

J A M E S J C R A F T

THAMES GREENE

by James J. Craft
A Tales of Transformation Book

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The sign said it would be the finest master-planned community in the country. It was hard to argue. The builder controlled everything. From the roads coming into the new town-to-be, to the parks, commercial spaces, and schools... Everything was indeed “master-planned.” It was exciting to think that you could be a part of a new town that was being built from the ground up. That was exactly what Hank was thinking as he drove past the new development’s massive stone gates. He worked in the city, and true... City living did have its perks. It was nice to be so close to everything, but he knew it was no place to raise kids. There were so many bad influences. The air was bad. There was crime... Etc, etc.

Maybe Thames Greene was the answer... The answer to his question of “where to move so that will be better off?” The artists’ rendering of what the finished community would look like was exactly what Hank was hoping for; lovely brick homes on tree lined streets, kids playing in state-of-the-art recreation facilities, neighbors you actually wanted to meet. It was, in a word, perfect. That and the prices were right, very right. Better than just *right* – it was a bargain. Hank knew he could easily sell his old two-story row house in the city for far more than a house of twice the size would cost out here. And with the planned interstate bypass expressway extension and commuter rail-link, he and his wife could easily get in and out of the city. Worse case, it might take another 20 minutes. But those twenty minutes would well be worth it in the long run.

Ira thought the same thing. A co-worker had told him about Thames Greene. He had boasted about how fantastic his new home was going to be, and how cheap... make that inexpensive. Ira’s interest was piqued. He had spent the last few years in a modest town house in a nondescript part of the city while his executive counterparts hung their hats in large, opulent homes in affluent neighborhoods. He was, to be blunt, jealous. But his jealousy did not make him fool.

His wife had stayed home to raise the twins, Martin and Connie, hence they could ill-afford the house that Ira so longed for. Until now anyway. Housing prices in the city had doubled since they purchased it years ago. And his brother the realtor, insisted that if he ever wanted to sell, it would be sold in a day. These new homes were as nice as almost any of his colleague’s homes, and were certainly in his price range. Ira longed to finally have a house he could be proud of. One that he could invite people over to see. One that his associates might even be envious of. He could see it all starting to line up... All except one thing. How to convince his wife Marjorie. He pondered the angle. He hadn’t become an executive financier by allowing obstacles to remain in his way. There had to be an approach he could take.

His son Martin was starting to hang around with a crowd that both Ira and his wife concerned. He was slipping in school, talking back to his parents, staying out late, even smoking and drinking underage. To add insult to injury, he had no plans on what to do with the rest of his life. Ira had arranged an internship for him at his firm, but Martin had declined. He argued that “Just because you’re some big important business man, doesn’t mean that I have to be one.” Unfortunately Marjorie supported Martin on the issue, so Ira was forced to back out of the internship plan

he had made for his son at work... a source of great humiliation. Moving out of the city to a brand new town, with a brand new school, where all the kids could leave their old habits and stereotypes and cliques behind was exactly what was in order. At least that was what he would tell Marjorie in order to get what he wanted.

The Thames Greene sales center was a collection of seven homes, interconnected to the main office building, so that interested persons could browse through them all. Ira was in the second home from the end, called the "Empire A." It was a stunning two story that included a finished basement, and a master bedroom with adjacent bathroom that would rival a five-star hotel. Ira could easily see himself living in it. There were two other rooms on the floor. One for his daughter and one to possibly use as an office, as he was sure that Martin would want to live in the basement bedroom beside the oversized family room. His wife Janice would fall in love with the kitchen, and the dining and living rooms were perfect for entertaining. It was exactly what Ira had been pining for.

"Pretty nice huh?" Hank said to Ira as he browsed the model house next to the one he was determined to buy. Ira looked up from his brochure with a smile, "Yeah... I can't believe how nice this is... And the price..."

Hank laughed in agreement, "You got that right!"

Hank continued on his way back to the sales office. He was going to sign the papers right now. Joan, his wife, would understand. She wanted to move just as much as he did, and this was such a good deal that she would forgive him for not consulting her first.



The Thames Greene project manager watched the taillights of the last two cars disappear into the night. It had been another blockbuster day of sales. At the rate the units were selling, they would have to begin preparing phase two for development almost a full six-months ahead of schedule. On his desk were conditional offers from two successful inner-city men. Ira, and Hank all seemed to be more the anxious to move and the project manager would do all that he could to accommodate them. He had already called in extra crews and hired extra tradesmen from all over the state to keep construction on schedule. The last thing he wanted to do is get behind the proverbial eight ball. The big-wigs at LCI's head office in Virginia would not be impressed.

As it was, LCI's CEO was a little "disappointed" that the Thames Greene project wasn't yielding better results. Scott Penner was used to the company's other divisions, where a breakthrough in pharmaceutical science could net a double-digit return in no time flat, or he could boost the stock share by purchasing their nearest competitor. But being a land developer and home building was an entirely different bowl of wax, and even though LCI had hired the best and the brightest, they were experiencing some growing pains... To say the least. Still, Scott was confident he had made the right choice. He could have simple chosen to sell off the twenty-thousand acre plot of land, formerly known as the Thames and Greene farms. After all, no one in the executive office was even sure why the company had purchased the farms in the first place. Whatever the reason had been no longer mattered as the land had already been written off the books, meaning that any

profits made developing the property would be “found-money.” And with up to 5,000 new homes planned, Scott was certain that there would be plenty of it. He needed the boost in the profit margin as he continued to clean up the previous CEO’s mess. It was true, that his predecessor had returned the company to profitability from near ruin, but he had also left the company’s board of directors to answer for some big questions. Questions that everyone from the FDA and EPA, to the families of former employees of the company’s Edenwood division wanted answers to. The shoddy record keeping and entirely missing documents only compounded things. Something had gone on... Something was amiss, but what exactly happened was only known by one individual, and that individual had since been replaced by Scott Penner.



Joan Anderson was hardworking and level headed. She had spent the last 18 years at home, raising her and Hank’s children. She prided herself on being known as the “practical” one in the household, the one who kept everything running neatly and efficiently. As a mother, she was in her element. But once her son Julian entered grade twelve, it dawned on her that her baby no longer needed her as they once did.

So she re-entered the workforce. Not that she had to. Hank’s job at the plant paid well... Very well. But she had felt that her usefulness as a mother was nearing its end. And she *did* have a degree in nursing that she had worked so hard through correspondence school to get. And nurses were in demand. But getting back to the matter at hand...

Joan was caught completely off guard when she listened to her excited husband ramble on about the new house they had bought that day. They had bought!?

“We really lucked out!” Hank proclaimed.

“Wait just one second,” she said sternly, “There was no ‘we’ involved here. This was all you. You unilaterally decided to buy us a new house, in the middle of nowhere, away from all of our friends and family and our jobs and our kid’s schools and without even thinking to consult your wife first!?”

You big dumb muscle head! She thought to herself.

“But...” Hank tried to say.

“But nothing!” Joan snapped “This is, by far, the most impulsive, selfish, childish thing you’ve ever done Hank! I may be your wife, but should have the simple courtesy to ask me before dragging me and the family off to some God-knows-where cardboard cutout housing development!”

Hank’s heart sank. He had done all those things, but it was in everyone’s best interest. If only she knew what he knew, Hank thought to himself. He would have to do his very best to explain it.

“Honey, this is for the best, trust me. Our house is almost paid for, and its worth a lot more then what we paid for it.” He paused, watching her body language for a moment before continuing, “A *whole lot* more! We’ll get a brand new house in a brand new town, and have a pile of money left over when we’re done!”



Joan's brow furrowed, "Hank, why do we need more money. We've already got money."

Hank sighed, "But what if something happened? What if, say... One of us lost their job?"

"Hank dear, I can assure you that there's no chance of me losing my job. Those idiots would be lost without me," she rebutted. She thought about her job at the medical lab where she worked. *Them... get rid of me?* She chuckled aloud... But her facial expression quickly changed when she realized what her husband was implying, "Unless..." she gasped, "You lost your job?"

"No-no-no" Hank tried to keep his composure, "Not yet. Well I mean..." his voice trailed off as his eyes became misty. He took a deep breath before he continued, "You know things haven't been great..."

"But I thought it was getting better," Joan interjected.

"It was, but..." Hank sighed, "They're closing the plant at the end of the quarter. April 29th."

Joan could tell by the look on her husband's face that he was crushed. His job had been his life for so long, he had always taken such pride in his work. Immediately, she knew he needed comforting now, not chastising. She leaned forward and kissed him, then wrapped her arms around him, "Then we'll move to this Green place and we'll get through this," she spoke softly to him as she embraced him. She gritted her teeth as she cursed at herself for giving in. She hated to lose arguments.

"They did say that they were going to move some other divisions here from Cincinnati," he tried to sound confident, "and all of us with seniority will get first crack at any new positions."

Joan smiled at him, “and I’m sure you’ll be first in line,” she said, never believing it for a moment.

So that was that. Joan was just going to have to get used to the idea. Then Andersons were moving from their upper class neighborhood on the city’s upper west side, to Thames Greene, the new master planned community from LCI Developments.



In another part of the city, another husband was trying to convince his wife that the move to Thames Greene was for the better. So far, Marjorie Heath was proving to be something of a hard sell. She was perfectly happy in their middle-class town home in their middle class neighborhood. She was perfectly happy to take the bus to go shopping for groceries. She figured that her husband Ira should be perfectly happy too. The problem was, he wasn’t. Worse, he couldn’t just come right out and tell her that.



So after a half hour of convincing, Marj was starting to come around.

She could not deny the fact that the influences that were being introduced to Martin’s life were less than good. And it was also hard to deny that moving to a freshly built, sterile community far away from said influences wouldn’t be good for their son. Capitulation was not something that Marjorie took lightly, such as when she decided to abandon a promising career to be a housewife... But in this case, she knew that Ira had done his homework. She also knew that he wanted – secretly – to be like all the other guys at the office with their big, fancy houses. *Why couldn’t he just come right out and say it?* She wondered.



The next day, standing on freshly-turned earth, Alfonso watched his step as another giant cement truck wheeled past him. He trudged over to where he had left

his equipment and scratched his chin. He was at the construction site that would become phase two of the Thames Greene development, contemplating his best interest. Alfonso was the most respected, most talented, and oldest excavator operator on the site. He had seen and heard it all, and so when he heard the sound of his bucket scraping metal on metal he knew he had a choice to make.

The sickening scraping sound was fresh in his ears. He had heard the sound once already that day, on the neighboring basement he had just dug. He figured it was a rock the first time. Maybe some buried debris the second time. But what were the chances of it happening a third time? Obviously pretty good. There was no question about it in his mind. There was something buried here. All over the site, actually. He was running out of ideas. Especially when the side of the forty-five gallon drum he had uncovered was so clearly visible.

He could have called his foreman over, and by all rights he should have. But that would have slowed the whole thing down to a stop, and all eyes would be on him for having sounded the alarm. On the other hand, if he simply raised the bottom of the hole by an inch or two, no one would be the wiser. The gravel would get laid, the concrete floor would get poured, and whatever it was he had uncovered would never be thought of again. Besides, it was probably just some old empty fuel drum that some farmer who had owned this property had buried instead of disposing of properly. Crazy farmers, Alfonso thought to himself, always making trouble. And so, having convinced himself that it was in fact someone else's fault, the crusty old backhoe driver gently sprinkled an layer of soil over what would become the basement floor, then moved on to his next dig.



Four months later, holes that Alfonso had dug had been filled with poured foundations, and finished with carpeting and recessed lighting. Above them, beautiful homes now stood, homes that were all anxiously awaiting the arrival of their new occupants. It was moving day.

The street was busy... *very* busy. There were moving vans and rental trucks everywhere as new families hurriedly loaded their belongings into their new residences. Dunney Drive, the longest, widest street in the neighborhood, was crammed. Ira could barely navigate the wide rental van through the masses. He was headed to number 171, the house he had first seen at the sales center all those many weeks ago. His daughter Connie, was seated beside him excitedly scanning the new street that would now be called home. Marjorie and Martin followed him in family SUV. One-Seventy-One was the only house on the street with an empty driveway.

