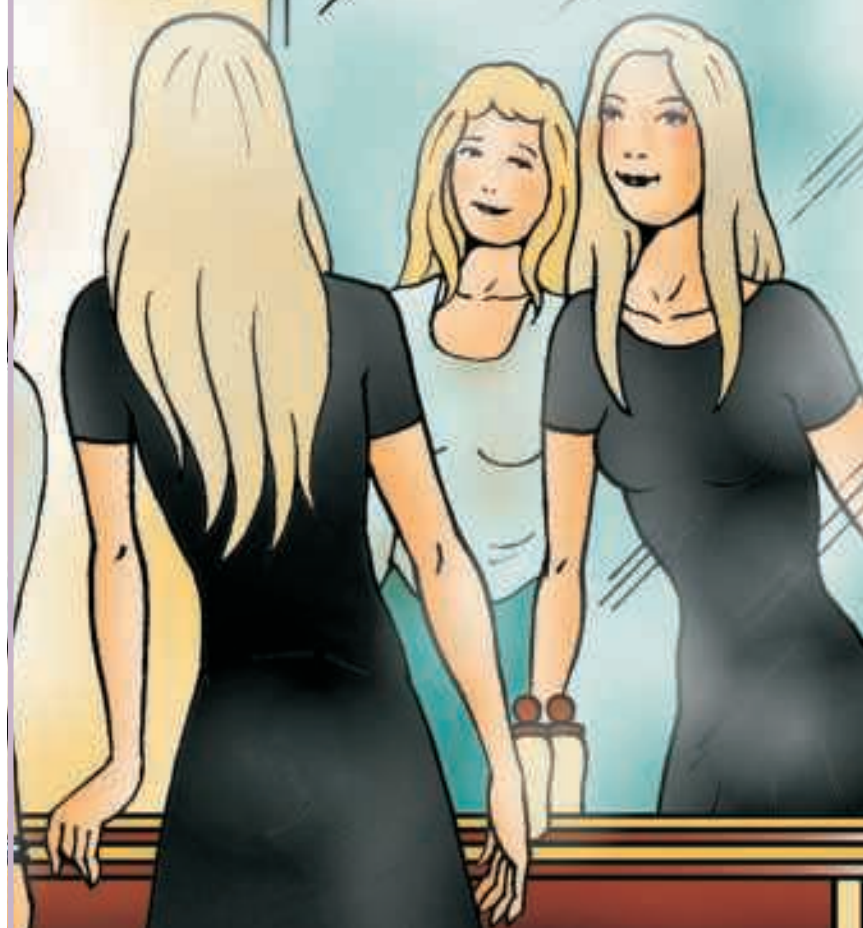


Stepmother in Law



Jessica Matthews



A "Her TV" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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Stepmother in Law

By Jessica Mathews

“I’ve a position waiting for you once you’re qualified.” My stepmother smiled as if it was reassurance rather than a command. “It’s what your father would have wanted.”

“I’ve got the grades,” I said. “I’m on the way to law school. I feel like it’s been my destiny since I was born.”

Of course it was. Bailey and Bailey had been long established in Belleville. Dad wanted me to be a small town lawyer just like he was. He wanted me to be part of the community, looking after their land deal, trusts, and such like. I’d always taken it for granted that I’d qualify and then join the family business.

It wasn’t Dad’s fault that he was the last of the line, so much older than my mother. It wasn’t his fault that he’d married Martha either. He was lonely after Mom got sick and died so it was natural that he’d look for comfort.

Martha had been a godsend. Just out of law school when she joined the firm and junior partner when Mom passed. Junior Partner sounds grander than it was. The firm was small, only the two of them, deal-

ing with small businesses and the occasional court case.

Dad and Martha were the fee earners. The rest of the staff consisted of a secretary receptionist, sometimes a paralegal, and me over the vacations. When Dad passed too, that left Martha and me.

And that's where it all started; with the vacations.

"Jonty, I need you to help me out," Martha called me into her home office.

We were alone and just at the stage of getting used to each other. Martha had been shocked when Dad passed. She's come into the firm expecting to be shielded by Dad until she found her feet. Now she was thrown into everything.

"You know I have to keep the law firm going," she explained. "If it fails, all the loans come due, and we'll lose this house. I don't want that to happen."

"I know you love this house," I replied. "I love it too and it's my last link to Dad. I'll help when I can. You don't have to ask."

"That's really good of you to say that, Jonty." She smiled at me with those big brown eyes. I could tell why Dad fell for her.

"Catherine's on holiday from Monday," Martha explained. "She's away for three weeks, and I've no receptionist."

"That's going to be hard for you," I said. "Do you want me to do the cooking?"

"No, I need you to do more than that," Martha continued. "I need you to take her place for those three weeks."

"Won't your clients think it's wrong if they see me there? I'm sixteen and they'll think I shouldn't be there."

"I know; that's why I've come up with a solution."

"A solution?" I couldn't believe it.

"Yes, you're going to become Catherine's younger sister, just filling in while she's away. I can't afford to pay a staff agency for a replacement."

"But I don't look anything like Catherine," I said, probably sounding puzzled. "Did you say her *sister*?"

"Yes," Martha replied. "I can't have a young boy running the office, although I'm sure that with your computer skills you could do it easily. The clients would wonder if they saw a boy there."

"So how do I look like Catherine's sister?" I asked.

"Easily." Martha smiled as if I was being stupid. "Catherine doesn't have a sister, so no one's going to worry about what she looks like. You, on the other hand, could look as if you *were* Catherine's sister."

"I don't see how."

"Don't worry about it." Martha sat back as if explaining to an idiot. "The right clothes, some makeup and padding. All you have to do is sit behind a desk, take messages, and answer the phone calls. How difficult can that be?"

"It's going to be very difficult." I couldn't believe what she was suggesting. "It's going to be impossible. I don't want to be a girl anyway, not even for three weeks."

"I really need you to do this," Martha said. "Please don't make it difficult. I'll pay you Catherine's rate."

"But I don't look anything like her."

"Listen to me; I already told you that Catherine doesn't have a sister. If she *did* have a sister, she'd be from out of state anyway. All you have to do is look something like a young woman for three weeks."

"I don't think I could do that. I'd look so stupid trying to make like a girl for three weeks."

"I don't think you'd look stupid," Martha said. "I think you'd look really cute."

"I'm not sure I want to look cute," I said, laughing at the sheer stupidity of the idea.

"I'll make you a deal," Martha said. "Let's try to make you look like Catherine's sister and if you still don't think you look cute, I'll have to close the office for three weeks."

So I was under no pressure there. I knew the business was running on a shoestring. I knew we were just clearing our bills and starting to get into profit. I was trapped.

"Okay," I said slowly; reluctance obvious as I said it. "It might be fun to try, but if it's a disaster, I'm not doing it."

"All I can ask is that you try. I realise that it's a big ask, but it's so important that we don't risk losing any business." Martha relaxed a little. "If you're not happy that you look the part after a makeover, you don't have to do it. Agreed?"

"Agreed." We shook hands on the deal but I crossed my fingers, hoping it would fall through.

"I'll make some arrangements," she said.

I put it to the back of my mind, trying to ignore it. I'd never wondered about how girls saw their world before, but I watched them more closely during the next week. I saw them in class. I watched how they walked and how they held their hands. I looked at their clothes and listened to the way they talked.

It was an education all of its own. Their language was so different from mine and their body language was incomprehensible; a gesture or a look could replace a thousand words, but they never stopped talking either.

It wasn't that I didn't find girls attractive; I did, but I didn't know what to say, or how to approach them. I was getting to that stage; some of my friends were starting to date already and more.

I wasn't interested in boys; please don't think that. I'll admit that I was a little immature. I guess I was a late starter, the way some boys are.

Martha was ever so solicitous and kind for the next couple of weeks as the term was coming to an end. She reminded me of my agreement, but didn't push it or make a big deal out of it.

I let it ride and whatever she said, I agreed without taking too much notice of the things I'd agreed to. Maybe that was a mistake.

"It's time to prepare for Catherine's sister," Martha said as we were finishing dinner on that fateful Wednesday evening.

"I guess," I said, showing no enthusiasm. "I promised I'd let you try, so I'll do it, but I don't think it's going to work."

"I think it will," Martha said. "I saw you in the school drama club play. You've a talent for acting. Maybe all you have to do is to think yourself into a part and use a bit of imagination."

"But I was playing an old man," I protested. "This is nothing like that."

"It's the same skills; acting a part that's miles away from your everyday life," Martha tried to encourage me. "Think of tomorrow as your audition, or maybe your camera test."

"Camera test?" That scared me.

"I didn't mean that literally," Martha reassured me. "I've arranged for you to go to Mirabelle's Salon after hours."

"You go there, don't you? That's where the rich kids all want to go." Even I'd heard of the place. "They say it's the best in town."

"So there's nothing but the best for my girl," Martha laughed. "The owner is Anna, a friend of mine from way back. I've told her what we're trying to do and she's really excited. You're to go after hours on Friday, and Saturday, and then on Sunday she'll do the big makeover."

“But there’s another week of school.”

“This is a test on Sunday. If you approve, then the next Sunday, Anna will make you over for the three-week period when you’re going to be working.

“You promised that I can back out if I don’t look right,” I reminded her.

“Yes, and we’re going to stick to that.” Martha smiled. I think she was pleased that I didn’t argue. “If you don’t look like a girl that you’d like to date, it’s all off.”

Thursday evening and Martha had me using a depilatory.

“I want all that hair off you,” she said. “Everything below your eyebrows. We’re lucky that you don’t have any beard growth yet.”

“I’m not hairy,” I protested, wondering what she meant by “lucky.”

“It doesn’t matter; I need you to be smooth all over, even down there.”

I stood as she smeared the cream over the bits I couldn’t reach, then stood in the shower for the time the packet said it needed to work.

It did work, and as I dried myself, I could tell that every little hair had vanished. Even though I’d thought I had no body hair, this felt really different and told me that I *really* had no body hair now.

Friday evening came and Martha drove me to Mirabelle’s.

“Can we go round the block again please?” I asked. “There are some boys from school about to walk past. I don’t want them to see me.”

We circled the block and Martha parked. I took a quick look round and then as she got out of the car, I bolted to the door. Fortunately it was unlocked.

“That was some entrance.” I burst into the salon as fast as I could. Martha followed to find me breathless in a bit of a panic.

“Anna, meet Jonty; Jonty, say hello to Anna.” Martha had followed me and found us staring at each other as she calmly walked in and closed the door,

Martha walked past and flipped the lock. “No one else can get in, if that’s what you’re worried about.” Anna took my hand and smiled genuinely.

“I didn’t want those boys to see me,” I said.

“I’ll make sure they don’t see you, even if they’re looking at you,” Anna replied. “Martha sent me some pictures and your sizes. I think I can make you totally unrecognisable to anyone who knows you.”

“That would be good,” I gasped.

“You may get bothered by some of the boys.” Anna looked at me carefully. “With those eyes and that facial structure, I think you’re going to look stunning.”

“Not too stunning, I hope,” I said lamely.

“I’m a beautician,” Anna replied. “It’s my job to bring out the best in everyone.”

“What are you planning for this evening?” Martha asked.

“I asked you to come so that I can meet Jonty,” Anna said. “I want to take a few pictures and check his measurements. I know that you’ve sent me a lot of information already, but being with the person is always better.”

“I’m really doubtful about this,” I said.

“I can understand why,” Anna agreed. “It must seem like a horrible thing to do.”

“It does.”

“It’s not such a big deal. I think it will go easier if we know each other a little, you can tell me some things about yourself.” Anna nodded to Martha as she spoke to me.

“Shall I come back later?” Martha asked, taking the hint.

“I’ll call you,” Anna said as Martha unlocked the door and went out. Anna locked it again.

“Jonty, I’m really happy to have this chance to do a full makeover. Usually people come in here and tell me what they expect to look like when they go out, and I can’t always do it.”

“It’s like they’re asking the impossible?”

“Exactly; I have to run through the possibilities, without letting them down too far. In your case, you’re not telling me anything.”

“Does that make it difficult?” I asked.

“In some ways, it does.” Anna sat opposite me. “I have a few ideas from the pictures and now that I’ve met you, I can see how things might work.”

“So you’re there already.”

“I’m nowhere near it,” Anna replied. “I’d like you to tell me what kind of girl you’d like to become. You must have thought about it.”

“I don’t know what you want me to say,” I replied. “You’ll probably have all kinds of strange thoughts about me if I could tell you exactly.”

“Telling me exactly could cause problems because I may not be able to do it.” Anna stood and came to stand over me. “Your hair is quite beautiful. How long have you been letting it grow?”

“I always liked it long,” I replied as she took out the band which held it in a low pony tail. “It’s not been cut for ages.”

“I’d guess you keep it in good condition too.” Anna fanned it out as it hung between my shoulder blades.

“I do like it to feel nice,” I said. “And the smell of greasy hair is awful.”

“That’s good. There are a lot of possibilities.” Anna combed it through. “How do you feel about the colour?”

“I haven’t thought about it,” I said. “You’re not planning to dye it, are you?” I felt apprehensive at the thought.

“I think that would be really nice,” Anna said. “I could do something really special and you can always dye it back afterwards. It would help as a disguise too.”

“How would it do that?”

“If you were to choose a colour that girls really love, it would shout that you *were* a girl. It would also say that you couldn’t be a boy in disguise, because a boy would never risk a colour like this.” Anna held out a strip of colour swatches.

“I’ve never thought of that,” I replied, with a tremor of something running through me. I couldn’t tell if it was excitement or fear.

“Would you let me try it?” Anna thumbed a couple of the shades and held them out to me. “I think it would be great if you would. Your hair could be one of your best features and one of your best disguises too.”

“I’ll think about it,” I said.

In truth, I liked the idea. It was the concept of disguise that appealed to me, but then I wondered if Anna was only saying that to lead me on.

“You don’t take care of your nails.” Anna took my hands and scrutinised them. “You’d have to do something about that. Let’s walk round the salon and I’ll show you where we do things.”

She took me round. I saw the backwash stations and the seats in front of the huge mirrors. I saw the driers, then in another part of the salon, the place where nails were treated.

“We can make your nails look really nice.” Anna showed me some colour charts in nail shapes. She held one and then another over mine.

“They’re a bit long.”

“That’s fashion.” Anna laughed at my naivety. “It’s no use having tiny nails when you can have striking ones that catch the eye.”

“I’d never get my hands in my pockets,” I said.

“You don’t have pockets,” Anna replied. “You have a purse, big enough to carry all your makeup and anything else a boy might think to put in your pocket, except it’s not boy stuff, it’s girl stuff.”

I looked at the display of jewellery as we passed it. There were display cases at the side of the salon. Anna saw me looking.

“Have you got pierced ears?” she asked. “Most boys your age do.”

“I never got enough courage.”

“It doesn’t need courage,” Anna said. “There’s no pain and it’s done in an instant. Would you like me to do yours? I can right now.”

“What would Martha say?” I asked.

She’d probably congratulate you.”

“Okay, let’s do it,” I said on impulse.

Before I had time to change my mind, I had two sets of gold studs in each ear. “There’s a lot to this girl stuff,” I said.

“There’s a lot to learn but I think if you look the part, people will treat you as if you really are what you appear to be.”

“Do you really think that, or are you just saying it to make me feel better?”

“Not at all; if you look like a pretty girl, you’ll be treated like one. I think that the prettier I can make you, then the easier you’ll find it. Other people will react to you and keep you in character,” Anna said.

“My drama teacher said something like that,” I replied. “We got a lecture about getting into character

and method acting. I didn't really understand it at the time, but you're saying something like that now."

"I had no idea that I was talking about acting, but I've dealt with makeovers and actors before. They say that looking the part is really important," Anna replied. "It's something to do with security in the role."

"Start with the shoes." I remembered a quotation that went something like that.

"Give a girl the right shoes and she can conquer the world," Anna said. "I think Marilyn Monroe said that."

"I knew I remembered it wrong."

"You were almost there and it's something to remember," Anna said. "The right shoes transform your body language. If they feel right, you'll feel right too."

