself, and unlike the waxing and even the manicure, it seemed undeniably feminine, and it involved the piercing of his skin. It was

something he couldn't and wouldn't be able to explain away very easily if anyone found out—especially his mother. Diana picked it out, and they went down and got it done at the same salon where he'd gotten his nails done for the first time. The girls giggled and teased him a little, but Courtney just laughed and said he wanted to start a new trend. "Maybe you'll get a bunch of guys down here soon trying to copy me."

"Maybe," the girl said, smiling. "I sure hope so."

When they were done, Courtney stood, feeling a little unsteady on his feet, and he fell into Diana's arms. She hugged him tight, cradled him in her arms, and then gave him a kiss on the cheek. "You okay?" She asked.

"Yeah," Courtney said, smiling gratefully. "I just felt a little dizzy for a minute there."

When he left the girls at the salon giggled. "He's the girlfriend, no?"

"Si," they all said. "Si."

"But I don't think he knows it. Yet."

Outside, Diana asked Courtney about his other efforts. He told her about mainlining episodes of Gossip Girl. "Good," Diana said. "Good."

As they walked, people recognized them, two of the town's top athletes, and they waved and said hi. Courtney smiled to himself. How many of them would ever think I am wearing a bra right now? He wondered.

Or that I have a belly button pierced? It made him feel special and excited, knowing he had this secret from the world.

His forty time got a little better. His bench press increased. But he did not see the same dramatic increases as from the bracelets, or the first time he wore a bra. “I was thinking I’d see bigger results,” Courtney said, slipping a thumb under the collar of his shirt to adjust his bra strap.

“It’s like when someone first starts working out,” Diana explained. “They see immediate results—lose 15 pounds, put on muscle. But then it gets harder to lose the next ten. That’s where you are right now.”

“I don’t know how much more Gossip Girl I can watch without losing my mind.”

“Are other things you could do to save up your animus?”

They were sitting in the kitchen at Diana’s house, playing with their phones. “Yeah.”

“What are you thinkin’?”

“Maybe more jewelry. Bracelets. Guys wear them anyway.”

“Yeah, they do, so that will only help a little.”

“Earrings?”

“Yes,” Diana said. “Yes. Now you’re talking.”

“But a lot of guys have earrings, too.”

“You’d want to wear earrings that most guys don’t wear, then.”

“No. I just... it’s too much right now.”

Diana didn’t want to push it. She knew that would be a big move, and it might be a huge negative to potential schools if he looked too feminine too soon, so she took his hand and smiled excitedly. “What are you reading these days?”

“Uh oh.”

They went upstairs, but this time they went into Diana’s sister’s room. She went into her sister’s closet and came out with a stack of magazines, which she plunked into Courtney’s arms. He looked down and was not surprised to see Teen Cosmo on top of the stack. “Really?”

“Really. It’s going to make you stronger, and also—maybe give you some more ideas of stuff you can do that won’t be as obvious as earrings.”

“Okay.”

“And let’s get some bracelets for those wrists of yours.”

Diana slipped a bunch of bracelets onto Courtney’s wrist—thin leather strips with flashing silver details, colorful plastic, beads and baubles. They were just a little girly, but more than most straight guys would ever

wear. As he stood looking at the bracelets, Courtney again adjusted his bra strap, and Diana laughed.

“What?” Courtney said, putting his bracelet wrapped wrist behind his back, feeling his cheeks flush with shame.

“It’s not that,” Diana said, taking his forearm and pulling his arm back out, kissing him on his wrist. “It was the way you just adjusted your bra strap.”

“Oh. Yeah. They don’t stay put like my sports bras.”

“Just don’t do that where other people can see,” Diana said. “Any girl would recognize that move right away.”

“Oh,” Courtney thought back through the day, wondering if he had carelessly adjusted his bra straps at any point during the school day, if anyone knew, had seen. “Oh my God.”

“Don’t worry,” Diana said. “Just be careful is all.”

“I will.”

And then they kissed and cuddled, and kissed some more.

Three

Courtney’s mother noticed that her son’s wrists were now draped in bracelets of all kinds, and that many of them seemed to her more like

something a girl would wear. “What’s with all the bangles?” She asked.

“Bangles?”

“Your bracelets?”

“What? Oh. I dunno. It’s kind of a thing at school right now.”

“What does your girlfriend think?”

“Diana likes them.”

“Wait. Who’s Diana? What happened to Ginger?”

“Amber.”

“What happened to her?”

“Nothing. She’s still my girlfriend, sort of.”

“You’re going to the prom with her?”

“Amber.”

“So who is Diana?”

“Nothing. No one. I just slipped is all.”

“Courtney, I hope you aren’t seeing two girls at once.”

“I’m not.” Courtney felt nervous and uncomfortable under his mother’s cross examination, and in his anxiety started to nervously adjust his bra strap, but then remembering the warning from Diana he just crossed his

arms and tried to act casual. “I’m totally not.”

“I hope not because I raised you better.”

“Mom?”

“Okay. Okay. I just wish you would talk to me more is all.”

“We talk all the time.”

“But you never say anything.”

“Ugh. I always say everything.”

After dinner, Courtney pulled the pile of fashion magazines from under his bed. He looked at the headlines on the covers. 10 quick make-up tips for spring! What he loves in bed! How to get him to say what you need to hear.

What do they need to hear? Courtney wondered, flipping open the magazine, releasing a cloud of flowery perfume that made him sneeze. Looking for the article, he glanced over the ads—all legs and bellies and breasts—golden skinned women with big eyes and plush lips. Maybe this won’t be so bad, he thought. I can check out some hot girls and try to figure out how they think at the same time I make myself stronger.

A Victoria’s Secret ad caught his eye-- first the firm, round breasts, but then the lacy little pink bra. He thought about his simple, white cotton

bras, his sports bras. Would it make a difference if he wore sexier bras?

Not gonna happen, he decided, continuing to flip to the article on getting guys to talk about things “that matter,” which he read with eye rolling, masculine bemusement. Why did women need to hear men constantly say things that were obvious from a guy’s actions?

When he finished, he flipped some more, and came across another Victoria’s Secret spread—this one consisting for five of their models in different “Angels” bras. All hot as hell. And the image popped into his mind—he saw himself in a white bra with pink lace trim, and just imagining it sent a surge of strength through his body, and this time he thought, why not?

Why not? No one would ever see it anyway. Why not? He was already wearing a bra.

And then he got up, sat down at his computer and went shopping. Diana’s going to be so proud of me, he thought, as he scrolled through all the different bras, trying to decide which one to buy, which one was the girliest, which one would make him strongest.

He added one to his Cart, and the website immediately suggested he buy the matching panties. He snorted, and thought “how ridiculous. Save ten dollars? Right.”

And then he bought the panties. He felt a thrill pass through his

whole body, like he was breaking some secret law. It would be his secret! He and Diana would be the only ones who knew that Courtney Colt, star quarterback, was walking around school in an Angel's bra and panty set from Victoria's Secret.

He smiled and shook his head as he clicked from page to page, looking for the perfect little bra.

Courtney avoided his buddies from the football team, his old friends. He stayed away from Amber as much as possible and spent more and more time with Diana, eventually meeting her sister, Mandy, the three of them hanging out one day at the park. He and Mandy talked about Gossip Girl and Pretty Little Liars while Diana mostly just watched, amused. Mandy told him he should totally watch ??????????, and he promised he would.