To the right of them, at 169, a moving van was in the final stages of being unloaded. It appeared to Ira that his neighbors at were to be a nice young family much like his. After backing the truck into his new driveway, Ira smiled as his new neighborhood quickly introduced himself and his son. Hank seemed to Ira to be friendly enough, and he had a son, Julian, that didn't look like a troublemaker, even if they were both wearing matching tank tops from "Cold's Gym." Ira was getting a good vibe already.

Julian Anderson was getting a good vibe too. As he looked to the house on other side of them where the Heaths were unloading their rented van, Julian flashed his best smile at the girl in the tight shorts that was carrying a box down the ramp and into the garage. She smiled back, but kept walking. This had some potential, Julian thought to himself. Definitely.

Ira had also seen the boy next door – what was his name again? – smiling at his daughter. Maybe his first impression had been wrong... But if was going to have some kid after his daughter, maybe it was it was better to have the boy living next door, rather than somewhere where he couldn't be traced. Besides, this boy's father looked like a reasonable guy, with a helluva handshake, *did he say his name was Frank, or Hank?*



Life had begun quickly in Thames Green, but after that first day, things progressed ever so slowly. It was the way of suburban life. Sedated and lethargic.

Hank's son, Martin, wasn't pleased to be living in Thames Greene. He longed to be back in the city with his pals. He spent his first week in suburban hell playing with his Superstation in the basement. He started thinking it wasn't too bad. The basement was well furnished, cool, and best of all, no one bothered him. But by the middle of week three, Martin was growing increasingly bored with his video games. He had tried to lounge around and listen to his MP3 player, text his old friends, but that got old quickly too. He had already rented almost every game at the local video store (which, by the way, sucked ass as compared to the one he used to visit back in the city). He had downloaded just about every rowdy punk rock song known to man, but those songs were only fun to play when his Dad was around. There simply wasn't anything to do but lie on the couch and watch a steady diet of Judge Jodie and Terry Stringer.

A new challenge for Martin was presented in the beginning of his fourth week in "the Greene" (which is what people seemed to smugly call this sterile urban prison). It was something he never expected to have trouble with.

Getting into his pants. His baggy jeans it would seem were *anything but*. It was like someone had shrunk them while he wasn't looking. That or he was putting on weight – which was highly unlikely. His stomach was still flat and his waist still looked slim, but then there were these damn pants. He cursed aloud as he tried to wiggle them up over his hips. It was always his hips as of late. The pants fit fine until he got to his hips. Damn stupid pants! How was he supposed to look dangerous in form-fitting clothes?

Connie was standing in the hall quietly chuckling as her twin brother cussed and fought with his denim pants. "I told you all those French fries would make you fat," she teased.

He could only turn and glare, "Shut up." He gave them another tug before collapsing onto his bed in defeat. "Dammit!" he cried aloud.

"I don't know why you're even wearing pants," his sister continued, "its like... Ninety out side." She looked down at her cute light blue shorts.

"But I'm not going outside" he chided, "and besides, I never wear shorts. Con, you know that." He resumed his seemingly pointless task of dressing from a horizontal position on his bed.

"Well... I'd let you borrow a pair of my jeans, but I'm pretty sure you won't want to wear them," she chuckled.

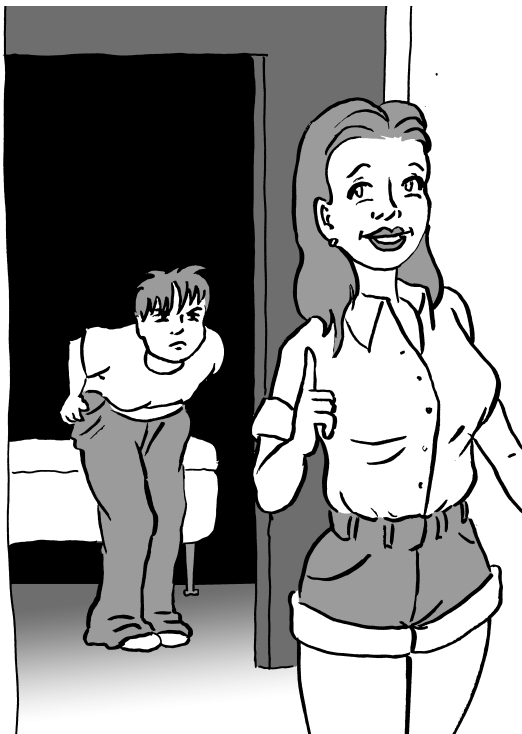
Martin only glared. "I'm not wearing girls' jeans. I'm not some kind of queer." He continued to fight the pants and get them over his thighs. He was grunting and growling in anger.

"Then I'll get you some of my shorts, then." She said merrily.

"Get out of my room!" Martin yelled.

Connie shrugged and walked away, listening as her brother cursed at himself, still losing the battle with his clothes. She made her way back to her new room, and was seated at her desk for about five minutes when she heard her brother at the door. "Gimme your damn jeans," he said. Connie smiled smugly and looked up, tossing the pair she already had ready for him.

A few minutes later, Martin was quietly slipping his twin sister's stretchy, low riding, flared legged jeans over his hips... With no problem at all! "Crud." He said to himself, angry that they did fit after all. *Maybe she's right about the French Fries after all*, he thought to himself.



Julian Anderson was getting restless. It wasn't his idea to move out to this burg. His life had been fine. He was the top jock in school, and had his little corner of the world by the tail. He was starting on the football, basketball and baseball teams. He was dating the hottest girl in school. And her best friend, too.

In class, he was the smartest kid in most of his classes. He wasn't a brain, but he didn't take those sort of classes. He knew the teachers, and they liked him. Some cut him breaks. That was just the way he was. Julian was the sort of kid who could charm the skin off a snake.

With so much going for him, he was crushed to leave his school. That was not just where he spent his days, but it was his private kingdom. He knew how to operate that place.

Now it was going to be a new school. With new kids and new teachers. He had no doubt he'd still be the fastest, strongest, best-looking guy there, but being the top dog was more than that.

He was going to need something cute to hang on his arm.

He got up and looked through his window, across the way at his neighbor's house, looking at the silhouettes in the window shades. Which one of them was her?

The best way to fix the problem was to be pro-active. If he wanted some eye candy, to pump up his profile, he was going to have to think big. Maybe two or three girls would be enough to show everyone what kind of man he was. And the girl who lived in the house next door was going to be his first conquest.





Later that day, Martin was playing Stealthforce II on his game console, which he had plugged it into the big screen TV he had *somehow* managed to convince his Dad to buy. Connie flopped down on the opposite end of the couch Martin was sitting on. She sat quietly, grinning stupidly at her brother. He wasn't able to concentrate, knowing what was surely coming. After a few minutes Martin finally turned to his sister with an angry sneer, "What's your problem!?" he growled. Connie simply looked him square in the face and continued to smile like a Cheshire cat. Martin's blood began to boil. He wanted to punch his infinitely annoying sibling in the shoulder, something he would have normally done and had been doing since he discovered he was slightly stronger than his twin. But instead, he simply threw down the game controller, stood up and started to leave the room.

This action caught Connie completely off guard. She had full well expected to be punched. Indeed, she even thought she deserved it. But Martin hadn't hit her. Instead he was simply going to leave. In *her* jeans, no less. She chuckled aloud, causing Martin to stop dead in his tracks, turning towards her in anger. However, his anger turned to something of a look of embarrassment. He blushed slightly as he looked down at his legs. Connie's pants were snug fitting, semi-low riders, with slightly flared legs. They were made of stretchy denim material that was unlike anything he had ever worn before. The jeans had actually expanded to take the shape of his body. And even though she was now mocking him terribly, the jeans weren't killing him like all the ones he had worn in the past few weeks. It was going to be hard for him not to want to wear them again. So he simply flipped his sister the bird and continued to storm off to his room.

Martin had always preferred tee-shirts and baggy jeans or cargo pants, with the belt somewhere around his thighs. It was an ensemble that had been wearing nearly every day for months, possibly even years. But now he was giving serious thought to why Connie's jeans fit so well. And hell, they felt better. Even his mother and father's curious eyes when they returned home from work that day could not deter him from doing what earlier that day he would have never even thought.

Ira rolled his eyes when he saw Martin's new choice in fashion. *This must be some kind of retribution*, he thought, *acting out to show he doesn't like living here*. Ira knew that Martin was not too pleased about moving out "The Greene" as people were referring to it as. He had taken away all contact with the bad influences that Martin had become so enthralled with, so this was the only way that his son could get to him – by wearing his sister's jeans. Ira furrowed his brow and grimaced as he passed Martin in the hall. He was determined to not let his son's antics get to him.

Truth be told, Martin did not yet realize his newfound pants were going to upset his Father; he was only interested in comfort for right now. "Can I borrow another?" he asked Connie sheepishly as he poked his head in the doorway. His sibling's jaw dropped. This morning he was dead set against wearing her stuff, and now... here he wanted more to wear. Smiling warmly, she nodded and told her twin that she would leave him some clothes while he showered. Martin's face lit up

as he skipped off to the bathroom, "Thanks Sis!" he shouted on his way. Connie just rolled her eyes, "boys" she muttered.

Skipped?



The next day, Julian Anderson was thinking more boyish thoughts. He had seen the cute girl that lived next door several times since the move in. Their parents had briefly introduced them to each other, but that was weeks ago. He made a concerted effort to be outside whenever he thought she would be. He even went so far as to remove his shirt so as show off his impressive, defined, chest. Julian had been "Mr. Popular" at his old school, and he had every intention of doing the same here in Forest Green or whatever this place was called.

But being Mr. Popular required him to have legions of adoring girls, which currently presented a problem, as he knew none. Little Miss Connie next door was important, as she would be the first to be infatuated with him. So when he thought he spotted her in his neighbor's backyard, he moved quickly. Slipping off his shirt as he slid open the patio door. Thank God they haven't built the fences between our houses yet, he thought to himself as he strutted proudly across the freshly laid sod. His prey was working in the garden, facing away from Julian as he approached. She didn't notice him standing there, which afforded the young jock ample time to take in the view of her very nice, round, and pert ass. The kind of ass that screamed to be slapped, encased in the tight stretchy beige material that her girly cargo pants were made out of. He could even see the tops of her white panties protruding slightly from the top of the pants. Sweet! He thought to himself as he cleared his throat. The helpless victim of his adoration turned around then stood up with a smile.

"Can I help you?" Martin asked.

"Uh... Er..." Julian sputtered a few times before regaining his composure, "I, uh... I... My name is Julian. I just wanted to introduce myself." He thrust out his hand in an effort to make it believable. Martin rose up from his position in the flower-bed and shook Julian's hand, "Nice to meet you." He smiled, "Do you normally sneak up on people when they're doing chores?"

Julian was cautious. he had the vague feeling that this kid was... Flirting with him? "Uh, no... Not usually" he replied. "So how do you like it here in the Greene?" he tried to make it sound like he was genuinely interested, even though he couldn't care less.

"Its okay," Martin replied, "But there's really nothing to do here. It's kinda boring." Realizing that he had just been caught working in the garden, not the most masculine of pursuits, he tried to cover. "Oh, uh, I've never helped my mother pull weeds before... Ever. But I'm sick of playing video games... And it's so boring out here... and all of my friends are back in the city... And a bunch of them have summer jobs, so I can't hang with them or chat with them online... So... You know..." He looked down at his sister's pants on his body. "Here I am."

"You like video games?" Julian asked innocently, cursing himself for furthering the conversation.

Desperate not to talk about his situation he responded enthusiastically, "Oh yeah! Before I moved here, I was the best customer of the video store down the street. I have them all!"

Julian didn't doubt it. This loser looked like a total loner. But he was still his ticket to meeting his hot sister.

Martin paused, "Why, do you play?"