"I'm really worried about that," I said. "Girls wear heels. Martha wears heels to the office; so does Catherine. How do I cope with that?"

"Practice and balance," Anna laughed. "And they'll nip your toes and make your ankles ache."

"That's awful."

"Maybe it is; but once you've mastered heels, you'll never want to wear anything else. They have a power all of their own."

"Why do they have power?"

"Men don't wear them," Anna replied.

"Do you want me to call Martha?" Anna asked. "I'd like to talk to you a little more if you don't mind."

"I'm happy to stay," I said. "I was really scared of meeting you, but somehow it doesn't seem so daunting when we're talking it through."

“One of the main differences you’re going to get used to is makeup,” Anna said. “I’m not going to do much tonight, but I’d like you to experience something.”

“What did you have in mind?” I asked nervously.

“I’m going to put some mascara on your eyelashes; nothing else.”

Anna took a tube from the side and came to me. She told me how to hold my eyes and where to look as she stroked a black wand over my lashes. I blinked a few times, feeling the weight of my lashes. I was suddenly very conscious of it.

“That’s amazing.” I looked in the mirror. “I never thought something so simple could make such a big difference.

“So, you’re suddenly a girl,” Anna said. “What’s your name?”

“I’ve no idea,” I replied. “Is it important?”

“Of course it’s important. It’s what you call yourself. Is Olivia too serious, is Charlotte too common?”

“What about Madeleine?” I don’t know why I asked that.

“That’s really good.” Anna replied. “That’s your name, now we have to decide what sort of girl she is.”

“That’s difficult,” I replied.

“I think you’ll find your personality when we’ve decided on your look,” Anna said. “You said that your drama teacher said something about getting into character. You can be dark and serious, sandy haired and flaky, blonde and play it cool; anything you want to be.”

“Do I have to decide?”

“It would give me some idea of how to make you over.”

“What do you think?”

"I would love to make you into a tawny blonde or maybe one of these really fashionable grey blondes; the sort of girl with precise makeup and perfect nails. You'd wear something figure hugging, with heels of course in the office. You'd wear tasteful jewellery and good perfume. You'd act a bit haughty and untouchable."

"Could I do all that?" I asked.

"Think about it." Anna closed her eyes to make the picture. "You'd be a bit dismissive if anyone, any man that is, tries to get your attention. It might save you from problems."

"But I'm too young for that," I said. "I'm sixteen, not twenty-six."

"I understand. I was letting my fantasy get the better of me." Anna nodded wisely. "So you'll be something similar; but we dress you younger, and you're going to look a bit less refined."

"I think I'm going to wait until you've done everything." I said. "I can work out my character when I know what I look like."

"That's a good idea." Anna thought about it. "I'd better let you work it out yourself."

"I'll call Martha." Anna reached for her mobile. "We've done a lot tonight."

"I didn't think we'd done anything," I said. "We've only been chatting."

"You've got your ears pierced."

"I know, but twice? That's going to cause a problem at school."

"They'll think nothing of it," Anna assured me. "Lots of boys have more."

"But we've done nothing," I persisted.

"You've been lovely," Anna said. "We've talked a lot through and I know what I'm going to do. Wait until tomorrow."

"Is that a threat?"

“No, it’s a promise and you’ll enjoy it all; I promise.”

“Wow, just look at you.” Martha picked me up outside Mirabelle’s salon. “Love those eyes.”

“Don’t embarrass me,” I said.

“I’m sorry, I was so surprised at how big your eyes look,” Martha said.

We drove in silence for some time. I could tell that she was bursting to ask questions but didn’t know how to start in case she upset me. Did I tell you that she was pretty supportive and usually on my side?

“How did you like Anna?” she said at last.

“She was really nice,” I said. “We talked and talked. I was really nervous at first but she chattered and seemed interested in whatever you expect her to do.”

“I haven’t given her any precise instruction.” Martha squeezed my hand and smiled at me. “I asked her to help you along, that’s all.”

“But you did tell her that I was going to be a girl?”

“Of course, but I asked her to let you be your kind of girl. I didn’t want her to make something out of you that was too uncomfortable.”

“You think I can be comfortable with this?” I asked. “I’ve agreed to do it, but I’m not sure that ‘comfortable’ is the right word.”

“I think you’re really intelligent and talented,” Martha said. “I’m grateful that you’re doing this. It’s going to save the firm a lot. What I meant is that I wanted you to have some choices within what we agreed.”

“I think Anna was really interesting.” I thawed a little at that point. “She listened and asked me all

sorts of questions that I never ever thought could be relevant.”

“Did you come to any conclusions?”

“Not really. I’m going to be called Madeleine when I’m a girl, but you can call me Maddie for short. Tomorrow is a tryout day whatever that means, then Madeleine is going to emerge on Sunday.”

“And she’ll be ready for work on Monday week,” Martha said. “I think that you’ve decided that you can be cute as a girl?”

“Yes,” I admitted. “I’m going to be really cute.”

I hadn’t really thought that through, but having met Anna, I thought it could be interesting; scary but interesting.

I was like a cat on a hot tin roof all through the next day. I couldn’t settle at all. I tried the computer; then I tried Facebook, but what can you say to anyone when your whole world is going to be changed.

“Who is Madeleine?” I asked Martha. “I’m going to be asked for some backstory at some point. We need something to say to people who’re expecting to see Catherine.”

“She’s my cousin’s daughter from out of the state,” Martha replied. “She’s finished High School and she’s having some time out.”

“She’s thinking of drama school,” I said. “That’s so I can talk about something I know a bit about.”

“She’s broken up with her boyfriend and it’s too painful to talk about. She caught him cheating with her best friend.”

“She’s come to fill in here because she doesn’t want to keep bumping into him and his friends back home.”

“If anyone wants to talk about her past, she won’t reply. It’s all too painful.” Martha said.

“That sounds good and if anyone asks me, I can say that Maddie hasn’t confided any more than that.”

“We may have to compare notes when it happens but that sounds believable.”

Martha dropped me at Mirabelle’s early that evening. Anna was waiting for me and this time she hugged me and kissed me on both cheeks like I’d seen girlfriends doing when they met. It seemed kind of nice in a way that I wasn’t used to.

“I’m going to get you to try several outfits and shoes today,” Anna said. “I want to get sizes and lengths right and walking in heels is a big thing to get used to.”

“I thought I was going to be made over today,” I said.

“We have the luxury of a bit of time,” Anna said. “I don’t want you looking like you’ve put on a dress for the first time when you have to go out of here. You’re sixteen; girls of your age have spent sixteen years of practising to be girls and young ladies.”

“Except for those girls who out jock the jocks for being tough,” I interrupted.

“Not every girl is a princess,” Anna laughed. “But it’s a good thing that some want to be or I’d be out of business.”

“I understand.” I looked at the rack of clothes at the back of the shop and the bags underneath. “It’s a dress rehearsal.”

“That’s right.” Anna waved at the clothes. “I get a lot of samples from several manufacturers. I sell a lot of clothes and shoes through the shop. Mostly it’s through direct orders, but there’s always samples and things to try on here. Shoes too, but some are far too small to be useful.”

“So where do we start?” I asked.

“With you naked.” Anna grinned. “Don’t worry; I’ve seen it all before, so no false modesty. Let’s be business-like.”

“I’m really pleased that Martha didn’t hang around,” I said as I stood in my birthday suit and Anna watched me pulling up a tiny elastic thing called a gaff.

“She had her instructions.” Anna helped pull it up at the back. “It should be really tight so that your equipment doesn’t bulge at the front. If you try later, not now, you should be able to push your testicles into their cavity and tuck things back so that it’s really smooth.”

“That sounds like it’s going to make my eyes water.”

“That’s why I said to try it later, maybe at home when you’ve time.” Anna looked critically at my profile. “If you can do it, keep it tucked for the whole day, or as long as you can.”

“Then it should get easier,” I said, wincing at the pressure.

“That’s what I’m told, although I have no direct experience.”

I stood, tightly confined and took a few faltering steps. It didn’t feel so good.

“I think you need a break.” Anna saw me trying not to stand in a stupid posture and handed me a robe.

“Feeling better?” Anna passed me a coffee.

“I’ve felt better, but it’s much easier now,” I replied. “Are you sure it’s necessary?”

“You’ll see when you’re trying on the clothes later,” Anna said. “I want to see what kinds of things suit your frame. But first we have to decide what size bra you’re going to be wearing, and if we need to squeeze your waist in with a corset.”

“That’s very female.” I wasn’t sure if I was comfortable with the idea. “Would a girl of my age wear a corset anyway?”

“You’re going to be pretending to be a girl about twenty-two,” Anna said. “You can’t be a sixteen-year-old doing the receptionist’s job.”

“Do you think I can do that?” I wondered out loud. “Twenty-two; I’ve no idea what a twenty-two-year-old girl would be like. I’d guess all boyfriends and hairstyles.”

“You may be right but when I’ve finished with you, you should be able to talk hair and makeup, maybe dresses and shoes; I don’t know about the boys though.”

“So there’s a flaw in the planning,” I said.

“I’m sure you’ll manage. It’s not as if you’ll be meeting anyone you know.” Anna stood and walked to the rack of clothing. “Let’s get on with it, shall we; underwear first.”

“I don’t know anything about girl’s underwear.”

“My, we have led a sheltered life, haven’t we?” Anna smiled knowingly. “I’d bet you know far more than you’d admit. There’s bound to be some of those magazines floating around in school, and if not, the internet and movies will have given you some idea.”

“Okay, you win,” I admitted. “I have some ideas.”

“Think of this as your practical instruction.” Anna held out a bra. “You never know, learning how to put this on may come in useful when you’re trying to persuade someone to take theirs off.”

Before I had time to say anything more, the robe was removed and the bra was fastened behind me. It felt strange around my chest. It felt even stranger a moment later.

“These are breast forms,” she explained. “They come in all kinds of sizes and some different shapes. Ladies with tiny breasts use them to pad themselves out.”

“They feel like stiff jelly.” I gingerly squeezed one.

“They’re silicone-filled, just like implants. They’re meant to mimic a real breast.” Anna slipped one into each side of the bra. The weight on my chest and shoulders was instantly making me alter my posture.

“Won’t they fall out?” I asked.

“They won’t if they’re glued to your chest.” Anna took them out and replaced them with different ones.

“These are much heavier,” I complained.

“What I want to do is find a size which looks proportional and that you’re happy with.”

“Happy could be a relative term.” I adjusted the way the cups lay on my chest.

“These will make you unhappy.” Anna slipped really heavy ones into the cups. They were far too large to fit inside. “I can get a bra to fit these if you like them.”

“You’re kidding.”

“It’s some people’s fantasy.” Anna took them out and replaced them with tiny ones. “These are some girl’s real size.”

“They hardly show,” I said. “Is that for real?”

“Would I lie to you?” Anna joked. “That’s why some girls buy these silicone enhancers.”

“I’m confused.” I took them out. “What size should I be?”

“I think these will look right. They’re what a girl would call a B cup. They’re smaller but still noticeable.”

“They’ve got to be noticeable?” I asked.

“It’s pretty standard. You don’t want to be too big; it might attract the wrong sort of attention. Men can be pigs sometimes.”

“I read about that.” I thought a moment. “You don’t think I’m going to be harassed, do you?”

“Sadly, it goes with the territory. You have to be prepared for hands to intrude where they shouldn’t. Whistles and cat calls are every attractive girl’s burden.”

“Am I going to be attractive?”

“I’ll have failed badly if you’re not.” Anna pointed to the sign above her mirror. “This is a beauty salon after all.”

“I guess you’re right.” I relaxed. “I’ve said I’ll do this, so carry on, do your worst... or best.”

Once the bra size was decided, the rest was comparatively easy, except that the breast forms fell out as I dressed.

“That settles it.” Anna picked one up again. “You’re going to have them glued on.”

“That sounds a little bit further than I want to go,” I objected.

“How far do you want one to fall when you’re with people?” Anna asked.

Of course, I conceded there and then. Glue was the order of the day from that moment on, with no argument from me.

“Can I have a rest please?” I asked after trying on skirts and blouses, dresses and jackets galore.

They all had to be paired with scarves and jewellery, shoes and purses. My mind was in a complete whirl. I had to learn what would look good together and what never to wear with something else. I had to know when to wear heels and boy, did that take some getting used to.

“Poor boy,” Anna said as I flopped down into a chair.

I was wearing a bra and panties over the gaff. I had a pale blue blouse and a denim skirt, tight to the

knees like a pencil. I had tights, and blue wedge sandals with a cork sole about three inches high. I could manage to walk in that.

“At least you didn’t say poor *girl*.” I saw a smile spread to Anna’s face at the joke.

“Tell you what we’ll do.” Anna looked at me carefully. “You’re tired of all this changing clothes. I’ve a good idea of where you’re going. Why don’t you get dressed in your own stuff and relax for a while.”

We sat for a while, chatting about nothing really. Anna was easy to talk to and she had a fund of stories about her clients and their peculiar demands. She made me promise not to repeat them. I noticed her looking at me intently as we spoke.

“Why don’t I make you up so that you know what makeup feels like when it’s on your face?”

“Will it feel different?” I had no idea.

“Of course it will feel different. It’s a lovely feeling to have someone do your makeup. Girls do it for each other all the time. It’s how they learn what looks well and more importantly, how to apply it properly.”

“Is this another thing that I’ll have to learn in a couple of weeks?”

“Probably, but you’re a quick learner. Martha tells me that you’re quite artistic, so maybe you’ll find it all so easy.”

Okay, what do I have to do?” I asked.

“Sit here in front of the mirror. I’ll tell you what I’m using and how I’m doing it.”

“Please don’t expect me to remember it all.”

“I don’t,” Anna replied. “I thought you’d like to see yourself all made-up. Martha’s coming to pick you up, so we’ll give her a surprise.”

“Oh yes, please,” I said. I was in that sort of mood.

“Do you want a really full makeup, or something light and subtle?”

“Let’s do it all,” I said, secretly thinking that this might change Martha’s mind about her plans for me.

“Are you sure about this?” Anna asked as I sat in front of her huge mirror with all the lights around. “This look may rock the foundations of your world.”

“Are you that good?” I joked. “You’ve not got a great starting point.”

“It’s not where we start from; it’s where we end up,” Anna put on a growling voice. “Whatever game we’re playing, I’m going to win.”

“And we’ll scare Martha.”

“Of course.” Anna started to moisturise my face, then she looked more closely. “I’m going to tidy up your eyebrows a bit. Don’t worry; no one’s going to notice that a few stray hairs have gone.”

“I’m not so sure about this,” I said; trying to look at my right eyebrow as Anna seemed to have been working on it for quite a while.

“Don’t worry,” she said. “I’ll have to work on the other one anyway; you’d look really strange with them so uneven.”

“What do you mean by so uneven,” I asked, suddenly worried. “Have you taken such a lot off?”

“Not really, but no one’s going to notice because they’ll look the same.”

“I guess I let myself in for this,” I said, not quite believing that no one would notice.

I sat quietly as she worked to even them up, then sat quietly as she worked through foundation and shading.

“It looks really weird,” I said, watching the stripes of different colours across my face.

“The magic is in the blending.” Anna drew lines at the side and then on top of my nose. “You’ll have to

learn a little of this, but maybe not as much as I'm doing."

"Eyes and eyebrows are next," Anna announced.

She seemed satisfied with her progress so far. I glanced at the clock. It had been half an hour. "What time is Martha coming?" I asked.

"I'm going to call her when we've finished," Anna said. "I think she's going to be pleasantly surprised when she sees you."

"If she doesn't faint with the shock," I replied.

"Being serious for a moment, I don't think she saw the same potential in you that I did. She thinks you'll be quite plain and normal. I think you're going to be stunning. You'll have to beat the boys away with a stick."

"That's not something I'm planning." I felt a frisson of fright. "Can you tone it down a bit, or maybe tone it down a *lot*?"

"This is only for fun. I'm enjoying myself. Usually clients tell me how they want things done. With you, I've free rein to do what I think's going to be best."

"You mean that I've released your creative side?"

