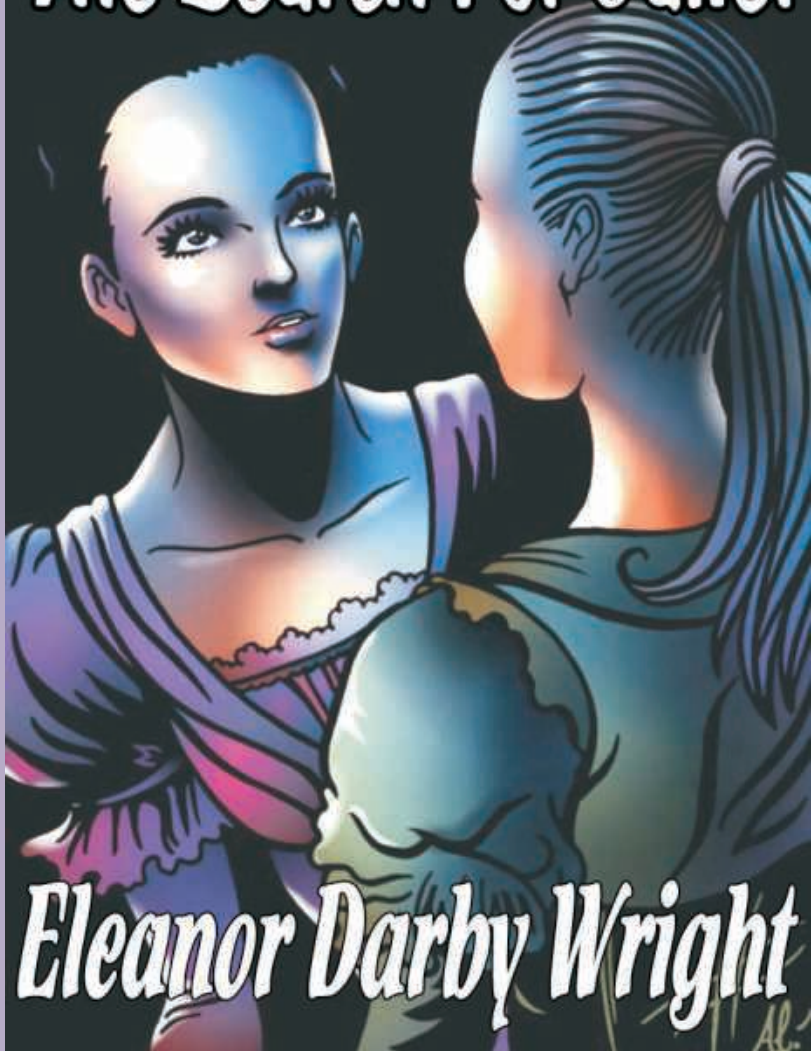


SHAKESPEARE COUNTY:

# The Search For Juliet



*Eleanor Darby Wright*

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# **SHAKESPEARE COUNTY: THE SEARCH FOR JULIET**

**by Eleanor Darby Wright**

Mrs Adams, the drama professor, singled four of us guys out after one of her classes on Shakespeare. "How would the four of you like to be in Shakespeare this summer?" she asked. "A week of rehearsal at scale and a week of performance at double that rate with a scholarship for the one chosen as Juliet at the end of the two weeks?"

Acting in a real production, acting in Shakespeare, acting for two weeks in a professional show, getting paid for acting, well, we were all smiling and nodding, she had us

all at that point, until the last part, 'chosen as Juliet', came out of her mouth.

"What, what do you mean, 'chosen as Juliet'," asked Darren, next to me. He still had something of a lisp in his voice and was constantly teased in the dorms about being gay. He just laughed that off but he was always the one to ask questions in class and so was noticed by everyone.

"Well, with all the gay parts in television these days," Jim 'Arnold' Schwartz said after one class. "Darren will never want for a job."

"He's welcome to those kind of parts," Frank Timmons had said to me as we had left the class together. Now, Frank, along with Gerry Bench, was sitting in the little theatre, part of the group that Professor Elizabeth Adams had singled out.

"Well, you all know that in Shakespeare's time," said the Professor, a smile on her unmade up face. Her blonde hair was pulled back in a sort of horse's tail down her back. She didn't wear much makeup and yet she always seemed womanly and attractive as she tried to coach us in the performance class we were all in.

"In Shakespeare's time," she went on patiently, waving to the next class to stay outside for a moment or two, "women were not allowed on the stage at all and so all the great female parts we study in class had to be played by men. Well, there is a place close to the university that you all must have seen on road signs, called Arden. It's in Shakespeare County and, guess what, they put on a Shakespeare Festival over the summer. An authentic Shakespeare Festival, I must add!"

"You want us to play female roles in Shakespeare?" asked Gerry then, stunned.

"You are all on the slender and on the small side," said Professor Adams with a smile, "which was how they

chose which actors would be male and which female in the theater of Shakespeare's time. Anyway, I was asked to recommend some actresses for the Festival and I have watched all four of you in class and feel you are all qualified."



"Please," lisped Darren then, standing up.

"If you are chosen to be Juliet in the final production of *Romeo and Juliet*," Professor Adams went on, "it's a twenty thousand dollar scholarship on top of any other monies you earn. But I have to tell you that the offer has been made, not only to the university, but to several other institutes of learning. This has been done before in Arden and they've never had less than twelve and as high as twenty actresses in Arden for their plays."

"They've done this before?" asked Darren then, sitting down again. "How come we haven't heard about this before?"

"Will you go around the school and tell the rest of the drama class the roles that you are going to play over the summer?" she asked dryly. I shuddered as I thought of what 'Arnold' would be calling me if he ever found out.

"I thought not," the professor smiled at us. "But it is a really good experience and almost all those who attend get jobs for the rest of the summer or in other Shakespeare productions. Well, I need to know by Monday if you want to go."

"Mrs Adams," said Frank quietly then. "This isn't the place where the guys in History One were, well ..."

"Encouraged by their girl friends to dress up and have a beauty contest with the boys dressed as girls?" said Professor Adams with a laugh. "Yes, this was the place. But they had nothing to do with the way that those poor boys were treated by this university three years ago.

"The village of Arden was quite supportive and understanding of what went on in that escapade. I can assure you that the Shakespeare Society, that runs the weeks and the plays, are very supportive of this university and they don't do anything to embarrass any of the actors from here who take part in authentic plays.

"I don't refer to it in my classes and I expect the same of you, unless you want to share with the others. I know some of the girls are fascinated by the insights you get being actresses for a week or so and those who have shared have always been most happy that they did."

The door rattled again and we all looked at one another, stunned by what she was asking of us, I'm sure.

"By Monday," she called to us all as she went to the classroom door to welcome the freshmen into another of her performance classes. She smiled broadly. "Let me know if any of you are man enough to do this!"

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I didn't tell the others even when I saw each of them around the campus and they tried to pump me as I tried to pump them to find out if I'd be going to Arden alone. Mrs Adams had sent us all a video of an interview done by someone who had been in the Festival a few years before.

It began with a scene from *As You Like It*, set in Arden, naturally, and Rosalind and Celia are conversing about Celia's banishment and her resolve to find her exiled father in the Forest of Arden. Rosalind decides to accompany her and to disguise herself as a boy, as Ganymede, to protect Celia, now disguised as 'Aliena'.

It sent a few funny shivers up and down my back to watch Rosalind, her long blonde hair flowing down her back, try to act like a boy but still appearing to be a girl while Celia, dark and winsome, as Shakespeare might have said if he had seen 'her', seemed to be a pretty, elegant girl, clearly a daughter of a father, Duke Frederick, who has banished her.

I was absorbed by the scene as I watched it and disappointed when it suddenly cut off and there we were, in the video I had become absorbed in, in a dressing room of sorts, in an inn most likely, as the Tudor-style, black beams and whitewashed walls suggested. Rosalind was being interviewed on the part that she played.

“That is the hardest part,” ‘she’ was saying in a very upper-class Brit accent. “I am trying to project that I am Rosalind inside the boys’ clothes that I am wearing but I’m afraid that it just looks like me in a wig.”

“Oh no,” said the interviewer, a man I might add. “I was quite convinced that you were a girl throughout the play. Did you seek out this part as a girl dressed as a boy?”

“No,” said Rosalind with a smile of thanks at the praise. “I am the tallest of the actresses here this week, though, and there is that line in there when I talk about how tall I am and how I’ll protect Celia. No, if I had had a choice after a week in rehearsals, I’d have liked to have been Celia and disguised myself as a sluttish kind of girl as she does.”

Then, Rosalind did a terrible thing. ‘She’ took off her wig and began to wipe her face with a makeup remover. It only took a moment and ‘she’ was a boy, her hair standing on end slightly but clearly a boy’s hair.

“Well, Graham,” said the interviewer. Graham! I ask you! He should have called ‘Rosalind’, I thought. “You certainly performed very well in your part as you must have been able to tell by the extra special applause for you at the end of the play. Are you going to be in other plays this week?”

“Well, we’re all in *Romeo and Juliet*,” said Graham, his voice dropping to a regular guy’s voice, just like mine

normally. "We all, no matter our other parts, have to be part of the extended ball scenes."

"What's that like, dancing with a man as a partner?" cut in the interviewer then, an eagerness in his voice that I found a little off-putting.

"It's just acting," laughed Graham then, putting on an *Iron Maiden* tee shirt as the dress that he had been casting off slid away from him, revealing the tights he had been wearing. "It isn't as if a man has to hold me or anything."

"Yes, but I've noticed a lot of giggling and laughing in rehearsals," the interviewer went on.

"Well, we actresses, if I can use that word," said Graham with a grin, "like to be really funny about the dresses we wear and the rustling noises they make. So a lot of us take it in good part and answer the boys who tease us as if we were lords' daughters or something. It makes the dancing fun and I hope that you will all enjoy it when you see it. I know we'll be enjoying ourselves."

The interview cut then to a 'news desk'. I don't know if it was real or not but there was another serious-faced man thanking Arthur for his interview with Graham Belson, Rosalind in *As You Like It*. He promised other interviews later with the actors who had played Orlando and Celia, they weren't on the tape, and then gave out a series of dates and times when other plays were being produced in the Globe Tent Theater, weather permitting.

I played the tape through twice and then it hit me where I had seen Graham Belson before. In my first year at university, he had been in *Waiting For Godot*, the play put on by third and fourth year members of the performance classes at our university. I had never seen him around campus and so I had presumed that he had left after that play. As I recalled now, he had been very good and had had a good write-up in the student newspaper.

"Is Graham Belson around?" I asked Mrs Adams when I took the videotape back to her on Tuesday. We had had an extension on her deadline.

"Not around here," Mrs Adams said with a big smile. "He's a professional actor now and has a couple of films coming out at the end of this year, with good supporting parts for someone just starting out. He's done a lot of television work as well, you know, but the Shakespeare Society Arden Festival, a real mouthful, isn't it, was his first professional gig and he did very well even though he wasn't Juliet."

"Who was then?" I asked.

"The actor, I should say actress, that's the way the Festival distinguishes who is playing the male roles and who the female," said Mrs Adams. "The actress who played Celia actually was chosen for Juliet. It's a pity that you couldn't see the whole play rather than a snippet. I have asked but that appears to be all that they have taped. Well, Murray Dangerfield, are you in for this year or are you out?"

Yes, Murray Dangerfield used to be my name. Of course I had to change it when I became a professional actor and headed to Los Angeles. But right then, I was still at university and that was my name, even though it made people smile whenever they saw it.

"Well, it gets you noticed, Rodney," said Jim Schwartz once when we were all discussing what names we would have when we 'made it'.

"Just like yours, Ar-nold," I said to him in my Schwarzenegger voice and everybody roared with laughter. Well, for the whole of this last year, I had been called 'Rodney' by everyone and Jim had been 'Ar-nold'.

"I, I think I'd like to try it," I said to Mrs Adams and she nodded.

"You will do well, like Graham," she said then. "You do understand how much you will be paid, don't you? Scale will be fifteen hundred for the first week and three thousand for the second, and if you do interviews or promos for the plays, and it is expected, you will be paid for those, at minimum a hundred a time, as everyone knows you are all starving actors. But food and boarding quarters are supplied and that is a saving. Now some other conditions."

I looked worriedly at her. Wow, nearly five thousand dollars. I would only have to work half time at the convenience store or gas bar to be able to afford my last year of college. I didn't mind minimum wage jobs which were all that we could get around Barrington, the university town. They allowed me to survive but the Arden gig would allow me to save, to pay my fees, buy my books and even have something left over as well as giving me a start on my resume. I just hoped the latter would be something that I would be proud to be able to say that I had done. Well, it hadn't hurt Graham Belson, had it? He was working now as an actor, Mrs Adams had said, and maybe I could follow in his footsteps.

"The other conditions," said Mrs Adams with a slight smile, jolting me back to reality. "One, you mustn't cut your hair again. In case you didn't notice, I didn't select any skinheads in this group. You'll find it much easier to attach hair pieces than always being in hot, heavy wigs under stage lights.

"Two, shaving. Well, it should be obvious, no beards or mustaches. Girls didn't have them, even in Elizabethan times. But you shouldn't shave your face at all. What you have do is to take this package that I am giving you and use the wax on your face two or three times before you go to Arden.

“Three, voice. There is a tape by a couple of transwomen in the package. Transwomen are women who were once men and changed their sex. Believe me, they know everything about how to find a natural, female register to talk in.” I looked at her in alarm as Professor Adams went on. “In Elizabethan times, boys who played the girls would have started before their voices broke and would have sounded like women. You have to make an attempt at doing that. Lessons in the first week will help you but it’s better if you have practiced and tried to speak as a woman for some time.

“Four,” she smiled at my consternation then. “A British accent. Graham Belson was from Mississippi, if you can believe, and had a terrible, Southern accent. Even in *Waiting for Godot*, we had to coach him for hours and eventually he tried an Irish accent and that worked for him, replacing one strong accent with another.

“Now you,” the professor smiled at me, “should have no trouble. I’ve heard you many times in class doing snooty Englishmen. Well, snooty, English women don’t speak that differently, do they? So practice, read, and here.”

Beside the package she gave me, she also gave me an envelope. I opened it and gaped at her, stunned. Inside was a check made out to me for two thousand dollars. It was from The Shakespeare Scholarship Fund and was signed by a Thomas E Johnson and Ralph Dunley. I had heard of him. He was a professor in Archaeology, I think.

“These people are Shakespeare lovers,” said Professor Adams. “They know how poor many of our students are and this is to pay you for practice. I must tell you as well that if you turn up in Arden and it is obvious that you haven’t practised or are still shaving, you will not be considered for parts in the plays that are put on. You will in fact be booted out of town.”

“Who, who,” I gulped, “are these people to do this for us? Are they, are they ...?” I wanted to say ‘perverts’, men who were into drag queens or female impersonators or something like that.

“Tom Johnson,” said Professor Adams sharply, dispelling the uneasy feeling I had then about how I was being lured into being an ‘actress’, “used to lecture in History here at this university. He promoted a hands-on approach which meant working at the notorious dig that ended up, after it was done for the year, with the dressing up.

“It all began innocently, you know, when Tom wasn’t even there in Arden. The students all had too much too drink and it was a warm day, I gather, and so the girls began putting earrings and makeup on the sleeping boys. And that led to the events that you’ve heard about and why men no longer sign up for History as a major. No-one wants to be labelled after the shenanigans of that affair. Well, Tom and Ralph are both married now and feel they should give something back to Arden and to the people involved who always treated them so well and did in this case as well. They collect money every year to help student actors. You might even meet them and their wives if you are lucky.”

Two thousand dollars. Well, if they didn’t want me, I would have a little profit anyway.

“You think that you can meet those conditions that I laid down to you?” asked Professor Adams with that beautiful smile of hers again.

“I think so,” I said. Well, I didn’t want to tell her but I hardly shaved as it was. I only had a few hairs around my chin that needed to be done.

“Now, the senior plays, *Death of a Salesman*, and *The Odd Couple*. You will understudy the card players in *The Odd Couple* and work the house in the other plays,” Pro-

fessor Adams went on, disappointing me that I wasn't going to be Oscar Madison or Willie Loman, though the roles did call for a stage presence that I had to work at to project.

"I'd like you to do a favor for me as well, Murray," Elizabeth Adams went on strongly then, "and read the Partridge Sister parts in *The Odd Couple*. They are British and no, I wouldn't ask you to take the part on stage. I want you to track the girls who have the roles and we can discuss what they do well and what they should be doing. I would like to read the parts with you in our tutorials if we have the time but the term is racing to an end now and I don't seem to have the time to do everything that I set out to do this year for myself."

Well, I did get on stage twice with *The Odd Couple* in different parts and Professor Adams was there to tell me how well I had done. She also told me that she wished that I could have been one of the Partridge Sisters as well as she found the girls in the parts so strident and 'over the top'.

"You and I should have been the Sisters," said the professor as I met her for the one-on-one tutorial that was a feature of the performance classes at Barrington. We went through the scenes again and Professor Adams played back the scene, which made me hot all over as I listened to the two of us. It did sound like two women talking, the voice lessons I had studied assiduously clearly paying off.

Professor Adams wasn't totally pleased with me. She found many errors in my pronunciation. "No, a woman doesn't say it like that," she would point out constantly to me and make me do it her way. Then, we would record again and sometimes I would lose my 'female' voice and Professor Adams would shut down completely.

"Well," she said after my last class in the last week of the term. "So, you have a month of rest and then I shall see you in Arden for the assessment. I am sure that you will pass."

I shuddered. "Am I the only one from here going to the Festival?" I asked her nervously.

Elizabeth Adams smiled at me impishly. "You should know," she said. "Haven't you asked the others if they are going as well as you?"

"They won't tell me," I said. I didn't actually phrase my question as Professor Adams had. I didn't say 'as well as me' to the others. Yes, I was still a little embarrassed when I thought about it. Two weeks in nothing but female roles in plays. I shivered a little when I thought about it. And I thought about the reviews I might get and I really didn't know which would be the best review, that I was convincing in the part or that I wasn't.

"Then I won't tell you, either," laughed Professor Adams as the hope that she would enlighten me vanished. "How are you getting to Arden by the way?"

"There must be a bus," I said unsteadily.

"It stops on the highway outside Arden," said the Professor. She scribbled on her writing pad. "I will make arrangements for someone to pick you up on the Sunday before your week begins in the afternoon if I can get someone. That will give you a chance to get settled before rehearsals begin at nine sharp on Monday morning."

"Do you have a schedule of what we do in that week?" I asked her.

"Only in general terms," smiled Professor Adams. "It will depend largely on where we are with the conditions that you were supposed to meet and how well they have been met by all fourteen of our actresses."

"Fourteen?" I gasped.

"Oh yes," said Professor Adams. "The Festival is very popular in quarters outside Barrington but I like to believe that my students in the end will be the ones competing for the role of 'Juliet' on the last day of the second week."

Two weeks to get a Shakespeare play ready for production? I didn't see how that could be. Just learning the lines was going to be quite a chore.

"Yes," agreed Professor Adams with a wry smile. "You can start reading through the part. If you are chosen in the last three, four, five actresses, whatever the director wants to do this year, you will be ahead, I would think, if you already know your part. Tape yourself as well and listen as we have been doing to the Partridge Sisters. There's nothing wrong with too much preparation, is there?"

The last mocking phrase was one of hers that Professor Adams often used in our classes, usually to the group that was woefully under-rehearsed and was making a mess of whatever scene that was supposed to be presented.

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I was picked up on the first Sunday morning in June by Professor Tom Johnson and his wife, Davina. She was a devastatingly beautiful woman and Tom Johnson couldn't keep his hands off her which I wouldn't have been able to, either, if she had been my wife.

When his pickup parked at the entrance to the dorm, not knowing who he was at first, I saw him run around the truck and open the door and this blonde-haired woman got out. He had her in his arms almost right away

and was kissing her and she was kissing him and I wanted to call out, "Why don't you get a room?" to the pair of them.