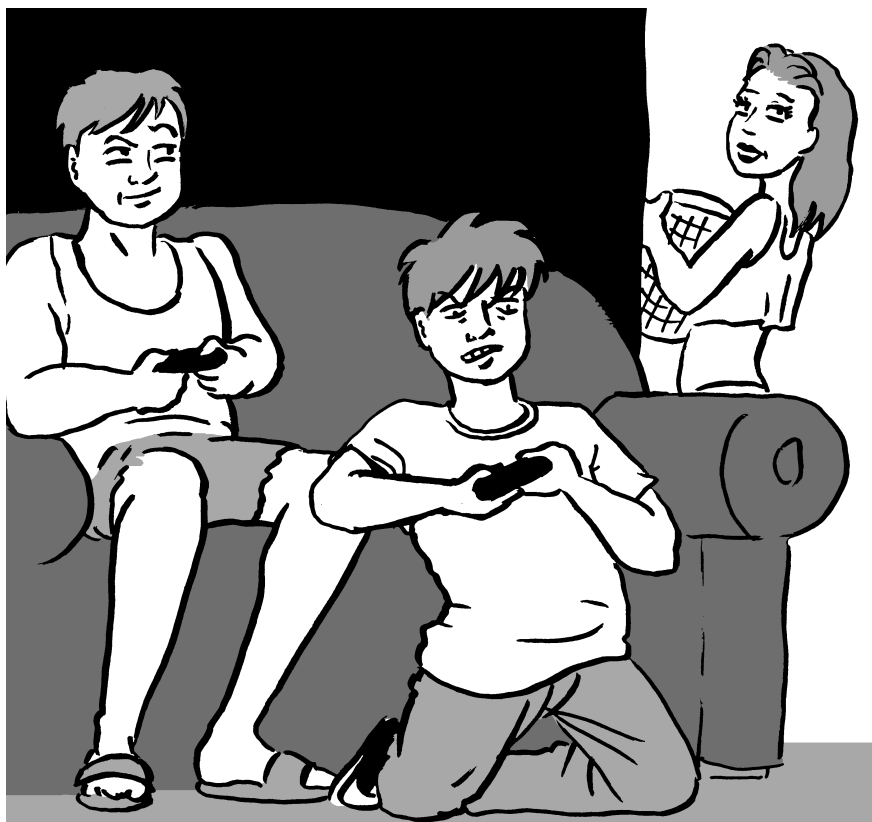
"Oh yeah all the time." Well not really. His Dad had long ago told him that video games were a poor substitute for working out. "What kind of system do you have?" Julian inquired, again wishing his big stupid mouth would just shut up.

"I've got a PlayBox 500" the other boy in the tight girly jeans said.

Julian's eyes lit up, "Really!? I've only a SuperStation 2. I've been thinking about asking my Dad for a PlayBox. Is it any good?"

Martin's eyes lit up, maybe he was about to make his first new friend, "Totally! You want to see?"

Moments later Julian was playing BloodSport on the Heath's big screen TV with his new friend Martin. As an added benefit, when Martin's sister Connie came home from her job, she happened to walk right by them with what looked like a load of laundry to place in the bedroom next to where the boys were playing.



"Marty," she said as she walked exited the room, "I put some old stuff that I don't wear anymore on your bed. Let me know if anything fits." Martin blushed deeply and remained quiet, hoping that his new pal hadn't heard his sister, and hating her for trying to embarrass him.

Julian was too fixated on Connie's ass to fully comprehend what she had said. It didn't dawn on him until later that Connie's ass and Martin's ass looked almost the same. In fact, he thought Martin had a pretty cute butt.

He shook his head in disgust, *What the hell am I thinking?*



Ira was thinking about relaxing when he got home from work that day. He struggled out of his shoes, into his slippers and yawned as he headed downstairs to watch T.V. His hopes were dashed the moment he entered the basement family room. Martin, still wearing those *Damn Girly* pants, had hooked his gaming console up to Ira's prized flat screen TV again. To his left was the neighbor's kid. Ira paused for a moment, a noticeably gruff look on his face.

"Hi Mr. Heath" Julian smiled. Ira simply nodded, "Hey there." Martin continued to ignore his father, which made Ira's blood boil. But rather than make a scene in front of Julian, he decided to swallow his pride and go back upstairs to the living room. The TV was decidedly smaller, but so too would be the conflict.



Julian couldn't help but wonder if his new friend was gay... Not that it should that bother him. He was feeling a lot more open minded in the weeks that passed since he first mistook Martin for his twin sister. The two boys had spent nearly every hour of every day in the Heath's basement playing Martin's Game Box. Julian had learned quite a bit about his new neighbor and was beginning to understand Martin's reasoning for wearing those hip hugger pants like he did. That it just started out as a matter of comfort... And then, when Martin realized how much it was ticking off his father when he wore them, he had become determined to wear them *every* day.

Martin may have not been the most masculine guy Julian had ever met, but the kid had balls. When his dad virtually ordered him out of the pants, Martin upped the ante. He started to wear girly tops, and even girly under things. Well, at least Martin claimed to be wearing girls' underwear... Not that he was looking. But he *had* noticed the lacy waistband of the panties Martin was wearing when he bent over to change the discs in the Game Box console the other day.

Though Julian thought he understood, and liked the idea of getting adults to blow their top, he was in no hurry to join him. At least... He didn't *think* he was. Whatever quarrel Martin had with his Dad was between *them*. Julian and his Dad had a pretty good relationship. So good in fact that when the two macho men were chatting about Martin's choice of attire, Julian was surprised to hear that Hank seemed to share his son's thinking that such clothing looked quite comfy. Even days later when Julian was showing off his new stuff he had just bought, it didn't even phase

him. He had purchased hip hugging jeans and trainers with a slightly thicker sole and partially elevated heel. Well, Martin deserved a little support in his war against his Dad, didn't he?

In fact when Julian informed his father that he had purchased them the other day at that Langdale's store where Connie worked, using her employee discount, which made them less than half the ticket price... Hank simply said, "Cool"

With his father's semi-approval in his head, Julian would return to see Connie the next day. And the day after that. He simply wanted to fit in a little more with Martin, and he of course there was the opportunity to flirt with Connie. Of course, whatever Connie told him to wear, he did. And whatever he wore, Connie told him that it "looked great" on him. That's all that Julian needed to hear. He bought everything without even thinking. When a pretty girl tells you to buy something, he had no resistance.

He was also in no position to disagree with her opinion. She could have said he "looked great" in an oat bag and he would have bought it and convinced himself that she was right. As it was, when he bought the flared jeans and embroidered pastel shirts, he looked in the mirror and was compelled to agree. Not that such behavior was abnormal for him. He was never known as much of an independent thinker or trend setter, but rather as someone who carefully watched others and then took on their trends as his own. He had taken his queue from his Dad. Spot a trend, observe others reaction to it, and if it will serve you... Make it your own. The canvas shoes with the wedge heel was one such example. They had taken him some time to get used to... But Julian was managing. And even though the new pants were snug... Even a little bit tight fitting, they *were* extremely comfortable. Just like Martin and Connie had said they would be. Besides it really didn't matter, since Martin and Connie were the only ones that would see, since all they ever did was hang out together, play video games, watch music videos... Even occasionally go shopping and browse through the stores in town... *Oh wait a second*, he thought, *I guess some other people would see me*. Oh well.

What was I thinking about? His train of thought was so easily sidetracked lately. *Oh Yeah...* Connie. The fact that he got to talk to Connie was an added bonus too. She was the cutest girl he had seen so far in Thames Greene, and he was determined to start the school year with a steady girlfriend. So if he had to sacrifice some of his self respect by dressing like a queer... He would. It's not like they were painful or uncomfortable to wear. They were extremely comfortable. *Did I already say that?*



After a few weeks of Julian going over to Martin's house, Julian's mother finally insisted that her son invite Martin and his family over for a swim. Joan, Julian's mother, was eager to play hostess, and Hank was eager show off his new swimming pool. The buyout package from the plant had been more lucrative than he thought, and after he had heard the splashes and laughing from the people next door all day, he was convinced that he should have one too. Ira was not quite as keen about swimming. He wasn't very interested in going over to have a barbeque at the Anderson's either, but Marjorie was insistent. She was determined that her

small-minded husband would interact with their neighbors regardless of his misconceptions of what they might be like.

"You're the one who wanted to live here!" Marjorie pointed out. "And if you wanted to live in place that has better neighbors, then you have to be one yourself!"

Ira rolled his eyes and grunted. Even five minutes before they were supposed to show up, even after his wife had spent half of yesterday making snacks, Ira still actually hadn't consented to going. "If you want to go, go." He had said three or four times.

"We're all going," Marjorie insisted. "You'd be insulting our new neighbors if you don't."

"They don't care," Ira insisted. "You know how these things go. You girls will start talking, What's-his-name, Hank will be working the grill, the kids will be playing and I'll be just sitting around, bored as hell."

"Well of course you'll be bored, if you don't try and be friendly."

"The best kind of neighbor is the one who keep to themselves and doesn't bother anyone," Ira insisted.

"Sound wonderful," Marjorie stood directly in front of Ira. "Now get moving or we'll be late."

Begrudgingly, Ira capitulated, and indeed, he spent much of the night on the deck, nursing his beer by himself. Just as predictably, his neighbor ran the grill, swam and carried on with the kids.

Ira sighed as he watched. This "Hank" character was a real piece of work. He acted like he was God's gift to human kind. First, he had the nerve to tell Ira that he didn't have any beer around the house, because he had banned "unhealthy" drinks from his household. Fine way to treat a neighbor. Ira had to go home and get his own. And they weren't even grilling up meat. No, "Hank" said that they had all given up meat as a family. Ira hadn't even touched what he had been given – some sort of shish kebab with "Chik'n" flavored wheat gluten. Ira heard his stomach rumble in hunger.

Although Ira had to admit that whatever he was doing, it sure paid off. His wife was hot, and Hank himself had a very trim physique. Not an overly-built weight-lifter's look, but kind of like a triathletes or something. He didn't seem to have an ounce of fat on him. Ira could tell, because he was wearing a pair of those idiotic European swim trunks. Speedos. They left little to the imagination. He was only half-surprised to see that Martin was be wearing something very similar, probably just to annoy him. But he was a little startled to see that both his son and Hank's son Julian were wearing similar super short, super tight, low-rise suits that looked like something out of his daughter's closet, not his son's. It made what Hank was wearing look tame.

As he thought about it, Ira did recall his daughter *had* been bragging about getting all of them into new suits, so he figured it must just be the style. Now that she was working at Langdale's department store, she had really been aggressive lately in shopping their clothes to everyone she knew. But Connie wouldn't lead the boys wrong... Would she? And so, feeling self-conscious and very much out of place, he pretended to suffer from indigestion and sat the swimming session out.



Another week passed, and Ira watched as Martin went over to Julian's almost every day to go swimming in the Anderson's pool. And when they weren't swimming, the boys were in the Heath's basement doing god-knows-what. Ira's fashion sense continued to send off alarms, as every time he saw the boys, they were wearing their tight pants with flared legs. Ira figured that Martin was doing it to push him, but that didn't explain why Julian was doing it too... Or Julian's Dad for that matter. Ira was convinced that Martin's most recent purchase of tight flared pants and calf-high black boots was meant to send him over the edge.

But although infuriating his Dad has been the original impetus for his wacky wardrobe that Connie had helped him to design, Martin was now actually starting to buy clothes purely because he *liked* them. Take for instance the boots with the tall four-inch wedge heel. After a few days, Martin had learned how to walk in them, by distributing his weight a little differently, with a slight sway in the hips... Now he couldn't help but walk that way almost all the time. He wore the boots and pants with a long, snug fitting T-shirt hid most of the wide, black leather belt with a double row of silver studs across it, that hung across his hips. It was a good thing that Connie worked at Langdale's and could get him an employee discount on the new clothes he was purchasing lately. There was absolutely no way he could afford to pay full price, and there was absolutely no way he could get into his old stuff anymore. But then, why not just buy new, bigger pants? One reason was that his father was so strongly opposed to his new look, he was committed to sticking to his principles. His Dad was not going to tell him what he could wear. And the second reason was that Those baggy pants seemed to be going out of style anyway. Tight was in. At least, that's what Connie said.

Ira bit his tongue when saw what his son was wearing. He was about to ground the boy for a month when Marjorie calmed him down. "He's just trying to get to you dear," she said, "you're the adult here, don't forget to act like it. Just ignore



him. If he wants dress like *that* then just let him. He's only embarrassing himself." Ira would eventually relax and agree with his wife. Besides, he knew that the new clothes weren't cheap, and without a source of income, Martin's aggravating behavior would eventually come to a halt.

It had too.