"That's it exactly. It's so much more interesting. As I'm doing this, I'm thinking of all the alternative ways I could do your makeup and how different hairstyles would make you look."

"It's a pity that I'm not a real girl," I said. "If I was, maybe I'd enjoy it. It seems such a lot of work for the three weeks that I have to work in Mom's office."

"Don't worry; you're worth it," Anna said. "Maybe you'll get the bug and want to know all the other things I could do."

"Like monsters. I bet you could do something amazing for Halloween."

"Okay, I'll make you into something for Halloween, but only if you'll come and let me do this again. I'm

really enjoying having someone who simply allows me to get on with it.”

“Are you really enjoying it? This is a Saturday evening. You should be going out somewhere.”

“That’s another story and you’re not going to hear it.” Anna’s face suddenly clouded. She stopped and turned away for a moment. “I learn how to do these things by doing them. That’s why working with you is so good.”

As she was talking, she was working on my eye makeup. I saw shades and shapes as my eyelids turned darker and looked tremendously bigger.

I looked up and down when I was told; opened and closed my eyes, and held rigidly still as she drew black lines over and under the eye. When I saw the mascara, I knew what to do.

“Would you like to try some false eyelashes?”

“Do you think I could?”

The idea appealed to me instantly. I’d heard the girls in class arguing about who could do the best ones and who hadn’t glued them properly. It was one of those mysteries that fill girls’ lives.

“I’ll get some.” She opened a drawer, looked through the contents and then held a box for me to look at. “These are wispiest,” she said. “They’re quite long and really stand out. They may make your eyes water but that will pass when you’re used to wearing them.”

“Will they hurt?” I asked.

“No; you’ll be conscious of them on your eyelid for a while, then when you’re used to them, you’ll forget that they’re there.”

“They look so fragile. How does anyone get them on?”

“It’s a skill you’ll soon learn.”

I watched as she squeezed some glue onto the edge of the false lash. She waved it in the air, and held it

for a while. "I'm allowing the glue to set," she explained.

And then it was on my eyelid. I blinked a few times and saw the difference in the mirror. Anna set the second one on the other eye.

"There are false lashes to go underneath as well, but that's a bit excessive for this evening." Anna compared left and right and did something to them with tweezers.

I sat rigidly still, hardly daring to breathe.

"A final coat of mascara will blend them in with your own lashes." Anna held the wand again. "This is going to sound silly; they always look false but the trick is to make them look as natural and as exaggerated as possible."

"I don't know what you mean, but I think you've done that," I said.

I looked in the mirror, marvelling at how I looked. I think that I was being seduced into the joys of makeup right there and then. As I look back, I think that was the moment when the trapdoor slipped open and I fell through, but maybe that's for later.

"All we have to do it your lips," Anna said. "I'll call Martha and by the time she's here, you'll be finished and you won't have had time to mess it up."

"I won't mess it up."

"You will; you'll touch your eyes, or smudge your lips. More likely, you'll nibble and lick at your lips until all the lipstick is gone."

"How about if I promise not to?"

"You'll do it anyway."

I watched as she outlined my lips, making them look larger by drawing outside the natural lip line. She used a brush to fill in the lines, using two shades. The middle looked shinier and glossier. I like that look.

“Don’t be so vain,” Anna laughed at me. She’d caught me examining my face in the mirror. “You can have your lips plumped up if you like.”

I knew what she meant. “One of the seniors had her lips done last year. I wasn’t impressed; they looked wrong, although I didn’t get to see them close-up. Maybe she’d had them done too large. She always was a show-off.”

“You can be much more subtle than that,” Anna said. “Sometimes a little enhancement can look perfect.”

“That wouldn’t go down well in school,” I replied. “I know one or two of the girls have had that done. There’s always one of their friends that lets the cat out of the bag even if they’re sworn to secrecy.”

“A small enhancement can be really nice, but a big one is generally a bit strange looking,” Anna replied. “I do it here in the salon. I had to train and get a certificate but I won’t do really big lips. I send them away if they want that.”

Martha looked at me, as if marking her work out. She played with my hair, combing it one way and then the other.

“You’ve really nice hair,” she said. “Let me loosen it and then spray a bit of style into it. Martha should be here any moment.”

Martha was truly amazed when she saw me. I saw the looks she and Anna exchanged when they thought I wasn’t looking.

I wore the makeup to go home and kept it on until bedtime. I know I shouldn’t have, but it felt so good. I liked the look and the feel of my hair flowing loosely. I was so sad when I had to ask Martha to help me take it off to go to bed.

Sunday morning came all too soon. After the excitement of the previous night, I wondered if I’d been carried away with the novelty of it all. I loved the



makeup. I loved the incredible feelings I got from looking at a female version of myself.

Much as I loved these things, I was afraid of the reality of being female for an extended period. I knew I looked good, but how other people would react to me was something which made me apprehensive.

“This is a big day.” Martha was ever so enthusiastic. “I’m going to meet my assistant for the first time.”

“You saw me in full makeup last night,” I reminded her.

“Yes, but that was a super fantasy,” she replied. “Today, I get to see what you’re going to look like on a regular basis.”

“I don’t really see any difference,” I replied, realising as I said it that she was right.

“There’s a huge difference between dressing up as a one-off, and living the part for three weeks.”

“I’m really trapped in this,” I said as I understood my position.

“Don’t worry,” Martha said. “Today’s really a dress rehearsal. I’ve no doubt that you’ll be absolutely fine but Anna wants to make sure that you look perfect.”

“I’ve agreed to do it, so I’ll be perfect,” I replied nervously. “Please stop winding me up. I’ve a week of school to get through anyway.”

“That’s why today’s so important,” Martha said. “I can’t have you embarrassing me when you’re actually in the office. Get used to the idea; you’re going to be the office girl, period.”

I didn’t say more. She was so determined and I didn’t want any argument.

The drive over to Anna’s studio was silent. I didn’t know what to say to break the silence. I didn’t know that I wanted to talk some more anyway. I was so afraid of what I’d let myself in for.

Anna was like a breath of fresh air when we arrived. She hugged and kissed us both and held onto my hand as we sat and talked the day through.

“From now on, you’re Maddie,” she told me. “If I say Jonty, you ignore it; it’s not your name anymore.” She turned to Martha. “The same goes for you; it’s Maddie all the way from this minute on.”

“I understand what you want,” Martha said. “It’s like immersion. Once Jonty’s gone, Maddie takes over.”

“And Jonty’s gone for the rest of the day,” Anna replied.

With that, it was like I was struck by a whirlwind. I was stripped in no time. I dressed myself, tucking you-know-what away inside a tight elastic dancers’ gaff. Panties and tights followed. I felt embarrassed as I stood there whilst Anna and Martha discussed me like an exhibit in a museum.

Anna won. I felt really strange as I sat back in her special chair. She tilted it back so that I was lying rather than sitting. I watched as she marked my chest.

“These are a girl’s best friends.” She held out two boxes to me. “One is your left breast; the other is your right.”

“Are these the silicone ones you told me about?” I asked lamely.

“Correct, and we’re going to glue them in place,” she said.

“Must you glue them?” I asked.

“Yes, I want you to get used to the feel and I don’t want you to be thinking about what to do if they start to slip from your bra.”

“That’s sensible,” Martha said. “That would get the firm talked about and no mistake.”

“They will come off this evening?” I asked.

“Don’t worry; you’re not going to school with breasts this week,” Anna laughed. “Maybe you could after the holidays?”

I didn’t make me feel good, hearing talk like that, but then I got a picture in my mind. I was talking to someone as Maddie and trying to hide a falling boob at the same time. It seemed so ridiculous.

“Will they feel real?” I asked.

“How could I tell?” Anna laughed. “Mine grew and they always feel real. Especially when...”

“Don’t go there,” Martha stopped her in mid-sentence.

“They’ll warm to the heat of your body,” Anna continued. “They’ll move as you move and you’ll soon be so used to the feelings that you won’t notice them.”

“I’m not so sure.” I looked at them in her hands.

“That’s what the publicity says.” Anna smiled. “I’m sure the advertising couldn’t be misleading.”

She sprayed the backs of the breast forms with an aerosol. “It’s surgical glue,” she explained. “It shouldn’t cause any irritation, and without the solvent, they should be secure for ages.”

“I hope you’ve plenty solvent,” I said. “I’m in class all next week.”

She gave me a look as if to tell me not to be stupid, then the first breast was placed on my right. She lifted my hand to support it and repeated the process on my left. My other hand was lifted into place too.

“Hold on for a few minutes,” she told me as she inspected the join to my skin, touching up and pressing as she worked round. I lay there, feeling increasingly stupid as Martha watched.

“Okay, you can let go now,” she said a few minutes later.

My hands fell back and for the first time I could feel the weight on my chest. “Is this what breasts feel

like?” I asked, to be answered by pulled faces and a laugh.

The weight was really unexpected, probably because it was all on my skin. I knew that girls had different muscles and guessed that they didn't feel anything like I was feeling. Anna came towards me with a bra and wordlessly held it out for me to put my arms inside the straps. She fastened the back and adjusted the straps.

“Suddenly, that feels more comfortable., I said, putting my hands under the cups to feel the weight. “Are you sure they aren't too big?”

“They'll go with your image as the office junior,” Martha said. “You're expected to be a little vain and to be very aware that you're on display as clients come into the reception where you'll be working.”

“When you're dressed properly, you'll feel different.” Anna held out a dark grey dress for me to step into.”

“Why can't I wear trousers and a blouse?” I asked as I stepped into it. “I think that would be so much easier.”

“Maybe it would be easier, but you'd inevitably start walking as a boy. Your posture wouldn't be right and a dress will always remind you who you're supposed to be.”

“Martha is right.” Anna pulled the zip up my back and settled the neckline against my breasts. “Remember to walk like a girl. Lead from your hips, not your shoulders. Some heels should help to adjust your posture but it's going to need some practise.”

“Isn't this a lot of trouble for three weeks?”

“It may be, but you're worth it,” Anna replied. “I am really enjoying the challenge of preparing you for the role.”

I turned to look at my reflection in the mirror. I looked so wrong. An elegant semi-formal office dress with a real figure but barefoot, and with my head and short hair above the slashed neckline.

“Stop admiring yourself,” Anna smiled. “Let’s get down to the real work.” She held a cape which I allowed her to fasten around my neck.

“Martha’s going to get your shoes and select some jewellery to go with your image,” Anna said. “When she’s done that, she’ll be fixing some glue-on nails. I’m going to be doing your daytime makeup at the same time.”

“Why the rush?” I asked.

It all seemed to be happening at once. I saw Martha and Anna exchange looks and wondered what they had planned. Whatever it was, I guessed that I wasn’t going to like it.

“When you’re ready and we’re satisfied, we’re going to take you out for some shopping, followed by dinner,” Martha replied.

I pulled my face in distaste. “It’s not to punish you, don’t think that,” she continued. “It’s simply to show you that no one’s going to think anything out of the ordinary as you do the things that Maddie would do every day.”

Anna worked on my face. She started with my eyelashes.

“Please don’t make them look too girlish,” I pleaded. “Remember I have a week’s school to get through.”

“No one’s going to notice,” Anna replied. “I’m only taking the stray hairs and tidying them up. Most people aren’t observant anyway.” I watched as she plucked, trying not to complain when she took several at once.

I thought she thinned them too much. They looked much higher above my eyes when she pronounced herself satisfied and then started on the makeup proper. I watched in the mirror as the contours seemed to change the shape. My nose looked thinner

and perkier and my face had some higher cheekbones.

I tried to keep as still as I could when she started on my eyes. It wasn't easy because Martha held up some black heels with ankle straps and started to fasten them to my feet. I watched as my eyelids were shaded in warm browns, with thin black eyeliner under and over.

"Am I to have false lashes today?" I asked.

"Would you like to?" Anna asked, seeming to be a little surprised at the request.

"Please," I replied. "You said I should get used to wearing them."

"You'll find these easier." Anna rummaged through a drawer. "They're not as heavy as the ones I used yesterday."

I sat as still as I could as she applied glue, waved them about, then gently laid them against my own lashes. When they were in place, mascara bound them to my own lashes.

"They're much less noticeable than yesterday." I examined them closely in the mirror.

"That's the idea." Anna checked that they were adhering properly. "This is daytime and office looks have to be more restrained."

"Let me finish your eyebrows and lips." Anna looked at me closely again.

Quite quickly, my brows became heavier and more arched. My lips became fuller and shinier, without being deeply coloured. It was a bit pink, but more peach or apricot. How do you expect me to describe these things anyway?

"He's getting really vain," Martha added. "He'll never leave home without full makeup by the time these three weeks are over."

"I wouldn't bet on that," I replied.

“How do you like your nails?” Martha asked, changing the subject before I could complain again.

“They look very real,” I replied, looking at the extended nails. They were red and shiny and felt really tightly fastened over mine. “I’ll never cope with pockets with these nails.”

“It’s probably as well that you’ll be carrying a purse,” Anna held a black satchel bag out. “The shoulder strap gives you somewhere to put one hand as you steady it.”

“But how do I deal with my mobile and the computer keyboard.” I looked from one to the other.

“You’ll adapt.” Martha held out her hand. “My nails are much longer. I type with the balls of my fingers rather than the tips. You’ll find it easy after a couple of days.”

I looked at my hands. “Something in that makes me feel afraid.”

“You can try later,” Martha said finally.

There was to be no more discussion. I was stuck in more ways than I cared to contemplate.

“This wig is the nearest I can find to the hairstyle you’re going to have next week.” Anna shook out a hairpiece. “Because we’re going out, I’m going to fix it carefully so that there are no accidents.”

“I like that colour,” Martha said. “It’s a real young girl’s colour.”

“That’s what makes me afraid.” I suddenly remembered that I was going to be out in public.

“No, that’s good,” Anna said. “It’s not a boy’s colour. It’s fun and vibrant. It’s a young girl’s blonde, but tawny. It will attract admiring looks but not the stares that a platinum blonde would get.”

“And that’s next week,” Martha added wickedly.

I didn’t rise to the bait. I sat back and watched as Anna put a close - elastic cap over my hair. She secured it at the front and sides with pieces of tape.

“This wig has a lace front.” She showed me. “I’m going to trim the lace so that only a tiny fraction is left.”

“I watched as she trimmed it, then she tried it on my head, looked from side to side and then took it off again.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Nothing’s wrong. I think it’s going to be perfect. I’m going to put a little glue on your forehead, just at your hairline. The lace will sit there and you won’t have to worry about it falling off.”

Anna held the wig away from my head in front of my ears. “A bit more glue here,” she said. “I think you’d need to trim your sideburns back a bit more if you were going to wear wigs regularly.”

“Wouldn’t that be better than dying my hair?” I saw a glimmer of hope there. Maybe I wouldn’t be stuck as a girl every day.

“No, it’s too risky,” Martha replied. “A proper colour job would be so safe and secure. With a wig, anything could happen no matter how carefully we fix it and fasten it. You could catch it and pull it loose, or worse, someone could pull it for a joke.”

She pressed the wig into place and stood back to inspect her work.

“You’d always be conscious that it was a wig. With a proper colour, you’d never have to worry,” Martha said.

“Until it’s getting time to touch up your roots,” Anna added. “Hair grows quite fast.”

“But I’m not going to need a touch up in three weeks, am I?” I asked.

“Maybe.” Anna shrugged. “I don’t know how fast your hair grows and anyway, you may decide to stay blonde.”

“No way.” I gasped at the thought. “I’m going back to being myself as soon as I can.”

“Let me fit these.” Martha looked meaningfully at Anna, then held up some earring and began to pull and twist my ear.

I squealed as she dug something into my earlobe. “Sorry,” she said as if she didn’t really mean it.

Both were fixed and Anna began to brush through my hair. She combed and smoothed, sprayed a little and pulled some pieces so that it lay over my forehead and in front of my ears. I seemed to have so much hair and earrings partly covered by it all.

“Please let this be easy.” I said silently to myself.

Shopping they called it. We wandered from one dress shop to another; tried perfumes from a dozen or more samples, and browsed the makeup counters of endless department stores.

“Smile,” I was told. “This is what we girls do for fun.”