The blonde girl in the high, high heels was the one to stop her amorous husband and direct him towards the dorms where I was waiting. As soon as I saw her, I knew that I had seen her before somewhere and then the wind blew her hair across her face and I knew that I had seen that look and that smile before in our local newspaper. Yes, she was a model of some kind and she was featured so often and no wonder. She was so gorgeous and her figure looked so great in a bikini. Yes, that was where I had seen her last. In the 'reading' material that was in the men's washroom. I had seen her in the swimsuit catalogue, in a bikini, on the front cover.

Please don't ask me why that catalogue was there, along with several *Playboys*, *Hustlers* and the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition. Let's just say that men spend a little more time in the bathroom than women and we like to look at beautiful women. Put the two together and you might understand why the catalogue with Davina smiling on the cover in her black bikini, her arms wrapped around her shapely legs, was one of the most 'borrowed' items from the magazine rack in our dorm.

The couple came through the door and several of the guys who were in there for summer classes stood gawking at the woman who looked around as her husband nuzzled her neck.

She looked in my direction and said then, "Murray Dangerfield?" in the sweetest of soprano voices. Umm, she made me feel all hot and bothered inside, just looking at her.

"Yes," I said. "Mr and Mrs Johnson?"

The rings on her ring finger glinted as she waved her hand at me and smiled. "See!" she said to her husband, his arm encircling her waist as he possessively held her. "I told you that university men are much more observant than archaeologists!"

I thought then of the wild things that I had heard about Tom Johnson and the History of Archaeology class that had ended up, or so it seemed, with almost all the guys dressing like girls and continuing to do so after they got back to campus. Some were even supposed to have become sorority members while others had slept with other guys on campus as if they were girls. The stories were so wild, I didn't believe any of them, really, as they were often so completely contradictory.

"Wow!" said Tom Johnson then, looking at all the stuff I had gathered about me. "Is all this stuff going with you to Arden?"

"I have to take it with me," I told him. "This was my last day here in residence. Next year, I'll have to find a new place."

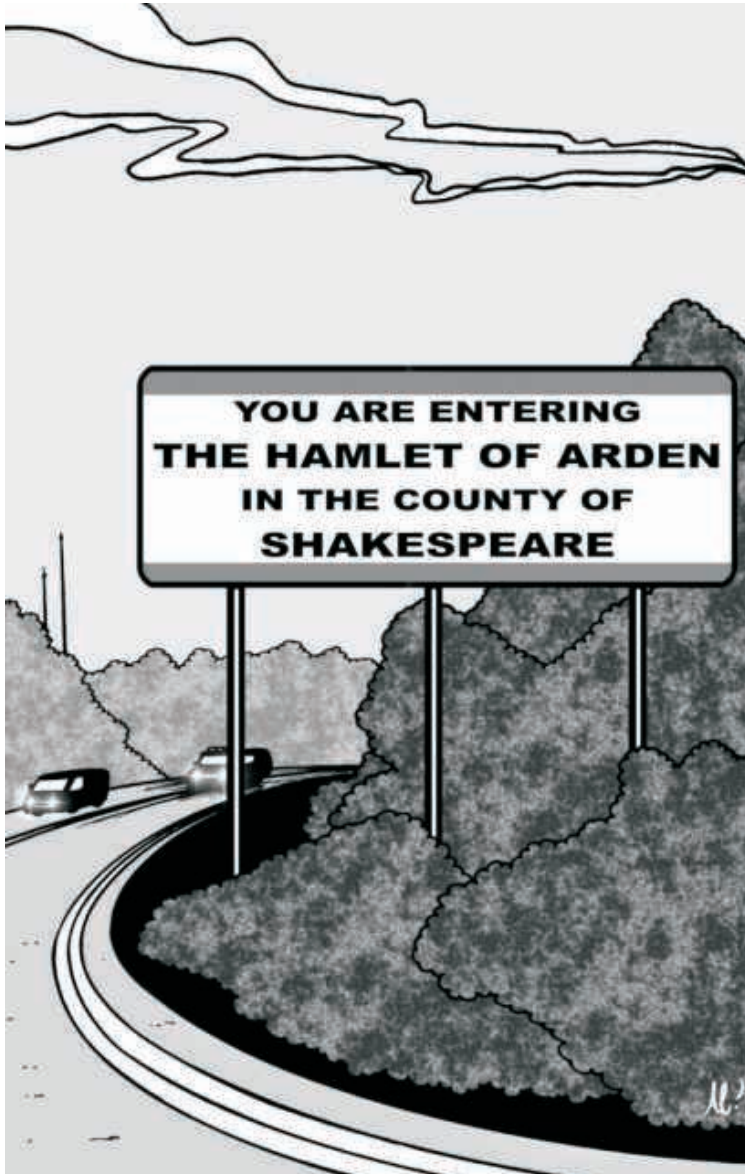
"And over the summer," asked Tom Johnson sympathetically, "you'll just crash with friends?"

"I have to," I said defensively. "That's why I asked Professor Adams if anyone doing a pick-up had a pickup as well."

Tom Johnson grinned at me, squeezed his wife and she smiled at me as well. I felt my legs turning to jelly as she did that. I definitely would have had my arm about her if I was Tom Johnson.

"Well, let's get going," said Tom Johnson and because Davina was there, we had all kinds of help from the dorm's male residents to bring the stuff I had out to the pickup truck. Davina smiled and thanked everyone prettily and so we got into the truck, me in the back seat.

Tom and Davina had to smooch before we took off and she held his hand as he drove. I think it got a few places it shouldn't as we went along the highway and then turned off after two and a half hours of really speedy driving.



'You are entering the Hamlet of Arden in the County of Shakespeare', a new, illuminated, blue and white sign announced.

"The Hamlet?" I asked as we went past a huge hotel, the Black Bull, that looked like an entertainment center, so many cars were parked in its parking lot.

"They think it's funny around here," laughed Davina musically.

We pulled into the parking lot in front of a row of shops. *Anne's Lingerie* was at one end and that was where we were headed apparently.

"Davina!" said an older woman, rushing out of the store to take Davina in her arms.

"Anne!" exclaimed Davina, hugging the older woman. "You've changed your hair!"

"And that isn't all I've changed," said the woman with a wicked smile. "See, can you find a wrinkle? If you can, Carrie Miller says I am to sue her for pretending to be a cosmetics surgeon. I've had these firmed up as well," she indicated her breasts, "and they're driving Arthur crazy. He's a permanent resident in my flat now, so I'm sorry but you can't share my bed with me the next two weeks."

I think that Davina blushed then. Certainly, she shook her mane of blonde hair at Anne Jenkins of *Anne's Lingerie* and indicated me. "This is Murray Dangerfield, Anne," said Davina. "He is a performer in the Festival and looking for a room for the night. Where do you have him billeted?"

Anne looked at me and her mouth dropped a little. "Hmm," she said with a frown. "An actress, I would say."

I shivered at that but neither Davina nor her husband, Tom Johnson, seemed to turn a hair.

Anne invited us into her store then and I didn't know where to look. All I saw were articles of female underwear all about me, some of it very frilly and very, very sexy.

"Here's my list," said Anne then, sitting at the computer keyboard. "Oh, here we are. I have you billeted with three other actresses at the Morton's B and B."

Davina smiled at the blank look on my face. "Bed and Breakfast," she said with a lovely smile on her pink mouth. "Your other meals you take with the rest of the cast. Is that going to be at the Black Bull again this year?" She put the last question to Anne.

"Not all the time," said Anne. "The new theater tent went up yesterday and there are facilities there for catered meals. We're getting bigger and fancier this year than ever before. Claudia and Sheryl are expecting you, Murray."

Sheryl was a small, jolly woman who was delighted to see me and threw her arms about me to hug me. I wasn't sure about Claudia. It must have been the way that she moved on her high heels, the gestures she made that I had been studying for so long, but I got the distinct impression that Claudia Morton was a man in a dress.

I mean, she looked like a woman. She definitely smelled like a woman. Her figure was female, her legs in bare-looking stockings as her summery dress swirled about her. Again, Davina and Tom didn't say anything as my suitcases and junk was all taken from the truck and placed together in a lower storage room that was empty but for some other suitcases in one corner.

"There," said Sheryl gaily as the last of my stuff, the box with the microwave, was placed next to my computer. "One other of you actresses arrived this morning.

She's at Nancy's getting ready for work tomorrow. I expect that you, Murray, will want to join her there soon."

'She', 'her', I felt my face turn white and it was Davina who came to my rescue. "It's the way that people are around here at Festival," she said sympathetically to me, smiling so nicely that I could think of myself as being in love with her, I knew. "You are going to audition for the actress roles and so, no matter how you are dressed," she looked meaningfully at Sheryl then, "they call you 'she' and 'her'. Once you start rehearsals, you know, it's just going to be so much easier when you are 'Portia' or 'Cordelia', and dressed for the role, to call you by the name of the role you are in."

"Rehearsals don't start till tomorrow," I muttered to Davina.

"Well, of course not," said Sheryl, "but you actresses always have to get started early, don't you? I wish that all of you could be Juliet every year and that starting early was going to help you. At least it shows the committee that you are willing to work hard which is always what they want in a Juliet, don't they, Claudia?"

"It helps, darling," said Claudia then, looking at me and I must have stared at her for she smiled, her beautifully madeup face so female, her eyelashes so thick and dark, her earrings moving as she giggled, a definite feminine giggle. She stood by the doorway, her hands and arms behind her back, her dress swaying, the pretty little scarf at her neck disguising any lines or wrinkles.

"I think that I have been read, darling," said Claudia Morton then and Sheryl gasped and looked at me. "This actress is going to be very, very good in her role, I think."

I reddened at the 'her' that Claudia used in reference to me. Before I could speak, Davina put her hand on mine

and ushered us all out of the storage room and into a tidy, very feminine living room.

“Yes,” said Davina to me then in front of Claudia, Sheryl and Tom. “Claudia is Sheryl’s husband and a cross-dresser, Murray. That isn’t going to be any problem for you, is it?”

“N-No,” I gasped. I mean, what could I say when the girl of my dreams asked me a question like that. I wanted to give her an answer that would please her and it did. It pleased Tom as well as he put his arm about Davina and cuddled her to him.

“We’re at Barbara’s and Celia’s on the Green,” said Davina then, taking her husband’s arm about her waist and caressing it. “If there are any problems or someone needs a ride, they may call us and we’ll be glad to help.”

“After supper, that is,” murmured Tom Johnson then and Davina colored as Sheryl and Claudia laughed. Tom and Davina left then in a hurry and I would have as well if I had had a wife like Davina. I didn’t have a doubt in the world that they were hurrying away and that Davina was going to get laid that afternoon, probably for a long time, if what Tom had murmured was true.

“Those two,” said Sheryl then, beaming, while her husband smiled prettily, swaying in his summery dress. “They haven’t been married long, you know, and really they make minks look like pandas.”

I didn’t get it at first. It took one of the other actresses to explain that pandas seemed reluctant to mate while minks were notorious for getting it on a dozen times a day and more.

Claudia took me up to the room assigned to me and it was lovely. The frilly curtains on the windows, the frilled pillows on the bed and the frills about the pink quilted bed brought back the sick feeling to my stomach. So did

the second bed, a distance from mine under another frilled window. I hadn't realized that I would have to share a billet. But it was free and how could I complain? The room was everything that a couple of girls would have loved to be in and share.

"Isn't there a more ... a different room I could look at?" I asked, shaking a little with the feelings going through me as the room was so feminine.

"All of our rooms are basically the same," said Claudia in her womanly voice. I could imitate her easily if I wanted to. "But as you are to play the role of an actress, you can guess why we were asked to reserve these rooms for you. It is such a short time for you to prepare yourself for stage appearances as a woman that you have to be at it all day long and never come out character as a woman, not if you hope to be Juliet."

"And the other person who came here before me?" I asked with a lump in my throat. "Is he the one to share with me?"

"Yes, she," that funny stress again on the female, "is at Anne's or Nancy's, or Danielle's now," said Claudia. "Your other housemates won't be in till late, I hear." She sighed. Yes, I knew she was a man and yet, since I never saw her in anything but women's clothes over the next two weeks, I had to call her by all the feminine nouns and pronouns that I could.

"I do so envy you," Claudia went on with a sigh. "You'll all be so beautiful and pretty in a few days and your friends from school won't even recognize you at all. Then there are all the dances and balls you have to attend. Oh, the fun you are going to have as a woman, Murray! I really do envy you!"

I reeled at that and thought of all the things Professor Adams had said. Surely I hadn't signed on to be a cross-dresser for everyone to gawk at, had I?

"Let me take you to Anne's," said Claudia. "And you can get started on your career as an actress."

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"It's always the first part," said Anne Jenkins taking me into one of the bathrooms and cubicles at the back of her shop. "You are going to rehearse how to be a woman and that means dressing like a woman and that means wearing women's underclothing. Well, in Shakespeare's time, that wasn't so different from dressing like a man. Only the richest women would have been dressed as we are going to dress you as an actress."

"I saw the Graham Belson video," I began.

"Oh yes?" asked Anne Jenkins. "Well, we are considerably improved since then, my girl, you will find out."

I flushed at that and Anne got cross with me. "Now, that's one thing that you have to stop right away," she said. "You are an actress and you are going to be called by a woman's name. People are going to call you, my girl, or my lady, or princess, or darling and are going to praise you for your womanly attributes. If they don't, you aren't doing your job and you'll never be Juliet. You do not blush when you are complimented or are referred to as she or her."

I had a whole bunch of bath salts and creams and stuff put into my hands and the scented, femininely fragrant bath steamed, ready for me. "I want you to cream yourself all over," said Anne Jenkins firmly. "Then soak in the bath for a while. I have to go and attend to Helen next door for a while but I'll be back before you burn." She

said that after taking some sort of wax like the one I had used on my face and put it over parts of my eyebrows and parts of my skin.

When Anne came back and I wiped myself clean of all the guck I had on me, all the hair on my body, in places I didn't know that I had it, came off me. I wished then that I hadn't been so liberal with the stuff about my private parts. I was as naked as I had been when I was just twelve years old, I thought.

"Let me do your hands and arms over," said Anne. "You needed to get it all off, everywhere, Katherine. You wouldn't want a hairy hand coming out of a pretty, silk dress, would you?"

How was I supposed to answer that? I know that I shivered. Well, a woman was there in the bathroom with me, helping me take all the hair off my body and calling me by a woman's name. And I wasn't supposed to blush. Well, what should I do, I thought. I should panic, part of me said. That was what I should do.

"This is a gaff," said Anne Jenkins then, presenting me with a tight, black, bikini brief that I was supposed to put on like a bikini, I guessed. "It will tuck in all of your male parts. If you bulge a lot, like now, we just run a very cold, shallow bath and have you sit in it and you'll get it on easily."

I wouldn't call it easily but I did get the thing on at my second try and the front of me, as Anne Jenkins had predicted, was flat as if I had no penis at all.

"We're trying to make our actresses feel like girls," said Anne imperiously and I quivered in front of her, wanting to grab my clothes and run but not sure what she would do to me if I did. "The Elizabethans had years to train the boys that they used and we have only one week.

So, you will do exactly what I tell you to do and not argue or ask me why and we will get along well."

Funny, but I imagined the dark-haired Anne then in a leather jacket and skirt, in long leather boots and a whip in her hand. I shivered again as I thought that I was in the hands of a dominatrix and I knew that I was going to be chastised at any second.

"Stop the shivering," said Anne again. "You knew what you were coming here for and you were paid well. Now, we will proceed with rehearsing you as an actress. These clothes you put on now."

I wanted to object. I knew that Elizabethan women didn't wear brief, lacy panties like the ones that I had to put on. I knew that Elizabethan women didn't have to wear the Merry Widow corset that was there for me, dark blue and edged in white lace like the panties. And Elizabethan women must have worn tights, like the men with their doubloons and such. But, in Arden, apparently, they wore stockings and garters that were attached to their garter belts.

Anne Jenkins stood in the doorway to the bathroom and watched me put on women's underwear and shake all the time that I did it. I couldn't help it. I have seen many drag shows in classes I have been in and it's always played for laughs though I rarely saw the joke in some bulky guy dressing up and pretending he was Britney or Marilyn or a hot chick.

But this was serious. I felt the stockings on my soft, smooth legs and I thought that I was touching a woman's legs. What was worse was that when I had attached the stockings to the corset, Anne Jenkins, picked up some gel pads and put them into the front of the bra and pulled the strings at the back of the corset so tight that they surged forward and I looked like I had breasts on me like a

woman. She adjusted the straps over my shoulders as well then so that they fitted me perfectly, for a woman. Only, when I moved, I could feel the tug on my stockings all the way to my shoulders. Oh gods, I was going to be reminded every time that I moved that I had women's underclothing on.

"Let's do your face now," said Anne Jenkins and I almost screamed out loud when I saw what had already been done to my looks. My eyebrows were almost gone! Another woman came in then and stood beside Anne, looking at me critically, a boy sitting there in female underwear.

"A blonde?" she asked.

"With this peaches and cream skin, yes, definitely," said Anne and the woman went off somewhere.

Anne Jenkins told me to repeat everything that she was doing. She had a sheet on which it was all written down, but I had to figure out how it applied to me. It might say, 'Shape eyebrows' but I had to learn what the shape was that suited me best.

I sat at a little table on the one side of the store and while I was there, two boys like me, dressed like me and accompanied by elder women were brought to mirrors like mine and their makeup was started like mine. They looked as girlie as I did from the chest down, in their shaping corsets and stockings and then they began to have their makeup done like me.

"What do you think, Anne?" asked the red-haired woman whom Anne had called Barbara. "I think Beatrice's hair is long enough for her to wear without a wig."

Anne looked at the frightened boy who was looking so much like a cute girl with every passing second, his eyes and lips so vivid. "Yes," she decided. "Take him into

Danielle's and bring the blonde wig she has ready for Katherine."

Beatrice rose to her feet and then had to put high heels on before a smiling Barbara took her next door apparently, through a back passageway. Beatrice wobbled on the high heels she was wearing but Barbara was very comforting and encouraging to her but she did look terrified, as I am sure that I did.

Barbara came back with a blonde wig that was fitted to me then. Opposite me, the dark-haired boy's opened so wide as the wig was put on me. His eyes were so outlined with eyeliner and covered with eye shadow that I thought I was looking into a female face even though he had scraggly boy's long hair, like me. His eyebrows had become narrow, little arcs above his eyes, just like mine, and his lips were as red as mine with lipstick.

The gleaming, golden hair that flowed right over my shoulders and down my back almost to my waist changed me, I saw in fright, as I was turned to the mirror and was able to look at myself. I might be twenty-one in age but in the mirror I looked like a young girl of fifteen or sixteen, the right age, I thought with a shudder, to be a Juliet.

"Put your shoes on, Katherine," said Anne then, "and you can finish her off. Barbara, can't you? She needs that wig pinned, some jewellery and a dress at Nancy's. Oh, the black, beaded purses are ready for all the girls as they will go with anything. Moira and Gina are sending us all four of their boarders in just a few minutes. I think you can take Elizabeth into Danielle's, Celia, and do her there. I think a brunette wig will be fine. But come back as soon as you can. I do need help here. Holly and Davina said they will be here after six and they can help the late arrivals."

I kept on looking at myself in the makeup mirror that Anne had uncovered. The girl looking back at me couldn't be me. This wasn't just looking like Graham Belson had looked in the vid. Even without the wig, I had looked like an actress getting ready for the stage. With the wig, I was a young girl.

Barbara spun my chair around and slipped a high heeled court shoe on my foot and then did the same with the other. She helped me to my feet and everything pulled on me and I must have blushed. Luckily, nothing could be seen because of the heavy makeup that I was wearing.

"Have you ever walked in high heels before?" Barbara asked me.

I whispered, "No."