Courtney worried his friends might notice the changes in him, and even more so Amber might see, as he was becoming increasingly conscious of how much more attention women paid to the little things. He'd only been into his new skin care regimen a week when Amber had given him a funny look one morning at his locker and said, "Have you been exfoliating?"

"What's that?" He'd asked, though the word had very much entered his vocabulary.

She put her fingers to his cheek and then let her fingertips train down to his chin, and then to his arm. “Nothing,” she said, giving him a quick kiss, but as she’s walked away she’d glanced back at him suspiciously.

He glanced at his face in the little mirror he had in his locker, and even he could see his skin was glowing.

They hadn’t made out since he’d agreed to stay with her until the prom. He was relieved because if they started making out she was bound to feel his belly ring or his skin. As it was, if she wanted a hug he’d started to go for the arms extended, no body contact variety, and though he could see it hurt her, he couldn’t risk her feeling his bras.

Thursday morning during first period, Diana texted him. “Your package arrived! Get here!”

He smiled. “Right after school!”

All the rest of the day, Courtney found himself unusually distracted, excited and nervous as he thought about the package from Victoria’s Secret, what it contained, how it would feel to slip into one of those pretty bras. He was extra conscious of his bra and his bracelets, his belly ring. He loved the fact that he was getting away with it, fooling everyone, and becoming a better and better athlete in the process.

And yet... it puzzled and scared him a little, but he begun to

fantasize more and more about how fun it would be to shock everyone, to let them in on his secret in some big dramatic way, like maybe show up to sign his scholarship papers in a dress?

But no. No. No. What would his mother think? And how fast would the scholarship vanish?

Courtney walked up the steps to Diana's porch, and before he could even knock on the door, it flew open and Diana came out and gave him a hug bear hug, lifting him right off his feet. "I'm so fucking pumped!" Diana said, grabbing a blushing Courtney's hand and dragging him into the house. Courtney, grinning, let himself be dragged right up the stairs and into Diana's room, where he found the box from Victoria's Secret sitting on the bed.

"What did you do?" Diana said, shoving Courtney.

"You're crazy!" He said.

"Open it! Open it! I wanna see."

"I thought it would be a way I could, you know," Courtney said, picking up the box and carefully picking at the packing tap with shaking hands. "To get stronger and stuff but without, anyway, you know or whatever."

"Hurry!"

Courtney took a deep breath and realized he was trembling,

terrified. “Maybe I shouldn’t.”

“Arrrgghhhh!” Diana grabbed the box from Courtney’s hands and ripped it open, candy colored bras and panties spilling out, and her mouth fell open. “Oh my God!” She said.

Courtney just stood, blushing, his eye lowered.

“Don’t stand there. Put one on!”

“I don’t know...”

“I do know. Here,” Diana grabbed a tiny little pink and white bra and found the matching panties, thrusting them into Courtney’s arms. “Go... go...” she said, pushing him into the bathroom. “Hurry! I can’t wait.”

Courtney heard the bathroom door closed, and started to get undressed. “You are such a fucking stud,” Diana said from outside. “I am so fucking impressed. God damn, I knew you were a winner, committed to doing whatever it takes, but wow! This is badassery the likes of which this shitty little town has never fucking seen!”

Courtney peeled off his clothes, slipped into his sexy new bra. I am a badass, he thought. A total badass. He stepped into his panties, the first really sexy panties he’d ever worn, and he slipped them up his legs and felt them tight and small around his butt and waist, his hand brushing against his smooth hairless belly, his belly ring.

As if she could tell he was ready, Diana threw the door open and looked at her man standing there in a lacy pink bra and panty set, the light flashing from his belly ring, his skin smooth and hairless and soft, and he looked up at her wide eyed and vulnerable, so vulnerable and sexy, and took him in her arms and kissed him, and let him know that he was safe with her, and he would always be safe with her. Courtney accepted her kisses and caresses, and when she gently lay him on his back and crawled on top, her powerful thighs around his rib cage, he looked up at her and sighed as he took yet another dainty step into his new life.

“I saw him go into her house!” Mandy spat, leaning in so close her nose almost touched Amanda’s.

“No.”

“Yes!”

“And then the light in her bedroom went on! And then? It went off!”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“That bitch.”

“Yes.”

Amanda dug her nails into her palm and felt her head start to pound. Diana? Stealing her boyfriend? It all clicked, it all made sense. That’s why Courtney had suddenly wanted to break up with her. Why he’d been so distant. She knew it. She knew it! But she just didn’t want to believe.

“What are you going to do?” Amanda asked, her smile revealing a glittering line of steel braces.

“I should smash her face!” Amanda said, but even as the words left her mouth she pictured Diana, the Amazon, and she knew she wouldn’t stand a chance against that giant. The image of her—so tall and lean, infuriated Amanda. How could Courtney pick her? She barely had any curves at all, and she was a giant!

“Let’s go right now.”

“No,” Amanda said, losing her nerve. “Not yet.”

“You aren’t going to let that slut steal Courtney!”

“No, but...”

“Come on!” Mandy said, grabbing her Amanda’s hand. “You need to stand up to that pig!”

Amanda let herself get dragged across the lunchroom to where

Diana was sitting with a bunch of the other female jocks. Diana was talking and laughing, and Amanda felt her blood boil at the sight, and by the time they got closer to the table, she had gone crazy with rage, but she was also on the cheerleading squad and had spent years doing pageants, and all that training kicked in as she counted backwards from ten, took a deep breath and said, in a cold, clipped voice, “Hello, Diana.”

Diana looked up, and the smile didn’t disappear from her face. All the jocks turned and looked, curious. “Amanda.”

“I hear you’ve been hanging out with my boyfriend.”

“Yeah,” Diana said. “Hanging out would be one way to put it.”

“Don’t you think that stealing someone else’s boyfriend makes you something of, I don’t know, a slut?”

The lunchroom had grown quiet, and all eyes were on the two girls. Diana stood, still smiling, and Amanda matched her smile as Diana walked right up to Amanda and let her whole 6 feet overshadow the 5’4” cheerleader. Amanda didn’t back down at all. She was used to people trying to intimidate her with their size and had already backed down boys who were bigger and stronger than Diana. Their eyes met, and Diana reached toward Amanda as if to pat her on the shoulder, but Amanda slapped her hand away.

“Don’t touch me.”

It was Diana's turn to take a breath. "I didn't steal your boyfriend," Diana said. "He chose me. But, if you ever want to do a threesome, I'd love to share him with you."

"In your dreams."

"There, too."

"Ladies!" They both turned to see Vice Principal Murray striding across the lunchroom. Amanda looked at Diana. Diana looked back, and they each slit their eyes and silently promised a bigger fight to come, but neither would risk their extra-curricular activities with an open confrontation, so they each turned and went back to their corners, grabbing their phones and texting Courtney.

Courtney had found a shady spot under a tree, where he'd pulled out his Ipad and had been surfing the net, looking at reports of Spring football practice at different schools he still hoped to attend. Michigan. Notre Dame. Penn State. He felt a rush reading the comments from the coaches—which players were making a name for themselves, where the teams needed improvement. He could smell the turf and fertilizer, hear the popping of the pads. Football practice. The thought he would never experience it again, might never experience it again, left him feeling empty, alone, purposeless, and he looked down at the bracelets on his wrist, his smooth, hairless arm,

and he sent a wordless prayer out into the universe. Let. This. Work.