“It’s a bonding ritual,” Anna confided. “You don’t have to say anything meaningful but you have to show that you’re taking it seriously and enjoying it.”

“Try saying something like, ‘that perfume is so you.’” Martha sprayed a little on my wrist.

“Or say that any man would find that irresistible,” Anna tried another.

“It seems that as long as I say something, then I’ll be part of the group that I’m with.” I was beginning to understand a little of the girl bonding ritual. “I never understood why girls hang around in groups.”

“It’s to keep them safe from the wolves,” Martha replied. “Men hunt in packs and we girls have to defend ourselves somehow.”

“Until we find the right predator,” Anna added. “And then we can pretend to have been cornered.”

“Devoured,” Martha Laughed. “And the poor guy thinks he’s made all the running.”

“Do girls really think like that?” I asked.

“Forget the helpless images,” Anna said. “Girls can take this so seriously.”

“And even though we make mistakes...”

“Cody was a real mistake.” Anna waved a finger at Martha.

“Cody who?” I asked.

“Never you mind,” Martha told me. “Take care not to make mistakes. Try to think of the guy in his socks. If you can stand that image, maybe he’s right for you.”

“But right today doesn’t mean right always,” Anna added. “Be prepared to dump the guy and run. Your girlfriends will protect you.”

“Comfort you,” Martha amplified.

“And probably point you to the next big mistake,” Anna laughed. “It’s the way the world goes round.”

“Aren’t you being cynical?” I asked. “Doesn’t love come into it?”

“Maybe, but diamonds are a girl’s best friend.” Anna took a bow. “Always be prepared for some guy to take advantage and make sure you take it first.”

“But I’m not a girl,” I protested. “I don’t want a guy.”

“You’ll find out soon enough,” Martha said. “They don’t really care what *you* want. They’ll try anything.”

“Now I’m really scared,” I said.

“No need.” Martha hugged me. “Girls always win, and we’ll look after you.”

I found myself relaxing as we drifted from shop to shop. I even tried shoes and ended up with a pair of ridiculously high heels after trying what must have been twenty different pairs.

We ended up in a mall restaurant where I was allowed only a small salad and iced water. I was terrified but conscious that no one appeared to see through my disguise. The waitress smiled at me and I could tell from her eyes that she was sizing me up as a girl; maybe a rival somewhere.

I even got some looks from the boys who I could tell were thinking different things, and not that I was a boy in disguise. I didn't hold their gazes but part of me rather liked the idea of fooling them so completely.

Maybe the distance from the boys and presence of Ann and Martha gave me an extra confidence.

"You did really well today," Martha said as we got back to Anna's salon. "You were so awkward when we started but you seemed to change as we went through the shops."

"I noticed that too." Anna began to remove my wig and place it on a head-shaped stand. "The waitress saw you as a girl. I could tell by the way she sized you up."

"I saw her looking too," I replied. "I didn't see any suspicion in her look; more like she was thinking I might be a rival."

"I think that was because the boys hanging around in the mall may have been waiting for her," Anna said. "I've seen her with them before."

"She thought you were going to steal her boyfriend." Martha poked me in the arm.

"That's awful," I replied. "You got me into this. I'm not changing into a girl."

"Don't take any notice," Anna said. I thought you were really perfect, especially because it was your first time out and your nerves must have been jangling."

“And how.” I replied. “It’s funny but I was dead scared at first, then it all seemed to melt away and it all felt normal; well, normal until you had me trying all those shoes. I couldn’t even stand in the highest ones.”

“You’ll be begging for them soon,” Martha said. “I was young once too.”

“You’re still young,” Anna replied. “You were a child bride when you married Jonty’s father.”

“And I never guessed that I’d have such a lovely stepdaughter,” she grinned.

Anna helped me to undress and soon I was sitting in my jeans and an old T-shirt as she cleaned the last of my makeup. “Here’s a basic makeup case,” Anna said, pointing to a cosmetic bag on the shelf. “It’s got all you’ll need for everyday makeup. I want you to practise every day until it becomes second nature. There’s some cleansing wipes in there too.”

“I’ll make sure she practises.” Martha took the bag and placed it in her larger one. “We’ll be two ladies, fully made-up, sitting down to dinner each night this week.”

“Isn’t that a bit excessive?” I protested.

“It’s not if you want to eat this week,” Martha threatened.

“I want you in heels too,” Anna said, pointing to the bags waiting by the door. “From coming home to bedtime, wear them all the time. It’s going to feel strange at first, maybe it will hurt, but you’ll adapt.”

“I’m not sure...” I started.

“There’s no option,” Martha interrupted. “You’re going to be so used to heels that anything else will feel wrong.”

I could tell that she meant it too!

Martha got her way of course.

I needn't have worried about school. No one noticed my ear piercings, or if they did, there was no comment. A lot of the guys wore earrings and other stuff in our school and it was coming up the vacation so discipline was relaxed.

Once home, I had to do my makeup. Martha was really strict on that. I had to be fully made-up for when she came home.

"That's quite pretty." She examined my makeup before we sat to dinner on Monday. "A little less eye-liner and more mascara would make it better. You need to watch your lip line too."

"I can see you're right." I looked in the small mirror I'd brought with me. "It does look a bit clumsy."

"You can try again tomorrow," she said.

Tomorrow came and the day after. "You're getting really good." She examined my face carefully. "I think my daughter's going to attract a lot of male attention."

"Stop it," I protested. "That's going to make me paranoid."

"But I bet you'll learn to enjoy it," Martha said. I couldn't tell if she was joking or not.

Schooldays were going slowly as the start of the vacation drew ever closer. We had to be there. The end of year results would only be announced on the last day. It was all a bit artificial really.

I was walking down the corridor one lunch time when a hand slipped into mine. I didn't react instantly. I didn't really know what to do. I stopped and looked.

It was only Bryony Carter's hand in mine; the hottest girl in the school and she was clinging on to me.

I looked at her and she looked at me, all big eyes and tumbling sandy blonde hair. She held onto my hand and waved it.

"Don't look so surprised," she said, her eyes laughing at me. "Aren't you pleased to see me?"

"Of course," I mumbled and started to think what to say next.

"You can take me for lunch." She said it like a command.

I didn't object, thinking that I'd really done something special if this was happening to me. We got our trays and went to sit by the windows in the most popular area.

She didn't sit opposite me either, but came and sat beside me with our shoulders touching as we ate and drank. The silence was awkward; I felt tongue tied as the guys looked at us in both envy and wonder.

"If I tell you a secret, you have to tell me one in exchange," she said.

"Okay," I replied, wondering where this was going.

"I'll make it easy; me first," Bryony said. "I always quite fancied you, but when I saw those traces of eyeliner you're wearing, I knew I *really* fancied you. Your secret is to tell if you fancy me too, and why you were wearing eyeliner."

At that moment, I think I seized up in horror. I thought that I'd been so careful when I cleaned it off. Maybe I was getting careless. My mouth went dry. I struggled to speak.

"How did you..." I started. "Who else saw?"

"Don't worry." Bryony put her hand over mine. "I don't think anyone else has noticed. So tell me a secret. The first one is the easiest; I asked if you fancied me too?"

"I do; I do. I never thought you'd ever notice me." The words tumbled out. "But I'm not one of the jocks. I don't have a car or anything."

"That doesn't matter. I hate getting pawed by some rough senior who thinks he's God's gift. So tell me a secret." She looked at me with those big eyes.

"I shouldn't," I started and saw her looking at me again. "It's a vacation job."

"You've got a job as a makeup artist? I don't believe it."

"No, it's nothing like that," I gulped. "I don't know if I can tell you."

"Then I don't know if I can keep your secret." Bryony kept on looking at me. "I can't think what might happen if that got round school."

"Okay, you win." I took a deep breath. "I have a vacation job working for my stepmother."

"I don't understand," Bryony said. "I know who she is; she has that small law office in town. Where do you fit in?"

"I have to be her receptionist." I blurted it out. "And she says that the receptionist has to be a girl. It's only while her real receptionist is away."

"You're the new girl receptionist," Bryony said slowly.

"Only for three weeks," I said defensively, as if it would lessen the humiliation I felt right then.

"So who are you?" Bryony looked really interested, and I felt a little put-off.

"I'm Madeleine, the new girl," I said. "Maddie for short."

"That's fabulous," Bryony said, and then she caught my eye. "I really mean it. Your secret's safe with me. I always knew that there was something really special; something about you."

"I'm not gay," I blurted out.

"I never thought you were," Bryony replied. "I think it's great that you can do this and you can get to explore your feminine side."

"I don't know if I'd put it like that. My stepmother gave me no options."

"It's fascinating. You've got to let me meet Maddie." Bryony squeezed my hand. "I think we're going to be the best of friends."

"Me or Maddie?" I was confused.

"Why, with both of you." Bryony leaned in and kissed my ear.

I tuned to look at her, more in shock than anything else. I looked again in her eyes and suddenly our lips were touching. We pulled back as if shocked by what had happened and then the unthinkable happened. Bryony put her arm round my neck and pulled me in for a real kiss.

I felt the tip of her tongue opening my lips and I went for it, then I heard applause and the kids in the dining room were clapping and cheering. I think we were both a little embarrassed by it and left quickly, with my hand in hers.

"Come with me, and I'll clean that bit of eyeliner away." Bryony pulled me into an empty classroom.

We swapped numbers and promised to call later. After school, I watched as she ran to her car.

I was in something of a daze as I walked home and wasn't really concentrating as I did my makeup before Martha arrived. On a whim, I used the false lashes that Anna had included in the makeup bag. I don't know if it was beginner's luck or euphoria after the events of the day, but they went on perfectly.

I put dangling earrings into my piercings and brushed my hair until it hung loose over my shoulders, rather than tying it back as I usually did. I was extra careful to make my lips look shiny and moist.

“Wow, just look at you!” As she came in, Martha’s eyes widened in surprise as she looked at me. “You look absolutely believable and that makeup is perfect.”

“Thanks, but I have a confession to make,” I said. “I got found out at school. I hadn’t cleaned all my makeup off properly last night.”

“Oh you poor boy; I’m so sorry.” Martha sat down. “I should have checked this morning, but I was in such a hurry. Was it awful?”

“No, it was quite the opposite.” I couldn’t help smiling. “I think I’ve made a friend and I think the secret’s safe.”

I could see Martha thinking hard, wondering perhaps how she could phrase the next question; was it a boy or a girl? I put her out of her misery.

“You know her, I think,” I said. “It’s Bryony Carter. I had to tell her about Maddie and she wants to meet her.”

“That’s silly.” Martha looked sternly. “Maddie doesn’t exist. She’s you... you’re her.”

“No, I think she wants to see me *as* Maddie,” I said. “It’s the price of her silence.”

I made that last bit up but I didn’t care. Maybe there were advantages to come out of this situation.

“I know Bryony’s family,” Martha said later. “They’re really important in this town, so don’t even dream of upsetting her.”

I didn’t tell her that upsetting Bryony was the last thing I wanted to do. I didn’t know if it was going anywhere, but she really excited me. I didn’t pause to wonder if it was me or Maddie that she was really interested in.

Things between Martha and I seemed easier that evening. She was usually quite sharp and strict with me. I put it down to typical stepmother behaviour. Now she was getting her own way and I was doing as she wanted. I could feel how she was controlling me.

I'd never thought of it that way before but there was no doubt where power was in our relationship. She was telling me what to do, and I was doing it. Although part of me wanted to rebel, I knew it was easier that way.

Was I changing under this pressure to become Maddie? I guess I was. Little things kept telling me that resistance was useless, and that I didn't want to resist.

After dinner, it seemed natural to redo my lips and check my makeup. I saw Martha watching me out of the corner of her eye as she cleared the table. I should have felt it as her being oppressive and controlling.

Maybe it was, but now I was more interested in being Maddie because Bryony was interested in her and I wanted that so much.

I didn't get much chance to speak to Bryony until the last day of school. She always seemed to be busy. We passed in the corridor and she made a point of stopping to give me a hug or a quick peck. I could see her girlfriends looking and guessed they were wondering what she saw in me.

On the last morning, she was waiting for me as I walked through the gates and into school.

She was wearing a plain pink top cover, tight white jeans, and pink trainers. Her hair was loose and glistening in the sun. I got the scent of lavender as I felt it brush across my face as we kissed; properly this time, even though her friends were watching.

"Is this the last time I'm going to see Jonty." She took my hand as we walked. "I'm so excited that you're going to be Maddie."

A sudden doubt tumbled into my head. "Please don't say that unless it's true," I said.

We stopped walking and she looked at me.

"I'm not kidding." Bryony looked into my eyes as if searching for something. "I've always liked you. I tried to give you signals, but you never came near me. Now I know I really want this to work. You can be my girlfriend and my boyfriend at the same time."

"But they're going to make me look like a girl all the time," I said. "Do you know how that makes me feel?"

"No." Bryony's grin widened. "How *does* that make you feel? I bet you have no idea."

"I've not really much idea." I found her amusement infectious.

"We're both going to have fun finding out then." She leaned in and kissed me again. I was getting to enjoy this.

"So tell me when you go into metamorphosis to emerge as Maddie."

"Sunday." I saw no reason not to tell her. "I'm going to Anna at Mirabelle's Salon as Jonty and leaving as Maddie."

"I wonder if they'd let me come and watch," Bryony said. "I know Anna slightly. She did my split ends."

"Split ends?" I asked.

"It's something you need to have done with long hair like mine," Bryony explained. "I love having long hair, but I have to look after it."

"It always looks wonderful," I said, touching it for the first time. She leaned her head into my hand.

"It's good that your hair is quite long and full as well," she said. "We'll be able to do each other's hair."

"I don't know if I'll have the skills." I laughed at the thought.

"We'll have plenty of time. I'll teach you."

The day passed quickly. We split up to our different homerooms. I said all the right things to everyone, but remained really vague whenever anyone

asked me what I was intending to do through the summer and beyond.

“Mom’s going to lend me her car.” Bryony saw me waiting for her at the gate. “We’re driving home and then I’ll come back and pick you up.”

“I’m supposed to go home and...” I stopped. I didn’t want to tell her that I had to go and practise makeup and heels.

“Go home and what?” she asked.

“Just prepare,” I mumbled. “Sunday and all that.”

“I think I understand,” she replied. “But you can take me to the mall first. I’ll get you home early.”

“That sounds like the sort of promise your mom would be asking *me* to make.”

“Get my little girl home on time.” Bryony wagged her finger at me and laughed. “I’ll drop you home afterwards.”

“Let’s do it.” I really wanted to let people see me with Bryony holding my hand. I guess I was thinking of the moment, not the future.

Walking round the mall was different. I was used to going to one shop, buying whatever I’d gone for and going home. I wasn’t prepared for Bryony’s way.

“Isn’t that a dress to die for?” It was one of the things she said more than once as we walked through racks and racks of clothes in shop after shop.

It wasn’t only the dresses; there were shoes and purses, jewellery and makeup. I was really embarrassed as she insisted on trying some of the colours on the back of my hand as well as hers.

“I think that would be a good shade for you,” she said at one time.

"I saw the girl behind the counter look up. "Don't you mean for Maddie?" I corrected her.

"What did I say?" Bryony realised what I meant. "Of course I meant your sister. It's just that you look so alike, being twins."

She pulled me away and we fell into giggling. All that time in the mall and we didn't buy anything.

"I think I'd better get back," I said as we sipped our drinks in the mall café. "Martha will be wondering where I am."

"I don't really know her," Bryony said. "Is she so demanding?"

"She's my stepmother., I said. "She's not the fairy story villain and she's been good to me since we've been on our own."

"That must be difficult."

"Tell me about it," I replied. "She's only about ten years older than me, and I'm sure that being stuck with me wasn't in her life plan."

"My mother knows her and likes her. I think she did some work for our business."

"Martha told me that whatever I did, I shouldn't upset you." I repeated what she'd said. "She knows your family is really important."

"So you'd better not upset me." Bryony snuggled up to me. "I'm really excited, so don't let me down. And the family will be away all summer. I have the house to myself for weeks. If Maddie's really good, I'll ask her to come and stay."