Barbara smiled. "You have to do better than that, Katherine," she said to me. "You have to answer me with a 'No, Miss Barbara,' at least! And I want to hear your voice and your British accent, if you have one yet!"

I tottered away from the table as Barbara held my hand and smiled at me. I can't do this! I can't do this! I told myself but somehow I did. I think it was because Barbara smiled at me.

"No, Miss Barbara," I managed to say in the womanish voice I had been practising. It had been easier I had found to put on an accent and lift my voice into a woman's register. "I have not worn shoes like this before."

"Nice voice," approved Miss Barbara as I hobbled in my corset and stockings, my bust sticking out in front of me to the little doorway, hidden behind a rack of corsets and bras. Through the door was a glass-sided passage that led past Danielle's store which must have been a hairdresser's, past another which was a pharmacy of some kind and then right into a dress shop, where there

were several women preening and parading in front of mirrors.

They looked over and smiled at me as Barbara led me, still wobbling, up to a row of long, puff-sleeved, straight necked Elizabethan dresses.

“Oh, the second today,” beamed an older woman who was helping a tall woman fit an elegant gown to her, marking with pins where some alterations had to be made. Only when she turned, did I recognize Claudia, the husband of the woman whose home I was staying in. “The white rack are the underskirts for the actresses, Barbie. Yours will need a full slip and an extra waist slip, I think.”

And that was what I got. It was like wearing a night-dress and then having an extra skirt tied about my waist. Well, at least it covered me from the laughing eyes of the women in the shop and then I had to choose a dress.

I tried to choose a drab, black one but that wouldn't do. All the women got in on it then and so I was dressed finally in a golden dress much like my hair and the banded earrings that Nancy, who owned the boutique apparently, produced and had attached with clips to my ears.

“She will have her ears pierced tomorrow?” Nancy asked Barbara who nodded as I had the dress floated over me. It was fastened and tightened to me while the women looked on as I was made to turn this way and that by Nancy who looked at how the hems of the dress fell about me.

“Have all the actresses arrived now?” asked one of the younger women who was trying on a red business suit and looking again at the hem and her petticoat in the mirror.

“No, Kendra,” said Barbara. “That’s why all of the stores here are open so late. But aren’t you working to-night, girl?”

“Not till eight, Barbara,” said Kendra with a lovely smile on her thin face. She had such a pretty, bobbed nose and her makeup was flawless. Her smile turned wicked then. “Mr Chapman wants me in then to show me something special in his office, or so he said. I wonder whatever that might be.”

Kendra strolled off to another part of the store then and Nancy murmured to a stiff-faced Barbara, “You’re going to have to watch out for that one, Barbie.”

“What can I do?” sighed Barbie. “You know Stan. He’s always liked us young, hasn’t he?”

I swished in the dresses I had put on. Barbara smiled and turned her attention to me. “How to walk in high heels and a long dress, lesson one,” she said, stopping me and tying a black ribbon into my long hair. As a coach, Barbara was marvellous. She taught me how to take small steps, how to hold my skirts at just the right time and we walked up and down the back passage and even up the stairs to Nancy’s apartment.

Barbara was full of praise for me. She got me to talk and praised my voice and so I began to feel good about myself. My legs were so tired but I wasn’t wobbling because of that. I wasn’t wobbling at all as I slowed and made sure that I moved my hips as I stepped, swinging one foot in front of the other.

My skirts swished so noisily about me and soon I saw Beatrice and Elizabeth practicing like me. I actually felt like an actress then as all the women in the store praised me and told me I looked like a Juliet. I suppose, in Arden, that that is the highest praise that you can get.

Claudia left the evening gown to be changed, paid for a skirt that she had bought and then offered to walk me back to my billet.

"My clothes," I said and all the women laughed.

"You won't be needing them this week," said Nancy with a smile. "They'll be packaged with your credit cards and stuff and put into storage in our basement for you. Do you have your purse? That's a good girl. You do have a bank card in there and some money if you need to buy simple things, or even if you want to spend all the money you make, here. in my store. Actresses, though, usually don't need any money as every man in town will be willing to treat you if you only smile at them and tell them what you need."

"Now, isn't that the truth?" said Claudia, taking my hand and leading me out of the *Bridal and Everyday Dress Shop*. Ye gods, there were Darren and Gerry walking unsteadily towards *Anne's Lingerie*, a red-suited girl, Kendra I think, showing them where they were to go. The way that they looked, Kendra must have been telling them some awful story about what was going to happen to them. They only glanced at me, a girl in a long dress, with Claudia beside me, like my mother, in her summery dress.

I swallowed hard and wondered if I should let them know that it was me and what had been done to me. But they didn't even recognize me! It was only as Claudia and I walked along hand in hand that I realized that all the swishing of dresses came from us, and that it was my high heels clicking just as much as Claudia's on the sidewalk. The shadows ahead of us showed two definite, female silhouettes on the sidewalk and then I flushed mightily and shuddered as I realized that I wasn't Murray any more. I was now Katherine.

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There was a girl in my bedroom. She sat primly on the bed beside mine and carefully bookmarked a place in the dialogue of a play that she was reading. "My lady," she said, standing and then curtsying to Claudia and me as we went into the room.

I must admit that I stared, well perhaps more than that, I must have been googly-eyed, at the lovely, little, blonde girl in a long, pink, silk dress, her hair braided and twisted about her head. Her face was so feminine. I didn't know if it was all makeup but she looked flushed as well as she held out her skirts in her curtsy, her bosom, as Shakespeare might have called it, as girlishly pronounced as my own.

"Helen," said Claudia then in the woman's voice she imitated so well. "May I introduce to you, Katherine, who will be your roommate for the next two weeks or so? That is, unless you two girls have a fight and we have to split you up."

"Prithee, good beldame," said Helen in the lightest, most feminine of English accents. "I canst but see a kindred spirit that thou introduceth into my little world. Fey, it would be churlish of me in the extremity to become a shrew to one as fair as the Lady Katherine."

Claudia smiled at me then. "Oh, I love it when I hear you actresses talk as you must," she said. Surprisingly, she hugged me then just as one girl might another. I felt so silly as my dress swirled about me. Claudia let me go and went to Helen, who was smiling as Claudia put her cheek against the girl's, and hugged her as well. Helen even put up her arms and hugged the woman back. How she could do that so easily when I still saw Claudia as a man in woman's makeup and a dress? I didn't know.

"I am going to leave you alone now to get acquainted," said a beaming Claudia then, "and go and look in on Miranda and Ophelia. When they are properly dressed, it will be time for supper and my wife has prepared a special meal for you all this evening. It will help us all to get acquainted with our guests."

Helen curtseyed again to Claudia as she left. They both looked at me then and I gulped and did a sort of bob as well to Claudia. Well, I didn't want to be eliminated from the Juliet competition right there on my first day, did I? 'Willingness to accommodate the wishes of others' was one of the prime attributes of a 'true Juliet', I gathered.

"Lady Katherine," said Helen then with a smile on her pink, lipsticked mouth. "Is this not the sweetest of abodes for ladies like ourselves?"

Wow, was this 'girl', I hoped she was a 'girl' like me, really in character? I gulped again as I couldn't see anything about her that even indicated she was a boy like me at all. I raised my voice and tried to compose myself as I would have to do if I ever went on stage in front of an audience dressed as 'Katherine', the girl I was supposed to be.

"I do believe that it is the sweetest of domiciles," I said in my fruitiest of English, female accents and Helen smiled in delight at me.

"I am so glad we are of one mind in that regard," she said. "Wouldst thou mind, fair Katherine, if I approached thee then to greet thee with proper regard as one maiden should another?"

My goodness, whatever did she mean by that? I shivered nervously. "I would welcome such greetings as thou wouldst think proper, my Lady Helen," I said, falling into the speech pattern that she had initiated between us. Well,

we had done a lot of this at school on ‘Shakespeare days’ and it was marvellous then to go to a professional production of *The Tempest*, say, where Miranda is an important character, and the words seemed not to be stilted at all but so natural. Helen must have taken acting classes with a professor just like Elizabeth Adams.

Helen smiled then and came forward with her arms out and hugged me as she had hugged Claudia. Her soft cheek pressed against mine, our skirts swirled noisily together and her hands pressed so gently on my shoulders as, well, as our bosoms touched as well. I felt her earrings on my neck and she must have felt mine.

“I think that they record us,” she whispered so softly in my ear then that I wasn’t sure that I had heard her clearly. She smiled at me, inches from my face, her eyebrows thin and arched, her eyelashes dark with eyeliner and mascara, no, they must be false like my own, I thought. No boy I knew could have lashes so long and so thick, naturally. Well, I was wrong about that. Helen did have naturally long eyelashes and makeup had actually just enhanced a natural feature of hers.

Helen smelled so wonderful as well, of flowers and roses and all things feminine. I could have held her to me for a very long time.

“Verily, Lady Katherine,” she then said with another charming smile at me, pointing to the dark, modern setting beside the chandelier light in the center of the room. Yes, it could easily have hidden a recorder, a camera, anything inside its dark bowl. “I must admit that I find thy fragrance to be most pleasing, nay, most stimulating, and I prithee, be not alarmed if I feign must hug thee once more. Thou art the epitome of that which a feminine fragrance should be.”

Helen hugged me again then and once more our dresses swished together. I must admit to getting rather aroused by this lovely, blonde girl who seemed to love kissing my cheek and telling me what a lovely woman that I was.

"Oh, Helen," I managed to say as we embraced again as girls might and men would never do, "I do so love your heavenly fragrance as well. I think it to be superior to that of all other women I have ever held in my arms and I do declare that I find it heady and a joy to all parts of my ignoble corpse."

Helen did the prettiest wrinkle of her nose as if she recognized that I had reached the point that I couldn't think of pretty, Elizabethan words any more to describe what I really wanted to say. Yes, I should just have said 'body' and not 'corpse' but talking as we were does that to me. I do over-reach in my language at times. Helen didn't seem to have that difficulty.

"Come, I prithee," said Helen, taking my hand in hers, looking at my nails and placing hers over mine. They matched, I saw with butterflies in my stomach, save for the different, feminine colors. "Sit beside me on my bed," Helen went on gaily and if we were being recorded and graded, she must have won every point available for her willingness to act like a girl and to actually be a girl. If she hadn't whispered in my ear that they were recording 'us', as if she and I were alike in our predicament, I would have sworn that I had been put into a room with a real girl.

"Dost thou knoweth yet the part that thou wilt perform in the tented theater on Arden Green, my lady?" Helen asked me.

"Oh no, fair Lady Helen," I simpered as I thought of the way I sounded when I tried to do three things, be fe-

male, be English and be smiling all the time. "The ladies of the welcoming station, Lady Anne, Lady Barbara and others were overwhelmed, I do believe, with the responsibility of greeting other actresses who were not so prompt and punctual as thee and me."

"Ah but thou art Lady Katherine," said Helen. "And is she not the woman of most import in the master's most prestigious of comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew*? Durst that not proclaim thy leading role in our early ventures?" She became quite mournful then. "But of Helen, who is she, what great personage I ask, that I may venture in my quest to become Juliet? Helen, I cannot find in all of the master's great works."

I smiled. "Oh, Lady Helen," I said, "Thou must know of the Trojan Wars and Helen, whose face, like yours, didst launch a thousand ships. Search thee for *The History of Troilus and Cressida* and there thou wilt find a role to soothe thy most, most ..."

"Trembling and yearning heart," said Helen, moving to sit beside me so that our legs touched in our gowns and she could slip her arm so familiarly under mine as I had seen girls do. But we men never did that, I thought as I glanced in alarm at her. She picked up her book.

"Oh, but such a work is not in this paltry document!" she exclaimed.

"*All's Well That Ends Well* has a Helena as a maiden," I said to her, my throat beginning to feel the strain of all the lilt that I was making my voice do. "But oft she is called Helen by her teachers and elders and there is a Helena, a lover constant and demure, who attains her heart's desire with Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is there not?"

"Oh, thou art the most learned of scholars," said Helen, throwing her arm about me and I felt her soft lips

brushing my cheeks in her eagerness to thank me for the suggestions that I had made. I felt myself putting my arm out as well and it was if I was holding a girl as she buried her head into my shoulder and her lovely perfume threatened to overwhelm me.

"Here is *All's Well*," said Helen in a most excited tone as if she was a little girl and was just opening a present. I could never have acted like that, I was certain, as I sat stiffly in my dress and my female underclothing, feeling so odd, so effeminate and completely out of my depth in acting, as I had never felt before in any improvisation.

"I didst overlook the role of Helena," said an eager Helen but suddenly she shut the book and sat back from me, looking so sad. "But Helena is not Helen," she said then so mournfully. I was amazed at her change of emotion. I shivered and did put my arm about her to comfort her and she leaned against me and looked up at me then and slyly winked.

Oh, Helen, I thought admiringly, what a performance. Was that ever worthy of getting her the part of Juliet? I hoped then that we were being spied upon as that change of emotion that she had emoted was so clever and so captivating that I had been captured completely.

"'Tis but the smallest of differences," I said to her, trying to keep our conversation going but she put her hand in mine in my lap and the femininity of our hands stood out to me. She even wore a jewelled ring on her left hand, on the ring finger.

"This orb that thou hast chosen for thy marriage finger," I said with as much of a smile as I could. "This hath a significance that should be known to me, thy bosom companion, and friend in the trials and complexities ahead of us."

"Oh, yes, my fair Katherine," gushed Helen eagerly, changing her mood so quickly in a manner that I just had to admire. "Twas given to me by my one true love ere I entered into this most elegant and puissant of worlds. I didst promise that I wouldst ne'er remove it unless compelled by the most dire of circumstances and then I wouldst wear it with my locket that contains a lock of my true love's hair."

"And how so is called this most fortunate of suitors?" I asked Helen, trying out the girlish laugh that had been so hard to master.

Helen's eyes gleamed at me as she seemed to recognize what I had done and she understood and sympathized.

"Why, my lady, I dare not say," murmured Helen.

"And thou will not confide in me, thy bosom friend," I said again, smiling as I looked at her heaving chest, a little cleavage there just like there was in my own, so tightly was I, and I guessed she, laced into out shaping corsets. "'Tis a Rosalind, I daresay," I went on and her eyes opened wide to me in shock. "Or mayhap, fair Ophelia, whom our eyes may light upon anon."

"Oh tush, Lady Katherine, tush," Helen said then in agitated fashion. "What dost thou think that this maiden is? The worship of Sappho of Lesbos is not a crime any shouldst accuse me of. No, but my true love will soon appear before even you, my bosom friend, as he seeks to be Romeo to my Juliet. But, hist, I have said too much, Lady Katherine, and by the white and bilious countenance that thou showest to me, thou dost not approve of the confession that thou hast wrung from me, your most truly womanly of all companions."

Oh gods, how did I get myself into this, I thought wildly. I was in a room with a man dressed as an Elizabe-

than actress and she, he, was confessing to me that she was engaged to another man, an actor whom we would meet later in the week. I tried to stand but Helen's hand pressed down on mine and her eyes sparkled at me again.

"A merry jest, I say to thee, Lady Katherine most beautiful of actresses," Helen chattered on in her lilting, female voice and I stared at her, unable to believe that she had been acting a part in what she had just said or whether she was acting a part with me now. "Thou didst not find amusement in my little diversion," she went on happily. "This pretty trinket was placed on my hand by Lady Barbara and now I give it to thee, my most precious friend, in token of our undying love for one another."

Now, Helen was openly laughing at me. Oh yes, I thought in a sort of relief, she had got me all right. She slipped the ring from her finger and put it on mine. "I do believe that whoever dares to question the ring," she said with the most impish of smiles that never, never, could have appeared on a man's face, I was certain, "should receive the very tale that I recounted to thee, dear Kate, and then this puny orb must be passed in its turn. I mayest then reclaim it from the fair maiden who possesses the love bangle on the last morn of our travails and thence it will be a most treasured memento of this, our journey through womankind to become fair Juliet to our most beloved Romeo."

Helen stood then and put out both hands to pull me to my high-heeled feet. She had to show me the 'accoutrements' of our so well-appointed room. I couldn't believe the drawers in the chest of drawers she opened. The side nearest my bed was for me and the side nearest her bed, four drawers of women's underwear and lingerie, was all for her, she said in a delight that I was unable to produce.

What I had thought was a simple wardrobe was anything but. It led into a room, that's what I would have

called it that was lined with women's dresses, skirts, shoes, with even a shelf for wigs. No wonder the B and B of Sheryl and Claudia Morton only had room for four actresses. The female clothing that we had access to must take up one room alone on each floor of the house.

"Is this not the most charming of rooms?" exulted Helen, clutching black high heels to her chest as if she had just found the most wonderful of treasures. Then, she took a bust of dark brown hair and clutched it as well. "Thy hair is so divine, Lady Katherine, but mine is so short when these glorious tresses must be removed. I beg thee not to look at me when I must sleep, my lady, as thou wilt feel such hilarity when thou seest sweet Helen in all her most unwomanly estate."

"I wilt not laugh at thee," I promised her, "if thou makest the same queen of promises," yes, I know, but I felt I should use a feminine and not a masculine 'king' or 'prince'. We were girls after all, weren't we, tremble, tremble, swish, tremble? "the most queenly of promises," I went on as Helen smiled at me as she hugged her womanly treasures to her breasts, "to me when thou seest how dastardly is my countenance when thou can truly say, this is no Katherine that I have ever beheld before."

Helen was on the point of showing me the bathroom which was private to our room alone but was just outside our main door when there was a knock on that door and Claudia partly entered.

"Yoo-hoo, girls," she said, looking so female then in the black, flared cocktail dress she had put on. Her hair seemed shorter as well and she was wearing a tiara that glittered just like the huge earrings that dangled beneath her hair line to her shoulders. "Miranda and Ophelia were already gone when I went downstairs and now they're back and as prettily dressed as you two and so, Sheryl

says that we should eat now, as the hors d'Éuvres are ready."

So we followed Claudia down the stairs in our high heels, treading very warily and there were two more, little doll-like girls, a little shocked like me, clearly not certain what they had got themselves into. So I let Helen go first and, within a few minutes, she was hugging them and having them attempt to speak like educated, British girls just the way that she did.

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We didn't always dress in our long Elizabethan dresses. On Tuesday, after the training sessions in voice, walking, and makeup, we found actual, real girl's dresses for us to put on. Well, that was nerve-wracking and intense as I was with Alice at the time, whom I wasn't allowed to call Gerry as I had at university all year long.

Helen and her little coterie of 'dolls' as I thought of them went all girlie and twittery, almost shrieking in delight at the short, flirty dresses they eagerly changed into.

"Oh, isn't this heavenly," squealed Bianca as she went twirling about the room and her little dress twirled about her, her dark, page-boy hair in motion as well.

Alice took down a little dress with the thinnest of shoulder straps. "We're supposed to wear these?" she asked doubtfully. "I don't think that Elizabethan actresses dressed in anything like these."

"No, of course not, Alice," said Nancy Harvey who was helping us all into the dresses that she had for us. "But there are other events in this Festival beside the plays and the acting. There are the workshops as well and, of course, if you looked at your schedule, there is one for you this afternoon. Personally, I think it's a little early

for some of you girls but there it is. It is scheduled and Angelina prefers to talk to you all as regular girls and not all gussied up. It's why your makeup isn't for the stage this afternoon."

"So what is the workshop today?" Alice asked me quietly as we slipped out of our long dresses and tried not to be embarrassed as we stood in front of each other in the colorful, padded women's underwear that we were each wearing. She, like all of us 'actresses' was in a frilly, garter belt and stockings and I was sort of getting used to it now, watching Helen and all the other girls, um, 'actresses', showing off to each other, the feminine finery that they loved to wear.