His phone buzzed, and he ignored it. He closed his eyes instead, and he pictured himself at spring practice in shorts and pads, and in his vision he dodged a rushing defender, scrambled to the right, and then fired a pass that streaked from his arm like a laser, rocketed between two defenders and right into the hands of a wide receiver thirty yards downfield, who was so surprised at the incredible velocity that he almost dropped the pass. Courtney leapt and shouted, pumping his fist in the air, and he heard the coach shout, “Holey crap,” from the sidelines as the triumphant offense trotted off the field, and the stunned defenders got ready to run sprints, the punishment for letting the offense score.

“You have a hell of an arm, son,” coach said as Courtney came off the field. He pulled off his helmet, and blonde pigtails spilled out and tumbled down over his shoulders.

“Thanks, coach,” he said.

“Even if you are a little bit of a girl.”

The word stung, and Courtney felt suddenly ashamed of his hair, his earrings. “I’m not.”

Then, coach opened his mouth to say something more, but only a strange buzzing noise came out.

“What?”

Coach’s mouth kept moving, but only made buzzing sounds. The team then started to gather around Courtney and point and smile, and they also started to open their mouths, and the buzzing sounds came out of their mouths as well, and they crowded in and someone grabbed one of Courtney’s pigtails and yanked, and then someone snapped his bra strap, and Courtney started trying to push his way out, to get away from them all as the buzzing grew louder and louder, and began to sound like some sort of cold, mechanical laughter.

And then Courtney woke, bleary eyed from his quick dream, and he realized his phone had been going crazy. He pulled it out, suddenly worried there might be some emergency with his mother, but then he looked at the screen and saw a barrage of texts from Amber and Diana, and he sighed and said, “fuck.”

Amber’s texts were psycho. She knew ALL about Diana. He was an asshole. He could fucking go to hell. I love you. Let’s talk. I wish you were DEAD! We still going to the prom? You OWE ME!

Diana’s were calm and cold to the point of being a little crazy in their own way: Amber knows about us. I told you to break up with her. Deal with it. climb

Even as he scrolled through them, he saw more texts coming from other people—his friends, Amber’s friends. People he barely knew. Of course. Great. The quarterback gets caught cheating on the cheerleader, and the whole school had to get in on the drama. He felt a sinking feeling. The beginning of a sickness. High-school was over. He really didn’t care anymore, and yet he felt he had to finish out this year, do the prom. Sign the yearbooks. But all he really cared about was football, getting into college, making it to the NFL.

Still. Amber was a person. He did owe it to her. Shit. Why did he have to make-out with Diana? It made him feel like shit. Like the kind of person he never wanted to be. Like the kind of person his mother would be ashamed of.

A person like his father.

An asshole.

Part of him wanted to just ditch school the rest of the day. Go home and crawl under the covers. But he took a deep breath, climbed to his feet, and picking up his backpack, walked slowly back into school. He knew he had to face up to it all, to find some way to make it up to Amber. Find some way to be a man about it.

The thought made him giggle, and yet, wasn’t that what all this was

really about? He was shaving his legs and exfoliating, moisturizing, wearing a bra—because in the end it would make him more of a man. And so would doing the right thing now with Amber.

He paused at the door. Pulled out his phone. And he texted Amber back with just a single word: sorry.

And then he turned off his phone and headed off to history class, there to learn, as it turned out, about the causes of the Great Depression.

Diana was mildly concerned. Not about Amber, who was just a cheerleader and a girl. No. She felt that Courtney was at a crucial and vulnerable stage in his transition, and that this whole thing—well, he might just go running back to the safety and security of the familiar old masculine routine. Things had gone smoothly so far. Too smoothly, really, but he'd been so eager and so needy, so desperate to play football, that he'd been drawn into the whole thing and started shopping for lingerie before he really even had time to think about it. She knew the increased forty times and bench presses had been like crack cocaine to him, and as long as he was doing things he could hide from the world—and his mother—it had been acceptable as trade-off.

But he was a guy. A dude. And a life getting manicures and

chatting about Pretty Little Liars would still be uncomfortable to him, would make him feel insecure, vulnerable, confused. And oh! How she loved him that way. Loved seeing that insecurity and fear in his pretty eyes as he stood there in his satin bra, or when he tentatively mentioned something he'd read in Cosmo, waiting to see her reaction, eager for her approval. He'd been so sweet the other night, so gentle as Diana had laid him on his back, and kissed him, and slipped a hand beneath his bra and played with his little nipple, and she did not want to lose him now.

The Prom. It was her biggest challenge. Amber and the prom. It was a chance, a night above all nights, for Courtney to retreat back into masculinity, to put on a suit and assume once again the cold, hard armor of manhood.

Diana got out her sketch pad and started to work, soft, rounded streaks of charcoal, and soon she felt her nipples getting hard as the image took shape-- Courtney in a prom dress— modern—with a short skirt to mid-thigh, stilettos, hoop earrings...

Another, this time an old-fashioned gown with princess sleeves, another—a giant floor length skirt and a bustle....

Another and another... Courtney completely and totally feminine, glowing with pride, with the last one featuring him with a swelling of teen-

age breasts, hugging roses to his hip as the tiara was placed on his head as Prom Queen.

Diana sighed. It wasn't possible. Probably wasn't possible. Wasn't wise, anyway. No one would sign the prom queen quarterback, and she wanted her pretty little boyfriend to be a famous football player, after all.

One day, she thought. One day. Patience. Patience. Maybe at their wedding—

And then it hit her. Of course, she thought. Of course. Maybe it didn't have to be a full on prom queen in a dress moment, but there was still a way they could go to prom together, and Courtney could be the girl without totally being the girl. She got up, sat down at her computer, and started to shop.

Amber refused to respond to Courtney's texts. Wouldn't answer his calls. It would take time. He knew, so he cancelled plans to meet with Diana and instead he walked around for awhile and thought about his life and his future, and what he should say to Amber. The sun started to set, the air cooled. The air filled with the smell of roasts and stews and curries as all the neighborhood houses started getting ready for dinner.

As soon as Courtney walked in the door, his mother said, “what’s wrong?”

“I screwed up,” Courtney said, dropping down onto the couch in their living room.

“Ginger?”

“Amber.”

“I could tell the other night.” She sat down and brushed the hair back from his face. “Tell me about it.”

And he told her, because he wanted to, and it felt good, and he was hoping she would know what to say to Amber.

“I am disappointed,” she said when he finished.

“I know.”

“You need to talk to Amber. Tell her everything.”

“What should I tell her?”

“The truth.”

“I’m not sure I even know what the truth is.”

“Of course you do.”

“I just found someone I like better right now.”

“Okay. Then tell her that.”

“Really?”

“I wish your father had just been honest with me instead of... what he did.”

“I think it’ll make her feel bad.”

“And lying to her will what? Make her feel great?”

“I guess.”

“The hard thing is the right thing a lot of times. And you’ve always been willing to do the hard work.”

“Yeah.”

Courtney’s mother had been stroking his arm, and as he sat up, she half-consciously said, “Your skin is so soft.”

“Hunh? I guess. Whatever,” Courtney said, getting up and quickly moving away, suddenly feeling very aware of his bra and panties, nervous his mother was going to start noticing... other things. “I’m going to try and call Amber,” he said, hurrying back to his room.

“Dinner will be ready in five minutes,” his mom said, watching him go. Something was bothering her, something she couldn’t quite put her finger on. Something was different about him, and she wondered if this

Diana had something to do with it. I need to meet her, she decided.