"I'm sure Martha won't miss me." I felt really good about that thought.

Martha's car was in the drive as we pulled up. As I got out, the front door opened and she appeared with an armful of files. She dumped them in the trunk of her car and came over to us.

"It's Bryony Carter, isn't it?" she said, looking from Bryony to me.

Bryony got out of the car and came round to introduce herself. "I think you'll be seeing a lot of me," she said to Martha. "I've found a new best girlfriend."

"I guess he's told you." She looked at us each in turn and sighed deeply. "Please don't shout that all over town," Martha said. "I can't afford to hire anyone else and I really need someone to deal with the front office."

"But why a girl?" Bryony asked.

"It's better for the clients," Martha replied. "I try to specialise in helping women, as well as my commercial business."

"I think I understand." Bryony leaned in and kissed me with no embarrassment or hesitation. "I'd like to help, if you'll let me."

"I think we're okay," Martha said.

"If I don't have anything to do, I may be tempted to gossip," Bryony replied, the unspoken meaning hanging there.

"You'd embarrass Jonty," Martha replied.

"I'm going to do that anyway." Bryony looked at me blushing, and put her hand in mine. "I'd like to be with him. I can advise on everything that today's young lady needs."

"Are you implying that I'm too old to do that?"

"Not at all, but I'm going to be Maddie's best girlfriend and we need to bond."

"Okay, you win." Martha's severe expression softened. "Tomorrow is wardrobe day. You can come and help choose the right things."

They arranged a time. Bryony kissed me again, then drove away. Martha looked at me suspiciously.

"Practice time," she said.

I went to my room, stripped off, and then did my makeup. This time, I tried for light and easy, using a minimum of products; light eye makeup with black kohl in my waterline, and black mascara. I left my eyebrows as Anna had plucked them, and used a paler lipstick with a glossy finish.

I bent over and brushed my hair from the back upwards, then let it fall back in as big a mass as I could. I got dressed in a shirt blouse and on an impulse, tied it above my waist. I pulled on my skinniest jeans and, barefoot, fastened strappy heels to my ankles. Earrings were put in and then I was done.

Anna had been right. I remembered a bit of a quote from a drama class from ages ago. "Start with the shoes and get into character from there," Well, it was something like that, I'm sure.

I was getting good at walking in heels and they felt quite comfortable. I really liked the height and the way they altered my walk. I could slink better and move my hips.

"Are you sure that Bryony coming over tomorrow is going to be all right?" Martha asked as we finished dinner.

"I don't think I could stop her even if I wanted to," I replied.

"I do hope you're not going to let her distract you," Martha snapped back. "I'm relying on you while Catherine is away. I can't afford to pay someone from an agency."

"She's going to be my friend," I said. "She *is* my friend."

I didn't want Martha to guess how much I'd wanted her to be my friend and how lucky I felt. I was pleased that she wanted to come along, but again, I couldn't say that.



On Saturday morning, Martha was still in her bed when I was up and dressed, wearing more or less the same as I had the previous evening, except that I wore the shirt loose. I did my makeup as lightly too, and walked out into the rear yard where we had a small lawn and outdoor furniture.

I liked the sound of my heels on the paved floor and walked up and down a couple of times, listening to the clicks and clacks. I thought it sounded sexy. I heard a car pull up outside and then the door closing. I walked round the house, forgetting what I looked like.

“You’re Maddie.” Bryony looked at me carefully and curiously, before throwing herself into my arms.

I looked down at her; I was in heels and she was in flats. Her face turned up towards me and before I knew what we were doing, we were locked together and kissing like we’d never done before.

“This is going to be a great day,” she said when we broke apart for air. “I love the makeup. I never tried to do my eyes like that. Can I borrow your stuff; I’m going to try it now, while you get me some orange and toast.”

“I can guess who wants to be in charge in this relationship.” Martha came into the kitchen in her gown. “Don’t mind me; I’ve only come for some papers. I’m going to read them in my room.”

“What about checking through my wardrobe for when I’m Maddie full-time?” I asked.

“Your new wardrobe is in the den,” Martha said. “Anna delivered it all yesterday morning. You’ll have to try it all and make sure it fits.”

“But aren’t I the wrong shape?” I asked. “Anna said something about padding and breasts.” I blushed as I realised what I’d said, with Bryony listening.

"I think it's all there," Martha said and then turned. "I'll leave you to get acquainted with my new daughter," she said to Bryony.

We looked at each other and then we were kissing again. "This is going to be so much fun." Bryony broke away and opened the door to the den.

"It's like a great big dressing up box." She turned and held out her hand to pull me in. "Let's look through everything, then you can start giving me a fashion show. Some of this stuff is really lovely... and expensive." She read the labels.

I sat quietly as she sorted through it all. "This looks far too much for three weeks," I said.

"But you've never been a girl before," Bryony reminded me. "You'll need all this. There's office dress, jeans and casual clothes, a couple of sundresses."

"Look at all the shoes," I said.

"A girl can never have too many shoes." Bryony opened box after box. "And here are your breasts." She looked inside a black box. "I never saw anything like this before. They look and feel as if they're real."

She held them out to me. "It's no use asking me," I said. "I'm not an expert on breasts."

"I bet you looked at those magazines in the boy's homeroom."

"Okay; sure I did, but I mean... I never touched them for real and I certainly don't have my own."

"It looks like you do now." Bryony laughed at my discomfort. "And you have really beautiful lingerie to go with them."

As I took one of the breast forms from her, the realisation of what was to come hit me. I could feel myself rising hard. It was really uncomfortable under the tight jeans and started to tent my blouse.

"Someone's getting turned on by all this," Bryony noticed. "I'd better help you with that."

She loosened the top of my jeans and my penis sprang free. I felt more and more excited but a little stupid and exposed at the same time. I didn't know what to do or say. I put my arms gently round her neck and kissed her again. She responded with her tongue and we stayed like that for a few moments.

I think Bryony knew far more than I, because she ran one hand up and down the shaft, massaging it while the other hand played with the tip. I could feel a surge within myself. Bryony must have felt it too, because she leaned in and kissed me hard.

I held on to her, wanting more, but not really knowing what to do next. She took one of my hands and placed it on her breast and for the first time I felt the sensation of a girl's flesh under my hand.

I couldn't help it.

I could feel it coming and I was about to say something to warn her but it was too late. I jerked and pumped. It went over her hands and some hit her jeans. Some fell on the floor. I eased and started to shrink.

"I think I made a mess everywhere," I apologised. "I'll get something to clean it up."

"Where's the bathroom?" Bryony looked down at the wet patches on her clothes.

I fastened my jeans again, then showed her the way to the one off the kitchen. She handed a towel out to me. I soaked a corner of it and went to mop up, saying a silent prayer that I could finish before Martha came down and that she'd never notice any stains.

Guess what. Almost inevitably, Martha appeared as I was wiping up, sniffed the air as if she could smell the sex. Her look was enough for a thousand words.

"I'll have to think of something to keep you under control." She glared at me and left the room.

Maddie and I worked through the clothes. She told me what shoes to wear with everything from business

suits and dresses to the casual stuff for when I was out of work.

It felt really strange to be doing things wearing a bra with the weight of breasts pulling at my shoulders, and keeping myself inside the panties was another problem altogether. Later Martha shouted a quick “goodbye” as Bryony and I worked through all the wardrobe options.

I was disappointed when Bryony said she’d have to go, without another opportunity to try and enlarge my sexual experience.

“I’ll see you at Mirabelle’s tomorrow,” she said, giving me a quick kiss as she dashed to her car.

“Has Bryony gone home?” Mother breezed back from her shopping trip.

“Yes, but she’s coming to Mirabelle’s tomorrow,” I said.

Martha didn’t seem happy with that news. “You’ll have to be careful. I need you to be discreet and not a figure of fun or curiosity.”

“I’m not stupid,” I snapped back.

“You are the receptionist; the office girl. Your job is to take messages, keep the waiting room happy, and generally look pretty.”

“I thought I was to have some responsibility,” I replied.

“Yes, and those are your main responsibilities,” she said severely. “You’ll have other work as well, but you’re there to enhance the place. Remember that.”

I decided that an argument wasn’t worth the time. “I’ll go and dress for dinner,” I said.

I turned on my heels and strutted off. I was quite proud of the way I did that. I’d seen some obnoxious

soap opera character do it just like that. Maybe I was really getting into girl mode now.

I did my makeup really heavily, with the darkest of smoky eyes and the longest of lashes. My brows were really exaggerated and arched high and I drew the outline of my lips as big as I dared.

I zipped up a pink dress which fitted me quite tightly and had a daring scooped neck and only came down to thigh level; well, it was daring for me as I wasn't too sure about the security of the breast forms in the bra underneath. I wore tights over my panties, praying to avoid showing too much. My shoes were pink stiletto heels, plain and really high.

I put my biggest silver earrings into my piercings and brushed my hair to make it as big and smooth as I could. A single strand necklace, a bangle on my left wrist, then I went down.

Martha looked me over. "You look really good. If I had a daughter, you'd be the one I'd choose."

I wondered at the choice of words as I sat at the table. Martha had a glass of wine and offered me one too. I accepted and sipped it cautiously. It was really sweet and had a funny aftertaste. I assumed that this was what all wines tasted like.

After dinner, I suddenly felt very tired. I could hardly keep my eyes open. Martha had to help me to the couch to lie down.

I woke with a throbbing headache. I struggled to focus my eyes and when I did, I realised that I'd slept for over two hours. I pulled myself into a sitting position. That's when I felt that there was something different; something wrong.

I felt between my legs. There was something hard there, and it wasn't flesh. I pulled at it, but it remained there and pulled on my penis. I pulled up my dress and looked inside my tights and panties.

I could see my penis, but it was encased in a shell of some semi-transparent material. I couldn't touch it and I couldn't get the shell off. There was a ring under my sac and the shell over my penis was fastened to it. It hinged, but kept me pointing down.

I couldn't tell how it was fastened, but I could guess who had fixed it there. Martha must have heard me moving because she came back into the room as I was examining the device.

"That looks really lovely," she said. "Don't you like it?"

"How could you do this to me?" I shouted.

"Easily," she replied. "It's there to protect you. It's soft silicone and will keep you hidden under your clothes. No unsightly bulges if you get excited.

"But I can't get it off."

"You're not meant to get it off. I have the key and it's going to stay there for as long as I want it to."

"But what... But how..." I started to ask. "I'm not going to do this."

"Then it's never coming off." She had an evil smile. "If you're good, I'll let you out in three weeks when Catherine comes back."

"That's awful."

"No it's not. It's for your own good. It will keep you away from unwanted urges when you're supposed to be concentrating on being a girl."

"It's unhygienic."

"No it's not. You'll have to sit to pee, but that's what girls do anyway. You can wash it easily and remember; you can't get it off so stop complaining and make the best of it. I thought the resin one would be much more comfortable than a steel one."

"This is so cruel." I almost sobbed.

"It's only a safeguard," Martha said softly. "It's not as if you're having sex regularly, so you should be

thanking me for protecting your secret while you're working in the office."

"Gee, thanks," I replied.

"I'm sure Bryony will see the sense of it all," Martha said. "Maybe in three weeks if all goes well, I'll release you... or maybe I'll give her the key."

"You wouldn't."

"It might be fun that way." Martha smiled and walked to the door. "Better get to bed; you've a busy day tomorrow."

There was nothing I could do. I took her advice, did nothing and went to bed.

Next morning was the Big Day.

That awful shell thing was still locked over my penis. I was conscious of it at every step. It wasn't that it was particularly uncomfortable; it was simply that it was there. I had to sit to pee and drying it after my shower was a little awkward, but I knew better than to make a fuss. Martha had a will of iron and I didn't want my sentence to be longer than it was already.

I dressed simply in jeans and a loose blouse and didn't do anything with my hair except brush it through because it was going to be coloured and styled. Even to this day, I don't know why I put on eye makeup and mascara though. I felt naked without it. I guess it had become a habit in such a short period.

Martha and I got to Mirabelle's quite early. Anna was waiting for us and lost no time in starting on my hair. She washed it, then sat me down while she brushed some goop-like stuff over it in sections and wrapped them in foil.

"This is just the bleach to get all of the natural colour out of your hair," she explained. "The real magic is when the colour goes on afterwards."

There was a knocking on the front door.

“That’s going to be Bryony,” I explained to Anna. “She’s my new girlfriend.”

“Okay,” Anna said slowly. “And you’re her new girlfriend too; how does that work?”

“I don’t know.” I answered truthfully, wondering if I should say anything about the shell covering my penis. “I only know that I really hope it works.”

As I said that, I saw Martha’s expression as she went to the door. It didn’t raise my spirits.

“I’m going to do some work at home,” Martha said. “Call me when you’re ready to be collected.”

“I’ll bring her home,” Bryony said.

Martha nodded her assent and left. I wondered if she registered that Bryony had called me “her,”

Bryony came over to me as soon as she got in and kissed my cheek the way girls do.

“I know you.” Anna came and greeted her too. “Your mother comes here.”

“That’s right and sometimes I do as well, but I’m growing my hair as fast as I can.”

“It’s in great condition.” Anna examined it closely. “No split ends and no chewed bits. Have you come to watch me turn this caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly?”

“That’s my sole purpose today.”

Bryony wasn’t going to be outfaced by either Anna or Martha; she exuded a natural authority even though she was my age.

“Can I see the colour charts, please?” Bryony asked Anna.

They disappeared to the other side of the salon where I could see them deep in conversation. I couldn’t hear what they were saying but they went to the front window and compared shades against the natural light from outside.

“I’ve chosen a really great colour for you,” Bryony said. “It’s super modern and you’ll love it.”

“I’ve something to tell you,” I whispered. “Can they hear us?” I thought I’d better get it over with.

“No, I think they’re in the kitchen.”

I took her hand. “I’m not being rude, please don’t think so, but feel here. Martha put me in this thing yesterday after you’d gone. She slipped something in my drink, I passed out and when I woke up, it was there.”

“What is it?” I could feel her hand exploring the sides of the device.

“It’s some sort of locked thing. My penis is inside it and I can’t get it off,” I said. “Martha has the keys and she says it’s going to stay there until I’ve done my three weeks at her office.”

“You poor boy; that’s a terrible thing to do.” She paused. “Don’t worry, I’m with you whatever happens, and three weeks will pass.”

She could see a tear come to my eye and wiped it away with her finger.

“Now I’ve smudged your mascara.” She laughed and I laughed with her. It all seemed so ridiculous.

“Tell me about the colour.” I changed the subject.

“It’s the most amazing grey shade, silvery, and really eye catching.”

“Old ladies are grey,” I said, surprised that it could even be considered.

“Old ladies are never this shade; trust me, you’ll be fabulous.”

“I don’t want to be fabulous.” I felt afraid at the thought. “It would attract too much attention.”

“Hiding in plain sight is a good strategy,” Bryony said. “No one would ever guess a boy would have that colour, and I’d like you to have it anyway.”

"I guess that's a decision," I said. "But I don't think it's what Martha had in mind."

"I've fixed it with Anna. She'll say it's the right thing. She's doing it anyway so what she does will stay, right?"

"You're the boss."

"Don't you forget it, girlfriend." We smiled and bumped fists in agreement.

"It's time to get you rinsed out." Anna came back across the room.

"I'm going to decide on your nails." Bryony smiled at Anna who smiled back. They seemed to be co-conspirators already.

As I leaned back over the washbasin, I saw Martha and Bryony chatting together. Martha scared me so much now that I was locked and restrained. I hoped for something, anything that might get me out of this mess.

The water hissed over my head. Anna's hands guided it back over and down, washing the bleach away. She was thorough and with the noise, I couldn't hear anything Martha was saying although she and Bryony appeared to be deep in conversation.

"Head up, please." Anna wrapped a towel round my head and fixed it turban-like over the top. She patted it to absorb the water.

"Now when I take this off, don't be shocked. This isn't the colour that you're going to live with. It's the preliminary stage."

"I'm scared," I said, suddenly realising that the point of no return had been passed.