"It's 'Making love as a woman'," I said, my mouth so dry as I thought about that title. I think that my accent and girlish tone was still in place like Alice's. It often seemed so absurd the way that we talked together and with Amelia and Silvia, Frank and Darren as I should have called them, as if we were 'fair maidens', curtsying to one another and speaking in our exaggerated, girlish voices as we tossed our long, femininely styled wig hair over the shoulders of our dresses.

"I, I suppose it's meant to show us how to act as if we were women in love on stage," I said anxiously as I put on the black dress and shivered as it fell so lightly over my body. I felt as if I was just wearing underwear as it fell only to my knees and fluttered there. I think that I broke out in goose bumps and when I looked at Alice, in her blue dress like mine, she was shivering as well.

Nancy and Claudia, who was there helping her, came and zipped and hooked us at the back of our dresses and reminded us to take our little purses with us and so we did, mincing along on our high heels as Nancy led us all out of her store and along the street where we were all stared at by the villagers passing us by, many smiling at

us. Well, with the way that Helen and the excited girls she was with were acting, no wonder. Helen and Ophelia and Rosalind seemed delighted to be attracting the attention that they were.

I was so glad then to get off the street and to hear my high heels clicking like thunder as all of us passed over a wooden floor and into the huge, tent theater that had been erected at the place the villagers called the Green. Now, however, it was the Globe and there were volunteers everywhere, who all stopped and smiled, many applauding as we were paraded into a little lecture theater.

We had the front rows to sit in but I was surprised to see how many other women were there to listen to the lecture. Claudia went over with a smile and sat next to the girl called Kendra that we had seen on the street. Claudia smoothed her skirt beneath her and crossed her legs to show off her smooth, stockinged legs but I really couldn't think of her as anything else as a man, only I supposed because she had admitted it. I just knew she was despite the fact that the way she looked and now the way that she acted was entirely feminine.

All of us actresses, fourteen of us, sat in the front row, smoothed our dresses beneath us and crossed out pretty legs. There was a lot of shaking of hair then and the large earrings we had all had to put on in costume class. I had had my ears pierced there and so had several of the girls, Alice the only one to make a really vocal objection.

"Fair Juliet wears the most sublime of ear trinkets," said the woman who was helping us choose and put on the right rings, bracelets and necklaces that suited our dresses and the colors we would wear later in the day. "Dost thou wish to remove thyself from the trial that thy bosom friends are partaking in such friendly sport, Mistress Alice?"

Of course, Mistress Alice, one of the lead roles in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* did not wish to be removed from the chance at winning the most major prize at all. Her acquiescence then in having her ears pierced and permanent earrings in the two holes she had in each ear meant that none of us other actresses dared to refuse.

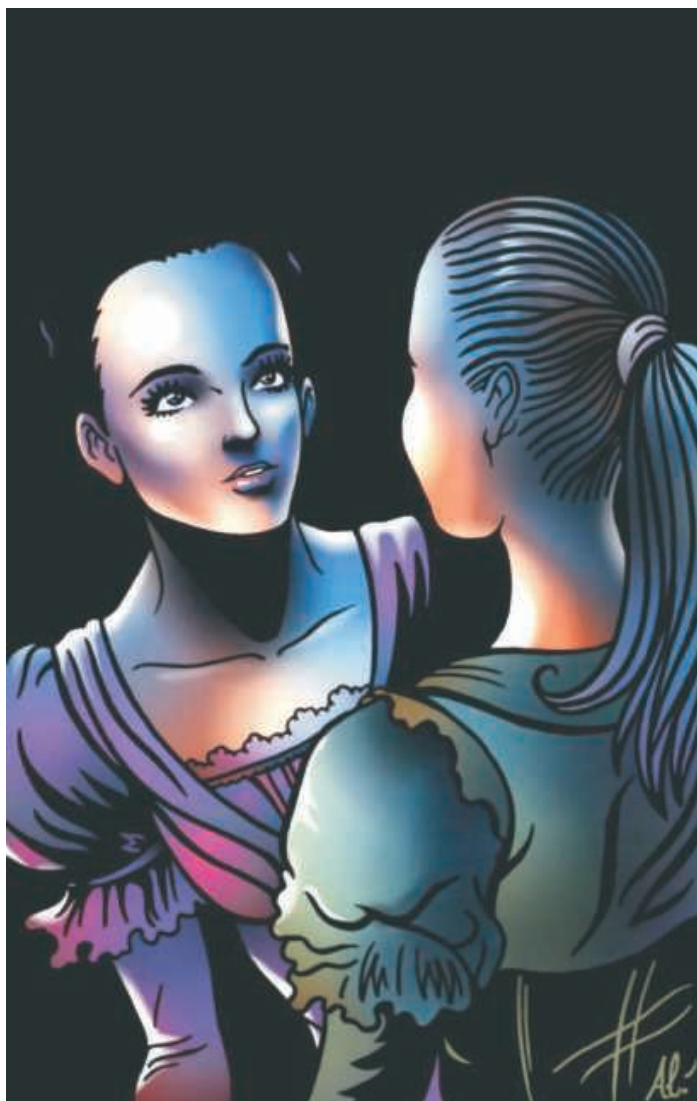
“We suffer for our art, do we not?” asked Danielle, the older woman who ran the beauty parlor between the lingerie shop and the dress boutique, her heavily madeup face smiling at me. The way she moved then set off bells in my head as she smiled at Portia on the other side of me. Oh gods, I thought then, she was a man as well as Claudia.

I glanced over my shoulder before the program and there she was, Danielle, talking to Nancy Harvey of all people, and a small row of older women, many showing wedding and engagement rings on their fingers.

Anne Jenkins came out on the stage in front of us then, with a creature beside her that I couldn’t believe. The person was dressed in a flaming red dress and her black hair was a total wreck, flaring about everywhere. She wore huge earrings and more makeup than any of us did when we were getting ready for the stage in the morning classes.

“I’d like to introduce all out actresses to Angelina Mackie, our guest speaker for this, our sixth workshop on ‘Making love as a woman’,” said Anne Jenkins, making several of the actresses that I could see open their lipsticked mouths in pretty Os. I felt more than a little queasy myself to be looking at such a garishly dressed figure and know that ‘she’ was clearly a man in a dress. “We have all learned so much from Angelina over the years and here she is again. So, ladies and actresses, and our future Juliet, may I present to you, Angelina Mackie.”

Anne was applauding as she went and sat down so femininely and gracefully on one of the chairs behind Angelina. It was something that I knew that I hadn't done as well at all when I had sat down and I saw that several of the girls were looking at Anne Jenkins, arched, feminine eyebrows showing their awe at such a womanly movement.



"When you look at me, what do you see?" Angelina asked in one of the most gravelly, masculine voices imaginable. She batted the two or maybe even three sets of false eyelashes at us all as her eyes swept along the row of us squirming actresses. I think that the other girls, well, we all knew that we were boys in dresses but Anne Jenkins and Elizabeth Adams, yes, my drama professor, insisted that we refer to each other as 'girls' as that was a part of getting into character as an actress.

"In two weeks, you won't have to do it any more," Professor Adams had said with that lovely smile of hers. She was wearing heavy makeup for the first time in my memory and she looked gorgeous in each of our classes. She didn't treat any of the four of us students she had enticed into this class differently to the other 'girls'. She unfailingly knew as well who we were as girls and called us all by our feminine names.

"Well, girlie in the pretty green dress and panties to match," Angelina grated as she pointed a sinewy arm at Lavinia. "Look at me, girl, not at the floor and tell me what you see."

Poor Lavinia. What could she say but what we all saw. "An ugly man in a dress," she said, squirming in her seat, pushing the long, streaked hair from her face and still not looking up. I didn't understand Angelina's reaction. She laughed and the women behind us laughed as well.

"Exactly," Angelina said. "And what do you think a man sees when he meets me in a drag club or sees me swinging my tush on a street corner? Well, I can look prettier," and with that, 'she' pulled off some off the lashes from her so thickly made up eyes. "But I don't want to."

That jolted us all, I think, and those who had been looking away, I was one of them, returned my glance to her.

"I don't want to look like anything else but a man in a dress," Angelina said with a big smile on her huge, redly painted lips, which she reached up to then and peeled away, revealing that she had pink lips, a little thin for a woman, I suppose.

"I expect any man," somehow Angelina's voice had softened and risen in timbre, "who wants puts his arm about me and says, 'Hey, sugar, can I buy you a drink?' to know exactly why he is buying me a drink and what I am going to do for him after we have a drink or so and hit it off."

Angelina smiled and looked over our heads then. "Yes," she said. "I am a drag queen and I love being a drag queen." She glanced down then and picked out little Miranda, who was in the same rooming house as me. "What am I?" she asked Miranda then.

Miranda almost choked in embarrassment to be singled out. She was actually very pretty, her face entirely feminine, her hair not very long and in the thin, spaghetti-strapped dress, her legs crossed, she would have fitted into any group of girls anywhere.

"You, you're a drag queen," whispered Miranda.

"And drag queens love to have sex with men, right?" asked Angelina, smiling at Miranda who flushed a bright pink and looked as if she wished the floor would open and she could fall in.

"Yes," she whispered again, looking down, her darkly painted eyelids making her face seem so pretty and so female.

“No,” said Angelina and everyone’s head seemed to come up then and Angelina smiled broadly and looked around at us all. “What I meant by that, of course, is that it isn’t an exclusive proposition. I go down to my drag club in New York, yes, I do own it. It’s called *Angels* and any taxi driver in the city will bring you to my place if you just say the name. They won’t ask you the address. They all know it. I have some of the prettiest girls in New York working for me. Well, I actually don’t have any girls actually working for me. I have the prettiest queens in New York working for me. And I take it as my responsibility to keep them all safe on the job.”

That shook us all then. “What do you think a man wants from me?” she asked us all then. “You,” she pointed at me, “the pretty blonde in the black dress, what would a man want from you, do you think, when he invites you to leave my club with him and go home with him or to a hotel room?”

What could I say? I think it was obvious to us all. “Sex,” I said and felt a flush all over me as I said it. I couldn’t help the nervous swaying of my crossed leg then, nor the hurt that came from my gaffed male parts.

“And what do you mean by sex?” asked Angelina bluntly.

That caused a titter among all the actresses and women present. Angelina then removed her wig and the wig cap she wore. She opened the purse she carried, took out a brush and began to brush her blonde-tipped hair then into a reasonably nice, short woman’s hairdo. She looked much less grotesque than she had when she had come out on the stage.

“Well, the cutie in the black dress,” Angelina meant me, “doesn’t want to tell us what she means by sex and so I suppose I will have to tell you. Now, when a man sees

me in all my drag queen makeup and pretending to be a woman, he knows that he is going to take a man to bed with him. And he usually wants just one thing from me. He wants me to lick his lollipop."

There was a lot of nervous shifting then amongst us actresses. I couldn't believe that this, this drag queen was being so forthright in a group like we were in with all the women there.

"And when that's done," Angelina went on, "he usually takes one look at me and remembers that his friends are waiting for him and he has to go." There was a nervous titter then as we didn't know whether it was a joke and we were supposed to laugh or not. Angelina started then to take off the tacky earrings and replace them with some nice, little golden hoops.

"A man rarely thinks that I, a drag queen, have needs as well. Why did I go with him in the first place to his hotel room?" she went on, stopping for a moment and looking at her improving makeup in a compact mirror. "Well, I wanted sex as well. And I wanted different sex from what I get at home with my wife. Yes, I am married and I have been for over twenty years and I have a very understanding wife. Lucky me, right?"

Angelina really had all our attention then. "So, blondie," she said to me again. "What did you expect from Joe when he took you into his room and laid you on the bed? Did you think he was just going to kiss you all night long or did you want your lollipop taken care of as well?"

I couldn't answer such a question. I must have looked as stricken as I felt because Angelina took pity on me and turned back to the rest of the group. "Wow, what a topic and what a pervert, you actresses are thinking," she said with a big, glossy smile. "But it has to be faced, doesn't it?"

Tomorrow, you actresses are going to meet the actors. You are going to dance with them. You will be the girls.

“You are going to play love scenes with them. You will be the girls. You are going to socialize, you have a dance or ball every night to attend, and you are going to dress as you are now and dance and play all night long as girls as part of the training process. You will be and feel like the girls. And when you feel like a girl, you are going to wonder what it’s like to be really a girl. And, naturally, you are going to respond to all the compliments on how pretty you are, how nice your hair looks and what a lovely girl you are.

“Now, how many of you have ever kissed a man before? I mean, really kissed him on the lips with affection?” Angelina waited then and looked over the nervous, shifting actresses who were mostly looking demurely at the floor, I think. I know that my cheeks were flaming and I was looking down, past my skin-colored stockings and high heels, to the floor, terrified that I’d be picked on again.

“If you girls had looked up,” mocked Angelina then, “you’d have seen that my hand was up, so was Anne’s and all the women’s hands here but for you actresses. Now, when the young men who are going to be your Romeo are brought into your classes, what are they going to see? They aren’t going to see boys like them struggling with the difficult part of trying to portray a Shakespearean heroine. No, they’re going to see young girls struggling with their parts.

“Oh, they know that you are boys but soon they’ll begin to forget that and calling you Helen, and Katherine,” I shuddered at that, looking down again and only seeing my cleavage and the padded mounds in front of me, “Bianca and Diana is going to make them think that that is who you are. You will all smell so much more prettily

than any of them and they will have held you for so long and maybe given you little squeezes and inadvertent caresses, and, just like you, they will want to know just what it would be like."

There might have been the sound of a stocking sliding over another but all of us girls were just frankly staring at the soft-voiced Angelina then. "It will probably be a little kiss at first, and you'll both be appalled at how good it feels," Angelina went on, "and we know why you're appalled, don't we? Because it's not supposed to feel good, not to have a boy kissing you."

"And then, you'll see Lavinia or Beatrice coming back from a walk after lunch and her lipstick will be smeared and Lothario will have his arm around her waist and all the guys will be wanting to take you for walks as well and why not. You're young, you're pretty and you should find out what it's really like, shouldn't you? It's all going to make you a better actress, isn't it, and who knows? You could even be Juliet to his Romeo, couldn't you?"

Angelina did a twirl then and her stupid, padded dress came off and there she was in a short, black mini-skirt with a pink top. She was surprisingly slim and what a lovely, woman's figure she had. If she hadn't been saying all that she did about 'my wife' and being a drag queen, we'd all have thought her a woman, I'm sure, on first glance, no matter what her voice sounded like.

"So he's going to say that he's so aroused by you," Angelina went on and we shivered again at her words, "and he's been taking cold showers for days and can't you help him out. Well, he is a boy and has needs and you can make him feel so good – with your hands, right? – with your mouth? – with your body?"

"Yes, girls, it will be all about what you can do for him and, when it's all over, you are going to feel so awful. I

know. I did it a million times with a million men before I finally figured it out. I want my needs met as well as his. He can take me to his hotel room," and, looking at Angelina then, I shivered, because I could see any man wanting to go with her with the way that she looked then, her legs so long and slim and beautiful, "on the condition that he treat me like he would treat a woman.

"Now, I do give this same lecture to the actors as well as to the actresses. And I let them know that we want to be romanced and feel how it is to be women. Yes, we want to be kissed and yes we want to be on the bottom if we make love. And that's what we call it and they will have to as well. If we give them a little of what they want, they have to give us a lot of what we want and we want face to face love like women, right? Yes, we'll go down on them and do the doggy thing later but we want the full experience as a girl, don't we?

"So he's got me into his bed," she went on and we all jerked at that, I think, but Anne Jenkins only smiled. "I've always stacked the pillows at my back then. It really makes it much easier to kiss my man when he penetrates me." I think a dozen girls then shifted and re-crossed their legs in their pretty dresses. Oh, I was hurting in my panties! I had to cross my legs and smooth my dress about me all over again. "Well," the irrepressible Angelina went on, "it is what happens to women, isn't it, and we all want to feel like women, don't we, if only for just a little time."

Angelina looked along the line and stopped then at Helen and Ophelia. "So when we're locked together on the bed, and I can really feel him growing against my thigh, what do I do then?"

Poor Helen. She tried to say something about mastering him. Or that was the way it came out. "That meets his needs," said Angelina again. "Your needs, my pretty little doll. Your needs as a woman. You can help him to satisfy

you as a woman. You lift your legs and cross them about his back and you roll up your little tush and make it easy for him to enter you.

“If he really paid attention in my lecture on how to make love to a drag queen, he might already have had his fingers inside you. Nothing wrong with that. Most of you will need that first in order to relax because he can’t enter you if you are fighting him. And soon, when he enters you, you will let him, and he will be kissing and caressing however much of your body you’ve let him strip of clothing. You are going to have the ultimate of experiences then as you take your man in your tush just like a girl would.

“Now, you’ll do other things but that will often satisfy both of you beyond all the little dreams you might have during this week. I venture to say that it is going to happen to all of you that you fall in love with a boy. You will see girls going around in a dream and you will know exactly why because it will be the same for you.

“Some of you will be satisfied with just the one penetrating experience. You and your first boy friend might even want to carry on being boy and girl together after you leave here. It has been known to happen. Others of you might like to try out many of the boys and willing young men of Arden and, believe me, next week, you are going to be propositioned by so many men that you can have more than one any night and many girls here probably will.

“Lastly, I own a drag bar. Men come to it to meet women like me. I have three regular boy friends whom I see whenever they’re in town. That’s my lifestyle. I go home to my wife on most nights and am a sort of regular parent to our three lovely girls. And, yes, I am a fully functioning male. I will employ dancers, actresses, singers, impersonators, waitresses, bar girls, hat check girls

and hostesses in my club. The only stipulation is that you must be a male to get a job as a female in my club. I will employ any actress here after this Festival is over, or even in a year or more's time, when you decide that you really want to be a woman like me.

"Now, I am willing to answer any questions you have and I'm here for the full two weeks for counselling on any problems that come up. They might be technical like where do I put my penis when he's got his inside me to simply how can I get him to kiss me when we're out together as well as in the sack. And no, you're not a gymnast and so I don't recommend watching porn to anyone before or during sex. Let it all come naturally, I say, to me as a woman, and my pleasure will be equal to my man's. That is how to make love as a woman."

The women behind us all applauded as Angelina finished, smiling, and Anne Jenkins stood up beside her, so elegant in a really classy way, and I couldn't tell which one of them was the woman and which was the man

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I was dreading the arrival of the boys. Claudia had said to Sheryl, his-her wife, that Angelina had terrified all of us actresses, as usual. Sheryl had instantly been sympathetic to us all at the late supper she had insisted on providing for us through the first few days of the morn-to-night workshops and rehearsals.

"She didn't terrify me," said Helen sassily, with a lovely smile on her blushing pink, lipsticked mouth. Her hair was loose and in the pageboy style that the hair stylists liked all of us to wear back to our billets. We had wigs as well, like them, that we had to sleep in as well to 'maintain' the illusion that we were all manifesting so well. Of

course, sleeping in nighties and panties, as we all were, helped in that regard as well. As soon as we woke up, we were reminded of all the female things that we had to do in the bathroom to get ready for the day.

The counsellors checked as well and were very severe on Bianca, having her go to *Anne's Lingerie* to get her legs waxed, I think. She hadn't gaffed, Diana whispered to me, and the ladies supervising us through cosmetics and costuming had noticed. They did seem to notice everything did those ladies and they always inspected us in our pretty corsets, panties and garter belts each day, I noticed. They insisted that we actresses wear stockings all the time and the 'cache-sexe' as one lady called it, as it was 'un-seemly' for an actress to reveal her 'true passions'.

I was in a long, blonde wig, my face made up, the hair pinned so that the golden hair swept over my shoulders when Professor Adams joined us with two other ladies and a tall, handsome man. The dressing ladies barely had time to fasten the ribbons at my bosom before we were all ordered into our places and the quartet of directors, as I learned they were, inspected us.