Something tells me she is a bad influence on my son. Something is changing, and I don't like it.

Courtney threw himself on his bed and side. What the hell? He thought. Reaching down he traced his finger-tips over his belly ring, feeling the rough edges of the cold stones, the smooth surfaces. There had to be some way out of this mess, but who could he talk to? Better work, he decided, thinking about all he needed to do—file his nails, put on a facial, maybe watch some Once Upon a Time.

He rolled on his belly and reached under his bed, pulling a couple of his magazines out. There, on top, a headline caught his eye: 5 Easy steps to Breaking Up With Your Boyfriend. Why not? He thought. Maybe in this case what worked on guys would work on girls, too?

He paged through the article, pausing to look at some ads for cute shoes and tops, even a really pretty shade of lipstick, and then he started to read the ad.

The next morning Courtney got up early to get ready. While he was shaving his legs, he nicked his knee and calf, hissing in pain. Then, he slipped into a pair of powder blue polka dot cotton panties and a matching bra. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror, saw how ridiculous he

looked, the flashing jewels in his belly button making him all the more ridiculous. He smelled faintly of vanilla.

This is such bullshit, he thought. Total bullshit. How could I ever agree to this?

He felt himself growing angry. Ashamed. Stronger? He looked like an asshole. He reached back intending to unhook his bra, and he found himself struggling to get it undone, fighting with the clasp. “Damn it,” he thought, losing his balance and falling over and slamming into the floor.

“Courtney?” His mother called, and he heard her start to climb the stairs.

“I’m fine,” he yelled, not sure if he’d locked his door or not. “Be right down.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah.”

He pushed himself up onto his knees and reached back again intending to shed his bra, his panties, this whole girl thing, but then his cell phone began to ring-- She’s Something Else-- Diana’s ring tone. Screw her, he thought, but he found himself reaching out and picking up the phone, and though he had every intention of snapping at her, instead he heard himself say, “Oh, hi!”

“Hi, yourself, sexy. I have some awesome news!”

“Awesome... um... what?”

“Buster Green, the offensive coordinator for Princeton has agreed to come see you for a private tryout.”

“What? Princeton? Really?”

“Yes. Princeton. Excited?”

“Well, I mean, yeah,” he said, picking now at his bra strap nervously, but I was hoping sort of for more of a football school?”

“Princeton, Courtney. Get excited, and get ready. You impress them, maybe it starts some buzz and gets more schools interested, but if not, guess who is planning on installing a spread-option offense and needs-- NEEDS—a quarterback who can run and throw?”

“Yeah. Wow. So when is it?”

“May 25th

“May 25th?”

“Yeah. 10 o’clock in the morning.”

“Wow. Okay. Great. That gives me some time. This is... great. Um, how?”

“Don’t worry about that. Just get ready so you can blow him

Away... when he sees you.”

“Yeah. Yeah.”

“See you at school, babe.”

“Yeah. Thanks. Bye.”

Courtney sat there for a minute holding the phone in his soft palm. Princeton? Hell. It wasn't Michigan, but it beat the shit out of joining the Army and getting his ass shot off in Afghanistan. He stood up and looked at himself in the mirror again, and he thought—whatever it takes. He would deal with Amber, and do whatever else he had to do to make it.

Hell yeah, he thought flexing his muscles and striking a lifter's pose. I am a badass. And he had some definite ideas on how to manage the break up from Elle Magazine, so life was good.

Diana hung up and raised her arms in the Victory pose! She knew Princeton wasn't his first choice, but it was where he belonged. Besides, she wanted to go there and play volleyball, so she needed him to follow her like the good little boyfriend he was being groomed into. May 25th. Of course, it didn't even register on him that was the day after the prom. Typical guy. But once he realized, she was sure that would put an end to any chance he might run screaming back to his old self.

No. Courtney wanted to play football so badly, he would do anything, and that would be all he needed to get Diana her prom night to remember.

But oh, she wished so badly she could get him there in a dress.

Later. Later. There would be time for that once she got him to Princeton and he could blossom fully into her girlyboy. For now, maybe they could have their own private little prom night, and maybe Courtney could get pretty for her.

Maybe? She corrected herself. Without a doubt that was happening.

Courtney saw Amber in the hall that morning, he smiled and said, “hey.” She walked right by, and a few minutes later he got a text that said, “Fuck You!”

“Let’s talk,” he texted back, and then he turned his phone off and slipped into his book bag as the bell rang, and the teacher started to call roll. His mind wandered. He was thinking about Princeton. Ivy League. Rich kids. Smart kids. Could he compete there? Was he smart enough?

Sure. Of course. He had no doubt about that.

There would be questions. Doubts about the level of competition he faced. It could hurt his chances to be the star he wanted to be, to make it to

the NFL. But Michigan hadn't shown any interest, nor had anyone else.

His mind wandered from football to Pretty Little Liars. The last episode had ended on such a cliff hanger! He really wanted to know what happened next.

He and Diana went running together after school. They talked about Princeton, the future, her plans to go there and play volleyball. "It's one of the best schools in the world," Diana said. "Why not go where we can be our best?"

"Football isn't all that great."

"It will be. You'll change that."

"I'm just one player."

"You're going to be the best player in America!"

After, they found a spot under a tree in the park and they kissed and cuddled, and kissed some more, and at one point Diana gushed "You're skin is so soft!" and Courtney sighed, "thanks." Diana didn't seem to care about the things most girls cared about—muscles. It was all about how soft he was, how pretty.

It made Courtney uncomfortable. He knew where it was going, had

gone, and yet, some part of him just seemed to accept it, to feel like—hey, I'll get used to it. In weightlifting class the guys were noticing. His squats, dead lifts, leg presses, bench press—everything was shooting up and up again-- everyone wanted to know what he was using. At the same time he was getting stronger his body actually seemed to be getting thinner and leaner, not all bulky and muscled, and no one believed it was all hard work, so he claimed to be taking different supplements—fish oil—coconut milk. Some of the other guys started taking the same stuff, hoping to match his results. He wondered how many guys would slip into a bra if they knew it could make them stronger. Not many, he thought.

But that's what makes me better. I'm willing to do what others won't do. And so when he pressed 350 pounds, and the guys cheered, he stood up and grinned, feeling the bra and panties he wore under his gym clothes, and he felt proud and strong and he knew he was a winner.

It took Amber three days before she finally agreed to meet. As per Elle Magazine, he asked her to meet him at a public place where they could speak privately and where either of them was free to walk away -- the bike racks behind the auditorium. He got there first, and Amber showed up about five minutes late. She looked hot as hell in tight jeans and a tank top that hug her breasts. She's tied the little tank up to show off her toned, flat belly, and

he saw that she had a flashing stud in her own belly button, and it made him smile. She'd done up her make-up, and he remembered now how fucking hot she was. She looked really angry, and he found that hot as well.

“You look great,” he said.

Her angry face broke a little, and she said, “Thanks.”

They were both quiet for a minute, and then Courtney said, “I am really sorry, Amber. You deserved better, and I was a total jerk to do what I did.”

The apology and admission seemed to surprise her, and Amber cocked her head to the side and said, “Okay.”

“Friends?”

“Sure,” Amber said, and she started as if to offer him a hug, but he reached out and shook her hand instead. She laughed. “Really?”

“As hot as you look, I don't trust myself.”

“Whatever.”

“About the prom?”

“Jeff Watson is taking me, so don't worry about it.”