There had been so many of those these in the last few days that I'd lost count. I wondered how many of these points of no return were really crucial. Maybe they were only steps along the way, or like boundaries. Anyway, this wasn't the time for philosophy.

"Bryony's chosen this colour for you," Anna said, holding out a bottle for me to see. "It's really new, and

fashionable. We'll not tell Martha that she's chosen it, though. She wanted you to have something that's getting to be old-fashioned."

"She wants me to have an office look," I said.

"Offices look like offices." Anna started to spread the contents of the bottle through my hair. "You don't need to be as dull as the filing cabinet." She wrapped my hair in something like a plastic bag and wrapped a towel around my shoulders.

"I've chosen your nails." Bryony came to talk to me as Anna secured it all on top of my head. "You're going to love them when you get used to the length."

"But how do I do anything with my hands if they're too long?" I pleaded. "I have to use a keyboard, and coins and keys..."

"So does every girl and they manage." Bryony held out her hands for me to inspect.

"I can't imagine you like having them that long." I measured against my hands. "They're impossible."

"Think about that." Bryony ran her nails along my arm. "I got these done on Friday after school finished. I'll admit that they're a bit too long for school."

"And you'd get into trouble if they were like that in class."

"I don't have to worry about that." Bryony held out a colour card for me to look at. "I've been shopping and driving, I do my makeup and hair. It's all something to get used to. By weekend you'll never notice them."

"I'm not sure about that."

"I bet you cry when you break one," Bryony mocked me. "I know I did the first time. And you're not going to escape anyway, so accept your fate."

"Yes, boss," I said. "I'm ever so humble. You're right."

"That is the most useful thing to say to your girlfriend. Keep it in mind all the time."

“But I’m your girlfriend too.”

“With that thing on your penis, you’d better be a really attentive girlfriend later,” she whispered. “You’ll have to take care of my needs like a real girl.”

I’d seen enough of those things on the internet. I knew exactly what she meant. I thought about it and decided it was something I really wanted to do, especially with her. Somehow it didn’t seem forbidden or even scary.

All I said was, “I’m looking forward to that.”

Bryony pretended to hit me and then walked across to talk to Anna. She came back a few moments later.

“Anna says I can do your nails,” she announced. “I worked in a nail salon after school and over a vacation. I can do really great acrylics. Aren’t you lucky? You don’t have to brave the nail salon on your own.”

“I couldn’t.” I blushed again at the thought.

“You could,” Bryony said. “It’s on your list of things to do as a girl.”

“I didn’t know I had a list.”

“I’ll think of a few things. I’m going to enjoy being with you, girlfriend.”

It was as if my present was separate from my mind. I couldn’t bear the thought of disappointing Bryony, but I’d have loved to upset Martha. I didn’t want to be turned into a girl. That was never something I’d thought of before Martha imposed it on me.

Part of me was shouting “Don’t let them do this.” Another part of me was fascinated by all they could change. And what did Bryony mean when she said I’d have to satisfy her like a real girlfriend? I thought I knew that that meant, and I was looking forward to it.

What a mess it all was; a mess in my head and a mess in my life too. What's a boy to do when everything seems stacked against him? Should I stand up and fight. That would upset them all, including Bryony. She'd never given me a second glance until that accident with me failing to clean off my makeup.

And what if I gave in and went along with this stupid plan? Could I ever convince anyone that I was really a girl? Would I end up looking stupid and being turned into the laughing stock of the town?

If I asked Bryony about it, I knew she'd tell me to go along with it all. In my darkest moments, I think she was treating me as something between a treasured pet and a project. When I relaxed about it, I thought she was treating me as if I was her partner and someone she'd have a future with.

Decisions were awful. I couldn't make them. I sat back and let it all happen.

"Do you want to watch?" Anna asked when she decided it was time to rinse the dye from my hair.

"Don't let her watch," Bryony said. "Let's get her all dressed and made up before she sees anything."

"That sounds more fun." Anna looked from Bryony to me.

"I am merely your subject," I hammed it up. "I shall become whatever you wish me to be."

"That could be dangerous," Bryony whispered in my ear. "You may never get out of dresses again."

She turned the standing mirror round and put a sheet over the big one in front of me. Anna took me across to the backwash and started the rinsing and conditioning of my hair. It was long enough for me to see the ends but they were so dark from all the water, I had no idea what the colour was going to be.

At the end of all this rinsing, a towel was wrapped round my head like a turban and I sat patiently as Bryony and Anna chatted together.

“Come over to the nail station.” Bryony pulled me up from the chair and we crossed the room. “I’ve got to prepare your nails first. That means a manicure, to get them really smooth and sort out those cuticles.”

“I’ve never had any attention to my nails before,” I said. “Are you really sure we need to do this?” I was getting more and more afraid of going deeper into all this feminine stuff.

“It’s necessary,” Bryony assured me. “Every time you see your hands, it’s going to remind you to stay in character.”

I sighed inwardly. This was turning into a real long day and we were far from finished.

“Watch what I’m doing,” Bryony said as she took my hand and started to work the cuticles down and clean the nails. She filed a little all over the nail and then cleaned it all with a pad soaked in something strongly scented.

“It’s to make sure that nail is clean and dry,” she said. “Then I’m going to fold a nail form around each finger to guide me as I apply some acrylic over your natural nail.”

“It looks pink.”

“It’s natural so that I can put a gel colour on top when the shape is there.”

“Won’t it pop off when I put any pressure on it?”

“Not if I’ve remembered all I was taught. I got really good at this and had a lot of repeat clients last year. It may seem mindless and wasteful to a mere boy, but it was fun. I met a lot of nice people and made a lot of tips too. It was far better than waitressing.”

“I’m getting really tense.” I could feel a bit of panic rising. “Just do it and don’t tell me every stage as you do it. Talk about anything else.”

“Okay,” Bryony said. “If you’re really good, I’ll take you for dinner after we’re done. It can be your first trip out as a girl. Don’t worry, Anna can come with us if you want her to.”

“I’ll have to think about that,” I said.

“And after dinner, I’m going to take you home with me.”

“Won’t your parents object?”

“What could they object to? This is my new best friend Maddie, I’ll tell them. And I bet my brother’s eyes light up when he sees you.”

“How old’s your brother?”

“Fourteen going on twenty,” she replied. “We can go to my room and you can show me whatever it is you’re wearing down there.”

“It won’t come off,” I said.

“I’m good with a hairpin in locks.” Bryony smiled and looked into my eyes; I couldn’t say anything to put her off, even though it was madness.

“Now a final topcoat,” she said after several filings, cleanings, applications and smoothing. “Put your hand in my mini oven.”

“Your *what?*”

“It’s only a UV light to harden your nail colour and then you’re done.”

The light glowed with one hand, then the other, under its rays.

“They feel really long,” I said looking down at my nails, then holding my hands at arm’s length for another impression. “Did they have to be this bright red?”

“Maybe next time you can have a different colour, but red nails are never wrong with whatever you’re wearing. Slip off your shoes and I’ll do your toes the same colour quickly. That won’t take as long.”

“Why bother with my toes?” I asked.

"If you wear sandals or open toe shoes, it's essential," Bryony said. "Besides, whenever you see them..."

"I know, it's going to remind me to behave.

"You got it, girl; I'm proud of you," she laughed.

"I did as I was told," I said as I walked back across the salon and sat in Anna's chair.

She took the wrap off my hair and gently combed it back.

"I'm going to trim it a little so that your hair has a definite girl's shape and it will move and fall back into place whatever you do."

She combed and snipped, holding the tips down at each side, making sure that they were even and that there were no stray bits to spoil the style. She got a drier and brushed my hair this way and that; lifting and curling it against the bristles.

All I got was a glimpse of the ends of the hair as they were flicked and brushed into place. Bryony sat to the side, watching with an appreciative look on her face.

"The colour looks very different," I said as I realised just how different it was. "My hair should be much darker."

"Jonty's hair was much darker," Anna said. "That's why Maddie's hair is so much lighter."

"You're Maddie now." Bryony came over and took my hand. "Forget about Jonty for a while and you'll find it's all so much more fun."

"I'm terrified," I said. "Why did I ever let this go so far?"

"It's probably because Martha wouldn't have given you any choice." Anna sprayed something over my head and patted it softly.

“And we’re going to have a wonderful time together,” Bryony said. “I can’t wait to see the boys drooling as we walk past with complete disdain for them all.”

“You’re not going to make me walk past boys as if I’m really a girl!” I gasped in horror.

“Of course I am,” she replied. “Where’s the fun if we don’t make them sit up and take notice. They’ll be running a competition to see who can get into our panties.”

“They’ll probably kill me if they find what’s in mine,” I shuddered.

“Then you’ll have to make sure that they don’t find out.”

“How do I stop them if you make me get that close?”

“That’s what girls do,” Bryony said. “You’ll learn. There are other ways of keeping them on a string without opening your legs to them.”

“But maybe Maddie doesn’t want to do that,” Anna added.

“That’s for her to consider when she finds the right boy.”

“Hey wait a minute,” I interrupted. “You’re talking as if I really wanted to be a girl. I don’t; Martha’s forced me into this. I wish I’d been stronger and told her where to go.”

“But we are where we are,” Bryony said. “We might as well enjoy it. Girl power is wonderful and looking at that hair, I can’t wait to see what you look like with makeup and all, dressed really nicely.”

“I’m with you there,” Anna said. “Enjoy it. You may never get the chance again.”

“Thanks, but I’d really rather not have had the chance anyway.”

"I think I should do something more to these eyebrows," Bryony said as she and Anna peered closely into my face.

"A little thinner at the outer edges, then you can draw the line a little higher," Anna suggested and before I could say anything, tweezers were being used mercilessly.

"How am I ever going to be able to look like myself again?" I asked.

"This is your new self," Anna replied. "I think you're going to find it addictive."

"I'm getting that feeling too." Bryony started shading my eyes. "I really like the idea of a secret boyfriend."

"Even if he's locked..." I stopped before saying anything more.

I didn't want Anna to know my humiliating secret but she exchanged a look with Bryony that made me wonder what they might have said when I wasn't listening.

"This is going to be fabulous." Bryony stood in front of me, looking intently at my eyes as she shadowed and lined the lids.

"I'm going a little heavier under her eyes," she said to Anna as if I wasn't there. "Tell me if it looks too much."

I could feel the brush working across and then blending towards the eyelid.

"I would stop there," Anna said. "And I think these lashes would look great. They're wispy and long, but look absolutely wonderful. They're my favourite and I think you'll love them."

"What about me?" I asked.

“You’re being patient and uncomplaining,” Bryony told me. “And you’re going to stay that way until I’ve finished.”

That was me told. I didn’t mind now. All the feelings of panic had subsided, but inevitably there would be tests to come. I tried to put that to the back of my mind.

I sat quite still as Bryony attached the false eye-lashes to my eyes. I was so used to doing it myself by now that it felt strange to have someone else doing it. I waited patiently and blinked as she sealed them with mascara.

I remained seated as they both looked at me. “Earrings,” Bryony said. “No self-respecting girl would be without them, especially with that hair.”

“Silver would fit in with the hair,” Anna suggested.

“But big gold hoops would contrast more and be much more noticeable.” Bryony looked at Anna who nodded. “Gold hoops it is.”

She rummaged in her purse and handed a pair to me. I tried but I couldn’t. “You’ll have to help me,” I pleaded. “I can’t do anything with these nails.”

“You’ll learn,” she said as she fixed them in my ears. “They look good and the studs in your other two piercings don’t look out of place either. “If I can get home, we’ll replace them with something that stands out more.”

“Don’t I get to look?”

“Not yet,” Anna said. “It’s time to get dressed and when you’re ready to go, you can look.”

She had obviously sorted out the outfit that I was to wear. I could see the packages and the hangar at the side of the salon. I stood up and walked across.

“Stand there,” Anna said. “I need to work out exactly where your breasts should be.”

“Surely I put them into the bra cups.”

“Of course you do but these are going to be fastened to your chest with surgical glue. You’d hate it if a breast was to slip out of your bra at an embarrassing moment in the office.”

“I guess...” I said. “But isn’t surgical glue a bit permanent?”

“It’s not permanent at all,” Anna said. “Of course, you won’t be able to take them off at night, but they have to come off every week to clean your chest and make sure the skin remains undamaged underneath.”

She held a breast form against my chest and looked critically at the position before drawing a mark on my skin with a cosmetic pencil. She repeated this on the other side of my chest before telling me to lie on a bench.

Once there, I lay still as she placed the first breast on my skin. She lifted my arm across to hold it in place as she attached the second one, and raised my other hand. I lay there like a dummy for what seemed to be ages.

I stood and in quick succession, I was dressed by Anna and Bryony. They seemed to work in tandem as if they had worked it all out beforehand.

A beautifully lace-figured pink bra took the weight of my new breasts, which I had been finding quite heavy on my chest. I’d been afraid to let them go, but now they felt something approaching comfortable.

A really tight panty was next; with my manhood locked away as it was, there was a bulge but it was pulled back as far as it could go. This was covered with pink panties which matched the bra I was wearing.

I was surprised when an old-fashioned garter belt was next. Sure, it matched the rest of my lingerie, but I’d assumed that the days of stockings were past and that everyone, me included, would be wearing tights. Clearly that was not the case as pale stockings were held out for me to put my toe into, then they were rolled up my legs and attached to the garters which hung there.

The feelings were quite erotic. I tried to think of something else. I tried counting slowly. I tried counting backwards slowly in threes. It was no use. The pain from my trapped penis was awful. It wanted to grow and really wanted to be huge and free. It just hurt.

I know Bryony could see what was happening and then I saw her signal and Anna drifted casually into one of the side rooms.

“I don’t know if I can do anything about that,” she said, touching my prison.

I could feel her fingers cupping my sac which was available, even though it was trapped behind the locking ring. I could feel something happening and then to my pain and surprise, I started to come all over her hand and if she hadn’t grabbed some tissues, all over my new stockings.

When I subsided, I sat down, breathless and hurting. The restraining nature of my confinement was awful. I’d never felt so wrung out before.

“I think we’d better get you into your dress before we have another accident,” Bryony said, and called Anna back into the room.

If she knew what had happened, she kept a straight face as they helped me into a plain black dress and zipped up the back. It held tightly to my new breasts and came tightly down to my knees. I sat and they fastened black court shoes with ankle straps and a three-inch heel to my feet.

“Are you ready to meet Maddie?” Bryony stood beside the big mirror which was still covered by a sheet.

Anna went to stand beside her and they both looked at me. I felt really nervous right then. I never wanted to be a girl, and underneath it all, I wasn’t, but on the outside there was no question. I looked like a girl and if I wanted to get away with the next three weeks, I’d have to get used to it and act like one too.



I stood and took a deep breath, looking from Anna to Bryony. “Wow,” I said in a small voice.

The mirror was exposed and there in front of it, I stood. I looked and waited while it all fell into place in my brain. I was a silver grey blonde, not bad looking, and pretty enough to have turned my head; my boy head that is.

I was svelte rather than skinny. I watched in the mirror as my manicured hand went to my face, then to my breasts. I was surprised by how prominent they were even though I’d been assured that they were normal size for a girl of my age and height.

I took a few steps forwards, feeling how my balance was affected. I was used to heels and to higher ones than these, but there was something about the breasts being glued to my chest that subtly altered my posture.

I was more conscious of them than before when the pressure had only been on my bra straps. Now it was on my chest as well and I could feel movement there as I stepped forwards. I tried to absorb all these new feelings, but they seemed to be too many to register. I stood silently taking it all in.

“Stop admiring yourself, Maddie,” Bryony said. Here’s your purse, we’re going out for dinner.”

Before I could panic and object, they had me through the door and into the open air for the first time as a girl. We walked from the salon, through a mall, and into the centre of our small town.

I felt the breeze on my legs and, most of all, up my dress where bare skin was between panties and stocking tops. It lifted my hair, despite the hairspray Anna had used.

I realised that I was looking down. I forced myself to loom up and to meet people’s gaze as I walked. Eye contact, however brief, is the norm in our society and I didn’t want to attract attention by going against it.