We weren't doing whole plays, I had discovered in relief. We were only doing 'scenes from' all week long and so Katherine, me, and Bianca, naturally, had the scenes we were in together in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

"They'll do," grunted the big man, glancing at me in the frilly, white, evening dress that I was wearing for a support role I had as Ursula in *Much Ado*. We had found that some licences were taken with the bard then because 'Hero', the principal actress's part in that play, had been changed to 'Helen' which had delighted the girl I shared a room with.

Yes, I say a girl because I was certain that that was what Helen was after several days of living with her. She

expected me to behave exactly like her and have the same interests in dresses and makeup and doing every little, taxing thing like the lotions we applied to our hands to make them so soft, just like our coaches told us we must. Helen was determined to be the most beautiful of actresses and the most feminine. She even wore a soft, 'training' bra beneath her frilly nightdress to sleep in.

"Oh, but we must," she whispered to me. "What if they heard us and realized that you weren't wearing your training bra to bed. You must, Katherine. You must."

The directors then divided us up into groups for the plays that we were in and that was when the boys came in. There were a lot of them, more than there were of us. I stood with the girls, shivering in the 'evening dress' that I wore while the male director talked to the boys.

"How many of you were here last year?" he asked and almost all of them, some of them were men, I noted in terror, had been there the year before. He took the three or four who hadn't been actors before with him and he went off with those doing *As You Like It*. Professor Adams didn't even seem to notice me.

I was with Helen, Beatrice, and Lavinia, who was reading the part of Margaret as I was doing Ursula. It was confusing as the director, a nice woman kept referring to us by our roles and not by the names that we already knew each other by.

The six boys with us didn't tease us at all. They were really rather nice to us. I guess they had all been primed. We had to use play copies as we walked through the scenes that we had to do. I had very little to do, other than to smile and to look pretty, as the director told me to, as I was watching Helen overacting and being more flirtatious than she needed to be with Claudio.

Then we had to dance with the boys. A lot of ladies and volunteers seemed to be around and many of them, Barbara, Anne Jenkins, Danielle, Claudia and Kendra, I noticed, joined in the dancing after a while, becoming partners for the boys who didn't have any. Even Professor Adams joined in as well and I was in a set with her where the women had to move in and swirl as if attached to a maypole. Her hand was on mine as we twirled around the circle and she smiled at me but I don't think that she recognized me at all. Well, after all that had been done to me, I don't think that I would have recognized myself, either.

In the dining room, for our Spartan lunch, the boys all stood behind a girl's or a woman's chair, and pushed them in for us as we sat down. I shuddered as I had a boy on either side of me, boys who seemed eager to talk to me and I had to keep up the pretence that I was an actress.

"That's a really pretty dress that you are wearing," said John, who was on my left. "Which play were you in this morning?"

"*Much Ado*," I whispered, noticing that the boys had sandwiches with their lunches while we actresses only had salads as usual.

"I saw you in that," said Martin on the other side of me. He saw me look longingly, I'm sure, at his club sandwich and chivalrously offered me some. Well, I saw Elizabeth Adams, standing and smiling with Anne Jenkins, turn and look at me. She actually smiled at me and I blushed and refused Martin's nice offer.

"This is my third year in doing this," said Martin then with a smile. "I like actresses who are graceful even in the minor parts. What play is your major part in this afternoon?"

"*The Taming of the Shrew*," I told him.

“And what is your part?” asked John from my other side, not wanting to be left out.

“I’m the shrew,” I said and both of the boys laughed uproariously as that.

“Casting against type,” said Martin with a smile at my flushed face.

Elizabeth Adams stopped near me then and said, “Katherine, you are in my group this afternoon. Make sure that you have enough time to change dresses and your hair for this afternoon, won’t you? There’s a lot to do and you girls have to pick up the pace a bit now that you know that the boys don’t bite.”

“Yes, Professor Adams,” I said automatically.

“You know her?” asked Martin then.

I shivered as I watched her walk on about the room and stop to talk to Bianca as well. “I, I’m in her class at, at ...” Oh no, I shouldn’t say that as this guy would know right away where I was from. He could find me and tell everyone and make my last year in Barrington a living hell, I thought in a panic. I wished then that I had never taken up Professor Adams on her offer to do this, two weeks of Shakespeare. Two weeks of hell, I thought it was, miserably.

Martin must have seen the panic in my eyes. He put his hand over mine then and I almost jumped a foot in the air. I’m sure that my heart inside my tightly corseted figure and pretty dress did.

“It’s not going to be bad,” Martin said to me in a low voice. “You’re doing your part really well. I’d hoped that you would be Bianca as I get to be one of her suitors in this afternoon’s rehearsal. Phil Crowe gets to be your Petruchio. He studied under Beth Adams and thinks the

world of her and her husband. You saw him with the *As You Like It* group."

Martin held up my hands and smiled at my lovely, womanly fingernails and the women's rings that I wore. I blushed and pulled them back into my lap. "I, I have to go," I said, getting to my high-heeled feet.

Martin, of course, got up and escorted me to costumes where Nancy Harvey was delighted to see me so early. She consulted a list and then I had a makeup mirror all to myself as she took away my dress and slippers and I sat there in my body-shaping corset and stockings and she helped me out of my golden wig. How grotesque I looked without it! I was thankful to get back into my familiar blondish, pageboy hair, to have it pinned and to have my earrings changed.

I was almost relieved to get back to me again. It was only after Nancy began to put me into a new, velvet dress that I realized, with a tremor, how I was feeling. I was actually feeling like me again. But the me I was feeling like was Katherine. I was so glad to be Katherine again, to sit in my pretty new dress, and new high heels and have my makeup reapplied by Gina, one of Danielle's 'girls', who came in early to do it.

Bianca was very nervous in our first rehearsal. She was astounded that I didn't need a script for the speeches that I had to give. Well, it had been obvious what part I was intended for and so it was nothing to study for it, was it? She was Bianca and she should have done the same.

Bianca fumbled the "*Good sister, wrong me not, nor wrong yourself*" start of our entry into the second act. Well, her speeches were a little longer than mine but she seemed to find it hard to get into character. She wasn't the blushing maiden, that I, as Katherine, or Kate, was sup-

posed to tease about Hortensio and her love for him, even though it wasn't Hortensio she was really interested in.

At one point, Elizabeth Adams, "no Professor, please, Katherine! Elizabeth or Beth, I much prefer!" switched parts and she did Katherine to my Bianca. She had such power that I was naturally timid and afraid of her.

"Yes, beautiful," said Elizabeth then, smiling at me. "That's the way to play Bianca. Now, Bianca, just as your sister just played it."

We tried again and it was much better but clearly Bianca had to learn her lines. She retreated with Hortensio to do that as Elizabeth greeted a late arrival to our class. I shuddered as Philip Crowe joined us. I shuddered in my velvet gown because I knew him. He had just graduated from university and had been said to have a part in a new drama on television in the fall. But here he was at this Festival and he was making a point of kissing Elizabeth Adams on both cheeks, with a smile on the lips, which she allowed him, I supposed, as he wasn't a student of hers any more. She finally broke from him, Philip smiling and wanting more, I could see as I shivered and hoped Beth's husband didn't come back to see what she was doing. Beth brought Philip over to me.

"And this is your Petruchio, Katherine," she said to me. "And here is your Kate, Petruchio."

Philip Crowe's eyes gleamed as he looked at me. "*Good morrow, Kate, for that's your name, I hear,*" he said giving me the line from the play where we first meet.

I was shivering, which Kate of course, wasn't. Elizabeth was smiling at me from where she stood. "*Well have you heard, but something hard of hearing,*" I said, lifting my voice into the lilt and English accent that I hoped were girlish enough. "*They call me Katherine, that do talk of me.*"

*"You lie,"* chortled Philip then, and for a moment I thought he might digress and say something like, 'Hey, Murray, how's it going, man?' but he didn't. *"You lie, in faith,"* he went on, *"for you are called plain Kate, and bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the cursed, but Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom, Kate of Kate-Hall, my super-dainty Kate, for dainties are all Kate – and so on and so on."*

I blushed at all that and Elizabeth laughed. "Oh, I see that you two are going to get along most famously, Philip," she said. "But your Kate is all prepped in her part, Petruchio, and you and she can practice seriously. I'd like you to change if you will while I rehearse Bianca a little more and then we'll come back and marry the pair of you together."

We rehearsed a little more and then Philip returned and he and Elizabeth went through the scenes we were going to perform in the week ahead. There were things to plan with the other men as well, as the play only has two other female characters, the hostess at the start and the widow at the end. Elizabeth said that she would do those if needed, when I asked her.

"Oh, I'm so glad that you're Katherine and not me," whispered Bianca as we stood together. "I could never stand up to a man like that!"

I wanted to say, but you're a man like that yourself, you silly girl, but I didn't. Some of the actresses, clearly, were getting very deeply into their parts. "What happened to you earlier today?" I asked her, trying to remind her what she was.

"I was late going to bed, talking to Portia and Glenda, our billet hostess, about what it would be like with the boys today. I didn't put the lotion on my legs to soften them. You did, I bet," she said quietly, watching Beth Adams fearfully. "I didn't think anyone would notice and

then I forgot to put on my gaff as I was in a hurry and my panties were tight on me anyway. So, I had to go through all the depilation again that they made us do at *Anne's*. But she taped me this time.

“Everything I have is pushed up inside me and I’m taped between my legs. I daren’t drink as I have to go and get Anne Jenkins if I need to. She will go with me and do me up again. She is going to put me to bed tonight as well and make sure that I’ve done everything that I should to be pretty and to pass as a girl. I have to be the one that they call on to model first in every class today and tomorrow. We have to do the fashion show and the boys will be there and I lead off the Victoria’s Secret section.”

“The boys will be there?” I asked her with a shiver of disbelief. Danielle had said differently when she had put my wig on me that day.

“Because of me,” said Bianca. “The rest of the actresses are going to be so angry with me when they find out it’s my fault. It’s my punishment for not following the rules exactly.” And a punishment and warning to all of us, I thought angrily. I thought of protesting and wondered then what new punishment might befall all the girls because of something I said.

We barely got more than a walk-through and a reading before we had to join all the other actresses and actors and practice the dances we had learned and then how to move in the crowd scenes to let the boy folk singer have room to perform.

The male director, Beth’s husband, Richard, insisted that we change partners every time. Half way through we were joined by a lot of the women who were helping us. Barbara was there. “Lady Capulet, so good of you to join us,” said the director bowing to her and she curtsied to him. I noticed Davina there as well. How could anyone

miss her? She was so beautiful even though she wore just a regular, drab, long, grey dress. She and Kendra seemed to know one another and another girl joined them who seemed to be a friend of theirs, a Steffi, I think. She was small and very pretty. Martin went instantly for her, but I thought he would be out of luck as Stephanie definitely wore a wedding band on her finger.

Claudia joined the women as well and so all the boys had partners. We danced madrigals, as the director called them, and mirror-dances, when we had to do whatever the boys did, and that was sort of funny. I was with Gregory and then Eddie for those and they thought doing girlie moves themselves were really funny as I had to do them as well.

"Well," said our director, after the round dances and waltzes, "that was a lot of fun. You are all ready now for the first ball. Now, actresses, you change to what we call street clothes while actors, you get fitted for proper Elizabethan costume. Tomorrow we are all Elizabethan in all that we say and you will all know the first act you are in, which plays you are in, and react to your character name.

"Tomorrow, the villagers will also be in Elizabethan dress, and so expect 'Good morrow, fair maiden' or 'young gentlewoman' for the next ten days, for those in female attire. All older ladies are ladies, good gentlemen, Lady Anne and Lady Nancy will apply corrections to those who break the code of good manners. Supper tonight for all is at the Black Bull and there will be a little dance for all to relax and enjoy after that."

And when was there going to be time to learn lines, I thought to myself. We all retreated to the big, dressing tent together and there were feminine figures everywhere changing. Everywhere I looked were women dressed like me in pretty underwear, so many in corsets with ribbons like mine. I didn't see a woman who wasn't in stockings

and a garter belt, not Davina, Kendra or Stephanie, not Barbara, wow, did she look sexy in a black and white bra and pantie set, not Anne Jenkins or Claudia, of course, who was right in there with the women as if she was one of them. I guess a cross-dresser like her was having the time of her life that week.

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Admission to the dance, as it was every night in the short balls or dances that we had to attend, was by reciting the lines of the first section of our plays perfectly. Those who couldn't had to stay in the dining room until they could impress upon Beth Adams and her husband, Richard Woodstone, who I had only read about before as director of a theater group in St Louis.

I was one of the first then to enter the dance and I had to wonder if I shouldn't have flubbed some of my lines. I had a line-up of boys, boys no less, who all wanted to dance with me. I was in my flirty little dance dress, of course, but somehow, it hadn't occurred to stupid me that a 'real dance' wasn't one where we, the actresses, would dance with girls.

I had been thinking that we would meet some girls and they would be scathing in their comments about us, but, apart from the waitresses in the restaurant in the Black Bull, like Molly, who served us, I don't think that there was a young woman in the place.

Of course, there was Davina, but she was with her husband, and Stephanie, who was with her husband as well, while Kendra was with a couple of the locals, brothers I thought by their looks who were both flirting with her and she seemed to be lapping it up.

Lady Barbara was there, of course, and Anne Jenkins with the sheriff, the relationship between them known to us all after a little gossiping that had gone on between the billets, the hairdressers, the actors and us, the actresses. I danced with Martin first, my dress twirling about and around me and then with Philip Crowe, who told me how pretty I was and asked me where I went to school. That flummoxed me and then I realized that he really didn't know me. Beth hadn't told him it was me as she hadn't told me who of my friends were there as actresses like me.

It was thrilling in many ways to have so many boys wanting to put their arms about me and hold me. The compliments on my hair and my perfume, and how I looked, and how lovely my voice was, were legend, as they say. Oh yes, I was Katherine and it was fun and then it was the last dance. I didn't know what the last dance meant and why so many boys had crowded over to me to ask me for the last dance, as they did at every ball after that, but I had promised it to Martin, who grinned at me.

"Did we tell you about the tradition at the end of the last dance?" Martin asked me as I clinched with him which I was getting so used to doing with boys.

"No, what is it?" I asked him.

"Wait," Martin said with a grin and then the song drew to a close and Martin whispered in my ear as the deejay grinned and said it as well. "Last dance, first kiss."

Ye gods, the boy was kissing me right on the lips! And all around me, I saw past my fluttering false eyelashes all the women were doing it. Davina and Tom Johnson were wrapped in each other's arms. Anne was kissing the Sheriff while Kendra was kissing both of the brothers she had been dancing with. I was squirming to get free but Martin just held my head harder and so what could I do as he kissed me and he seemed to like it.

I wasn't the only one struggling. I think all of us actresses were taken by surprise and then the deejay laughed and played some more slow music. "Let's do that again," he said. "It's always been a tradition here at the Black Bull in Arden. Last dance and first kiss. So, are we all ready for it now?"

Martin had his arms around me and he swirled me just as the music cut out again and all around me, the men kissed the feminine figures they were dancing with. Some kissed very lightly and tenderly and some were really smooching. And it wasn't just Davina and Anne Jenkins. Helen and some guy I didn't know were almost making out on the dance floor.

Martin kissed me lightly and I turned my head so that he got my cheek but then he hugged me and I felt so weird as he moved his head and sought my lips. I still felt the imprint of his first kiss and I went rigid when he kissed me again, this time a little harder and definitely with some passion. Oh, it was so weird to be kissed like that. I felt such a pricking at my groin as I swayed. I had to hang onto Martin or I would have fallen as he leaned me back. I think the other guys were doing it as well.

There was a fanfare then and I broke free of Martin and all around me the same thing was happening. Martin held onto me then, taking my hands as I tried to step away from him, shivering a little at what we had done. I know I was a little wild-eyed.

"You didn't know at all that that was going to happen at this dance?" asked Martin then with a smile as all around me, actors were putting arms about actresses and we were having the whole incident explained to us. Miranda was laughing up at the boy who had kissed her and was stroking his chest with her bright, red-tipped slender fingers, tossing back her long hair most femininely.

I caught myself doing the same thing but then Martin led me back to the chair where my purse was. "I get to walk you back to your billet," said Martin then, putting his arm about my shoulders and leading me into the exodus from the ballroom at the Black Bull. Barbara was at the doorway that led out of the back of the Inn, wishing us all 'sweet dreams' as a tall man, Mr Chapman, the owner of the place, stood there with his arm possessively about her waist.

"Where, where are we going?" I asked in my girlish lilt as a pathway of lights through the trees opened up before us.

"This is the village pathway," said Martin as he took my hand in his and brushed my skirt against my thigh as we strolled, the couple in front of us doing just the same and so on up ahead along the path. "But you know what you actresses call it, don't you?"

"We, we haven't come this way before," I said nervously, figuring out that we were headed back into the main part of the village, possibly coming right out near to the Globe tent theater.

"You will again," said Martin, squeezing my hand. "You actresses in years past have always called this Lovers' Lane." The couple in front of us, it was Silvia, the girl I also knew as Frank Timmons, spun out of the way suddenly and I noticed that there was a covered swing beside the path. Not that they needed it. Silvia had her long-lashed eyes closed and she was kissing the man she was with, her arms about his neck, as if she really was a girl kissing her boy friend.

I felt hot all over and tried to walk a little faster in my high heels. "Those are the arbors," said Martin then, switching his arm again so that he could take me about my waist and slow me down. We passed several but

no-one was in them. "By the end of next week, you won't be able to walk along here and find an empty one. Some couples I know actually go off into the woods for a little privacy so you have to watch where you walk."

I shivered again at the thought of lying down on the ground and having a boy treat me as if I was a girl. No, no matter how I was dressed, I thought in panic, my legs feeling so sore as I swayed along on my high heels, I was not going to go into the woods or an arbor, ever, and play at being a real girl like Silvia.

We came out right by the Globe and so couples started moving off in all directions. "Eleven o'clock curfew," said Beth Adams, leaning under a lamppost with her husband's hands about her. "And tomorrow this is an Elizabethan village. All the boys in doublets and hose after ten, all the girls in long dresses. Good night, perchance to dream, to you all."

I looked at her desperately but she only smiled at me as Martin directed me along the Green to Sheryl and Claudia's B and B. I knew what he was going to do as we got there, because, there were the other girls, all in alcoves around the house, and they were all being kissed good night. They all appeared to be loving it. Ophelia's hands were moving most lovingly over the back of the man she was leaning into, one of her high-heeled feet actually off the ground.

"Thank you for a most lovely time, Katherine," Martin said to me, turning me and putting both his arms about my waist, rocking my dress and skirt against him. I must have looked as scared as I felt. He took my arm that I was trying to use to keep distance between us and put it about his neck. He was really strong and that terrified me as well. "It's not the end of the world, beautiful Kate," he murmured to me, "to kiss a man. This is all part of the training for all of us. We have to learn to fake that we like

it as well. Of course, if you do like kissing, it's all the better for winning the part of Juliet as you have to do it a lot in the production they put on here."

My bosom, my taped breasts, pressed right against Martin's as he lowered his head and most gently kissed my sticky lips. No, it wasn't the end of the world. It wasn't so terrible but I had to tremble and that meant my dress was floating against me and my stockings were tugging on my garter belt and I could feel the pressure on my panties. And Martin was hugging me into him and all around me were other girls, just like me, kissing and kissing their boy friends. Then Martin's hands were on my tush, just the way that I did it to girls in the past, and he was pushing me into his erection just as I had done it to girls in the past as well.

His kiss became much firmer and I felt his tongue then slide into my mouth and I went weak at the knees as he held me so firmly and he was so manly. He clearly expected me to be like Helen or Miranda and to be passionately embracing the man who had escorted her through Lovers' Lane. But I couldn't. I just sort of went rigid in his arms.

Sheryl came to the door and opened it, light pouring out all along the pathway and onto the street. "Come on in, girls," she called. "Curfew! You boys get going. Has anyone seen Claudia tonight, as well?"