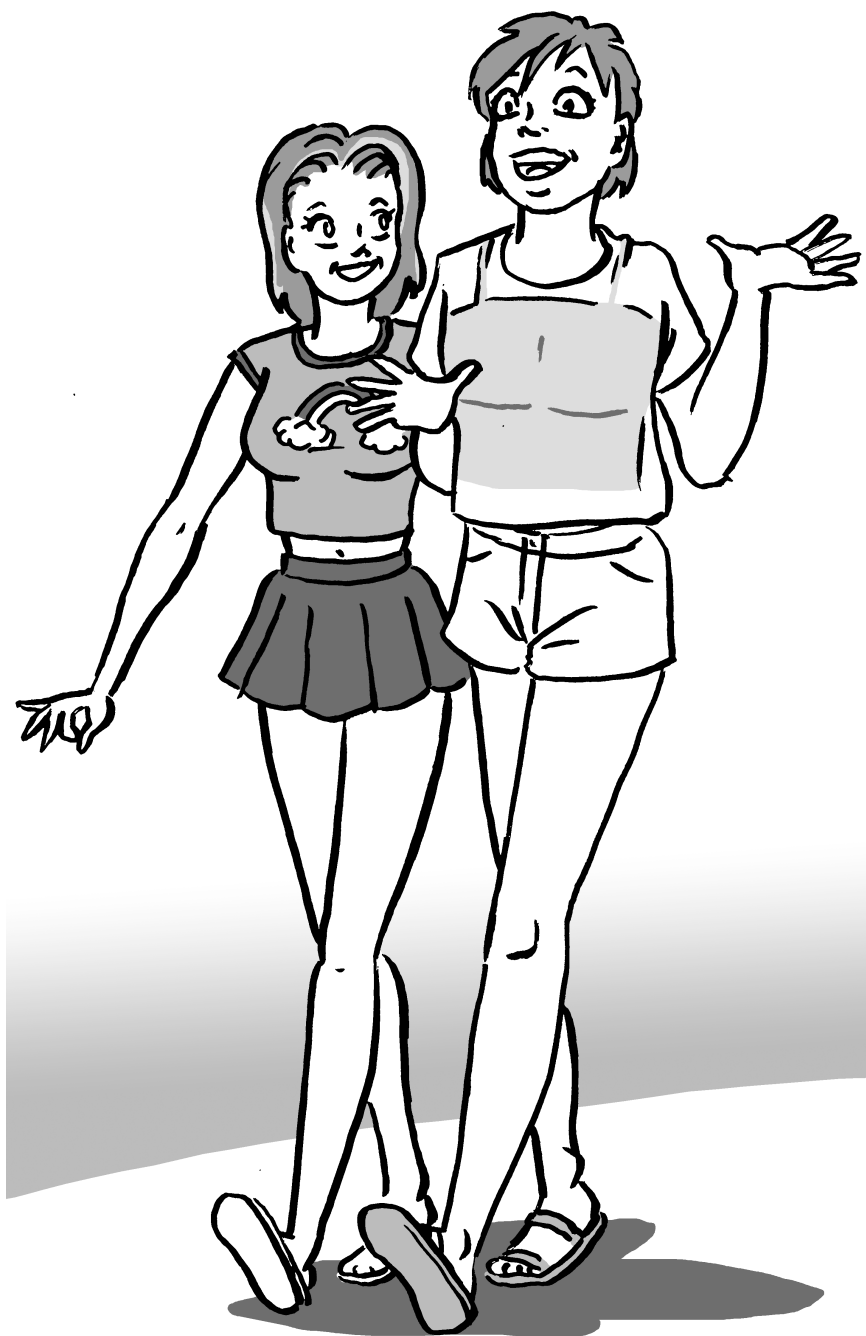


Julian was headed in a similar direction, running out of money thanks to his new clothing habit. Julian was a bright kid, though, and instead of letting the inevitable bankruptcy happen, he had decided to apply to the local diner for a job washing dishes. He had Connie suggest what he'd look best in, and went to the interview wearing a tight-fitting semi transparent light blue colored top over a snug fitting black tank top to his interview. A tank top that had very thin straps on the top, almost like... What did Connie call it again? A camisole top? A 'cami?' It didn't matter; all he knew for sure was that Connie had used her employee discount to buy it for him so it had cost him practically nothing. And he wanted to look good for his interview.

Aside from his clothes, Connie had convinced Julian to use thin black eyeliner to circle his eyes. Julian had no intention of letting her talk him into this, as it was something that would have certainly gotten him beaten up back in the city. But Connie had convinced Martin that it would make his eyes "pop" and look more awake and attentive when he talked to the interviewer... And after she showed him how to properly apply it, Julian was powerless to resist. She was the cutest girl he in town. She might even be the cutest girl he had ever met. He would do pretty much anything she asked of him. He would wear these decidedly effeminate pants and girlish tops if she asked. He would wear girly eyeliner if she asked. He would even shave his legs and armpits for her if she asked.

Which is, of course, what had happened. When Connie commented that he would look so much nicer in his nice tight high-cut bathing suit if he shaved his legs and armpits... And chest... Just like Martin had done... Well, he did it without giving it a second thought. The feel of his smooth legs against his hands was on his mind as he sat with his hands in his lap in the manager's office at the "Diner on the Greene." He had worn a pair of shorts that day, with sandals, his new "fav" footwear. The shorts were short... Very short, and hung low on his hips much as his pants had. His hip. His wide, fat, hips. He pouted. He was so disgusted with himself for having put on so much weight. He had switched to eating only salads and fruit instead of his usual stuff. Even the health food his Dad had him eat looked heavy and fatty to him now. So was it a good idea to get a job in a Diner? Fatty food was something that would prove to be increasingly difficult to avoid if he got the job. But still, he would have to do it. *Being fat was gross!*

Waiting patiently outside the diner, Connie was contemplating her luck. She had always had boys after her before, but nothing could compare to this. Julian was a total puppy-dog. If she told him to sit, he sat. If she told him to jump, he would jump. If she told him to sit, he would sit. If she told him to wear cork-soled sandals, he would wear cork-soled sandals. In fact, he would wear almost whatever she told him to, and even though she knew he was trying to impress her so he



could ask her out, she couldn't help but feel their relationship was never going to amount to any more than a friendship. She had never really considered that she could be "just friends" with a guy, but then, Julian was different. She was reminded how different he was when Julian came out of the diner – after having got the job – and he was giggling like a bubbly, chatty girlfriend.

Of course he was excited. Everything had paid off. The clothes, the eyeliner, the manager even complimented him on his shoes. He was to get started the following week, and even though he was pretty sure the manager hadn't gotten his name right through the whole interview, he was excited to start working.



Julian's new job wasn't too hard, and he was quickly awarded with the one true joy of working. A paycheck. It afforded him the luxury of a mini-shopping spree, the likes of which made Martin insanely jealous. Julian's cart was filled with snazzy embroidered hip hugger jeans, new black flared pants for work, new shoes and boots and sandals and the cutest looking tops for lounging around.

Jealous? How could Martin feel jealous? His friend was breaking his back working hard labor. But it was starting to occur to Martin that what he really needed was a job, and fast. But no-one wanted to hire him. Maybe it was his look? It was a little bit... Well, different. It was only intended to irritate his dad. Not alienate his potential employers. He had dropped resumes all over the town to no avail, and was ready to give up, until...

One night, while watching Dime-elodeon, the kids network what Connie seemed to be watching *all* the time lately, Martin lamented his lack of meaningful employment. For her part, Connie was largely ignoring him, instead trying to focus on the newest episode of Spongebob.

She was perfectly happy watching her show, telling her brother to shut up, until something he said piqued her interest..."Maybe I could fill in for you one day, if you wanted the day off!?"

Connie turned and looked Martin in the eye, "Huh?"

"You know, I could take your shift at the store and you just pay me for those hours. You were saying you thought you were working too much anyway... Weren't you?" Martin said.

It *was* true. She *did* think she was working too much. The thought of spending the day reading 'teeny bopper' magazine, watching cartoons and playing in the yard *was* pretty appealing. She could even go hunting for her old collection of Bambi Dolls, something she had been meaning to do lately.

But it wasn't like her brother could just come in and do her work for her. It was the women's department, and Martin wasn't... Well, let's think about this for a minute, she told herself. She looked her brother over carefully. It wasn't like she interacted with the staff much at work. She barely even knew their names. Her manager was still calling her "Becky," after the girl who used to work her spot.

And the way her brother looked right now... He had already worn some of her clothes, after all... Martin would just need is a little makeup and some work with

his hair. And it's not like he had never worked retail before. He had, in previous summers, stocked shelves, and occasionally helped customers at the local hardware store back in their old neighborhood in the city

"Pleeeeee!" he begged his twin.

"Tomorrow!" Said the TV, "Tune in for the all-day Strawberry Shortcake and Friends marathon!"

Well, that was the clincher. Connie just sighed, pretending to give in. "Fine", she moaned, "We'll try it... But if I get fired..."

Martin cut her off, "You won't get fired. I really need the money, you'll see!"



Martin was standing in the ladies' wear section of Langdale's Thames Greene store. Not one person had suspected that he was anyone other than Connie. She had helped him with his hair and makeup, and given him a pair of the tight black flared pants she usually wore with a nice casual top. Though he insisted on wearing his new wedge heeled black calf-high boots, the long legs of the pants hid most of them from view.

He had been practicing his twin sisters soft speech, slight lisp, and limp wrested hand gestures. He also practiced walking in short steps with a slight sway of the hips. In every measurable way, he was almost a perfect copy of Connie.

This is going to be sooooo easy, he thought to himself as he helped customers find the clothes they wanted... Or maybe at least the ones that Martin *thought* they wanted. It wouldn't dawn on anyone until a few weeks later, but 'Connie' was definitely pushing a lot more blacks and purples than she ever had.

A few weeks later? Well, Connie had less and less interest in her job. She had her little hobbies, like playing with her old toys she loved so much. Martin was happy to go in, so what was the harm?

"What's with all the black and purple she's selling?" one sales girl asked the store manager casually one day, "And what's with those boots she's been wearing?"

The store manager took it all under advisement. Connie was, after all, one of the better summer students he had hired. He certainly didn't want to do something to cause her to change her ways on sales.

At home, though, Martin made no secret of his filling in for his twin sister. He wanted his Dad to be extra pissed off... And this would really be feeding fire. His Dad might be forced to move the family back to the city... Back to all of Martin's friends. His lips curled at the outer corners as a smile formed.

"It's *so* easy." He said, "Everyone just assumes it's Connie. I even get hit on!"

Marjorie burst into laughter. Ira nearly choked on his mashed potatoes.

"It's illegal," Ira proclaimed, trying not to let his voice crack from the thick coating of potato that still lined his throat.

"Oh, it is not," his wife retorted, "There's nothing wrong with it." She turned back to Martin who was even more pleased that his mother was publicly disagreeing with his dad on the subject.

"In fact, maybe I'll come down and see you one day and you can fill me in on all the latest trends." She giggled.

Ira simply scoffed and went back to eating.

Connie mindlessly prodded her broccoli, "Can I be excused?" she whined.

"Eat your broccoli" Ira grunted.

"But mommmm, I don't wanna eat it... It's cold..." she paused, then lowered her voice, "and the new episode of Bambi Girl is on!"

Marjorie grinned, "It is?"

Connie nodded.

"Well let me put our plates away and we'll both go watch it," her mother said.

Ira shook his head, grunted disapprovingly, and continued to eat. *No wonder things are going to hell...* He thought, *I'm losing control of my family.*



Bambi Girl was huge... Ten years ago. Eight year old Connie Heath, at the time, had accumulated a massive collection of Bambi products. Now, the company that made Bambi was re-marketing it all to the next generation. Ten, twelve, and thirteen year old girls were buying Bambi dolls like they were going out of style. Bambi's new cartoon was a hit. And slowly but surely, eighteen year old Connie Heath was re-discovering her love of Bambi dolls.

Recently, she had spent hours with her brother in tow, digging through boxes in store rooms and closets, boxes and boxes and *boxes* of "Bambi-dolls" and accompanying clothes and accessories. She had amassed a gargantuan collection years ago, and never threw it out. Back when she was a little kid, she was so obsessed that her parents had worried about her growing up to be some kind of anorexic, image obsessed fashionista type. But thankfully they were wrong. Connie had turned out just fine. Although, she did like clothes... So much in fact that it was part of the reason she had applied for the job in women's department.