Jeff Watson? Total asshole, Courtney thought, and it annoyed him, but he held his tongue and just said, “That's great for you.”

“You going?”

“Probably not.”

“What about Diana?”

“Nah. Let’s just end this with us being friends?”

“Yeah,” Amber said, “okay. Well, take care.”

“You, too.”

And then Amber walked away, and Courtney stood, a little stunned and surprised that it had been that easy. He didn’t even get a chance to give her his whole it’s me, not you speech. So, he pulled out his phone and texted Diana: Done.

She texted right back: Good.

And that was that.

Or so he thought.

Courtney wiggled his hips as he pulled the jeans on, and then struggled to button them. “They are freaking tight,” he said.

“You look like such a stud,” Diana said.

“I don’t know,” Courtney said, checking himself out in the mirror. It was a pair of girl’s jeans with fancy pockets and stretchy fabric that fit him

like a second skin. He turned and looked at his profile, and the words came out of his mouth before he could even realize how girly he was about to sound, “do they make my butt look big?”

“Yeah,” Diana said, slapping him on the ass. “And I love it.”

“What girl wants a guy with a big butt?” Courtney asked, pushing down on his groin, trying to find space for his junk in the tight crotch.

“All of us. Have you ever seen the ass on a Greek statue?”

“No.”

“Those are models of perfect men. Like you.”

“Whatever I have to do,” Courtney said. “I guess this is the next step, right?”

“Yes,” Diana said, giving him a hug. The jeans were shaping jeans. Like a bra for the butt, and what he had kind of seen that bothered him was that it lifted his butt and gave it a round, girlish shape. The sight of him with that pretty, girlish behind sent a thrill through Diana, and she couldn’t wait to take him around town and show him off in his new clothes, and then take him home and kiss him breathless.

Courtney started to reach down to unbutton the jeans, but Diana stopped him. “Wear them out,” she said.

Courtney twisted the bracelets on his wrist nervously. This was the first time he would wear women's clothes in public, and even though he was pretty sure most people wouldn't even notice they were girl's jeans, he still felt scared. "Maybe I can just wear my old stuff for one more day?"

"Now, Courtney. Now. I need you to be my brave, strong man."

"Diana....?"

She brushed the bangs from his eyes, tilted his head back and kissed him, reaching down to squeeze his butt as she did so, and she felt him tense up and then relax into the kiss, surrendering with his whole body before she cradled his head gently against her shoulder and he whispered, "okay."

"I love you, babe."

He slipped into his sandals and Diana took his hand and led him out of the changing room. "He looks hot as hell, right?" She said to the salesgirl.

"Hell, yeah," the girl said looking him up and down, sharing a quick little conspiratorial look with Diana. "You look amazing!" But then, as he walked by and she saw how the jeans gave him a sweet heart-shaped rear, and thought, "Amazing for a teen-age girl."

It was kind of cute, really. He was so obviously the girl in the relationship, and she found it kind of sweet how Diana was so protective of him, and he was so vulnerable and dependent on her. She felt jealous of his

skin—it was so clear and radiant! And she'd noticed his nails were perfectly manicured. It almost made her feel a little insecure about her own femininity to be around a guy who was so totally nailing his girly.

To each their own, she thought, and then turned her attention to ringing up the sale and getting herself a nice little commission.

After, Diana led Courtney out into Red Bank and they walked around together, bumping into people as you do. Diana had her arm around Courtney's shoulder, and she noticed how he frequently brushed his hair out of his eyes as they walked, his bracelets flashing.

Courtney's mom placed a plate of steaming spaghetti in front of him. "Have you been doing your laundry?"

"Of course."

"Really?"

"Why? Do I smell or something?"

"No, but I just haven't had to buy any detergent in a while, and usually I have to get a bottle every week."

Courtney felt himself tense up, could feel the bra tight around his chest, his panties hugging his hips, became, as he always did when he

worried his mother was starting to figure something out, hyper-aware of his neatly trimmed nails, his long hair. He decided to go with the truth. “I’ve been doing it over at Diana’s.”

“Oh?”

His mom sat down and started nibbled at her food, but he could tell by the way she had her head slightly cocked to the side that she was thinking, and after an awkward couple of minutes she said, “Do her parents work?”

Courtney could see right through the coded question: are you two hanging out at her place alone? He decided to stick with the truth, and so he said, “Yeah. Diana and her sister are latch-key kids.”

“Oh.”

Courtney stared to eat a little more rapidly, wolfing down his food and hoping to escape any more questions, but before he could escape his mother said, “I want to meet her. Bring her over sometime for dinner.”

“She’s pretty busy.”

“Well, I am sure she could find the time one of these nights.”

“I’ll ask her,” he said, hoping to just brush it off.

“You must be getting pretty serious.”

“Not really.”

“Doing laundry together?”

He groaned and got up. “Okay. Fine. We actually got married last week. It’s my big secret,” he said, tossing his hair and rolling his eyes dramatically.

“Don’t be a smart-aleck.”

“Better than a dumb one!” And then he hugged his mom and gave her a big kiss on the cheek. “Love you, mom!”

“Love you, too,” she answered, though he could hear the slight annoyance in her voice.

Courtney went up to his room and sat down at the computer. He went to the website for Princeton football and started to read the bios of the coaches and the players. This is what it’s all for, he remembered. This is why I am doing all this.

And then he locked the door to his bedroom, went into his bathroom and digging the jar out from under the sink where he’d hidden it behind the toilet paper, he gave himself a facial.

Courtney spent all of his time with women now. He would talk to his old football buddies if he ran into them in the hall, or after class. They would say Hey and he would talk for a minute if he saw them around town,

but the gap between them was cavernous. The football season was over and high-school winding down. Everyone was getting ready to move on to the next thing, or settling into the grind of a post-school work life in construction or maybe looking forward to spending the summer smoking grass and delivering pizza.

So, Courtney hung out with Diana and the female jocks before school, during lunch. On weekends he went with them to the movies, to get pizza at Pizza Hut, to go hiking in Hartshorne Woods. Sometimes it was he, Diana and Diana's sister, and they would go the mall and go shopping, get something to eat at the food court, see a movie. Usually, Diana would shove her purse into Courtney's hands, and he found himself walking around the mall carrying her purse, blowing his hair out of his eyes and blushing whenever he thought someone noticed.

The volleyball players were mostly tall girls-- 5'11, 6' and even taller, and Courtney soon found himself growing used to being the shortest person in the group, and feeling a little embarrassed sometimes to share his thoughts on the shows he was watching, he found himself growing quieter, listening more, nodding and agreeing as the women talked.

One day they were in the mall at Sports Authority, and Diana was looking at some tops. Courtney was holding her purse, and Jill Campbell, a junior on the basketball team who stood 6' 3" and had shoulders like a

linebacker, came up behind him and pinched his butt. Courtney squealed, and Diana and Jill high-fived. “Hey, cutie,” Jill said, looking at Courtney.

“Hey.”

“So, you got him carrying a purse now, eh?”

“It’s her purse,” he answered defensively. “I’m just holding it.”

“Well, you look really cute.”

“Doesn’t he?” Diana added.

“You’ve got the cutest little boyfriend in school.”

Courtney felt his cheeks begin to burn, and he looked away. “Cut it out,” he said, surprised at how weak he sounded.

“Oh,” Diana said, putting her arm around him and kissing him on the head. “We’re just teasing.”

“Yeah,” Jill answered, her tone still mocking, punching him on the arm. “Don’t get your panties in a wad.”