With Anna on one side of me and Bryony on the other, I quite liked the looks I was getting, especially

from the boys. If only they knew. Was I becoming too vain, or merely too confident too soon?

“You don’t order the extra size portions,” Anna said as we were walking to the restaurant. “Salads and chicken or fish would be a good choice for a girl who’s watching her figure.”

“No big desserts either,” Bryony added. “Watch how we eat and try to copy it.”

“That means small forkfuls and chewing slowly.” Anna opened the restaurant door and we stood and waited to be seated.

My nerves were tingling in fright. It was all I could do to stop my knees knocking and that wasn’t because I was having trouble with the heels.

I was expecting to be called out as an impostor at any moment, despite the big mirror at the side where we were standing. All I saw was three women and the one with the most attractive hair was me.

We were seated without anyone taking extra notice of me, although I did see a few boys look up as I passed, but their expressions were admiring rather than disbelief. So far, so good.

I was happy that our table was to the side and that I could look at my companions without catching the eye of anyone else there. Looking back, it was far easier than I thought at the time. Menus and ordering; sipping ladies drinks rather than gulping down Coke or even beer.

I took their advice and ordered a chicken salad, which I ate deliberately slowly, matching my pace to that of my companions. It was frustratingly slow but I was learning as I joined in the chatter across the table and began to relax.

I was the first to refuse dessert when our waitress asked, which earned me a look of appreciation from Anna. Bryony simply smiled to herself.

I was taken to the rest room, which was probably as well as I might have mistakenly gone into the male section. They had to remind me to take my purse or I'd have left it on the table. Because of the confinement on my penis, I had to pull up my dress and lower my panties to sit and wipe anyway, so I was driving in the girl lane immediately. Outside, I saw Bryony repairing her lipstick in the mirror, and did the same.

We walked back to Anna's salon. I was feeling good with myself. It was a hurdle overcome.

There were a few to come.

Bryony and I drove away in her car almost as soon as we could after getting back to Anna's. I collected a bagful of cosmetics and far more instructions about taking care of my hair than I could ever remember.

Idly, I said to Bryony, "I wonder what would have happened if my hair had been really short like some of the jocks in school."

Bryony looked at me as if I was from another planet.

"Would they have me in wigs or would I be one of those girls with almost shaven heads?"

"Neither alternative seems good," Bryony agreed. "I'm in love with your hair."

"Really?" I looked at her.

"Yes, that's why I'm taking you home with me before I return you to Martha."

"Home with you?" I sounded like a parrot, repeating her words, but I was astonished and excited at the same time.

"No one's home," she said quickly, seeing confusion in my eyes.

I can't remember what we said as she drove. We pulled into the drive of a neo-colonial style house with well-tended gardens. It was quite a class above my home.

"What are you waiting for?" Bryony called as she unlocked the door while I sat dumbfounded in the passenger seat.

She came round the car, opened the door and, taking my hand, pulled me out. "Don't forget your makeup," she said. "I plan on mussing it up so you'll need to repair it after."

"After?" I said stupidly.

"Come on." She pulled me, not that I was reluctant when I realised what she meant.

I can't remember exactly which way we went through the house. I didn't have time to look. Bryony pulled me into her bedroom, shut the door, and flipped the lock. She turned and the next moment I was locked in her arms, being kissed really hard.

I responded willingly and gratefully, then that horrible pressure from my groin told me that things might not go exactly to plan – don't ask whose plan. We tumbled to the bed, losing shoes and panties somewhere along the way. I felt her hand on my groin.

"I'll kill her for this." Bryony tugged, which did nothing to lessen the ache. "I wonder if the old hair-pin trick will open it. I used to be good with my brother's secret box where he stored all the stuff he didn't want Mom to find."

"This looks different from any lock I've seen." She was looking hard at my cage. "It's some sort of barrel."

I could feel her fingers and the warmth of her breath on my penis as she turned it as far as she could.

"I'm going to try, but maybe this one won't come off," she said. "If I can't get it off, you're going to have to use your tongue."

I knew what she meant. I'd seen those books in the school library under the desk when the librarian wasn't looking.

"I can do that," I said with more confidence than I felt.

I mean, I knew the mechanics of sex; we'd had lessons in class and of course the magazines and the internet told other versions of the story. I knew what I was aching to do, and probably what she wanted me to do. It never occurred to me that she knew far more than I did.

"I can't undo it." She sat back in frustration, then kissed me again. She lay back, opening her legs. "Come on and make me feel that I was right about you all along. Use your tongue."

She was right about messing up my makeup. I was wet from her, and wet from myself as I licked and sucked, feeling her squirm, feeling her legs hold me still, and listening to her panting and moaning. I guess I was getting it right.

"You have to do that again." Bryony's eyes shone with delight. "Even if I get you free, you have to do that again."

I did and then it was over and we sat on the bed, looking at each other. Her eyes were shining again and our hands touched each other as if we were afraid to let go.

"You look a mess," she laughed. "I told you I'd mess you up. Let me help you, then I'll have to deliver you back to Martha."

"She's going to hate this hair," I said, smoothing it and catching a glimpse of the colour. "I think she wanted the studious look and she's got the fun and flirty look instead."

"That sounds a lot more like fun." Bryony started to clean my face. "You can hide behind being a bit scatty, maybe even a bit of a bimbo in hiding."

"That would really tick her off." I knew I was right there.



“But fun, right?” Bryony started to repair, or rather to redo my face. “You should always make sure your makeup is precise in the office. I’m going to make your eyes a little darker; I think you’ll like it.”

“It’s surprising that my eyelashes didn’t come loose,” I said. “And something someone said earlier is coming back to me. I think Anna said something about hiding behind the makeup like a mask.”

“I get the idea. Don’t think about yourself; think about being the image you’re living in.”

“I think that’s the only way I’m going to get through the next weeks.”

“Hey, don’t forget you’ve got me to take care of too.”

“How do I take care of you?” I asked. I realised it was a silly question when I saw her eyes, and the flick of her tongue.

“I’m going to be a super locksmith too.”

Bryony dropped me off at home. We kissed gently; not the lipstick smearing kind of kiss. I’d never have gotten out of the car if we’d done that.

Something happened on that journey. I don’t mean something physical, more like something switched inside my brain. I was getting used to being Maddie and used to feeling—what exactly was I feeling?

I walked towards the door, listening to my heels clicking on the path, and then I realised. I *liked* being Maddie. She was me and I was her. It was something profound, as if I’d found a new confidence in being someone.

I took a deep breath and reached into my purse for the house keys. I wondered what kind of reception I’d get from my stepmother as I pushed the door open and called out.

“What have you done?” Martha said when she saw me. “You’re going to be my receptionist. You look like something else.”

“What exactly?” I asked. I was in no mood to take her belittling me. “You decided I was to look like a girl and that’s what you’re looking at. This is me.”

“I never intended that you should be so attractive,” she stuttered.

“It’s not my fault. Ask Anna. She did what you asked her to do and this is how I turned out. Did you want me to be one of the ugly sisters?”

“I bet Bryony had something to do with this.” Martha’s venom was almost tangible as she hissed. “She did this to thwart me.”

“Oh come on,” I shouted back. I was really mad by then. “I didn’t ask for this. I’ve changed into someone that looks like an attractive girl. Don’t pretend it wasn’t something you expected.”

“I didn’t.” Martha took a breath and seemed to calm. “I never expected that you’d be attractive and feminine.”

“So it would be all right if I looked like a frump?” I asked.

“No, I don’t mean that.” Martha sat and looked at me. “It was the shock, that’s all.”

“So no welcome home and thank you for doing this for me?” I walked across the room to her. “I’m trying my best to adapt to all this and what do I get? You’ve attached some hideous lock on me. I can’t get it off. I know I look like someone’s wet dream but it’s not my fault. It’s what you wanted.”

“Okay.” She softened her voice. “You look so pretty and so sexy. I never planned for or thought of that.”

“And you need to understand what it’s cost me.” I walked towards her. “I think I look pretty good, and I can do the work you want me to do. I need you to have some confidence in me and allow me to be Maddie on my own.”

“Have you gone that far?” Martha’s eyes seemed to tear up. “What’s happened?”

“Maddie took over. That’s what’s happened,” I said, a little more softly than I intended. “Maddie’s a girl with real feelings. I don’t know why or how that happened, but I can’t go back. I can’t ignore it.”

“Okay, I get it,” she sighed.

“You get it,” I repeated. “Does that mean this lock comes off?”

“Not a chance until you’ve finished filling in at the office.”

“And then?” I needed to know.

“You can have the key in three weeks when Catherine’s back,” Martha said.

“And if I want to stay as Maddie after that, will you let me?” I suddenly thought how Bryony liked me like this.

“You can be whatever... whoever. Help me out, please.” Martha seemed to crumple and lose her belligerence suddenly. I saw that she was maybe confused; a little frightened. “It’s hard keeping going like this. I need you to qualify and take over. I promised your father.”

“I’ll do my best,” I replied, feeling a sense of responsibility to my father and a new idea of what Martha was going through. “Let’s go through the next three weeks together.”

Surprisingly, we hugged.

I was very nervous next morning and got up early because I was too wired to sleep any longer. I showered and tried to fix my hair as nicely as Anna had done. I was almost there, but not quite. I fixed my earrings and did my makeup, then dressed in my new office suit. It was grey, with a pencil skirt and a matching jacket which bulged over my breasts.

“You look perfect,” Martha gushed.

I guessed she was trying to make up for the previous evening. I smoothed down the jacket and twirled playfully on my heels.

“This bra makes too much of these breast forms,” I said. “I think they’re too big.”

I looked in the mirror. The white bra that I was wearing was visible through the white office blouse.

“Nonsense,” Martha replied. “You’ll be leaving your jacket over your chair, and never wear it buttoned up unless you want to emphasise your curves.”

I registered that. I had curves all over suddenly. Somehow I found it reassuring; goodness knows why.

At the office, I sat at the front desk and switched on the computer. It was warm in there and so my jacket naturally went over the back of the chair. Martha had explained the basics and I knew enough about office systems and database stuff to be able to feel my way through the rest of the system.

I still doubted my control of my acrylic nails, but they were there and so was I. It got easier the less I thought about it and using the balls of my fingers came to feel natural.

I heard myself answering the telephone in a higher register without deliberately putting on the voice. I wrote messages down in longhand on one of those pads designed for that purpose. I liked the way my nails wrapped around the pen as it flowed across the page. I was really getting vain!

I opened the diary and put on some rimless glasses that I’d found in a drawer. I thought they made me look a bit more like an office worker. I don’t know who the prescription was for but they made things a bit fuzzy, but not too much for me to see the screen.

I was very nervous as the first and second appointments came in to see Martha. I took a couple of deliveries, and signed for them. On an impulse, I put “Maddie B.” on the slip, liking the way that the letters

flowed girlishly into each other. I decided to practise it and make it more so.

I was breathing more easily as the morning progressed. No one seemed to be taking a second glance, well, not the sort of glance that asks if you're really a girl. I guess I was a little cold when faced with a little mild flirtation and I know that I blushed easily under my makeup.

"Hi, you're not Catherine." He stood in front of my desk, a thick file of papers under his arm. "I'm Walt, Walt Brigham, from Genesis Law. These are the papers for Mrs. Bailey. She's expecting them."

"I'll take them for you," I said, reaching out, but he held them back.

"I have to get her to sign personally," he said.

I called Martha on the internal phone and she asked me to show him in. I heard her clicking the lock on her door. Thirty minutes later, he was on his way out, looking a little flushed.

"What time do you get off for lunch, sweetheart?" he asked.

"You can go now, Maddie." Martha came out of her office at just that moment.

I saw a look of amusement in her eye as she said it. I blushed again and looked round for some sort of excuse, but there was no time to back out.

"Come on then," Walt said. "It'll be my pleasure."

He swept my jacket from the chair and held it for me to slip into. His hand squeezed my bum gently but deliberately as he smoothed my jacket.

I picked up my purse, feeling helpless, and allowed him to take my arm and lead me through the foyer and into the street. Silently, I cursed Martha for allowing me to get used like this with a total stranger.

"I've only half an hour," I said as he steered me into an Italian deli a couple of doors down the block.

“That’s time enough for me to tell you my life story, get your number, and convince you that I’m the only guy you want to date for the next twenty years or so.”

I found myself smiling at his bravado and said nothing as we were shown to a booth at the side. I wondered if this was what life was like for girls generally as he slid into my side of the booth, blocking my escape route.

“I ordered the special vegetarian,” he said, taking my hand. “No rings and no marks of rings. I’d guess you were very new in town and very single.”

“Well done, Sherlock,” I said. “But you didn’t include that I may not be looking for a date right now.”

“Everybody’s looking.” He scrutinised my nails and then looked into my eyes. “It’s the human condition, especially when you look as gorgeous as you do.”

Fortunately the waiter interrupted with the food and silverware. I took the opportunity to create a little distance between us. Walt chattered away as we ate. I smiled and nodded at intervals and congratulated myself on remembering to eat in a ladylike manner.

I smiled at his jokes and asked a few open questions. It only encouraged him to talk more, until I slipped my mobile from my purse.

“Goodness, look at the time,” I exclaimed. “I have to get back.”

I pulled a little mirror from my purse to re-apply my lipstick, then I ran my fingers through my hair. I had to push Walt to get him moving; even then he managed to brush his hand over my breast. I struggled gently past his hands and, leaving a couple of bills on the table, waved and turned to the door.

“Thanks, Walt,” I called over my shoulder. “I’ve got to run.”

Back in the office, I tumbled into the chair behind my desk in relief, hoping that he wouldn’t follow me.

“That was quick.” Martha came through to see who it was.

“Thanks, stepmother,” I said sarcastically. “You were a great help.”

“I don’t know what you mean. He’s a very attractive young man.” Her look said that she knew exactly what I meant. “His daddy’s a senior partner at Genesis Law.”

“He’s looking for a girlfriend,” I said. Martha gave me a knowing look. “Maybe I’m not what he’s looking for. I don’t come with the right equipment, or had you forgotten?”

“Who knows? You could do worse.” She turned and went back into her office.

Walt appeared several times that week. He had a couple of “conferences” with Martha, for which she locked the door. He was nearly always there as lunch time was approaching but once as we were closing the office for the weekend. Fortunately on that occasion, Bryony had come to collect me in her car.

“Can I take you ladies to dinner?” Walt asked, looking at the three of us.

“Of course.” Martha smiled at him.

“We’d love to, but there’s some important shopping to do,” Bryony cut him off before he could think of another invitation and we drew away from the kerb with a wave and a smile.

“He can be so persistent,” I said. “If only he knew what’s in my panties.”

“Don’t always bet on that putting him off.” Bryony looked across at me. “I’ve heard things about Walt before.”

“So should I be doubly afraid?” I went cold at the thought.

“I’m only saying,” she replied. “A girl should never take anything for granted these days.”

“I think he’s too busy attending to Martha,” I said. Bryony didn’t reply.

As we drove on, Bryony’s hand came to rest on my thigh, then gently worked its way higher.

“Careful,” I cautioned. “This thing hurts when I get excited.”

“I know and I think I’ve got something that may help.”

“Tell me” I begged quickly.

“I’ve been looking on YouTube,” Bryony said. “You know that it has instructions for all kinds of repairs and fixes, I’ve been searching for something to tell me how to pick that kind of lock.”

“And I’m guessing you found something.”

“I did and that’s where we’re going now. I want to try it out.”

She pulled into the drive to her house and almost dragged me to her room where my jacket and skirt were on the floor in an instant, closely followed by my panties.

“This thing really makes me ache when I get hard,” I moaned as she shoved me to the side so that she could look down the barrel of the lock.

“I bought this tapered tool off the net.” She showed me a slim brass piece with a hollow end. “I’m supposed to be able to measure, then trim the end to fit the barrel of the lock.”

I winced as she pulled the plastic sheath further round so that the light shone more directly into it. She grabbed and made me yelp as it twisted in a way that my body didn’t twist, but the tool was fitting inside the mechanism.

“I can feel it,” I said. “As you’re twisting that thing, there’s a slight click.”

"I think it's gripping." She pulled me again and I felt tears coming to my eyes.