But she blamed her twin brother's increasingly appetite for her fashion advice for bringing back old memories of the thrill of dressing her dolls... And of creating new and different looks for them. She loved it. That had lead her to find the old boxes of "Bambi" in the basement, and brought them back up her room, just for fun. That and all the Bambi TV she had been watching. At least that's what she thought the reason was. Helping Martin and his friend Julian dress had been fun, but they were no substitute for dolls. Well, *almost no substitute.*

On one gray, rainy and cool Saturday afternoon Connie had the chance to *really* play with her brother doll... Also known as Martin. The Anderson's pool was closed, and Connie had the day off. The boys were bored, and Connie's desire to dress up her "dolls" was growing stronger. She had been playing with her "Pole-dancer-Bambi" all morning when Julian came over whining of boredom. Connie smiled. Julian was going to make it *so* easy for her. He had let his hair grow down into a kind of mullet –long at the back – short at the front, and after he and Martin visited the salon in town, had colored it with bright blonde highlights (hello pay-check!). Martin had added reddish highlights to his hair and hoped it would be

something his father would hate. Never mind that it might complicate his taking his sister's place at work – if she ever decided to come back.

"I know something fun that we can do" Connie said as her smile grew ever more wide.

"What?" The two boys responded, eagerly.

When Connie had finished dressing Julian, she allowed her "doll" to check himself out in the mirror. She even had him strut around the room in his new tricky shoes. He picked up on the proper way to walk in such shoes quickly, and from behind would have fooled just about anyone watching into thinking he was genetically pre-disposed to walking in such footwear.

She had clothed him in a pair of black-blue denim Capri pants that brilliantly displayed his smoothly waxed ankles and calves (why had he let Connie wax him again!?). He had absent mindedly ran his fingers over the smooth skin of his exposed legs (Mmmm... Oh yeah, *that's* why) while she had fixed his new frilly-sleeved peasant top in place before helping into his new peep-toe platform pumps.

Now, it was Julian's turn for makeup, as he watched with excited eyes... Eyes that Connie began to line with black liner, mascara, and just a little tiny hint of pale blue shadow. Then she applied the pink lip gloss to his mouth. He wasn't sure if

this was a good thing or not. He really wanted to impress Connie by letting her do this to him, but he was equally impressed by how "authentic" he looked, as was evident by the throbbing hard-on he had developed as he was watching the girl he liked transform him as she had. He just thanked god that they were safely behind the doors of the Heath household, as there was no telling how much he would have been teased and teased some more. Not that he would have cared much.





Later that day however, Ira Heath had cared much. When he came home to see who he thought was Connie, dressed her dark skimpy clothes and heavy makeup, he began to chastise “her” for making such poor choices, and to think ‘seriously about the impact’ that this might have on her when she started school the September. After all, “How is anyone going to take you seriously in finance, when your dressed like *that* Connie!?” he asked heatedly.

The real Connie then poked her head out of her room, “Dressed like what Daddy?” Ira’s jaw fell to the floor, as Martin burst into laughter. Even Marjorie had to chuckle at her husband’s faux-pare. Martin then took it to the next level when he raised the pitch of his voice, posed femininely, and repeated his sister’s question, “Dressed like what Daddy?” he asked softly, “Like *this*?” he continued, twirling around to model his look for all to see.

Ira’s face turned red, and he stormed off to the living room for a stiff drink. *What the hell is Marjorie letting these kids get into!?*

Earlier in the day, while Julian was getting made up by his twin sister, Martin was getting a makeover of his own. It had started quite innocently when he noticed the ‘Help Wanted’ sign posted in the window of a new store in town. A new store that was decidedly out-of-place for a small bedroom community like Thames Greene. But there it was anyway, FUSE... The boutique for real rebels (well, kids that wanted to rebel against their parents, really). *And*, Martin thought cheerfully as he entered the store, *they’re hiring*.

Inside the store was a collection of all things goth and punk. Wall to wall black clothing with bright swaths of neon pink or lavender thrown in for good measure, and what looked like some kind of salon at the back of the store to boot.

“Can I help you?” a voice called from behind. Martin spun around to see a goth princess in an ankle length black dress and makeup in a morbid black and white palette, smiling... *Well kind of*.

“I...” Martin started, “I saw the sign out front says you’re hiring” he blurted.

The girl’s half smile turned to a half sneer, “Uh... Yeah. But I don’t think you’re the kind of person we’re looking for”

Martin looked offended. “Why not?”

The girl motioned at Martin’s clothes. Make that Connie’s clothes. Dress pants, with a button down blouse and a pair of boring flat soled walking shoes.

Another voice sounded behind him, “Oh, come come now Vega. Give the girl a chance.” Martin spun around... Again... To see a man with a very tall Mohawk and several piercing dressed in black jeans and a black shirt. “Remember how you looked before you came here to work for me?”

‘Vega’ rolled her eyes. The man extended his hand. “Dillon... But you can call me Dill” he smiled. Martin wasn’t sure how to react... So he blushed.

“Mar... Er, Connie” He fumbled.

Dillon chuckled, “Oh?” then smiled.

Martin felt flush. Why was he feeling this way!?

"Sorry. Connie's my twin sister. I've been filling in for her at Langdales"

Dillon chuckled again, "Ah... And now you want to get a job of your own instead of mooching off hers."

Martin nodded.

"But I do have to agree with Vega that if you want to work here... We'll have to work on your image some."

Martin nodded again, smiling, "Okay... What did you have in mind?"

Dillon silently gestured towards the salon at the back. "I don't know. Let's just see what happens."

Dillon led Martin to the rear of the store, and asked, with a grin, "How far do you want to go?"

When Ira came home from a long day's work, laboring his way through the door and to his favorite chair, he was incensed

too see what his only daughter had done to herself. Here she was, in some sort of crazy Halloween getup, wearing lacy black "foundation garments," including a very constricting black satin corset, and short "Gaucho" pants over black knee high boots. Boots with a very skinny – very high heel and very pointed toe, and a simple black camisole of a top.

Her nails had been extended buy a quarter of an inch, and painted metallic purple and her face dusted with a light loose powder. Her eyes had been outlined with thick black eyeliner, mascara with a bit of purple eye shadow, and on her lips, a hyper-glossy clear gloss that made her lips "pop."

'Pop' like her father's veins did once he found out that 'she' was actually her twin brother.



At the opposite end of the scale was Hank Anderson. He had watched his son, his protégé, his pride and joy, start to transition from studly jock to androgynous wimp, but he seemed to take it in stride. It was hard to be mad at Julian for dressing in such clothes, when his own “so-called” grown-up wardrobe was becoming exceptionally different these days. Well, Joan had always been on him to get out of those grey wheat suits and into something a little more colorful. True, he still spent most of the day in tracksuits or tank tops; but he had broadened his selection of such and veered away from strictly grey, black and navy-blue. He loved the track suits with the wide double white lines down the sides, made of stretchy material that clung to his hind quarters and thighs but had slightly wider legs. Almost like the old bell-bottoms that he had worn as a kid back in the seventies, so it was kind of cool to wear something like them again. And it turns out that there were more colors to wear than just grey, black and blue. There was baby blue, and yellow, and white, and light green, and light purple. All fun, funky new colors that made him feel happy and young and energetic. He even brought his new color palette to the clothes he wore when going to the store, wearing light colored button down shirts, left un-tucked over his new stretchy jeans and pants with wider legs. Back in his weight room downstairs, he chose new tight-fitting tee shirts and biking shorts.

The hair on Hanks’ head was growing longer, the hair everywhere else was practically gone. He had started by shaving his legs, but eventually gave the practice up in favor of getting them waxed. And once he got his legs waxed, as painful as it was, it was a natural progression to get his whole body waxed. His wife rationalized that his obsession with fitness was behind his new hairless look. Many body builders kept their bodies hair free, and without a job to go to... Working out in the basement was all he had.

That being said, Joan was still a little concerned when she found him plucking his eyebrows, but the stress of his having been laid off was no-doubt at the root of this all. Besides, with all the changes that were going on with the Julian, his new friend, and the way they were dressing, Joan was feeling encouraged to take a second look at her appearance too. She was, after all, still quite young. So why not dress like it? She was unable to wear anything but scrubs at the lab, but the platform soled white sneakers would certainly convey the message. It was bold enough to be noticed, but subtle enough not be “too much.” Just like her hair, which she had streaked with blonde highlights, and the tan she had got at the local tanning salon, subtle enough to be tasteful, but bold enough to turn heads.

Changes were all over the Anderson household. Hank had received the long-awaited email that posted all the new jobs that would be coming to the old plant. The company was sticking to their word about relocating the Cincinnati warehouse, and Hank and his former co-workers were to get first crack at any new jobs that were available. Joan was certain that all her husband needed was to get back to work and everything would work itself out. All the things that had happened lately, Hank just put down to “adjustment,” from moving to a new place and starting over. Now, he had the chance to get things more like they used to be.

Hank *was* anxious to get back to work. As he sat at his computer and browsed through the listing of available jobs, he considered exactly *what kind* of work that would be. His fingernail tapped the mouse to scroll the screen down. The old

Hank would have never, ever ... in a million years considered getting a manicure, but he was trying new things now that he was essentially starting over. Maybe losing his job was a good thing? He pondered the thought as he perused the job list. Nothing seemed to jump out at him. "Fork Truck Operator..." he kept scrolling down... "Shipper..." still not very interesting... "Receiver..." another boring menial job that Hank wanted to avoid.

He had gotten his job at the plant right out of high school, and never known anything else. Now that Julian was growing up, he felt his duty as the "hunter and gatherer" was nearing its end. Especially since Joan had gone back to work. At thirty-six, Hank's life was far from over. In fact... One might say it was just beginning. Then just under the third "Receiver" posting something caught his eye. Hmmm, he thought to himself, it may be a bit of a stretch, but I could do that. No sense in not trying.



Work was on the mind of Hank's son too. Julian had only worked in the kitchen for a day, when he was asked to switch to waiting on tables. It would seem that the young man they had hired the week before, wasn't working out as a server, so the two were to switch their positions. Julian found it odd that he was given the option of wearing a white shirt with either a pair of black pants *or* black skirt. Of course, the fact that his new name tag arrived a day later reading "Julia" shed some light on the matter. *Oh great*, he thought, *what am going to do now?* He knew he should have corrected that when he saw it on the form, but he was just too afraid to speak up.

Now, Julian decided that he would do the only thing he could, without creating even more of a problem... Wear the incorrect name tag... *And* the black pants, and hope that the manager would pick up on the fact that his name is spelled with an "n" on the end. But of course, the manager would *not* pick up on anything, due in part to the fact that Julian's black pants were the same tight fitting, low riding, pocket-less pants that all the girls in the place wore.

As time went on, the problem seemed less and less important and Julian decided to tough it out. Besides, it was kind of fun to get a wink here and stare there from his customers who seemed to be of the belief that he was a teenaged girl. *Oh well*, he thought. It would be too confusing to try and change anything now. Who was it hurting?

Life even *more* confusing for Martin. He had clearly written "Martin", on the application form that he had filled out when he applied for a job at FUSE, but it seemed that that had somewhere along the line, everyone started calling him Marty or Martina.

The walk to work was always interesting as more than a few eyebrows were raised, to say the least, by the young thing in black hot pants, black mesh stockings, and knee-high black boots, strutting through the village square. But it was exactly what he was expected to wear. In fact, Dillon had picked it out for him himself. And the customers he looked after seemed convinced that if he wore an outfit like that, he knew a thing or two about what he was selling them.

When Martin wasn't working two jobs, he was at home... Practicing. Video games just weren't as interesting anymore. In fact, there was dust on his *Superstation* console... Something that seemed unthinkable just months ago. His new found hobby was to continue to make himself over as the darker, sexier version of his twin sister... And infuriate his father in the process... Something that he was actually becoming quite proficient at it. As one would expect, the more he practiced applying his makeup and doing his hair... The better he got at it, and the better he got at it... The more he did it. The more he did it... The more his thoughts and actions continued to change from unassuming slacker to goth-chick in waiting, including everything from the way he walked and talked to the way he held his posture and his facial expressions. The more he changed from slacker to goth-chick, the more infuriated his Dad became. The more infuriated his Dad became, the more Martin wanted to practice even more!