"Just kiss me once, Katherine," said Martin lightly. "And I'll go quietly." The other girls were going in and I could see that Sheryl was coming towards me. Hastily, held so firmly, I kissed Martin's lips and he turned that immediately into quite a clinch that Sheryl had to break me free from.

"See here, young man," she scolded Martin. "That's no way to treat an actress. And you, girl, when I say come in, it doesn't mean one more passionate kiss, either."

My cheeks were flaming when I went in and there were the other girls and they wanted to know right away who I was with and what he was like. "He must have been dreamy," said Miranda with a sassy little smile and a flick of her streaked hair. "Katherine was almost last out of Lovers' Lane and she just had to have one more kiss than us from her handsome beau."

"Didn't Claudia walk back with you girls?" asked Sheryl as she came into the little parlor, fussing almost immediately with Ophelia's dark hair and her earrings. "I thought that she and Danielle went to the Black Bull."

I had seen them there but they were dancing with men that I hadn't seen before on the dance floor. And Claudia had been with the man in the dark blazer and a little mustache for the last dance, I thought guiltily.

The phone rang then and Sheryl answered it quickly. "Oh, no, darling, you just go ahead and do that. Yes, you and Danielle must get all those racks in order for rehearsals tomorrow. I won't wait up; so don't wake me when you get in."

"You know where Claudia is, don't you?" asked Helen as soon as we had kissed the other girls and Sheryl good night. The mirrors then showed me how much my makeup, like the other girls, had been ravaged by kissing Martin.

"Not for sure," I told her, as I took off my female clothing only to put on more to go to bed. Helen began to brush my hair as I would brush hers afterwards. It was the way that we had to do it so that our hair was ready to wear in the morning and why we wore sleep wigs. I had yet to see Helen without pretty hair as she changed in the

bathroom and styled her sleep wig to resemble the blonde braids that she wore each day.

“She’s off with that guy in the blazer, the poofy Englishman,” said Helen. “Barry says he’s always here at the Festivals and he takes out a different woman every night. So I asked him why he was taking Claudia out then and Barry corrected himself. He said that Richard only takes out women like Claudia and if we want to know who the trannies are in the village we only have to watch Richard and he’ll show us.”

“Is that what Barry calls us, trannies?” I asked Helen nervously. I hated to think that I was being called that and I wondered if I could sneak down to the storage area and get my clothes and leave.

“No, Katherine,” laughed Helen. “Barry knows that we’re girls. He told me that he loves girls like me and he wants me to be his girl all week long. If only we were in the same play.”

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I was so tired though that I slept like a baby in my nightie and beribboned hair. Then I had to hurry and get bathed, waxed, perfumed and into street makeup, knowing that I would be inspected as Bianca had been inspected the day before. I gaffed without thinking that I was doing that and put on panties and stockings while spraying my legs with cologne as I knew one of the older women would sniff me and complain about me if I didn’t. I put on my long shift, changed my earrings and locket in record time and was tightening my dress as I put on my high heeled ‘slippers’ and joined Helen and the other girls for our dainty, ritualized breakfast.

All the girls were reciting lines from their plays as I said, "Good morrow to you all," and gave Claudia a startled, guilty look as she came to breakfast in her nightie and negligee.

"She partied soundly and too well, if not wisely, didst my ancient Juliet," said Sheryl with a gleam in her eyes. She was in a long dress with puff elbows as she ladled out the tiny bowls of hot cereal that we actresses needed for breakfast.

Claudia had at least got her makeup on. She yawned and sort of sat wide in her chair, like a man. She corrected herself then but caught me watching her. "How is it, fair maiden," she said huskily to me as if she was having trouble lifting her voice to female pitch, "that Katherine ne'er has the troubles that I must truly endureth for my vanity's sake."

"Katherine is no strumpet," said Sheryl then before I had to try to frame a reply. "Her suitor trick-ed our lovely maiden into love's last kiss, I do declare, but 'twas not the fault of any artifice on Katherine's part. She, I hold blameless. Nay, she but attempted to dampen the young man's fire. She, at the least, hath sense not to find a surfeit of romance in a mere, little dick."

I'm sure that my cheeks were on fire again. I felt hot all over as Helen poked me while Miranda and Ophelia giggled like little schoolgirls.

"Prithee, my lady," began Claudia hoarsely. "'Twas the elder, greater Richard, not any sapling whose twig that I did bend. And thou knewest it, my lady, when thou and I didst agree not to prattle on our vocations and successes in front of such tender susceptibilities."

"'Tis true," muttered Sheryl as she straightened the line of my dress about my bosom and then kissed Claudia on her head. "I didst make agreement with Claudia but I

claim forfeit for every trans-gression, my sweetest of hearts." She sat then in Claudia's lap while we girls goggled at them, kissing and cuddling, as we sped through our breakfast.

"Didst I not tell thee that Claudia is of like gender to a rooster?" Helen said to me wickedly as we cleaned and flossed our teeth and then put on our lipstick for the walk to the Globe to arrive on time for re-dressing and re-making up.

"I never heard thou say it before," I murmured. "But I ha'e thought it ere long. Verily, I ha'e been convinced of it since first I witnessed the beldame greet thee and me."

We left in a pretty line, our long hair gleaming and brushed, the four of us girlish figures being greeted by more girlish figures from the houses nearby and so we were a train, our voices all so high and excited and discussing the only subject worth discussing on a bright, sunny day, the boys who had pursued us the night before.

I thought that that would be that but after we rehearsed the scene of Kate and Petruchio meeting, we did the abbreviated scene where Petruchio is late and I denounce all men and then go off weeping, but I went off in tears of rage, not of sorrow. Then Gremio describes the wedding and I had to change rapidly into a white gown and a veil was put about my hair and Beth Adams thought it a brilliant idea that we should all mime the chaotic marriage ceremony while Gremio is telling the disguised Tranio all about it.

And when it came to *This done, he took the bride about the neck, and kissed her lips with such a clamorous smack that at the parting all the church did echo*, Philip lifted my veil and kissed me just as violently as it said he was to do. I didn't have to act being upset and pushing him off me.

But Professor Adams had us stop then and go through the mime again and she told me to hold the kiss longer and to flutter my eyelids. "Start to surrender sweetly and then, only when he lets you go, do you flare up in anger and try to slap him again." I had to slap Petruchio earlier.

Then, we practiced the scenes where I have been 'tamed' and I prove it by kissing Petruchio in the street and then just before the end and at the very end of the play. Only there, Beth was having none of my pulling back or my arguing that the play does not give direction for kissing only the words that Petruchio uses.

So, I spent almost the whole of the rehearsal kissing Philip Crowe. I had to kiss him gently. I had to kiss him lovingly. I had to kiss him as if I meant it and that I was in love with him. I had to kiss him as if I was his wife. I had to kiss Philip as if I was Katherine and I was in love with him. I had to smile when my husband kissed me and lifted me up and carried me off as if to bed at the very end of the play.

"And when you come back for your bows," said Beth Adams as I stood quivering beside Philip, his arm about my waist as if I was indeed his wife, "you come to the front kissing and cuddling and refastening Katherine's clothes as if she has just scrambled back into them. Let's see you do that."

So, we did it, and did it again and again. I had to have my makeup renewed yet again and I was very close to tears at the way then that I was feeling. No, Professor Adams, I thought in distress. No Elizabethan actress ever went through what I was going through. They weren't just ignored as boys and treated as girls as I was.

Philip Crowe didn't treat me in any way different to the way any boy would have treated a girl in the part that I was playing. He kissed me with force at times and with

tenderness at others and held me always longer in the kiss than I wanted. Sometimes he smiled at me as if he understood the distress I was going through, trying to show affection for him as I kissed him.

All my senses were reeling and at the end, I was kissing him like a girl and not letting go, as he held me to him, and he decided when the riotous feelings inside me stopped. Yes, there was a riot inside me as I tried to stop the feminine emotions swallowing me up as I hung onto Philip like a good girl and felt such desire and longing in every kiss we now shared.

Professor Adams told us both then to keep on doing it like that as the way that we were performing was 'just perfect'.

Helen was a little miffed with me then as we strolled home together, her arm through mine. Rehearsals were over for a little while and we actually had a couple of hours of free time, though we all had lines to learn, dance steps to go over, dance dresses to put on, and costumes to prepare for new, minor, support roles we'd all been given.

"She never tells me that I'm just perfect," Helen pouted to me, her voice the most girlish that I had ever heard it. The way that she minced along on my arm, the flowery fragrance that emanated from her, the way she was now wearing her braids on top of her head with ribbons blowing in the little evening breeze, would have convinced anyone that they were talking to a girl. I couldn't think of Helen, my roommate, any other way. Never mind her feminine figure that now seemed to be narrower by far at the waist and she was definitely more shapely in the chest area.

Helen was also acting like a spoiled, little girl as well. I knew that she wanted to be Juliet and I think that she saw me as a rival to her. "She loves the way you are playing

Hero," I told her, like her, glad that we could revert to proper English when the last rehearsal was done. Several of the actors and actresses didn't, of course. I saw Martin, standing with his arm about Silvia, who was laughing at him and swishing her dress as he squeezed her about her waist as they chatted with Alice and another tall guy in doublet and hose.

"She said it was a really good idea," I went on as Helen pouted again, her lovely mouth in a pink, glossy line, "to make the name more feminine as it suits you so well. She was wishing we had done *Troilus and Cressida*. She said that you would have been perfect as the most beautiful woman in the world."

"She did?" asked Helen eagerly and then I was her friend once more. "Are, are you, you know, with Philip?" she asked me then as we discussed the boys and the way they treated us which was the favorite topic of conversation of all the actresses, I found.

"Philip is a good actor," I said. "He makes a fine Petrucchio."

"So you and he aren't committed to each other?" asked Helen with a smile as we reached our billet. She twirled and danced up the pathway, her dress billowing out.

"Committed to each other?" I asked her. "We're just in the same play. That's all."

"Miranda is going for a walk to the Black Bull with Everett before tonight's dance," Helen said in a rush then, "and he asked her to bring along another girl for his friend, Philip, and Miranda asked me to walk out with them. Oh, Katherine, you don't mind, do you, if I go out with Philip, do you? Oh, I want so much to go and to share an arbor with him but I won't if you tell me he's yours. You can go out with him."

"I'm not going out with any boy," I told Helen, shivering all over at the thought of going out with a boy deliberately on a date, which is what Helen was doing. She rushed around our room and changed her dress, changing into a little cocktail dress that I had seen hanging there but would have been too embarrassed to wear, the way the neckline was cut and the so-thin shoulder straps. It would be like wearing a nightie over our girlish underwear, I thought.

Helen wore vivid, red silk underwear that were also in my drawer but which I had avoided, getting a definite twinge inside me when I looked at them. I knew that I was supposed to wear them, and the bra and waist cinch in the same style, before the week was out.

Helen sprayed perfume everywhere on herself, even lifting her dress and spraying her stockinged legs near her thighs and panties. She laughed at the shocked look on my face. "Well, you never know," she said gaily, grabbing her purse and almost running out the door on her high heels. We could all walk so much better in them now. "I might get lucky like Silvia. You never know."

I shivered as I took out my copy of *As You Like It* and read over the part of Phoebe, the shepherdess, and then Audrey, a country wench. "My husband," Beth Adams had said, "needs a little help in those parts as Beatrice and Ophelia don't seem capable of doing more than one part at one time. I told Richard that you would have no trouble, Katherine, and, though it means more rehearsals for you, you'll be a better actress for it all, won't you, and that's what you came for anyway."

"Yes, Mistress," I had said to her and curtsied and felt like such a fool as she dismissed me then as if I was a girl servant of hers.

So I stayed in and studied while I slowly changed for bed. And then, when Helen came in, talking a mile a minute about how wonderful it had been to be out with Philip, how the dance had been so wonderful and how she and Miranda had never actually reached the Black Bull after all.

“And did your perfuming your panties pay off?” I asked Helen with a smile, trying to take the wind out of her sails a little, I think. She flushed then and looked into the mirror hastily.

“Does it show?” she asked me. “Oh, it was so wonderful, Katherine. I was really, really a woman. Philip said that I was. Oh, I could have done it a dozen times with him, I really could, Kate, but it’s like Miranda says, boys have no stamina. We’ll have to teach them how to pace themselves. Oh, but when he kissed my thighs under my dress, Katherine, well, I soaked my panties just a little then and Philip understood exactly what I wanted him to do. Oh, it’s so marvellous to be a girl, isn’t it, Katherine. I just can’t go back to being drab old Harold Downing ever again!”

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Our first performances were set for Sunday, beginning in the afternoon. I couldn’t believe the audience that showed up, all in Elizabethan costume, and it was all “prithie sir” and “marry, sir, and this fair maiden is like to the sun”. We actresses as well as the actors had to mingle as well in the area before the stages at the Globe. I was dressed as a shepherdess, but more as a Dresden China shepherdess than anything possible in Elizabethan times. I had crinolines, I think and ringlets with a bonnet tied at my chin with a pink ribbon.

So much for the authenticity of having no women on stage, I thought, as I introduced myself as Phoebe, a shepherdess. "Such a lovely dress," almost everyone said, making me cringe as they all knew that it was a boy inside the puffed sleeves and tight bodice of the shepherdess dress. There were women all over the stage, strolling and swishing around, like Davina clinging to her husband's arm. He looked very fashionable in his dark blue doublet and hose.

I had to curtsey to Sheryl and Claudia then, each on the arm of a man with a mustache. Sheryl was batting her eyes at the guy who was squiring her while Claudia was equally being all dainty on the arm of the man who matched the description of the man she had stayed out with before. You'd never have thought that the two women who smiled at me were husband and wife. I trembled again at all the subversive thoughts running through me but I managed in the end. I smiled and my hand was kissed by both men as I curtseyed to them. I didn't know who was in the plays or not until the musicians began and we all had places to be at, even Claudia, on the stage with 'my Richard'.

I was partnered with John who smiled at me and asked me how my week was going with just a 'thy' thrown in to make it 'Elizabethan'. "'Tis tolerable, sir," I said, and couldn't say more as the dance sets of a great ball began. Yes, I had had to attend the balls each night by Beth Adams's order. I had to have my last kiss and I had to let a boy escort me home. I had made sure, though, that it was always one of the new, younger boys who were so nervous around us girls. They were so relieved to leave with just a few kisses without me crawling all over them as the other girls did.

All the ladies who had helped us with our dresses, our costumes, our makeup and even checking us on our lines,

were in the dances at the performances. Even Richard Woodstone and Beth, Mrs Woodstone, I supposed, were there, smiling and waving to everyone as they danced. The stands, and boxes, were filled and so was the foreground, I noticed, many of the men carrying tankards and the women small glasses of wine as they milled around and stood, watching us dance, all of us actresses dancing like the women around us.

We danced and were applauded after each set; then a horn gave out a great fanfare and we all moved to the sides, we actresses shivering, I'm sure, to be under the gaze of so many people who all knew, I was sure, exactly what we were and how the afternoon and evening were to go.

Davina, as lovely as ever, came forward then and they cheered her wildly and she blushed and looked so demure, even from where I sat with John's hand in mine. "'Tis I, a lady of misfortune and misinformation," there was a huge cheer and applause at that, and Davina smiled even as she blushed again, "who serves as thy hostess for an afternoon of sport and entertainment," she said.

Davina introduced Orlando then who came in and did his speech that sets the plot of *As You Like It*. It was sort of nerve-wracking as we were never really off stage, the scenery rarely changing. Davina played several of the minor parts that should have been played by men as the plot was established and then Rosalind and Celia came giggling and dancing onto the stage.

"*I pray thee, Rosalind, sweet my coz, be merry,*" began Celia then and I stared at her as she spoke as sweetly as any girl could in saying that line.

"*Dear Celia, I show more mirth that I am mistress of and yet would that I were merrier?*" laughed Rosalind, swirling

and her long, golden hair flared out as did her dress, her petticoat and red, gleaming high heels revealed.

Davina bridged the scenes that weren't played and then I had to do the part of Phoebe. She has several long speeches and I guessed that was why Ophelia hadn't wanted to do them. She had said repeatedly that her speeches were too long as she learned them for the scenes she had to do. Besides, being Ophelia was enough, wasn't it?

So, with a shudder, feeling all the eyes of the crowd on me, judging me, I bounced onto the stage with Mark, who was playing Silvius. "Wow, that was so great," Mark said, his hands about my waist, hugging me to him as the applause followed us. "I would really like to get to know you better, Phoebe, I mean, Katherine. Would you come out with me to the Black Bull after the shows are over?"

"Mark," I whispered to him, his hands squeezing my waist as he smiled into my madeup face. "You remember what we actresses are, don't you?" I asked him, all my body shaking as he caressed my back right on my bra strap. "We are all boys, you know."

Mark's hand slowed and he gaped at me. "Yes, well," he began.

"Thank you, sir," I curtsyed to him as he grabbed on to my hand. "But I am to change my appearance and thee hast other parts to play, hast thou not?"

"But none as sweet as being thy swain," Mark said. "Until tonight, fair Katherine."

I couldn't believe it. I had told this boy that I was another boy like him and still he wanted me to walk along Lovers' Lane with him and be his partner at the ball there. All of us would be there again in our long dresses and doing Elizabethan sets with people from the community, I was told. I was seething with conflicted feelings all

through the next set as I was Ursula and then had to rest and change again for the dances while Mark smiled at me from the wings. He came to sit by me as we supped sparingly and then did the evening performances.

Ophelia was splendid in her role as Hamlet's doomed lover. I wished that we could have seen more of the play with Barbara playing the Queen, Hamlet's mother, so wonderfully.

I was enthralled by it all and then there were scenes from *'Much Ado'*, and Mark was beside me again. "I can't wait to see you being tamed tomorrow by Philip Crowe," he murmured. "But you do know that he has a girl friend, don't you?"

I shuddered and felt my long hair shudder and fall over my shoulders and about my padded breasts. "Please, Mark," I said to him. "Enjoy the plays. Helen is so pretty in this play, isn't she?"

I shivered as I thought about how I was describing a boy in a girl's dress now on the stage. Helen was so pretty, I thought, and she glowed after her tryst with Philip, if I could or should call it that. I flushed when I thought about all the things she had said to me and I could never repeat. She really did seem to think that she was a girl and that I was one as well with the same interests as her.

Well, I wasn't interested in the length and width of Philip Crowe's manhood and how he had had her relax so and how much better it was then. He'd complimented her so on the way she had wiggled onto him and told her that, for a first-timer, she was the best he had ever had. And they were going to get together again later as he had so much more to teach her about making love to him that Angelina Mackie hadn't said in her address to us.

"You must come with me next time, Katherine," Helen had said after the second dance that I had missed as I trembled on my pillow in my sleep wig and face lotions, the frilly straps off my nightie stroking my chin and making me shudder once more. "All the boys were asking after you. I told them that you were playing hard to get and they all think that they're the one for you."

I was describing Helen as if she was a girl. Well, she had talked like a girl all night. She had talked about the boy she would go out with next. Well, Philip was a big catch but not the only fish in the sea, was he? Oh, but he did fill out his doublet, didn't he, Helen sighed. Had I heard about Skip Night? It was a big secret from the trainers and directors but the actors would arrange it on a really nice night and I couldn't miss that. If I was shy, she'd ask a really nice boy to ask me to the Skip Party.

"Please," I said to her. "If I want a date," I added cruelly, "I can get one myself."

"Ooo, yes," Helen said, her voice as tinkling and feminine as the girl she played so femininely on stage. "You have to. It's going to be really, really fun. All the boys are saying so!"

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"I suppose you wonder why," the dark-haired, really attractive girl said, as we sat around again for another lecture as we had with Angelina, the drag queen. We'd attended half a dozen more on Elizabethan theater and how we were to act in the Globe as well as the makeup lessons and women's fashion shows galore we had to be at or in. Yes, the boys had been treated to an eyeful as they say in the underwear show. Well, we all got compliments for that show. But this was very different as we all knew this

girl that Anne Jenkins introduced before Anne said her name. She was Amanda Lewis, one of the hot new girls in the latest television drama about teenaged angst.