Panties? Courtney glanced at Diana, who gave Jill a wink, and then said, “Gotta run. See ya later, Jillster.”

Jill gave her a thumbs up and walked off toward the shoes department.

As soon as they were away, Courtney shoved Diana’s purse back

into her hands and hissed, “Asshole!”

“What?”

“She knows!”

“What?”

“She said, ‘Don’t get your panties in a bundle?’”

“Wad... but no. She just said that.”

Courtney looked her in the eyes, and he was almost sure she was lying! He shook his head. “Don’t make fun of me in front of your friends.”

“I was just teasing.”

“Well don’t.”

“Oh,” she started to reach out and grab his arm, but Courtney yanked it away.

“No! Don’t touch me.”

And he turned and stomped away. Diana watched him go, his cute little but nicely lifted and rounded by his jeans, and shook her head. I’m going to have to get used to this, she thought ruefully. He was starting to think and react more and more like a female, something she’d expected and wanted, but it would mean scenes like this, especially as he became more sensitive and emotional without yet having learned to deal with his new

openness.

She took the tops she'd found and went to the register. She'd give him some space for now. Let him calm down, and then they could work it out. As she paid for her items and walked out into the mall, a thought occurred to her and she couldn't help but laugh. He was, indeed, really sexy when he was angry.

Just like a pretty little girl-boy should be.

Diana walked over the massage courtyard where they always had massage chairs set up, and she got herself a massage. After, as she paid the massage therapist, she saw Courtney walking toward her, his shoulders hunched and eyes downcast. She gathered him into her arms and hugged him, and he hugged her back tight. She let her hand slide along his strong, muscular back, then scratched him along his bra strap.

He looked up at her, searchingly, and she met his eyes and whispered, "I'm sorry."

He smiled and said, "me, too."

"You ready to head home?" Diana asked.

"Yeah."

Without Diana even asking, Courtney slipped the purse off Diana's shoulder and onto his own. It just seemed to him like the right thing to do,

something he needed to do, to show her he would be there for her, that he was an equal partner in all this, whatever it was?

Diana smiled, and they held hands and walked through the mall, both of them feeling like they'd never been closer, never understood each other as deeply as they did now.

The week of the big try-out arrived, and Courtney and Diana met on the Sunday beforehand to plan out the week.

"This week, I want you to take it to the next level," Diana said, watching while Courtney painted his newly trimmed toenails with clear polish.

"Yeah," he said.

"I mean, everything you can do, can bring yourself to do, to hold back all that pent up masculinity, to keep your power, so you can explode on Saturday."

"Yeah."

"So, tell me what you are going to do to bring it to the next level. Something more, something bigger."

He bit his nail, but Diana gave his forearm a quick slap, and he stopped. “I don’t know,” he said.

“Oh, Courtney. I just know you can a little more powerful if you just take it one step further. You’ve come so far, done so much, now is the time to go balls to the wall and go all out to win that scholarship.”

“My mom? She’s getting suspicious... she asked me about my laundry. I think she knows something is up.”

I bet she does, Diana thought, looking at Courtney, his bangs now down to his eyes, his hair down to his jaw line and styled in a very round, feminine style. The bracelets. Hanging out all the time with the girls had even changed his speech a little bit. Not so much someone who didn’t know him would detect anything, but someone who had known the old Courtney would have noticed, for sure, that he had started picking up a lot of slang from the girls, had started frying his words.

“Does she know about me?”

“Of course. Oh my god, she keeps bothering me to invite you over.”

“What? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t think you’d want to come over and listen to my mom...”

“Hell, yes, I want to come over! Tell her yes.”

“Are you sure it’s a good idea?”

“Yes. I want to meet her. I bet you look just like her,” she said, brushing his hair back and smiling.

“Actually, I kind of do.”

“So, I’ll see what I can do when I come over to throw her off your trail! Don’t even worry about it.”

“I don’t...”

“Don’t even worry.”

“Okay.”

“Now, back to our original question of the day, what more can you do?”

Courtney bit his lip. “I don’t know.”

“Really? Well, those earlobes of yours are looking pretty bare. Pretty boring.”

“Earrings?”

“Do you have a better idea?”

Courtney sighed and said, “No.”

“Good because I already made the appointment.”

“For today?”

“Yup. Let’s go, girlfriend.”

Courtney knew that he wouldn’t and couldn’t win any kind of debate at this point, so he stood up and smiled, saying, “You’ve been dying to see this, haven’t you?”

“Oh, hell yes!” She said. “You are going to be so fucking sexy! I can’t wait.”

“Yeah? Well, don’t expect me to wear anything too ridiculously girly.”

“Of course not. Just a pair of sensible hoop earrings to start with.”

“Hoop? Never.”

“Never?”

“Never.”

“We’ll see about that.”

“Never.” He said, putting his hands on his hips.

“When we get home, I am going to kiss you until you scream,”
Diana said.

“I was hoping for a hand job, at least.”

“After your big day, sweetie. Save it until after you impress the shit out of that scout from Princeton.”

“It’s gonna be hard.”

“That’s what HE said.”

After she’d pierced his ears and slipped some gold colored studs into the holes, the girl turned the chair around to face the mirror and held Courtney’s hair back. He saw the gold flashing in his ears, Diana leaning down, her face next to his, her smiling and giving him a little punch on the arm. “You look great!”

“You do!” The girl said.

Courtney forced a smile. Great.

They went for a walk. Diana had her arm around Courtney’s waist. “You’re going to be so good Saturday,” Diana said. “That coach is going to shit himself.”

“I hope so.”

As they were making their way down Broadstreet, Amber came walking out of The Bees Knees and stopped. “Oh,” she said, “hey.”

“Hey,” Courtney answered.

“Hey,” Diana said.

The three looked at each other awkwardly. No one could figure out what to say. Courtney nervously hooked his hair behind his ear, and Amber's eyes lit up as she saw his earring.

"You made him get his ears pierced?" Amber said, looking directly at Diana.

"He wanted to," Diana said.

"Oh," Amber said, reaching out and touching Courtney on the arm. "You did?"

"Yeah," Courtney said, blushing.

"Well, you look pretty," Amber said. "And I love those jeans."

"Thanks," Courtney said in a near whisper.

"Well," Diana said. "It was great running into you. We have to get going."

Amber smirked and covered her mouth. "Bye, then."

Courtney felt he should say something, but Diana turned him around and led him away, so he just put his arm around her waist and followed. Amber, looking at Courtney from behind, felt a shock at how much he looked like a girl with his long hair and his round little butt. Part of her found it funny that the guy who'd dumped her was getting turned into a girl by his

new squeeze, but another part of her felt a deep, abiding hate rising within her toward Diana, who'd not only stolen her boyfriend, but ruined him. I wish I could get back at that bitch somehow, she thought. Put her in her place!

“You got a little slower,” Diana said when Courtney finished his practice 40 yard dash on Friday morning, the day of the prom and the day before his big tryout.

“What?” He'd felt good. Thought maybe he'd set a new time.

“Back over 5,” Diana said, putting on a fake smile over a fake frown. “Not bad.”

“Not good,” Courtney answered, looking at the display on the phone. “Let's try again.”

He ran again. Once again Diana let the timer run a little after he finished. Once again it showed over a 5.

“It doesn't make sense,” he said, shaking his head.

“Maybe it will be good enough.”

“Maybe isn't good enough!” Courtney exploded. “All this time... all this work... I have to be faster! Fuck!”