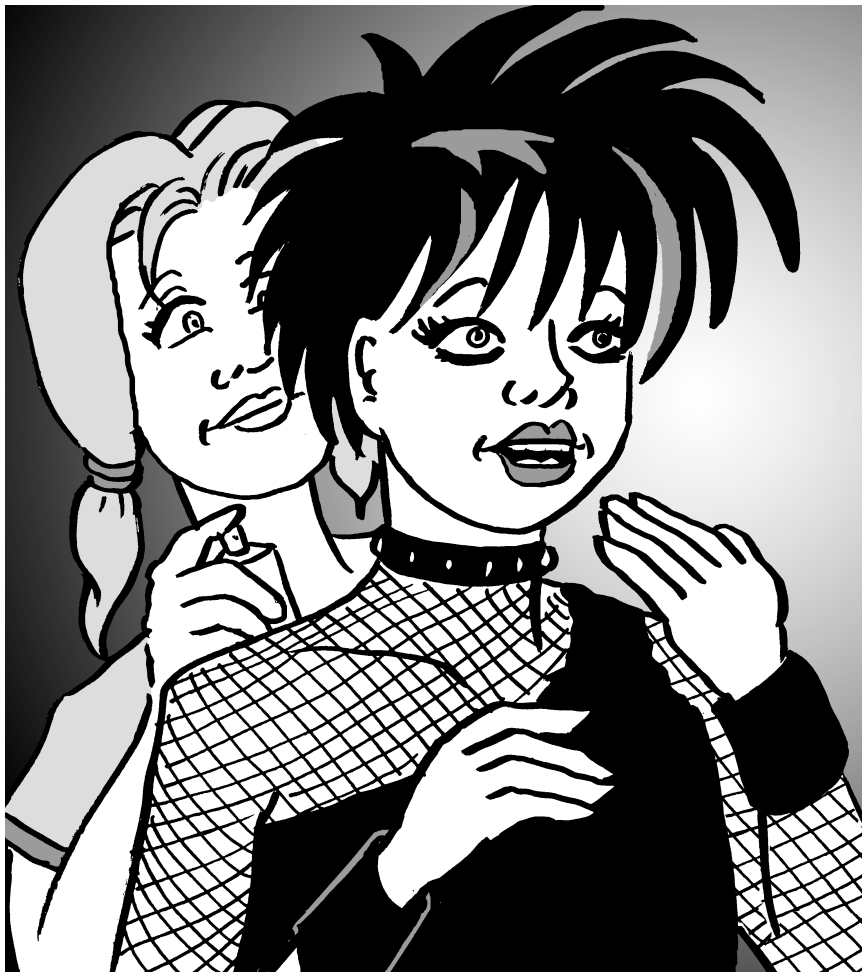
Phew!

And then with not one, but *two* paychecks in the bank, and armed with the *two* employee discounts, Martin went on a bit of a spree. He could have bought a new pair of sensible pants or shoes from the mens' department, but instead, Martin's newest outfit was more of the same. It's hard to say if he even thought much about the decisions he was making anymore. It sure didn't look like the distinction between male and female meant that much to him.

Martin was so happy to be able to get a pair new silver lame hot pants, worn with his knee high boots and purple fishnet stockings. He had an eye on them since he saw them come in to the shop. Martin contemplated buying another pair of boots with a "slightly higher" five-inch block heel and one-inch platform, but decided instead to opt for a cool pair of 'stripper' shoes with an ultra high heel and thick platform sole. Yummy. He also purchased some new tops to wear over his corset, such as a one-shouldered tank and a mesh top, all in black. The corset not only cinched his waist to a very tiny, dainty size, but served to make his hips and chest look bigger. It wasn't hard to see two very nice A-cup breasts were developing, but with the added help of the corset, they looked more like maturing B-cups.

Connie had to help him lace it up each morning, and she loved to help him dress up. She did it every day before she went off to watch her TV or play with her dolls. Today, Martin was wearing black leather cuffs with silver studs on each wrist, and a matching black leather dog collar. His Dad would freak if he saw him now. He smiled and thanked Connie for her help and asked her if she would help him finish up his hair and touch up his makeup. Connie giggled excitedly. Martin had already done his foundation – pale – and his eye makeup – black and purple with long feathered fake lashes – and his blush – bold purple – but he needed help with his lips... And since their Dad would be up soon, they had better get working. Connie smiled like a kid on Christmas as she sat beside her twin, before the vanity in his room (they had moved it out of her room... She wasn't so interested in wearing makeup as much anymore). She carefully lined his lips with black liner, then used two different shades of purple and metallic purple to fill them in. She brushed the color on twice, having him blot between coats, and then blended everything together before slicking them under clear gloss.

"Wow!" she exclaimed, "You're gonna have *all* the boys after you with lips like that!"



Martin blushed. He knew that this costume could actually give someone the wrong idea. Connie had helped him to look like a very believable goth girl, even though many people already believed it already.

“Are you ever gonna go back to being my brother?” Connie asked, innocently.

“Sure.” He shrugged. “I guess.” Martin told himself that he was doing it to get back at Ira for moving him out to the “burbs,” he had to admit that being Connie’s... Connie’s sexy evil twin... Was kind of enjoyable unto itself. Plus the way Connie acted when she got to “play” dress up with her Martin “doll” pleased him... Like he knew he was making his sister happy by being her plaything.

And she *was* so very pleased with her Martin doll. Connie thought it was funny when her Daddy got all mad every time he saw how Martin was dressed. *What’s the big deal!? It’s all make-believe!*



Connie's other doll, Julian, was also coming along nicely. This one bore more a resemblance to Connie's precious Bambi figures, and it wasn't a coincidence. When not at work, Julian came over to let Connie dress him up. He was still wearing the same preppy flared jeans, cargos and short-shorts that he had come to love since the Mid-July, mixed in with the occasional Capri pant and even a pair of heels... Like the pumps he had worn for Connie weeks ago. On top, she could attire him with an assortment of cami-tops, tanks, sleeveless sweaters and button-down shirts... Many of which showed some of the new swelling in his chest that had become *much* more noticeable.

But whilst on the job, it was a steady diet of black flares... The pocket-less kind that fit as tight as spandex shorts from his waist to his thighs... Worn with block-heeled black patent platform loafers and a wide collared white blouse. Such pants had benefits and detriments. The benefits were the even better tips from the grumpy truckers and crowds of retirees that seemed to flock to the diner each day. The detriments were the occasional pinch or playful slap on the buttocks from the same throng of grumpy truckers and crowds of retirees that flocked to the diner each day. To say nothing of the fact that such tight bottoms had require him to venture into uncharted territories with his wardrobe. Namely... the thong panty. He had started to wear them due to a need to maintain a smooth flawless image, free of visible panty line... And the little black purse that was needed to keep his wallet, ID, and assorted cosmetics that he found necessary to wear, to keep himself looking his best. A touch of blush here, a bit of mascara there and a dab of lip gloss made a world of difference in his appearance... And besides, his Dad had just purchased some he called a "man-bag" that



was identical to Julian's, so it couldn't be *all* bad. Julian had also opted to get his ears pierced and his eyebrows delicately shaped, something that Martin quickly duplicated with three silver studs in each ear, one through his nose and another through his tongue! (He was still waiting for his Dad to fly off the handle for that.)

Martin had remained steadfast to his resolve to use the confused men's weaknesses against them. He made a point of smiling extra warmly and widely and chatted his customers up, pretending to be interested... All in the name of better tips. If life hands you lemons... Make lemonade right?

A dab of vanilla perfume and an extra coating of pinkish lip gloss netted a ten percent return on investment when the tips began to roll in. Longer, rounder nails in a polish to match his mouth was another five points. Winking and placing his hands on their shoulders when he poured the coffee was another five again. And unbuttoning a button or two more to allow a glimpse down his A-cup bra was even more.

And I think they're getting even larger, he mused.



The very next day, with her brother in splendid feminine form, Connie went off to the Diner to meet Julian for lunch. Ira had planned to take the day off, and was reading his morning paper when his twin children waved their goodbyes and headed into town. As he watched from the window, it was hard to tell which child was which, what with Connie wearing a very juvenile pink shorts and t-shirt set with some logo of some doll or something it. Her hair tied in two pig-tails... Complete with ribbons... And Martin dressed... As he was. Ira simply shook his head. *What the hell is going on here?* He wondered.

"Going on where dear?" Marjorie piped up behind him. Ira realized that he must have muttered his thoughts aloud, and turned to see his wife, wearing a pair of Connie's short-shorts and tube top smacking bubble gum in her mouth as she stood before her husband. Her hair seemed lighter, and was pulled back into a playful ponytail. Ira had to admit, she looked pretty good for her age. Maybe all that swimming, and hanging out with Joan next door was good thing for



her. The two of them were always hanging out – gossiping, shopping, giggling, likely drinking – the whole lot.

“I don’t know... Its just the kids... They’re acting so...” his voice dropped off. Marjorie scrunched up her face as if it could help her brain process his words better. She didn’t seem to understand what Ira was saying. “So different...” He continued, “but a lot of things are different around here. I met Tom from the office, you remember Tom that first told me about this place?” he paused again, waiting for his wife to catch up.

“Uh, huh. Yeah. Sure.” She said, looking at her fingernails.

Smiling blankly, she nodded. “Anyhow, we had breakfast over at the diner in town, and you’ll never guess who served us? The neighbor’s boy, Martin’s friend... What’s his name? Julian?” Ira was getting this sinking feeling that Marjorie wasn’t really paying attention as she nodded unconvincingly again.

“Anyhow... *he* served us, which was fine, but I got to tell you Marj, I think he was wearing makeup... And the pants and shoes he was wearing... I have to tell you dear, I wasn’t sure that *he* was a *he* at all. And on top of that, his name tag said “Julia.” Not Julian... *Julia*... and have you seen what your daughter’s been up to lately? Playing with her dolls? What is she... Twelve!? And don’t even get me started on Martin...” He stopped to wait for some sign that what he was saying was sinking in to Marjorie’s head.

Marjorie nodded, “Oh, yeah. Its terrible.” She let a short pause hang in the air before speaking again, “Hey, are you takin’ the day off? We need some stuff from the store.” She handed over a list.

Ira’s jaw dropped. He shook his head, and headed for the hall closet, “Never mind.” He said in a gruff tone as he slipped on his shoes, grabbed a jacket and headed for the garage.

Marjorie simply stood and watched and smiled, “Bye-bye Babe!” she called after him, “Have a fun day at work!” Ira was intentional when he slammed the door behind him.

Marjorie didn’t clue in. Joan was also off that day and the two of them were going to play tennis. That was all that she was thinking about. She hadn’t played since she was a teenager, and was looking forward to it. To both the game *and* the sweet little tennis skirt and top she had bought. Truth be told she was dying to wear it around the house, but thought that old ‘Mister Pouty Pants...’ Her husband... would likely frown and get all mad and stuff.

Oh well, she thought. She would just have to have fun in spite of him.



Life in a small town can be fun. Connie, for one, was thoroughly enjoying her walk to the Diner for lunch with her twin brother in tow. People, mostly customers that knew her from Langdale’s, smiled politely when they saw Connie and her twin. Connie grinned with satisfaction whenever she heard whispering from behind them as she and Martin continued to the diner. The restaurant was busy, so chit-chat time with Julian was minimal. Martin was awe-struck with his friend’s

name tag. He said it was “so cool” that Julian was using a girl name at work like he was at Langdale’s. “We’re so bad.” He said to Julian.

Julian impishly smiled back in agreement. “We’re *bad* girls.”

Lunch consisted of a grilled cheese sandwich for Connie, and a garden salad for Martin. “I have to watch my girly figure” he chuckled to Julian. Soon after finishing, Connie announced that she had to get home, as her new favorite TV show was going to be on. Martin wasn’t sure what the name of it was, he just remembered thinking it was awfully juvenile. She said goodbye and skipped on out of the side. Since Martin wasn’t working until later, he stayed at the diner until Julian was finished with his shift, so the two boys could walk home together. They walked, arm in arm down Thames Green’s main street, giggling and laughing and carrying on like two teenagers would be expected to carry on. Two teenaged *girls* that is.