But it wasn't to be. "I think I'll have to admit defeat." She dropped the tool onto the cabinet with a clatter. "It does so much and then spins round without taking it further."

She stripped off her dress and lay on her bed. "You'll have to use your tongue again," she said. "I'm so horny, it might take a long time for you to apologise to me for having that thing fastened over your penis."

"Hey, it wasn't my idea," I said. "Maybe I should ask Martha for the key?"

"I'm sure she'll be really happy to give it to you." Bryony's look told me that she didn't believe that for an instant.

"Maybe after I've done these three weeks and Jonty emerges," I suggested.

"I don't think I want Jonty to emerge again unless he really has to."

"You mean..." I looked at her and saw her eyes shining.

"I'm getting really excited about being with Maddie," she said. "Think what fun we can have together when that thing's removed."

I didn't dare to think too far ahead as I slipped my tongue between her thighs and licked my way upwards. I heard her moan and felt her shuffle round so that I could get better access. Her fingers opened her lips and I licked between them.

What was she promising and could I do it as Maddie? I hardly dared to think about it.

Bryony dropped me home next morning. I'd changed and was wearing something soft and floating with a pair of her wedge sandals. My hair was

loose and flowing around my shoulders and the only makeup I wore was around my eyes, probably too heavily around my eyes, but I was getting really to like having heavy eye makeup anyway.

“Did you have a good time?” Martha asked rather more gently than I expected when I found her sitting in the kitchen.

“Wonderful, thanks,” I said, helping myself to coffee and coming to sit opposite her. “It would be better if you could give me the key to get this thing off me.”

“I’m sure it might,” Martha smiled sweetly. “But it’s staying for another two weeks until Catherine’s back in the office.”

“Please let me out,” I begged. “You know what it’s like for anyone my age. It’s unfair and cruel.”

“Nonsense,” Martha replied. “I’m protecting you from the dangers of uncontrolled sexual urges.”

“Oh, come on. Don’t give me that,” I sneered. “Don’t make me go to the police.”

“And what would you tell them?” Martha laughed. “They’d take one look at you and decide that I was right to keep you under control.”

I shut up, realising that if I turned up to complain, however I was dressed, with long nails, bleached hair and breasts glued to my chest, I’d be on a loser.

“Please let me out,” I pleaded.

“Two more weeks at work,” Martha said. “That’s all I ask, then you’re free.”

“Is that a promise?” I asked.

“Yes, it is,” she replied. “I really need you to be there for me in the office. I can’t manage alone and I’m afraid that you’ll disappear if I don’t have some control.”

“It’s not as if you’re paying me,” I said.

“Maybe not, but ask who paid for your clothes and your makeover.” Martha smiled wickedly.

“If I didn’t have my own money from Dad’s trust fund, I’d be broke,” I said, reminding her that some money was coming my way each month.

“Let’s not argue. You can go back to being Jonty in two weeks.”

I said nothing. I didn’t want to tell her that Maddie might be staying for the summer and until law school started in the fall.

Bryony called for me later that afternoon. Martha and I hadn’t spoken, other than about daily stuff. I knew that more pleading would be useless.

“It’s time for your appointment with Anna,” Martha reminded me.

Bryony looked at her. “I remember. Maddie, you have to go and get your boobs checked and re-glued.”

“No one told me,” I replied, suddenly feeling confused as to why I didn’t know.

“We’d better get going.” Bryony gestured to me to hurry up.

“What was that all about?” I asked when we were heading up the road.

“Anna may have something for me,” she said mysteriously. “And you really do need to have your skin checked over.”

It didn’t feel right to be sitting in the back room of the salon with my dress hanging loosely off my chest. I never thought that I’d adapted to the weight of the breasts until suddenly they weren’t there anymore.

One moment they were stuck fast and then with only a few drops of solvent, they fell away as if by magic. Anna inspected them closely and sprayed some kind of antiseptic cleanser on the backs and then a different kind onto my chest.

“That’s really good,” she announced as Bryony lifted the breast forms, feeling the weight and texture. “There’s no rash or skin irritation. “You’ll be good to go when I get these replaced.”

I went to wash my chest and saw Bryony and Anna in close conversation. They looked at me as if I was the victim of a conspiracy. They were still huddled together as I came back, but stopped talking as I drew near.

“What’s going on?” I asked, seeing a guilty look on their faces.

“We were wondering if Martha would hate it if you did next week with bigger breasts,” Bryony said slowly, looking at me.

“You could blame me for making a mistake,” Anna added quickly.

I looked from Anna to Bryony and back again. Their innocence shone sweetly as they looked at me. Were they asking me or daring me? I didn’t know.

“How much bigger?” I asked. “Walking around with those was difficult enough, let alone finding a comfortable way to sleep.”

“It’s only for a week,” Bryony said.

“And if it’s too bad you can call me and we’ll change them back to these.”

“How much bigger?” I asked again.

“Perhaps these.” Anna held out a box to me and I took it. I opened the lid and saw two breast forms lying in their packaging. “Put your bra back on and I’ll slip them into the cups; no glue so that you can feel the weight.”

“That’s different,” I said. “I can feel the straps hit my shoulders a little more severely than before.”

“They’re not glued so all the weight is going there,” Anna said, as Bryony helped me put my dress back on and fastened the zipper up the back.

“They don’t look all that much bigger.” Anna stood back and looked critically at me.

I noticed that she and Bryony exchanged glances as I walked back and forth across the salon and turned to look in the mirror. I looked from one to the other.

“If they don’t look bigger, how’s Martha going to notice?” I wondered out loud.

“She doesn’t have to notice, but I bet Walt and the other guys who come and go through the office will notice.” Bryony placed her hand under the breasts and felt the weight.

“It’s a distraction,” Anna said. “Maybe she’ll want you to be less of a distraction and you can bargain with her to get the key.”

“Yes; the key; if only I could,” I said.

Bryony looked at me as I said that and for once, she blushed. That was usually what I did.

Somehow a decision was made without me realising anything. You can guess; the bigger breasts were mine for the next week.

“I didn’t realise that these things were so heavy,” I complained as the cab dropped us off and Bryony and I walked through into the restaurant that evening.

“You need to look round,” she whispered. “They’re shouting at all the guys here.”

We did look good though. Our makeup was almost identical, with long lashes and dark eyes. I was as blonde as she was dark and we both wore tight dresses which clung to every curve.

“Are these fuck me shoes or fuck *you* shoes?” Bryony whispered as the guys stared.

I giggled. “I don’t care but this is fun.”

We sat at the bar and turned away offers of drinks from several men. It got to be quite embarrassing as drinks were sent over. I think I overindulged. I saw Bryony's look of caution and stopped myself from having more.

We danced together, then with a group who were obviously out for a party. Then we got separated from them but I didn't realise that two men were dancing closer and closer to us. I felt a hand on my bottom, then I was pulled closer as another hand settled on my other cheek.

He pressed against me and I could feel his erection through his trousers and through my dress. I wondered if he could feel the lock on my penis but when I looked at him more closely, I could see that he was well over-served and he would be working on instinct and not thinking too much.

Bryony grabbed hold of my hand, smiled at them, and pulled me away into the ladies bathrooms.

"Be careful," she said. "Those boobs you're driving could get you into trouble."

That was a sobering thought. I think I stood a little less upright as we left the bathroom and left the restaurant. A cab took us back to Bryony's home, where my tongue obviously had to work really hard again.

I got back home on the Sunday evening and sorted out my things for Monday morning. I looked through the meagre wardrobe that I had and decided that as it was summer, I'd wear a lighter suit.

There was a cream one there and I thought that I'd look right with a dark bra and a deep red blouse of some silk material. I had some red heels which were a little higher than I would have liked for all day, but they'd have to do. After all, I was going to be sitting there most of the time.

"You're going to be the talk of the profession," Martha said when we rode together to work on Monday

morning. "You look quite daring for someone who didn't want to be a girl at all."

I could see her looking at me carefully, as if trying to work out what was different. If she spotted it, she didn't say.

"I'm resigned to my fate," I said.

"Be careful that your fate isn't a sticky end." She turned into the parking lot and we walked together to the office, our heels clicking in unison across the pavement.

The week progressed as had the one before. Walt's visits were fewer this week.

"He's in court," Martha told me when I asked why he hadn't been to see her. She looked at me curiously as she said it.

My suspicions were confirmed on Friday when Walt did arrive before lunch and went into conference. I could swear I heard some noises which weren't strictly professional coming from the locked office.

Martha's eyes shone when they went to lunch together. I elected not to join them and stayed in the office with a fruit salad I had delivered from the deli down the block.

Bryony picked me up from the office on Friday afternoon. Martha was quite keen to let me go and lock up herself. As we left, I saw Walt's car coming into the lot.

"Guess who's going to get his wicked way with your stepmother." Bryony noticed the car too.

We changed clothes at her place and drove out to a restaurant by a lake nearby. We dressed pretty much alike again. This time we were in jeans and heels, with summer tops which clung to the breasts and fell loosely below the waist. They had long sleeves which widened out from the elbow; quite hippie-styled.

Bryony clipped my hair back with a pair of barrettes, which made sure my earrings – I wore big hoops – swung as we walked, casually hand-in-hand like ordinary girlfriends. It was a good feeling.

After we'd eaten, we got to talking to two really nice boys, both slim and cleanly attractive. We walked along the shore together and it was only when he put his arm round my shoulders and pulled me close that I realised that Bryony and her boy were out of sight.

I let him kiss me. It felt strange and wrong, but somehow quite exciting. His lips were firm against mine and I allowed him to push through my teeth and play with my tongue.

I must have got carried away with these novel feelings. I put my arms round his neck and kissed him willingly with one hand behind his head, feeling the softness of his hair as he leaned into me.

His hand dropped to my waist and I knew instinctively where it was heading.

"It's not a good time of the month," I said, removing his hand and placing it round my waist.

I understood that it was a mistake almost immediately. His erection was pulled against me, hard and prominent. Goodness knows why; call it curiosity or foolishness, but I let my hand feel how big he was. He moaned a little at my touch and smiled sweetly at me.

He kissed me softly and somehow his zipper came down and his penis stood out, strong and proud. I looked at it. I'd never really seen another man's penis like this before.

I touched it, then wrapped my fingers around it and stroked upwards. It seemed to swell again. I put my other hand there and he held me closely, but not too closely to stop me.

I played my fingers across the tip and then, looking down, I bent to do something; I've no idea what, or what possessed me. And then I was on my knees, the soft sand of the lakeside making it comfortable.

I licked the tip and worked my hands up and down the shaft. I licked the tip again, took a little into my

mouth and then withdrew. I kissed the tip and felt it swelling. I knew what was going to happen and moved to the side as he came into my hands. I leaned back and felt only a slight spit on my cheek as he pumped onto the sand.

He was breathing heavily. "I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't expect that to happen so quickly."

I stood awkwardly watching as he zipped up again, and I groped in my purse for a tissue to wipe away the bit that splashed onto me.

We turned and walked back, me silent, him chattering endlessly. I didn't listen; I didn't say much either. In was in shock at what I'd done. When Bryony came into view, I quickly steered us back towards her.

I think she could tell that something had happened. She made our excuses and said our goodbyes. I think I gave them both a peck on the cheek and then we were safely in the car. I burst into tears.

"I shouldn't have let us become separated. I could tell something happened," Bryony said. "Did he force you?"

"No, he was very gentle. I didn't intend to do anything, but there it was, a big penis sticking out and it was all my fault," I half cried. "I held it and, forgive me, but I licked the tip. I didn't know what I was doing."

"You poor baby." Bryony pulled over and held me close whilst I cried a little more. "It's nothing. It's what every girl goes through."

"But I'm not a girl." I wailed.

"But you look like a really beautiful girl; you're attractive to anyone," Bryony said. "If I didn't know you, I'd still think that."

Saturday came slowly. I'd cried a little more as Bryony and I lay together; then when I'd recovered,

my tongue went back to work. I tried extra hard to do it well in case Bryony felt that I'd let her down.

I felt a real relief at Anna's salon that afternoon as the big breasts fell off my chest. I never thought that having them glued on would be such a relief, but the smaller ones were so much easier.

"I don't understand why breast implants are so popular," I said, as I slipped back into my clothes. "They were too heavy."

"But think of the girls with small breasts. They might feel differently," Anna said.

"And don't forget the showoffs too," Bryony added.

We laughed as Anna inspected my hair. "We need to touch up your roots next week, if you're intending to stay blonde," she told me.

"He's definitely staying blonde," Bryony interrupted.

I looked at her and saw her determination. "I'm staying blonde," I said.

"For the summer," Bryony added. "And maybe longer."

"I can't go to law school like this," I said.

"They're tolerant and inclusive these days," Bryony replied.

"I think you'd better talk about this later," Anna cut off the discussion. "Meantime, I'll book you in for a root touch-up."

I don't remember what made me ask Bryony to let me call at my home before we drove back to her place. As she pulled into the drive, I thought I saw a car pulling off and away.

We went in and I called out. There was no reply although the door was unlocked and Martha's car was in the drive. I walked through with Bryony following. The kitchen was a mess, with the remains of a meal and a couple of empty wine bottles on the counter.

A snoring sound was coming from the living room. We crept towards it and opening the door, saw Martha lying on her back with her mouth open.

“Look.” Bryony pointed to some panties which looked as if they’d been taken off and thrown across the room.

I got closer to Martha and could smell the booze as she snored. There was another smell too; Bryony noticed as soon as I did.

“She’s been having sex,” she said.

“Drunken sex too,” I added.

Martha snored on as we got closer to her. I think we saw it at the same time.

“Look.” Bryony bent over her and fingered a small brass cylindrical object suspended from a gold chain around her neck. “I think I can guess what that is,” she said.

“Me too.” It was like finding the Holy Grail. “How do we get it off without her noticing?”

“I don’t think she’d notice an earthquake.” Bryony gently tugged at the gold chain until the clasp came into reach. She opened it and I grabbed the key as the chain slid down Martha’s chest. I handed it to her and she quickly unclasped her own neck chain and slipped the key onto it.

“We’ll leave the chain loose,” Bryony said. “Then she’ll think it came off when they were doing... whatever they were doing.”

Key in hand, we crept out of the room, out of the house, pausing only to set the lock as quietly as I could. We closed the car doors quietly, then drove away.

“Phew! Just think what this means,” I said.

“I know what it means,” Bryony replied. “I have the key to your future happiness.”

She held the chain out with the key dangling there.

"It means I can get this thing off and throw it away., I sighed. "That's wonderful."

"I've a better idea." Bryony looked at me seriously. "I think we put you back into it when you go home. That way Martha's not going to suspect anything. She'll think that she's lost the key."

"Don't tell her anything, you mean?" I said. "And tomorrow when I get home, I'll beg her to release me as I usually do."

"That's good, so not a word, not a whisper. It's our secret." She grinned across at me. "It's a good thing that I've condoms in my night stand."

I was so spent that Bryony put me back into my cage without any trouble and I was still exhausted when I got home that Sunday evening. It was a good exhaustion though. I tried not to show it.

"Martha, please could you unlock this thing?" I pleaded.

She looked away to the left. They say it's a sign that a lie is coming next.

"No, I can't," she said. "And you might as well know that Catherine's not coming back for a few more weeks. Her mother's taken seriously ill and she's staying to look after her."

"That's really sad for Catherine," I said. "But there's something more that you're not saying."

"I'm going to need you... err, Maddie that is, for a lot longer than next week."

"You can't expect me to stay like this indefinitely," I protested. "It's inhuman to keep me locked up like this. They didn't even do this in the Middle Ages."

"No, they probably just chopped it off," Martha snapped, then her face changed slowly. "That's absurd." She started to laugh.

For no reason, I laughed too. All at once I realised that I wanted to stay as Maddie and I knew Bryony would love it too.

“You’ll have to give me the key,” I said with a really serious expression on my face.

“Next week, I promise.” Martha looked left again; another lie.

I went out of the room, out of the house, and called Bryony’s mobile. You can guess her reaction. Maybe I was going to be Maddie so long that I’d forget how to be Jonty, but I didn’t care.

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