“It’ll be fine, just...”

“No! Stop mollycoddling me! I fucking need this! Goddamnit!”

Diana smiled and said, “I have an idea. You probably aren’t going to like it.”

“Tell me.”

“People might make fun of you. Of us.”

“Tell me.”

“Are you willing to...”

“Anything,” Courtney said tossing back his hair. “I’ll do anything.”

Diana told him, and she saw Courtney pale and then the sweetest pink color filled his cheeks, and he shook his head, "no," but she knew he meant yes. She felt a little guilty. A little. But, well, it was for the best, and everything she'd done was making him a better man and moving him closer to his dreams.

And hers.

So it was okay, she told herself, again. It was okay to fib a little. Because they would both get what they wanted.

The buzz started as soon as the couple arrived. People talking.

Texting. Every phone at the prom lit up and people started craning their necks, looking around, trying to catch a glimpse of the couple. There was milling and mumbling. The DJ looked up and slipped off his headphones, trying to figure out what the hell was happening, and then the crowd seemed to part, and a pair walked out into the center of the gym floor, hand in hand, and everyone gathered around what looked to the DJ like two sisters dressed as guys.

They wore tuxedos, but clearly cut for women with short jackets that only came to the waist, skinny pants that tapered in tight at the ankles, and big, floppy velvet bow ties. The taller girl's tie was black, the shorter one's pink, and they had what looked like matching diamond earrings flashing in their ears with low-heeled patent leather shoes. They stood there in the center of the crowd, holding hands, and the short one blew the bangs out of her eyes, and the DJ suddenly realized that the music had stopped while he was standing there trying to figure out what was going on.

He went to his computer and punched up the first ballad that he saw, feeling it was time for a slow dance, and the hall suddenly filled with the sounds of "Red." The taller girl took the smaller one in her arms, and they started to dance, and the DJ realized what all the fuss was about figuring this little suburban school wasn't hip to same-sex couples yet, and he thought—well, good for them! Then, on impulse, he started to clap for the brave young

couple, and the clap was slowly picked up by some of the chaperones, and the teachers, and the principal and then, gradually, one by one, the students joined in and everyone was clapping as the disco ball spun and sent rays of light washing over the two of them, and Courtney looked up at Diana and smiled, tears in his eyes, and they kissed as the crowd cheered and then, gradually, all the kids started to make their way out onto the floor and soon Diana and Courtney were just another couple slowly dancing together as their childhood days came to an end in a swirling world of light and music.

After, they went back to her place and he changed back into his regular clothes, and then he went home and slept and dreamt new dreams.

The next morning, Courtney got up and slipped out of his nightie and panties. He took a shower and for the first time in many weeks he washed with Axe Body Gel instead of his girly soap. He put on pair of boxers, and slipped into his shorts and a Guns and Roses t-shirt, and he felt like a man, and a surge of power passed through him, and he knew he would crush the tryout. When he saw Diana in her black leggings and hot pink tank top waiting for him he took one look at her long legs and tight round ass and he felt himself getting hard. Goddamn but he was glad to be a man again, and when he shook hands with the coach he gave him a good strong squeeze, looked him in the eyes, smiled and said, “You ready to shit yourself?”

“I’ve worked out some of the best athletes in the world, kid,” the coach said smiling right back. “It takes a lot to impress me, but I like your attitude.”

"Get ready."

And then Courtney blew the coach away. He ran a 4.36 forty yard dash, and the coach whistled and asked him to do it again, and he did. Then, Diana ran routes and Courtney fired passes after pass, each perfectly throw, and for some he showed off his new arm strength, sending the ball whistling through the air on a line, but he also showed touch, floating some perfectly over the heads of imaginary players, melding the accuracy he'd spent so many years perfecting due to his lack of arm strength with his new, powerful strength.

The coach gasped audibly more than once, and when Courtney finished he and Diana walked over, and the man was shaking his head and laughing. "I am very impressed, kid."

"I thought you would be," Courtney said, hooking his hair behind his ear.

"The weight room is just around the corner," Diana said. "We've got the racks all set up, so you can see how strong he is."

"How tall are you?" Coach asked, squinting.

"Oh," Courtney felt his stomach turn. "I know I'm a little short by some standards, but..."

"Five ten? Hopefully?"

Courtney felt the insecurity rushing back, saw all the rejection letters from all the colleges, heard every coach and player over the years who told him he couldn't do it, wasn't tall enough, fast enough, he crossed his arms over his chest, suddenly feeling very naked and exposed without the comforting feeling of a bra across his chest.

"Let's go lift some weights," Diana said, taking the coach's elbow. "You're going to want to see..."

"No. No. That's fine. I'm thinking five nine, right?"

Courtney felt his stomach sink, and he glanced at Diana. "Coach," Courtney said. "Let me show you my squat, my bench press. I promise, you'll be impressed."

"Not necessary," the man said, reaching out for a handshake.

Courtney swallowed and took the man's hand, looked him in the eyes and said, "thanks for making the trip."

"Thank you," Coach answered. "Now come on over with me to my car, because I want to offer you a full scholarship to play football at Princeton University."

"What? But the rest of the workout?"

"Why bother? I know a player when I see one."

Courtney's hand shook as he signed, and then the men shook hands, and Courtney and Diana watched him drive away. As soon as he was gone, Diana squealed and Courtney grabbed her and crushed her to his body, and then he pushed her back onto the hood of some stranger's car and kissed her until she saw stars.

"Let's go," he said in a husky voice. "I want you. Now."

Diana, stunned and rattled, followed along, sliding effortlessly into the girlfriend role, and Courtney led her to The Globe hotel and restaurant. "Hey, Lou," Courtney said to the bartender as they walked in and hit the stairs. "We're going to study for a little while."

"Good deal, Court," the man said with a smirk.

Courtney led Diana into the hotel room, and immediately tossed her onto the bed on her back. He climbed on top, put his hands on her small breasts and squeezed, then kissed her, letting one hand slide down to the inside of her thigh while he continued to play with her breasts and she reached up and pulled him down for a wet, hungry kiss.

When the kiss broke, Diana gasped and said, "Courtney, oh my

God...."

And Courtney laughed and kissed her some more.

Four

A week later his mother found Courtney's stash of bras and panties. She looked around his room and saw his manicure kit. His bathroom looked like the bathroom of a teen girl with all the flowery soaps and creams and facials and so when he got home that night he found her crying, and then he cried and they talked, and he told her the best version of the truth he could: I need to wear a bra. I need to wear panties. I need to wear earrings and bracelets, and I need all that in my life because it makes me stronger.

"How?" She said. "How?"

"Before I started," he said, "I had nothing. Now I have a football scholarship to Princeton. Isn't that enough?"

"It's that Diana," she said. "She's the one doing this to you."

"No. I am doing it to me."

"I want my son back," his mother said. "I want him back."

"I'm still your son," Courtney said.

"I don't know you," his mother said. "I don't know who this person is."

"Well, didn't you always say you wanted me to be happy?"

"Yes."

"I am."

But his mother just shook her head and walked away.

The school year ended. Summer came and went. It was a special time for Courtney, a time of transition. He spent a lot of time studying the Princeton playbook, learning the reads and the play calls, and he spent a lot of time at the shore with Diana and her friends. He wore Capri pants and loose, so-called "boyfriend" tank tops in pastels, and his hair grew down to his shoulders, so he frequently had it braided or tied back in a ponytail. He continued to read books and magazines for women, to watch shows for women, and he and Diana even went to the city and saw Wicked together. They went to Frozen. Except for football, he settled into a routine of living as a girl for the most part.