They loved watching to reactions. The gaping jaws. The whispering. The pointing. The two caused many a head to turn. Martin’s outfit in particular caused many a jaw to drop as they paraded through the town square.

One such head that was turned and jaw that was dropped was that of Trevor Hindlick, the star high school athlete who happened to be walking through the square with his girlfriend Laura, on their way to the diner for a milkshake. Trevor had never before seen the goth-looking girl approaching from the opposite direction flanked by a preppy blonde on her right side. She (Trevor had no reason to think that such a curvy creature would be anything but a ‘she’) locked eyes with him as they passed. Trevor’s head began to swivel as the “girl” continued on “her” way. His eyes gave a quick scan of her black knee high boots, bright pink stockings and short black skirt that hugged tightly to her pert round ass. His jaw began to sag. The “girls” both smiled at him as he paused on the street, his girlfriend looking *very* uncomfortable.

“Hey, you new in town?” he called after them, trying to act the part of the macho-jock with confidence galore.

Martin and Julian turned and smiled, “Yeah,” was their synchronized response.

Trevor moved forward, hand extended, “I’m Trevor...” he began, “and this is Laura” he gestured to the girl at his side as he shook the two boys hands.

“I’m his girlfriend” Laura added. She was going to mark her territory right from the start, as she too shook hands with Martin and Julian.

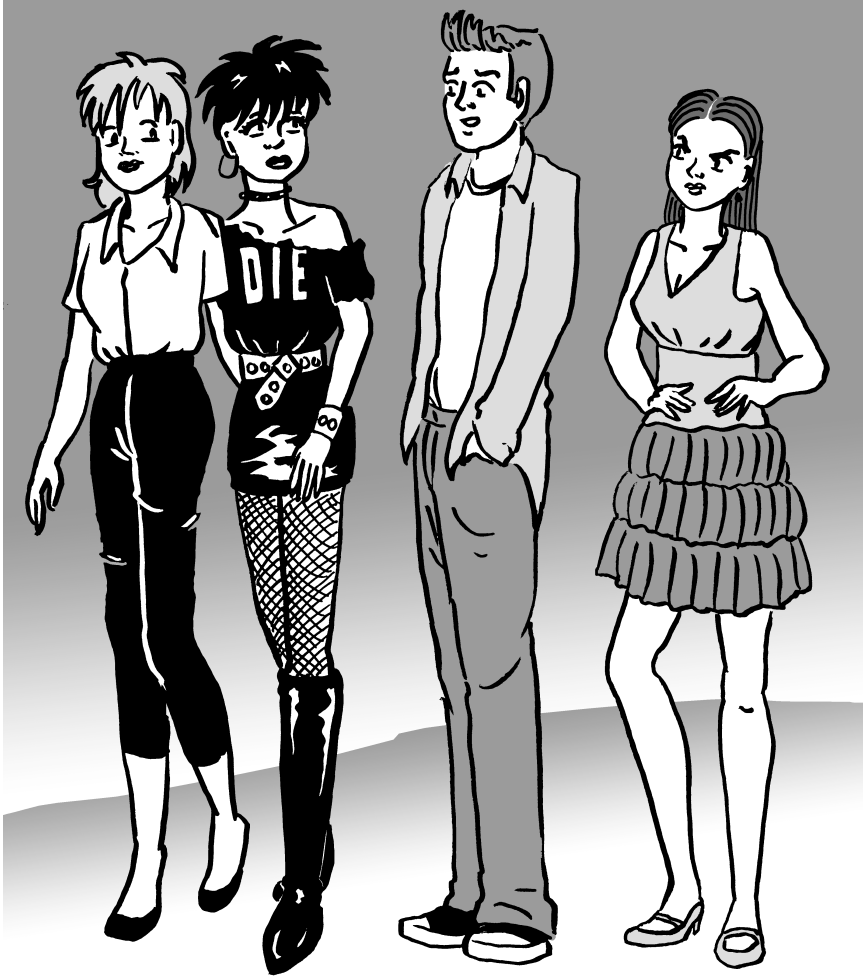
“I’m Mar...” Martin began, “...tina” he blurted out after a slight pause.

“Martina?” Trevor repeated.

“Yeah, but we just call her Tina” Julian interjected, “and I’m Julia.” He smiled and cocked his head to one side, fluttering his lashes and gazing at the boy as he did for his customers.

Trevor cocked his head, as if he wasn’t sure what Julian had just said, but smiled widely none the less, “Nice to meet you... Tina... And Julia” His smile seemed to be directed at Martin more than anyone.

“Hey... Uh... Are you doing anything this Saturday?” he asked, “I’m having a big party at my place. My parents will be there, so it’ll be kinda lame... But still, it could be fun, you know? Hang out, have some burgers and stuff. Get to know everyone.”



“No, *we* aren’t doing anything.” Julian answered, expanding Trevor’s question to include him as well.

“Yeah, uh, of course. Uh, so what’cha think? Up for it?” He tried to gauge the “girls” reaction. “It was my Mom’s idea... She’s big on getting to know everyone in town... And since we’re *all* essentially new here...”

“We’d *love* to!” Julian interrupted, not wanting to give his friend the opportunity to chicken out.

“Cool,” Trevor smiled, “We’re on 17 Edenwood... It’s the biggest house on the street, you can’t miss it. Oh and bring your friends, you know, like anyone else you know. The more the merrier.”

And with that, Trevor turned and walked away, with Laura visibly upset at his openly flirting in front of her. Martin and Julian were visibly giddy at the prospect

of being invited to house party... However lame it may end up being... As "Tina" and "Julia." They couldn't *wait* to tell Connie!



Ira waited until he knew that the kids had all left, and the women were off doing whatever they were doing. He rang the doorbell. "Hey, Ira? What's up?" Hank Anderson replied. He had a towel around his neck and was blotting some sweat from his brow. "Sorry. I must look like crap. I was working the pectorals."

"Yeah." Ira replied, uninterested in the reasons. "Hey, I just thought I'd come over and see if I could borrow a hammer from you."

"A hammer?" Hank said. "Yeah, of course. I've got a few in the garage. Follow me." Hank then led Ira inside the house and through the kitchen towards the garage.

Ira took the opportunity to do some spying and get a good look inside his neighbor's house. He noted that someone had been baking. "Joan cooks, huh? Luck catch there."

"Huh?" Hank said. "No, she doesn't cook." He opened the door to the garage. "Don't you have any hammers? You look like the handyman type to me."

"Sure I do... But I haven't finished unpacking yet. I just can't find one."

"I see." He waved towards a neatly organized wall of pegboard that held a variety of tools. "Take your pick."

Ira nodded. "Hey, I was meaning to ask you. Have you noticed anything odd about our kids lately?" Ira rubbed his chin, trying to look like he wasn't desperately awaiting the answer to this question.

"You mean how the boys are dressing up like girls?" Hank said, bluntly.

Ira's face could have fallen off onto the floor. "You know, then?" Ira asked.

"I was wondering when you'd say something. I assume you're not condoning your son's way of dressing?"

"I don't condone anything that degenerate son of mine is into lately." Ira gruffly replied. "I had been convinced he was doing this to tick me off, but now it's just going too far."

"I think Julian just was trying to fit in with your son." Hank leaned against the hood of his car, looking down on the floor, despondently. "He used to take such good care of his body. He was my best friend. My pride and joy. Now I'm pretty well convinced he's taking something to grow breasts."

"Why haven't you done something to stop him?" Ira demanded. "We can't let this happen to our kids!"

"What do you propose we do? Every time I talk to my wife about it, she doesn't even seem to understand what the problem is. It's like she's been..."

"Brainwashed." Ira finished. "Marjorie's the same way. And the way those two have been carrying on, they act like they're teenagers!"

"Joan is out of control. She's lost any sense of responsibility. I'm practically running this household now."

"Marjorie won't even make toast anymore. The other day, she called me 'dude.'"

Hank looked Ira in the eyes. "I swear to you, Ira, if I knew what was happening, I'd stop it. But I can't figure this out. It makes no sense. Julian doesn't seem to know or care what's going on in his life, Joan is a space case, and I don't know what to tell you about Martin and Connie."

"Well, at least I know it's not just me. I thought I was losing it. Time for the funny farm for ol' Ira."

Hank stood up and put his hand on Ira's shoulder. "Don't worry about it, pal. You and I, we can get through this together."

Ira stuck out his hand. Hank shook it firmly. "Together. We've got to fight this."

"We will."

They just didn't know how.



That following Saturday morning, Julian Anderson was sitting on Martin Heath's bed. Julian had spent the night at his friend's house, doing what boys do. Such as watching boy band videos, reading "Seventeen" and "Vogue" magazine, eating low fat rice crisps and gossiping. Both boys had plenty to gossip about, as they were experiencing the same growing lumps and swelling in the same places, in addition to their ever-growing love of all things fashion. That morning they were lounging around painting each others nails and talking about... Amongst other things... The boy that had invited them to his house party later that day... And how much they were looking forward to going.

"Oh my god," Julian purred while painting Martin's toes a shiny metallic lavender color, "Did you see her face when he looked at you? I thought she was going to shit!" referring to the girl that the Trevor had been with. Martin's eyes grew wide and sparkled, then he giggled, and continued to flip through his magazine, stopping to gaze at hairdos he liked and read the horoscope sections. The boys had figured that they more they knew about what it was like to be a girl, the more

they'd fit in. At least that's what they told each other. "Trevor probably thinks I'm a freak... And a freak named *Tina*!"

"So?" Julian chimed, "Some guys are into that." The two friends burst into a fit of giggles.

"Oh my God, I'd never have thought I was going to go to a party with a football player."

"Don't stress." Julian said, bunching his long hair into a scrunchie. "I played football last year. We're not all stupid jocks n' stuff."

"I think the last party I went to was my own birthday party. When I was ten."

"You were never that popular before, were you?" Julian asked.

"I was such a loser. I don't think I ever had any more than, like, three friends." He paused to think. "And they were just a bunch of guys who used to push me around. Got me into trouble n' stuff."

"That sucks."

"Oh, I know, right? I can't wait for school to start so I can just start over. No more being shy."

"I so know what you're talking about. Sometimes I just feel like I'm a completely new person." Julian examined his pink polished nails for any imperfections.

"You think I should bring my boss? Dillon?" Martin asked.

"Huh" Julian said, not really paying attention, "sure... Whatever."

"He's exactly the sort of person I'd never have had the guts to talk to. Do you like him?"

"Dillon? He's so old!" Julian objected. "He's what, like twenty?"

"I told him I was eighteen when I took the job." Martin grinned.

"Are you eighteen?" Julian asked.

Martin had to think. "I don't know." He thought more, but couldn't find an answer. "I can't remember. How weird is that?"

"I suppose it doesn't matter. So do you like this Dillon guy?"

Martin smiled to himself. He was feeling that weird flush feeling again.



Later that day Connie checked her makeup in the mirror, bubble-gum pink lipstick... The kind that was strawberry flavored... And powder blue eye shadow with sparkles. It was just the way she liked it. Cute and light and fun, not all serious and grown up like her brother's makeup. He had apparently spent the *whole* afternoon at work getting ready for the party tonight. Connie supposed that she couldn't blame him. Everyone wanted to look their best. She had helped Julian get ready to look his best, and she was sure when they finally saw Martin later that night, he would be looking his best too.

She looked aside to see her brother's best friend, and grinned wide with pride. Standing and primping in the reflection from his mirror, Julian was wearing his newest snug fitting denim. Not the snug flared jeans that most people had seen in

him for last few months. Not even the denim capris he was favoring as of late, but a new type of denim he had purchased just for tonight, a short denim mini-skirt worn with pale blue pantyhose, and white leather knee high boots. The boots had a slightly pointed toe and daring 4" stiletto heel, not nearly as daring as Martin's, but *very* cute nonetheless. A body hugging pale blue ribbed sweater with a high neck gave display his lovely budding curves, including two pert B cup breasts.