“What’s she doing here?” Miranda had whispered to me. “Oh, I wish I could look like her!”

I didn’t think that Miranda realized what she was saying.

“I think they flipped the lectures around,” said Beatrice, smiling at us as she crossed her legs in her short, short dress. I didn’t want to tell her but I could see her panties from the way she was sitting.

“Why am I here to lecture you since,” Amanda went on, smiling at all of us, “you’ve all been actresses on stage now two or three times. So, why you still have to come to workshops and lectures, especially one called, ‘Men and Trannies’. Yes, it is the right lecture that you’re at and I am the person you think I am, Amanda Lewis, and that’s my topic.

“Well, two years ago, I was sitting there where you are in a long, purple gown, in my long blonde wig, finally getting into the part of Helena.” That stunned all of us then but Amanda Lewis only laughed at us all. “I want to introduce you all as well to my partner, Jake Harmer.” Then, sheepishly, a tall, dark-haired guy slouched onto the stage from the wings and I felt sick.

I watched *Pirate’s Cove* on television faithfully. I had seen the romance flourish between these two until I had actually had a debate with some of the kids in school about whether the sex acts they were simulating, as I was sure they were, were right for television in any time slot. They really did get into it hot and heavy. I loved watching the pair of them but here they were and Amanda was saying unbelievable things that must be a put-on like Angelina’s words at first.

“So, men,” said Amanda sweetly, pointing with a limp wrist to Jake, “and trannies.” She ran her hand down as if she was demonstrating herself and we all stared at her gorgeous figure, her breasts clearly real, and her beautiful, shapely legs.

“Who here thinks that Jake is my boy friend?” asked Amanda. “The tabloids have us linked, don’t they?” She laughed as several of us indicated that we thought it was so. “Well, it’s not true, save that Jake and I are friends. I introduced him to the director of my show, got him an interview and Jake became my boy friend, but just on *Pirate’s Cove*. Luckily, next year, we get to take part in a very messy break-up. You girls are going to love it! Jake will be a free man again!”

“What Amanda doesn’t tell you,” Jake went on then in the remarkably smooth baritone that he had, “is that it was here at the Shakespeare Festival that we met. I was Petruccio and, if Phil Crowe comes up with laryngitis, I can fill in at a moment’s notice. So who is my Katherine this year, if that happens?”

Everyone pointed at me then and I wanted the floor to open up and swallow me as Jake the Great waved at me and smiled. I think that I was supposed to react to him like a giddy girl. And I did want to react to him, I have to admit. But he was a guy and so was I, Katherine. It was Amanda Lewis whom I should have been waving to. Jake looked at me and frowned a little when I just nodded to him. His eyes wandered then over my figure and I felt the urge to tug on the little skirt that Costume had had us all wear for this lecture.

“I wasn’t Juliet,” said Amanda Lewis then with a smile. “I was third in the competition that year. The girl I won was so much prettier than all of us. One of Ed Wamsley’s friends,” she named the world-famous writer,

director, and producer of *Pirate's Cove* and maybe ten other hit television shows, "really liked her.

"My Juliet was supposed to be on *The Cove* with Jennifer Garson and me but she decided not to act. No, she went to Trinidad, that's the sex change place in Colorado, had the snip," I wasn't the only one who gasped and began to tremble at Amanda's casual way of saying that, "and married Ed's friend. She and her husband have adopted twin girls and are blissfully in love still. Or so she told me when I met her for lunch. She loves being a mummy and she and her husband are planning more children by using surrogate mothers.

"That's one way that you can go. But there are others. Angelina Mackie has given you her lecture, I suppose, and that's a way to go if you like flaunting what you are to men. I bet there are a few of you who have decided that you are drag queens, aren't there? But I'm not here to ask you to fess up to that. If you are that, or love being called a she-male, Angelina's place is as good a place as any for you to work. I hear the money is pretty good."

Amanda took a glass of water then. "Some people in the know," Jake began then, with a glance at me, "ask me what I see in a girl like Amanda. Actually they're usually looking at a televised drag show then on *Maury* and they ask me what I think of that, the real she-male. I tell them that I'd have to be really queer, wouldn't I, if I wasn't attracted to such a beautiful girl as Vanity on the show I saw last. I should tell you the truth as well about Amanda and me.

"We've been friends since we were kids. The first time, though, that I met 'Amanda' was here in Arden. I couldn't believe that my best friend made such a pretty woman. I still don't. Well, I was Petruchio then but this time I told Anne Jenkins I would come back but only if I could be Romeo. I thought she'd just turn me down but I got my invi-

tation a month ago and I'd be a real piker if I didn't do what I said I would, wouldn't I? So I am going to be Romeo on Sunday, the final day of this Festival and I guess we all find out who my Juliet will be after the performances tomorrow."

I got the shakes then. Jake Harmer and Amanda Lewis were going to be there to watch me as Katherine, Kate, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, kissing and making out with Philip Crowe. It was going to be so embarrassing as they saw me in the play and role that they had once done at the Festival.

"The reason Ed Wamsley is also coming here," Amanda went on then, "is that the man is a big benefactor of this Festival. He puts up a lot of the prize money and he will be on the lookout for talent for the next round of *Pirate's Cove* or another show that's going to be started in the fall. Now, if you go the same route as I did, you will have to have your breasts augmented right away, as I did."

I felt a tremor go through me then as Amanda touched herself and she wobbled. Well, we did as well but she wobbled and it was all her. You could see the way that her breasts bulged up on her chest as she pressed on them and smiled at us.

"No, I'm not like Nancy and Danielle and the little group of transwomen who've all had the operation and are classed as women now," Amanda went on. "That might be for you but, unless you fall instantly in love with a rich guy who falls instantly in love with you, you're probably going to have to be a drag queen as far as men are concerned until you can get the money together for your change."

I think it was Diana whispering with Alice who caught Amanda's attention then. "Oh," she said, "you didn't

know that they were once men like us?" Oh, to look at the sexy brunette in her so short dress, speaking like Amanda Lewis, so girly and so flirty, and then hear that from her lips made many of us stir. I felt quite an agitation in my panties then as I looked at her. Jake Harmer looked over her head then, and actually winked in my direction but I don't know that he was winking at me. I felt a tremor sizzle its way through me as I thought what he would see as he looked at me with my long blonde hair and the tiny dress that showed off so much soft, scented skin.

"You all do know the rules of Elizabethan theater, don't you?" asked Amanda Lewis then, her glossy lips still smiling. "No women allowed on stage. Some allowances are made here for the transwomen since they used to be men, though they would probably correct me on that."

"They would," said Anne Jenkins from her chair and Amanda and Jake laughed.

"Anyway, you actresses know the rules. It's why you're here," Amanda went on. "Every person you've seen on stage since your presentations began cannot be a woman. Everyone in a dress must be an actress like you."

There was a stunned silence as Amanda and Jake both nodded their heads. "Yes, it's true," Jake said.

"But Anne Jenkins," blurted out Alice.

"Is a man like me," said Jake and Anne, to general nervous laughter, smacked him on the back of the head.

"But Davina Johnson," said an excited, thrilled Helen then. "She's one of us?"

"Absolutely," said Amanda. "I bet Lady Barbara has performed, hasn't she? Wait till you girls see her as Lady Capulet. I hope that Stan Chapman, her boss at the Black Bull, is Lord Capulet. They have a lot of chemistry between them."

I couldn't believe it. I felt chills run through me as Amanda and Anne Jenkins confirmed that they were men and so were Kendra and Stephanie and every 'woman' who had worked on us and taught us how to makeup and dress like women. I knew about Claudia but that surprised the girls I was billeted with a lot.

"Now, if you do get to Los Angeles like me," said Amanda, "and you want to work as a female actress, you've all heard of the casting couch, haven't you?" The girls all nodded, some a little unhappily, I thought. Well, that would keep any us out of following in Amanda's footsteps, I thought wryly, but Amanda was standing up and undoing her skirt.

"This isn't a strip tease," she said, as some of the girls gasped and giggled. "This is to show you how to beat the system. Most of the guys we deal with for jobs, I'd say all of them, want just one thing from girls, the real ones and us, whom they think are real. They want a blow job, so most of the time, they never ask us to strip off. It's just gobble, gobble, gobble and they do like to feel your titties as well. You have to have those. A T and A job is probably essential as all the girls, real and not, have them and that's what you're competing with."

Amanda took down her panties then and we all gasped. I did because of how she had fooled us all. Amanda Lewis had a vagina. She lifted her skirt and walked back and forth and several of the girls had lovely, slim, red-tipped fingers on their faces as they smiled at Amanda. I just felt a little sick by the way that we had been tricked.

Then, Amanda Lewis did the oddest thing. She seemed to undo something at her back and then she took off her vagina! It caused all the girls to start talking at once. All but me, I think. I just stared at the little penis

and testicles between Amanda's legs and at the vagina that rested in her hands.



"This is the pocket vagina," she said. Then she went on and Anne Jenkins showed off four or five other types of vagina. There was even one there, I saw, my head throbbing with the stress that I felt looking and listening to all this, that permitted a man to 'penetrate' you from the front as if you were a woman. There was another that you could slip on like panties and Anne Jenkins was wearing one of those if we wanted a demonstration.

I shuddered just at the moment when Jake Harmer looked at me and smiled. I know then that I sat very still once more, trying to be as poker-faced as I could be as all the girls around me were talking in excited, girlish tones.

"Now, in the costume session after this," said Amanda. "All of you actresses will be asked to try on one of these artificial vaginas. You'll be asked to wear them instead of gaffs in all your final performances and for the fashion parade that you are going to entertain the ladies of Arden with, tomorrow, I believe. Now, if it's Skip Night tonight," there was nervous laughter at that, "you should wear one of these.

"Imagine how Philip or one of his cronies is going to feel when he takes down your panties and there you are with a little pubic hair and a vagina, a really soft, lifelike vagina if you don't let him do too much touching. Well, that's how trannies like Jennifer and me have fooled a dozen directors and got one step into becoming accepted as real actresses. Having a boy friend like Jake helps as well, even though we have been friends for so long we're more like brother and sister ..."

"Brothers," cut in Jake, and everyone sort of laughed but me. I just felt a lurch inside me at what I was hearing. This is not what we signed on for, I wanted to scream, but Silvia, Alice and Amelia were laughing along enthusiastically with the rest of the girls.

“... than we are boy and girl friend,” finished Amanda, putting her panties back on but passing off the artificial vagina to Miranda and Ophelia who were fascinated and giggling about it.

What a session! The questions seemed then to be all about sex. So he could be aroused and climax if he was in one of the artificial vaginas, but how did the girl come? That was Silvia asking that in all earnestness and she got earnest answers from Amanda. The session broke up as little groups stood up and oohed and aahed over the packages that Anne brought out. She even hitched up her dress and showed off her panties and how it did appear that she was a woman as she slipped them down over the tops of her stockings.

“Not to your taste,” asked a baritone rumble then and I nearly jumped a foot in the air as Jake Harmer was standing right there beside me, Alice and Beatrice having moved off to examine Anne Jenkins’s goods. I shivered as I looked at Anne, so elegant and womanly, and she was a man.

“It’s, it’s not what I signed up for,” I said then in the lilting, feminine tones that I was so used to using.

“And what did you sign up for?” asked Jake Harmer easily, talking to me as if I was a girl and not a guy like him. He even took my arm and escorted me over to where Danielle, a man I thought, staring at her and remembering all the talk she made about her husband. She smiled and winked at me. I flushed as Jake got two glasses of punch and gave one to me.

I saw myself in the practice mirror then, all long legs in panty-hose, my little mini-skirt emphasizing their length like my high heels. Funny, though I looked like a girl, I could see how nervous I was. I almost jumped as Jake took my arm again and directed me away from the

giggling girls who were dancing over to the punch, flashing sparkling eyes and luscious lips at Jake who smiled at them all but steered me away to talk to me.

“What did you sign up for, Katherine?” Jake asked.

“The, the money, the experience,” I said with a shiver, “and the chance to appear on stage as a professional. This, this ...” I indicated the package that Miranda was clutching to her that showed a woman’s dark-haired vagina through its front.

“But you do know that you could be Juliet if you have impressed the committee ladies enough this week,” said Jake. “Have you read the reviews as well?”

“Reviews?” I asked, taking a sip of the punch and leaving, naturally, lipstick on the glass cup.

“The local rag publishes daily for the Festival,” said Jake. “Doesn’t your billet get a copy? They should get four or five if you’re in with other girls.” I had to shiver again at that word that he used for me and the actresses again. Jake noticed and grinned at me. “Well, you do look like a girl to me. This year, all of you do. Usually, there are only a few nice enough to consider for Ed Wamsley. This year, I think he’s going to want to take all of you actresses to Los Angeles. After the review you got for being Kate, he’ll want you for sure.”

When I got home that night, Sheryl found the back copies of the *Spear* for me and I had another butterflies in the tummy moment as I read that the best of all performances so far in the Festival had been the actress who played Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*. The review went on about the chemistry between Philip Crowe and me. Yes, they had his name there but not mine.

I was the epitome of womanhood, a perfect shrew and a perfect woman for a man at the end, the review related, when I read it at last, later that night. I can quote what it

said as I read it twenty times - 'When Petruchio called, *Kiss me, Kate*, I'm sure every man in the audience wanted to say it as well. And then the stage kiss Kate gives to her husband is one of those moments when we all wanted so desperately to be in his shoes, kissing such a beautiful, pliable model of femininity as Katherine.'

Almost every one was staring at me with Jake Harmer, at the reception after Amanda's 'lecture'. Amanda came to us then and asked Jake to get her and Anne Jenkins drinks which he did.

"You know why Jake has picked you out, besides the obvious," said Amanda Lewis while I shivered at being so close to her. She looked just like she did on television but she had never shown there what she had shown us in this session of our 'training' as actresses.

"I, I'm not, not so, so excited about, about ..." I began and Amanda shook her head.

"No," she laughed as she did on television, her smile lighting up the room and the people who were joining us then. Gosh, she just couldn't be a boy. She couldn't have been a girl like us here in Arden! "Besides being the prettiest girl here tonight, and you shouldn't blush at a compliment, Katherine. You look in the mirror and you clearly have been working on yourself. You are pretty and you will be announced tomorrow, Beth Adams told me, as the next Juliet."

I couldn't believe what she was saying. Anne Jenkins leaned over and smiled at me. "We shall all be calling you 'Juliet' after the announcement," she said. "But you still have to perform as Katherine tomorrow. It wasn't a huge disappointment when Amanda outed me, was it?" Anne asked me that with a knowing smile. "Claudia Morton told us how you picked up on one or two of her mannerisms right away and Danielle has been certain that you

read her as well from the very first. Robert Woodstone is very impressed with you and wants you in a legitimate production he's putting on in Chicago."

"B-Beth dances with us," I said faintly, "and she plays the part of the Widow in *Much Ado!*"

"Yes," said Anne Jenkins with a crooked smile. "She's a woman as I am a woman. No, she's not gone Nancy's route. She's become our talent scout for the Festival as well. This year, she has found us a bumper crop of actresses and I just know that you are going to be our most feminine Juliet ever!"

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We were just finishing the fashion show that we had put on for the 'ladies' of the Shakespeare Society. I think that we modelled just about every dress in Nancy Harvey's *Bridal and Everyday Dress Store*.

"Can you believe it?" whispered Miranda to me as we stood there in panties and bras and had our dressers bring us the next evening dresses that we had to wear, our makeup and hair already styled by Danielle. Miranda also wore a tight corset still on her tiny figure that gave her a lot of shaping. I just wore padding in my panties and at my breasts.

"We're not the only males in this place," whispered Miranda, her eyes sparkling. "All the people in here, and half our audience, are all men."

I shivered as a smiling Kendra came to help us into our long gowns with deep plunging necklines. I was zipped up over my stockings and garter belt as I minced forward in my high heels and was placed right after Diana. She smiled at me and swirled all the skirts of her lovely dress as she was announced. There was applause

as she went down the stage and catwalk, showing off her feminine walk and posture, which, Anne Jenkins had told an enquiring Alice, was the reason for the show in the first place.

“It’s a different form of practice,” Anne had told us all as we sat in our makeup class and had the women there turn us into gorgeous, female models. Our makeup was incredible. Not a spot or mark showed on our perfect faces, perfect for women, that is.

We had reached the last part of the show, the underwear and short dresses all stacked. Celia swept into the dressing area and announced with an excited smile, “The boys are all out there now!”

I stepped forward as Kendra pushed me before she went off to assist Celia in changing. “And here is Katherine,” said Beth Adams with a lovely smile at me. “She is wearing a Patrice Revy designed original. Patrice was, of course, the famous woman who broke the male monopoly of designing dresses for women. She always produces such feminine clothes for women and those that accentuate our best features as you can see in this dress worn so elegantly by Katherine. Isn’t it perfectly shaped for a woman?”

And so, I was on, my face set in a model’s pouting look. I sashayed forward to the applause of a largely femininely dressed audience, half of the women really men. Looking out at them, on my first embarrassing turn down the runway in a red, Merry Widow corset and black stockings, I couldn’t have said, well apart from Claudia and Sheryl, who were the men, and who the women, out there. I felt such relief that the men who were now allowed in as men didn’t see us as Davina and her friend, Stephanie, had seen us earlier. Gods, I could not think of that pair of strikingly beautiful and feminine women as men! I just couldn’t!

I sashayed back and was applauded all down the runway as I swirled and twirled and Miranda came out after me in ruffles and ribbons in her hair, so girlishly cute, breaking with some of the things we had been taught by smiling demurely at all the applause from the male section of the crowd.

I was held back then by Kendra as the actresses went out one by one and I had the last dress on show, a white, tightly laced dress that really should have been worn by a girl with a real figure. She would have looked fantastic in it. Danielle took all the clips out of my hair that had been holding it up and changed my earrings from dangles to hoops, brushing my blonde hair about my ears and neck. Then, Nancy, smiling came over with a little tiara and put it in my hair and so I walked out and there was a roar from all the people there then.

I didn't know what was going on as cameras started taking my picture as I sashayed down the runway where all the other actresses were lining the walkway and were also applauding me.

"And so I present to you, ladies and gentlemen," said Beth Adams, "an actress wearing the tiara and you all know what that signifies, I can hear. She will cease to be Katherine tonight after her performance and will become our Juliet!"

I have never been so embarrassed. All the women were standing and applauding me and Beth was presenting me with a huge bouquet of white roses as if I was a bride or something. Anne Jenkins was there with a huge cheque, made out to 'Juliet' for twenty thousand dollars and the cameras flashed as both Anne and Beth hissed at me to smile.

What was more embarrassing and humiliating was that my fellow actresses all came around me and acted as

if they were girls and I was a beauty queen. I was girlishly hugged by people who knew me well, by Silvia, Alice and Amelia, who kissed me and I wouldn't have known that I was being kissed by Darren, Gerry and Frank.

Helen had tears in her eyes as she hugged me. "Well, if it couldn't be me," she said shakily. "I am so glad that it is you, Katherine, who will be Juliet. You will forgive me for Phil now, won't you?"

I wanted to ask, "Forgive you for what, Helen?" but I couldn't as Rosalind, Beatrice, Bianca and the other actresses all wanted hugs and kisses as well as did a smiling Beth Adams and so many of the 'women' who had been out trainers and coaches during the last week.

"Now, rehearsals!" announced Anne Jenkins and there were groans from some of the boys. "And this afternoon, we set up the Capulet Ball for Act One of *Romeo and Juliet*. Everyone must be there, men and women alike, or Mr Woodstone will give the part you want to someone else who is there!"

Philip Crowe was nice to me for once as we did our last rehearsal of *The Taming of the Shrew*. By nice, I mean that he kissed me gently and not with all the force that he often used on me. He didn't throw me about with his usual disdain as Petruchio can be played.