Things stayed cold with his mother. She tolerated him. Only tolerated. That hurt more than anything, and it made it so much harder for him to stay the course. He wanted to be close to his mother, to share with her his ultimate success at what he considered THEIR dream, but she just couldn't see, couldn't understand that he needed to do what he was doing to

get there.

And he seemed to keep getting skinnier as he got stronger, his body become more and more lithe and lean, his arms going from thick and knotty to slender and round.

As the fall approached and Princeton loomed, he and Diana talked. A lot. The football team practiced five days a week, and had a game on Saturday. That meant that Courtney would have to use up a lot more of his power everyday than he'd gotten used to when he'd been able to spend entire weeks saving up his animus, so he would need to be all the more feminine during the rest of his free time.

That meant that he would need to go further. To do more. And so they put together a series of preppy women's wear for him-- not too obvious. Looks that a guy could wear-- but pants and shirts and sweaters that had all come off the women's rack and had a distinctive feminine cut and feel.

They decided he should major in fashion design, as it was not traditionally a masculine major, would place him around women and put him into a world where he could spend time sewing and paying a lot of attention to style and hit fashion shows in NYC.

And so when school started, Courtney found himself walking across campus in a pair of heather women's pants with a white blouse and a Peter

Pan collar, a leather "satchel" bouncing at his hip, his thick hair bouncing at his shoulders, earrings and bracelets and people who saw him though he was girl.

And the team did, too. Guys looked at him, at his slender body and lack of height, his long hair and they thought-- you kidding me? He heard some comments. But then workouts began, and pound for pound he was the strongest man on the team. And then he got on the practice field and outran everyone, and once they started hitting he stiffed armed a 250 pound linebacker and knocked him on his ass, and the guys nodded and high-fived and they all began to respect the little quarterback because maybe he shaved his legs and maybe he looked like a girl and majored in fashion, but he was a fucking stud on the field, and by the first game Courtney had been named the starting quarterback, and was making the whole team better, and they all knew it.

That year, Princeton shocked the football world by going 10-1, winning the Ivy League title and getting invited to the Pin Stripe Bowl at Yankee Stadium. Word the team, their almost impossible to defend spread option offense, and the little freshmen quarterback who'd broken every single-season record at Princeton for passing and running began to spread.

As did stories about the fact that this new star player, a player proving to be among the toughest competitors in America, wore women's

clothes and majored in fashion. Courtney had known it was coming, and he and Diana had prepared for it. Again and again, a puzzled reporter would ask, "why do you wear women's clothes?"

And Courtney would answer, "because I want to."

There was no point fighting it or trying to hide from it, and once Princeton got into the Pin Stripe bowl, the story went nation-wide getting covered on ESPN, FOX Sports, CNN and all the others.

There were comments. People yelling "homo" or "faggot" from the stands. Leshawn Goode, a player for Oklahoma, their opponent in the Pin Strip Bowl, said, "I ain't gonna get run over by a boy in a bra." The coach for Oklahoma, Bud Wilkerson, an old-school redneck coach, kept referring to Courtney as "that pretty little girl" when he talked about stopping Princeton.

Courtney ran over Leshawn. He ran over and around the Oklahoma defense, rushing for 158 yards and scoring a touchdown, throwing for 343 yards and passing for three touchdowns. Princeton won, 42-34, and after Leshawn apologized and the two shook hands at midfield, an image captured by the NYT and spread all over the Internet under the banner headline, "Pretty Little Payback."

Letters and emails began to pour in from all over the country. Boys and men who liked to dress in women's clothes, thanking him for letting them

know they weren't alone, for having the courage to wear what he wanted to wear. Courtney didn't know if he was really a cross-dresser, but he was cross-dressing, and it surprised him how good he felt realizing that he'd helped so many people, and so he and Diana both got involved with groups on campus and around the country that supported and celebrated gender freedom.

Immersed in the world of fashion and branding, Courtney realized that this was his identity now, and so the next fall when he showed up for the pre-season media day, he wore a bow in his hair in the school colors, and he'd put on some light make-up. It made him stronger, got him attention. It was who he'd become, was becoming.

Soon, he found himself wearing skirts and dresses in public, and he took his biggest step at the end of football season his sophomore year when he tried out for and joined the cheerleading squad-- as one of the girls.

He made his debut at a basketball game between Princeton and Columbia. Standing nervously in the tunnel in his skirt and tight little top, his face prettily painted, long hair in a pony-tail just like the other girls. He was as nervous about how people would react to his new blonde hair as anything else, and his heart was beating and he just hoped he wouldn't sweat so much it ruined his make-up.

When the announcer called out "Heeeeeeeeeere they are! The Princeton cheerleaders!!!!" He ran out, smiling, did a cartwheel and then bounced to his feet and did a high kick, shouting "Go Princeton!!!!"

The sold out crowd had come to see him, to see the star quarterback play cheerleader, and the room exploded into a blinding series of flashes as everyone shot pictures and roared and guys in the room shook their heads and thought-- I can't believe that's a dude.

His junior year, he started to put falsies in his bra, looking for a more natural profile for the clothes he wore. And by his senior year, Diana had talked him into hormone treatments that had given him a set of perky little b-cup breasts and softer, more rounded limbs. His legs were sexy as hell now, and he started to wear shorter skirts all the time to show them off. He'd also begun to mimic his cheerleader friends, training himself to speak in a higher register, and picking up the bright, perky sing-song speech patterns of a co-ed.

He appeared on the cover of Sports Illustrated in a montage that showed him in his football gear, in his cheerleader outfit, in a combination of the two. And then later his senior year he found himself inside another issue of Sports Illustrated-- the Swimsuit issue. He wore a tiny little polka dot bikini that showed off his now curvy, slender body and his firm young breasts, and he became the first male ever to be featured, creating another

wave of interest and controversy.

His mother had just grown more and more distant. She couldn't understand what he was doing to himself, couldn't accept that her son was living, at least in his mother's opinion, as a woman, that he was happy. She blamed herself, thought she'd done something wrong to make him turn into a girlyboy, and so with all the attention and all the media, she just disappeared from his life. That hurt Courtney the most of anything, and he kept calling and sending cards and loving her anyway, hoping that someday she would accept the choices he'd made, and that they could be friends.

As their senior years came to a close, Courtney found himself waiting for the NFL draft while busily working on his senior project for his fashion degree-- designing a line of feminine men's wear. Diana was fielding offers from Morgan Stanley and other big banks, getting ready to start a career in business. It seemed like a time for decisions to be made about the future. Their future. And so, on the night before the draft, where Courtney was expected to be taken in the first round, Diana arranged a special night out for the two of them as pre-draft celebration. Courtney slipped into his little black dress, pumps, did his make-up and put on his jewelry. Diana slipped into a pair of trousers and a blazer. And then, just after they had finished splitting dessert, she got down on her knee, and she took Courtney's hand and said, "I love you more than I have ever loved anyone. You are the toughest,

most courageous man I have ever known, and I want to spend my life with you. Will you marry me?"

And Courtney began to cry, and he nodded and he said, "yes! Yes! Yes!"

And then Diana stood and took him in her arms, and they kissed while the restaurant patrons clapped, and Courtney felt his leg lift, as his heart filled with light, and he felt pretty and happy and safe, and he thought, I am the luckiest boy in the world!"