"Oh, I like that, Philip," said Beth Adams as we did the penultimate scene on the street where I object to be kissed in public. Of course, I am, but this time, Philip just gently pulled me to him and I was really disturbed by the way that he kissed me. He kissed me as if I was a girl and as if he liked kissing me. I had this terrible urge then as well to kiss him back which was what Beth proposed that I do.

"He can't kiss you like that," Beth said and there were smiles on the faces of all those watching us. "And you not

respond to him, Katherine. But you do it in a maidenly way. You pull on his arm, on his shirt, and Philip is confused, and then he understands. He points to his lips and you kiss him.

“He tries not to respond but then he gives way and you put on a show for the street crowd and our audience. Try it. Start at *First kiss me, Kate, and we will*, give the first kiss on Katherine’s *Nay, I will give thee a kiss*; and do the second after she goes on *now pray thee, love, stay*. You kiss and that sets up what you might be doing after Petruchio drags his wife off after his last speech in that scene.”

So we did it as Philip had started it and the urge came just the same and I tugged at him. We lengthened the scene with me deliberately kissing a boy and he passionately arousing me, making me feel for a little while that I was his wife.

Philip kept his arm about me as we watched Bianca and Lucentio go through their scenes together. “I wish that you had come out with me a few nights ago,” Philip whispered to me then as we both had water to keep our throats ready for action. “You never have come, with anyone, have you?”

I shuddered and shook my long, loose hair.

“Why not?” asked Philip then. “Got a boy friend back home?”

That hurt and confirmed for me that Philip was not a nice person, no matter that he was going to be in some television series in the fall, was signed for a couple of films and was going to be a big star.

“I, I’m just an actress here, Philip,” I told him, unable to keep the nerves out of my voice. “I’m not a girl.”

Philip squeezed my waist then. “You could fool me about that any time,” he said, taking his hand away from

me and moving over to meet Helen whose rehearsal must have ended sooner than ours. She made a beeline for Philip and he greeted her as he would any girl friend. She flung her arms about his neck and her eyes closed in ecstasy as she kissed Philip. The way that their bodies naturally moved together told me volumes. I quivered as I thought what Philip wanted from me that he was clearly getting from Helen.

We were called to lunch and I watched the pair of them back away from all the other actors and actresses, coaches and directors heading out to the lunch that was served in the main tent. Helen was smiling, almost dancing on her high heels as she and Philip, holding hands, went out the back door from the rehearsal area. I hoped that she had the grace not to use my bed for whatever she and Philip were up to.

"So, Juliet," said a rough, male voice behind me as I was watching my roommate disappear. I almost jumped out of my white dress as Jake Harmer stood beside me again, looking dark and handsome in his doublet and hose. His hand went about my waist as Philip had just been holding me. I struggled free. Oh, if only I could look like that, I thought miserably, I could have been here and I could have been the one who was going to make a fool of myself in making love to Helen or Miranda.

"Juliet," said Jake then with a smile. *"I profane with my unworthiest hand/ This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this,/ My lips, two blushing pigeons, ready stand/ To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss."*

What could I say then but answer Romeo as Juliet. *"Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much."* I shuddered and left it there, realizing what it would lead to, a discussion about kissing and I didn't want to get into that. "Lunch is served in the main tent now."

Jake grinned at me. "Marry," he said, "But thy text of this tragic tale has words of foreign nature to mine own."

"Oh, don't you start," I said huffily.

"You don't want to be Juliet to my Romeo," said Jake then. "You'd rather have had Philip Crowe to be kissing you."

I flushed. "I don't want to be kissing anyone," I said.

Jake grinned at me. "Then why are you in two of Shakespeare's most romantic plays if you hate that so much. You must have known ..."

I shuddered as Jake Harmer steered me into the buffet lineup. A lot of people were looking at us again and I felt those deep, uneasy feelings I had had the night before coming over me.

"I guess I didn't know as much about what I would have to do as Juliet," I told him tartly then, "as you did about what you would have to do as Romeo."

That got me another of the famous Jake Harmer grins. "Is that all you are going to eat?" he asked as I took the prepared lunch for actresses and put it on my tray.

"You get to choose from the buffet," I told him, lowering my voice to hide a little of the indignation I felt. "You're a man. I'm an actress."

I took my tray and went to sit beside one of the actresses as I always did but every one seemed to have boys on either side of her. Yes, boys between boys, I thought sourly. I hesitated and Jake joined me then with soup and a heavy sandwich that looked so appetizing on his plate.

"Where shall we sit?" Jake asked me as I looked at him nervously, hating the earrings that caressed my neck each time I moved. "Well, we do have to rehearse, Juliet, you and I, and I don't mean the love scenes as Philip, I gather, is so fond of doing. This is a longer excerpt from the play

than what you have been doing and we do it on Saturday night and twice on Sunday. And we also have Skip Night set for Saturday." Just like the other boys, he held my chair for me to sit down and I think everyone was watching us avidly then.

"Skip Night?" I gasped, flushing at the eyes on me, sipping on the thin cup of soup, gruel as Ophelia called it, while a delicious scent wafted to me from the thick chilli that Jake was wading into heartily.

"No curfew," said Jake with a grin. "Everybody stays out late and celebrates. We used to do it on Thursday or Friday before but whoever has decided for this year has decided on Saturday. I hear all the motels in Whiteville," that was the village next door to Arden, "are totally full up. So are all the B and Bs in town. The Black Bull will be open till three or four o'clock with deejays and dancing if you like that sort of thing. The women in the village really let their hair down here on that night, you know."

There were a lot of questions I wanted to put to him about the women of Arden then but did I really want to know the answers? "Thanks for the warning," I said.

Jake blinked his eyes then. "That wasn't a warning," he said in surprise.

"What was it then?" I asked him, nonplussed by the way that he was looking at me.

"I think it was an invitation," said Jake Harmer with a grin at me.

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"How did you ...?" I began to ask Jake as he used his computer card and let me into the suite at the top of The Whiteville Inn.

“Those college boys started booking rooms this week when they had finalized a date to seduce all the actresses,” said Jake with a grin. “I took this room for two weeks, over a couple of months ago. Marry, but it doth pay, my sweet, to be prepared.”

Jake dropped our overnight bags on the floor and took me in his arms. Then he kissed me just as he had in the play that evening. Oh, but it wasn't like kissing Philip Crowe. Well, it was in a way, because there was a surge of emotion passing through me just as there had been from the start of *Romeo and Juliet*.

The tension really grew as we did the last scene of the first act while behind us the dance proceeded with all the actresses and all the women whom we all knew now weren't women at all. I darted about looking at Romeo and he was spying me. He did his blushing pilgrims speech when he caught me and we stood behind a large plant, 'shielded' from the dancers and my mother, Barbara, a most striking Lady Capulet, dancing with her husband, who was played by Stanley Chapman.

Just before we began as my hair was being re-done in a younger, girlish style, I was supposed to be just fifteen after all, Kendra, I think it was, had said something to Danielle, the hairdresser, about Celia being in the audience.

“Celia?” I had asked. “She's over there in the blue, gauzy dress.” And looking so pretty, smiling away, with her long red hair tied back in ribbons like mine.

“Not that Celia,” Kendra said to me with a laugh. “The Celia I'm talking about is Barbara's wife and Anne Jenkins' sister. She usually stays away whenever Barbara is engaged with Stan Chapman as she will be all tonight.”

“All tonight?” I'd asked stupidly.

“Well, it is Skip Night,” said Kendra archly. “And Barbara is entitled to her little bit of fun, isn’t she?”

“But I had heard that you,” I began and then I flushed.

Kendra laughed as Danielle had tried to shush me. “Stan and me?” she asked. “Well, I tried but once he saw Barbara in her Lady Capulet gown, he didn’t want me. No, I’ll be with the Delaney boys tonight and, on Monday, I’m going to be flying out to New York with Angelina Mackie.”

“Who are you skipping out with tonight?” Danielle asked me coyly then. “As if we couldn’t guess.”

“No-one,” I had said and both she and Kendra had laughed at me.

I had hoped that it wasn’t obvious how I was feeling as we rehearsed *Romeo and Juliet*, Jake Harmer and me. Just the touch of his hands on mine sent shivers through me but, in rehearsals, he was so nice to me. He kissed my fingertips and then pressed them to my lips and I quivered and nearly swooned for real. I was complimented after the scene by Robert Woodstone and then he talked privately with Jake, who explained something to him. What he explained, of course, was that when we came to perform the scene on stage, he was going to follow the stage directions as written.

“*Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purged,*” Romeo says but instead of kissing my hands, Romeo pulled me to him and kissed me on the lips. The startled way I reacted was quite genuine and he looked a little awed himself after he kissed me. I was so shocked at how I felt and how I so much wanted him to do it to me again.

“*Then have my lips the sin that they have took,*” I managed to say really breathily and I would have run off but for the strong way Romeo held onto my hands.

*"Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged. Give me my sin again,"* Romeo said and he kissed me again, and he held my lips to his, moving as I tried to edge back and all my nerves went jangling and screeching about my body. And I knew how it was that Juliet must feel then. It was a shattering moment of discovery. She had loved her Romeo from the start and so, looking up in wonder, at my Romeo, Jake Harmer, did I.

I gasped the next line out in terror. *"You, You kiss by the book,"* I prattled nervously, just like a young girl, over her head with a man, would say the line. Nurse, Beth Adams in an elegant ball gown, interrupted us as she should and I shakily and reluctantly let Romeo's hands go.

Then, I had to hurry, quaking all over as I changed into the nightdress that I had to wear as the revellers left the stage at last and we did the famous balcony scenes, Jake and I, my voice a-tremble, as the bard might have said, as I saw and heard Jake in a new light, totally as a girl in love. I knew now that he was going to change the little scene with the Friar and he did.

I entered Friar Lawrence's cell and Romeo, Jake, took me in his arms. When I finish my last speech of Act Two, Jake began to kiss me again and so it sets up the Friar's last speech that *"you shall not stay alone Till Holy Church incorporate two in one."*

"I, I'm not going anywhere," I managed to say when Jake took my hands when I went out of the dressing room after the play, all the passion spent, all the congratulations and plaudits still reverberating in my head along with the prolonged applause of the crowd in the tent. I had to do five curtain calls with Jake and, in the end, he danced me around the stage, my dress floating out as he held me and then he kissed me in front of everyone and they were cheering us on.

“Enjoy Skip Night!” Jake had said to the crowd as he picked me up as if I was his bride and carried me off into the wings and dressing room where all the actresses and women there wanted to hug and kiss me and tell me what a beautiful girl I was.

I took the longest of times to change to regular girl’s clothes. But it didn’t matter because Jake was waiting patiently for me as soon as I ventured out of the dressing room in my shaggy, blonde wig. I felt my temperature rise as he looked at me. I began to stammer that I had to go home and sleep.

Jake forcefully took my hand and waved to Danielle and the man with his arms around her, her real husband I had heard, as she was doing the lock up. “It would be a scandal of epic proportions,” he said to me, “if Juliet did not go out on Skip Night. It is a thrill for everyone if she goes out with Romeo and so we are going to stroll down Lovers’ Lane and smile at all the crowded arbors and visit the Black Bull and accept the praise that the multitude wishes to pour upon us. Then, in fifteen minutes precisely, you and I will leave and take my car over to Whiteville and we will not return until tomorrow afternoon.”

Jake said all that as he walked me, slowing his pace to mine in my black, very high heels. His hand was about me as we sauntered along the lit pathway and there was a girl in every bower, sometimes with two boys sharing her. Everyone called out their delight in our performance and my old friend Silvia had to come and hug me again.

“My lady, thou shouldst have married Cousin Paris as well as this Montague stripling,” she said, the boy I had known and defended so long as Darren. “For see, darling Juliet, I have two husbands betrothed to me and so I am doubly raptured on this blissful evening.”

Jake felt me tremble inside and so he hustled me along to the Black Bull. The older crowd were overjoyed to see us. It was as if I was a bride and Jake was my groom. I half expected them all to be throwing rice and confetti on us as we left, the whole inn, hundreds of people coming out to see me making a fool of myself as I slid into Jake's car and he drove off with me, away from Arden.

"I, I can't stay the night with you," I said to him, trembling all over.

"I asked for a room with two beds," said Jake with a smile. "I've never had that much luck with girls and so I come prepared for rejection."

"But everyone will think ..." I began.

"That's the idea," said Jake with that funny grin of his as he parked the car and came round to help me out. "I am protecting the reputation of my wife." He kissed me then as we stood in the parking lot and several people who must have been at the play went by and smiled broadly at us.

"So enjoyable to watch you two," said a gruff-voiced woman on an older man's arm.

"Yes, such chemistry," said another man while his blonde, jiggly woman just smiled and smiled at us.

I was almost glad to get into an empty elevator and get away from people but now I was in Jake's room and he had lied to me. There was only one, large bed in the room. But then it hardly seemed to matter as we fell onto the bed and my Romeo was kissing me so sweetly and I was returning all his kisses as only a Juliet can.

Reason and logic seemed to flee then as Jake Harmer gathered me in his arms and his body was pressed so close to mine. I had been Juliet all night long and all the words that I had said about him floated through my head.

*"Parting is such sweet sorrow," "A rose by any other name ...", to ask him to change his name from hated Montague, "O gentle Romeo, if thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully," "Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?" "Give this ring to my true knight," "my true love," and when he descended from my window, "Art thou gone so, love, lord, aye, husband, friend!"*

It all poured through me as we lay together on the soft, wonderful bed. Jake had been so careful in rehearsal as we lay in bed together and I anxiously asked him to go as it was the nightingale and not the lark that had sung. In the script it said that we were "aloft, at the window" but the stage moved and the window was behind us and I was in bed with my husband, in my nightdress, and we did a whole scene together where Jake kissed me as I trembled and tried to get my lines said well. It was the only time I had to look to the electronic prompter and get my lines out while my Romeo held me so intimately and made me feel like I was his wife. No wonder the theatre-goers thought that we had such chemistry.

That chemistry surged through me and when Jake undid my dress and then took off his shirt, I kissed him passionately as I knew what was going to happen and I just didn't want it to stop. Yes, I was going to wake up on Monday and I was going to be boring old Murray Dangerfield again. Just thinking of that name, and who I was, wakened me a little. A man was kissing and caressing me, was removing my lovely dress and taking the opportunity to stroke my thighs and my stockings as he did so.

"Please," I begged him, the last time I ever asked him to stop, trying to restrain his hand as he took hold of my panties. He ran his hands so gently between my legs and spread me apart and his pants were off, his underpants following. I felt a man's erect penis between my legs and

shook and clutched him as his gentle hands caressed my panties and the top of my legs.

My panties were only moved a little when I was suddenly lifted up, my legs pushed up high about Jake's waist. He was naked but I was still in my woman's stockings and garter belt and bra as I felt his manhood thrusting into me then. He kissed me so demandingly that I flung my arms about him and did what I could to let him take me as his Juliet.

I don't know what Jake was expecting, I was trying to do what Angelina and Amanda had told us to do with men. I swayed and rocked under him, feminine desire rising up in a tidal wave inside me as he caressed my soft body. I tried to let him into me as I clung to his lips and kissed and hugged his muscular body with all the passion that was consuming me.

I squeezed him with my legs and I felt such desire to be a woman all over me. I was in love as a young woman would be. I was in bliss as my husband made love to me, he encouraging me to be so womanly and feminine with him, his mouth arousing mine as well as my chest and neck. I was taking him then like a woman. I was a married woman, as Juliet had been, and I so wanted my husband to make love me.

Jake Harmer did make love to me, slowing me as ecstasy rose inside me as his desire for me became so very clear between my shivering legs. He made me relax and then he went deeply into me as I gurgled and wriggled beneath him, my panties finally disappearing. Sometime, Jake took the tape from my private parts and I was in agony as I wiggled and writhed beneath him but he wouldn't stop loving me. My stockings crossed over his back as I tried to bury him so deep inside me as a woman should. I knew it must be so because of the tumultuous, female feelings that he had released inside me

His kisses and caresses, even on my padded parts, finally had their feminizing effect on me and I felt such a climax rising inside me. I jerked and squealed. I felt him getting much bigger and harder inside me. I adored it as I was a woman and my man was taking me as he should. Then I came. I know that I climaxed and spit all over his abdomen while inside I felt his hardness turning me into a convulsing mass of passionate, feminine emotions. Jake said that I had just had my first female orgasm and that they were rare and I should treasure what had happened to me. I was surely his woman, he whispered in my ear, and he was in love with me, his fair Juliet.

I lay beneath my rutting Romeo and smiled anxiously at him. I gasped out my love for him and he knew immediately what to do with my love. He did it all to me again. I writhed once more in wonderful feminine distress and my orgasm came just as quickly and just as satisfyingly while Jake told me what a beautiful and rare woman I was. Oh, I so wanted to be that for him.

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Orgasms turned out to be not rare for me. I have them all the time with Jake and he seems enormously pleased that he can induce such things in me, his girl friend. It's not just climaxing like he does as a male that I seem to do. With me, it seems to be so much more than that. I just lose all control as I ride him or he rides me, our usual position. Of course we've tried everything else that my girl friends like Davina, Amanda and Stephanie share with me from their love lives, the wonderful things that their boy friends and husbands do to make them feel so womanly. Some of them my husband, Romeo, loves to use on me, his Juliet.

No, I didn't go home on Monday after being Juliet so wonderfully twice more with my handsome, passionate Romeo. I didn't go to university. I went to Los Angeles with my boy friend, Jake. I had a new wardrobe, twenty thousand doesn't go that far but Jake has showered me with a lot of girlish things such as new vaginas from Anne Jenkins.

I left with an appointment with a Dr Carrie Miller to get my breasts and tush augmented as soon as I got to LA. If I passed my screen test, I was going to be the new love interest on *Pirate's Cove*. I was going to be the new girl who splits apart Amanda and Jake.

Mr Wamsley was so enthusiastic as he hired me and told me that he wanted an actress who looks like a school-girl but who has such chemistry, there's that word again, with Jake that we would make the screen sizzle in the way that we kiss. Well, I love kissing Jake so much that I knew it would never be a problem between us.

So, Juliet Murray went off to Los Angeles with her new drivers' license, courtesy of the Sheriff's department of Shakespeare County. Jake has taken up kissing me in public at all the award shows we attend, me in a new designer gown each time. It's his new hobby, he says. It makes me feel wonderfully funny, and femmy, inside.

In the two years since I was Juliet, I have developed a body to conform to what I have begun to feel that I am. I just am so afraid that my breasts, so on fire under Jake's kisses are going to be so exposed by the low-cut dresses that I have to wear.

Jake has been delighted with the changes in my body, my more rounded tush and my breasts making him appear so enormous when he is aroused. We've been very lucky and haven't yet had to spend a night apart but that

may come soon as I have to be in a film, different from his.

Jake, of course, knows how to get the best feminine reaction out of me as well. He just has to murmur that he loves me and I am putty in his hands. I will do anything for him as his woman and I have. I will wear any sexy costume and let him have his way with me in any way he chooses. After all, I am Juliet to his Romeo. I have loved him since I first saw him, just as Juliet did her Romeo. And like Juliet, I shivered and shook as I 'married' him in a ceremony he says was legal. He calls me his wife and my legs buckle when he does that and I have to be in his arms, and have his lips on my body, on my mouth, my breasts or other parts of me that he loves to kiss.

So many of my fellow 'actresses' have come to Los Angeles with me. They stay with us to get started which is just fabulous for me but not so great for my husband who finds one woman in his life, and around his apartment, enough for him.

"I love you, my husband," I whisper as I am transported, by the way that he makes love to me, into an ecstasy as a woman that I never, ever, approached before I made love to him, a real man, my Romeo. I am so wonderfully happy, so fantastically fortunate, so incredibly lucky to be the woman that I am and all because I was the one, in Arden, as an actress, who was 'chosen to be Juliet'.

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