Julian had picked out everything for himself... From his clothes to his long metallic pink covered acrylic nails. Even though Julian felt perfectly comfortable doing everything himself, he let Connie do his hair. But that was only because she wouldn't stop whining about it. Was he still trying after all this time, to impress Connie? He wasn't so sure anymore that she was the type of girl that he had thought she was, she seemed increasingly immature as of late. Maybe it wasn't her he was trying to impress after all. He daydreamed about his adoring customers and their fat tips. Certainly *they* appreciated the extra effort. Maybe he wasn't trying to impress Connie... Maybe he never was.

He looked into the mirror... Then at Connie who, over at her dollhouse, was making sure that 'Homemaker Bambi' and her husband 'Ben' were carefully seated for dinner, then back at his image. He thought about looking like this at work, how his customers would gawk and drool over him. His heart was beating so fast. He shook his head to stay focused, his oversized gold hoop earrings flapping. Connie had helped him to style his bleached blonde hair into cute little ringlets, but had given only minimal assistance in applying his makeup. Pale, flawless, matte skin with bright pink cheeks and shiny metallic pink lips... To match his nails, his eyes were lined in pink, but his lashes were coated in black. Pale blue eye shadow blended to beige, blended to white. He looked fantastic and he knew it.

"Ready to go Jules?" Connie asked. Julia's ears rung, as it was the first time anyone had outside of the Diner had used that name... And to honest... It sounded marvelous. His dainty heels clicked as he skipped out of Connie's room, and the neighbors went off to the house party at Trevor Hindlick's house.



Ira continued to be less than impressed with the goings on his house. His daughter, once his pride and joy, had been acting ever more immature these last few days. Aside from her constant playing with dolls... When not playing with the life-sized doll her neighbor had become (but that was a different story)... She had been wearing more and more juvenile clothes, like those childish tee-shirts with cartoon characters on them, and chewing bubble gum, and watching cartoons on TV for gods-sake. To make matters worse, Ira could once carry on a very intelligent conversation with his college soon-to-be finance major... But lately, it seemed her attention span was waning, as was her knowledge of business and politics that she had once prided herself on. Most of the time, whenever he broached the subject matter, to try and instigate an intelligent conversation, she would simply shrug her shoulders, snap her gum, and say "I dunno. Whatever you say Daddy."

He sat on his deck chair behind his house, sipping a scotch on the rocks, and slowly smoking a cigar. It had been so long since he had last smoked, but with work as business and stressful as it was... And his Daughter acting as she was...

And Marjorie acting like a bubble-headed moron as of late... And Martin... He took a long puff and another sip before exhaling. Martin was going to be the end of him.

He had moved him out here to get away from the drugs and the fights and right next door to a two families that had started off perfectly normal, but were becoming more and more abnormal by the day. He furrowed his brow and took another puff of the cigar. He had seen his son wearing a skirt that he wouldn't even allow his *wife* to be seen in, complete with lipstick and other makeup... Calling himself "Tina." Ira shook the ice cubes in his glass tumbler before brining the scotch to his lips. *Something* more than just teenaged angst was going on here... He was sure of it. But what? Hank had said that he thought Julian was taking drugs to grow breasts. But that didn't even begin to explain the other things going on. In the distance he could hear his wife giggling loudly as she frolicked with the neighbors in the pool. She was no-doubt wearing that little bikini she had shown him earlier. She and Joan had apparently bought in the city when Marjorie met her there for lunch. Marjorie had never-*ever* gone out for lunch with anyone, and she had certainly never worn a bikini before. Ira gritted his teeth as he tried to formulate a possible explanation why his family and his neighbor's families, were slowly going mad. As of yet, there *wasn't* one.

He hoped Hank could come up with something. Because he had bubkis.



As Trevor had promised, his *was* the largest house on Edenwood Court, and it was buzzing with excitement when Connie and Julian/Julia arrived. They were brought into the back to be introduced to everyone and socialize over hamburgers and punch... Punch that Trevor had secretly spiked with vodka. Dillon and Martin were already there. Julian burst into a fit of giggles as Martin rose from his seat beside his boss, smoothing out his pleated black miniskirt. He had bought it that day, special... Just for him. He twirled for his best friend, drinking in the compliments then dispensing a few of his own. He was trying to remind himself that he was *not* a girl, but no one else knew that, and it didn't seem that important right now. He couldn't shake the thought of how much he had enjoyed the attention from Trevor earlier in the week, and also of his boss, the much older, much more devilish Dillon. He also couldn't shake the thought of how much he enjoyed the way a skirt felt on him... Especially with his black seamed stockings and knee high boots with the five-inch heel that he had decided against earlier (after practicing in them for a few days he had walking down pat). Dillon had convinced him. He also convinced him to darken his hair, still with bold mahogany colored highlights... And to wear a rich burgundy lipstick with his pale face and dark eyes.

The effect was intense. Trevor was trying so hard to spend as much time chatting with 'Tina' as he could afford, while Dillon would spend much of the night with his arm around Martin's tiny waist. Trevor's girlfriend Laura, spent much of the night giving Martin cold stares as she grumbled to her girlfriends about Trevor's flirtatious ways. Martin was enjoying it immensely. *Imagine... Two guys fighting for my attention*, something that he knew would make his Dad see red. *If only he could see me*, he thought while Trevor got him another plastic cup of punch.

Julia was being hit on too. But with Connie right there, he tried his best to resist the boys advances. He didn't want to let on that A) he wasn't a girl, B) He was interested and C) that he was available. ... that is until he spotted Connie with a guy from work, talking quietly together, his arm over her shoulder. That caused Julia to become insanely jealous.

Why am I wasting all my time on her!? He wondered to himself.

He resolved that he would fight fire with fire. So when one of Trevor's friends... *Did he say his name was Reg..?* Started to talk to him, he made sure that everyone at the party could see... Especially Connie. And after a couple more drinks of that delicious punch... *Oh my god this stuff is like, so good...* He made sure that every-



one could see him snuggling up with Reg on one of park benches in Trevor's backyard. And when Reg put his arm around him, he giggled sweetly, hoping that Connie would see him in another person's arms. Or did he even care what Connie thought? Did he even know where Connie was?

"What's wrong?" Reg asked.

"Oh, nothing... I..." Julia scanned the crowd for Connie, "I'm just not sure where Connie went. We're like... Best friends... You know?"

Reg smiled, then leaned in to give Julia's neck a quick kiss, "I'd like to be *your* friend too" he said softly.

Julia blushed fiercely, but couldn't help smiling. Why was he feeling so weird? Why didn't it seem to matter that the boy had just kissed his neck? Then it dawned on him... Reg, simply couldn't help himself. Julia thought back to all the times he had been courting a super hot girl... How totally incapacitated a hot girl could make a boy. *Reg thinks I'm totally hot!* He said to himself with a smile.

Julia's thoughts of making Connie jealous had finally and permanently drifted away as he focused on his newfound friend's hands gently exploring his inner left thigh and lower right breast.

While Julia had become preoccupied Reg's attention, Connie had been preoccupied with the attentions of many different boys... But in a different way. She was frustrated from all of them bugging her so much when she *clearly* wasn't interested in them. And *why* wasn't she interested in them? That was a good question that Connie could not seem to find an answer to. They just all seemed to be so... Bo... *Icky!* After being courted by boy number five, she finally became fed up, and went storming inside the Hindlick's house to "use the bathroom", only to stumble across a group of "tweens" in Trevor's basement. The giggling girls, aged eleven and twelve, were having their own party, hosted by Trevor's little sister.

"Oh my gawd!" Connie said as she came into the downstairs family room, "Is that the new Bambi-Movie DVD?"

One of the girls spun her head, "*You* know who Bambi is?"

Another girl piped up "Aren't you a little *old* to play with Bambi Dolls?" The group of girls burst into a fit of giggles.

Connie laughed mockingly, "Like, ha-ha. Real funny. I'll have you know that I've been playing with Bambi Dolls since you were in diapers. I've got like, *every* Bambi doll ever made... And I've got Bambi's Pink Hummer and the Bambi Posh Condo set, which I'm sure you know are super-rare."

The other girls were speechless. "You've got Bambi's Pink Hummer?" the first girl asked. Connie nodded. "That is like... *So* cool! My daddy said it was too expensive."

"It cost me so much, but so totally worth it! I mean... I wasn't playing with it much for the last few years, but now I'm totally into it again!" Connie grinned as she sat down with her brand new friends.



Ira had finished his scotch and puffed his cigar down to a tiny nub. He could still hear laughter coming from next door where his wife was chumming with the Heaths. He walked into the kitchen to freshen up his drink, when it struck him how quiet his own house was. With his children out at a party... And his wife at the neighbors... It struck him how sad and empty his home felt. This wasn't how it was supposed to be.

He had moved here for a *better* life. A better life for him, and his family, and while *they* all seemed to be having fun and making new friends, and having new experiences... Here *he* was... Alone. He put the cap back on the top of his bottle of fine Scottish Whiskey, this third... Or fourth... Or however many it was, he was losing count. He looked around the empty kitchen and sighed, before taking a sip from his glass.

Maybe he should loosen up, not be so hard on his son for dressing like some kind of vampire girl. Maybe he shouldn't worry about his daughter playing with dolls instead of reading the stock pages of the morning paper. Maybe he shouldn't care that his wife was dressing and acting much like she did back he first met her. Maybe interacting with the peculiar neighbors wasn't such a bad thing. Hank, after all, seemed like a solid guy.

He gave his head a shake. *I haven't been drinking that much*, he thought to himself. No... Things definitely *were* strange here in Thames Greene, and starting tomorrow, he was going to get to the bottom of it. But for now, he was going to venture up the street to sit around the backyard with his wife and her new friends... And finish up his drink.

No one was more surprised, and more pleased, then Marjorie when Ira came walking into the Anderson's back yard... Even though he looked to be staggering a little, and even though he had a drink in one hand and a freshly lit cigar in the other. Everyone greeted him cheerfully, as he pulled up a patio chair and plunked down beside his wife.

"Don't mind me," he slurred, "just carry on as if I wasn't here." Ira placed the cigar between his lips and took several long satisfied puffs.

"So Joan thinks that she can get me a temp job at the lab, babe," Marjorie bubbled excitedly, "That'd be so great!"

Ira rolled his eyes, but no one noticed, "Oh yeah... That's *great* dear. I'm sure you'll make a... A fine... Uh... Uh... Whatever it is that you'll be doing."

"Well its only part time... Like a summer job... Answering phones n' stuff," Marjorie hadn't caught on to the sarcasm in his voice... *No one* had, "but I'm thinking that maybe I might go back to school and become a nurse, er... Something you know, like... If I think can do it."

Ira's mind wandered to a picture of his wife dressed in a "naughty" nurse costume, "Oh I think you'd make a *very* naughty nurse."

Marjorie giggled. The others joined in.

"And I she doesn't work out as a nurse I can always get her a job now that I'm back to work," Hank piped up, "I think we're still hiring."

Ira chuckled; the thought of Marjorie working in a factory was even more ridiculous. "What do you do again?" He asked Hank.

"Well I used to supervise an assembly line, but now that they've outsourced all of that... I'm in more of a... Well... Administrative position now." He chuckled, looking around the group as if they were all in on the joke.

Ira was clueless, "Oh yeah? So like an office job."

Hank smiled as if encouraged by Ira's interest in his job, "Well yeah, since LCI, Lan-Cor International, centralized their distribution and file storage division in the old plant, that's about the only kind of job there is anymore."

Hank's smile continued after the sentence ended as he looked at Ira, as he fidgeted with his dangling gold necklace nervously.

The alcohol had slowed Ira's thinking some, but eventually Hank's words sunk in. He worked for Lan-Cor... The same Lan-Cor that had developed this community. *Hmmm*, he thought to himself, *interesting*. Maybe he could get a break with the homeowners association or something.

Joan and Marj retreated to the house to refresh their drinks. Hank took the opportunity to move his chair closer to Ira's, "So..." he began, smiling, "Tell me all about what *you* do Mr. Heath."

If Ira had been sober, he might have clocked his neighbor right in the yap. Of course, if Ira had been sober, he likely would never have come over in the first place, so it was a moot point. The point was that Ira wasn't sober, and as such... Did *not* realize the glassy odd look in Hank's eyes as he told him all about the world of business consulting.





The week following the party at Trevor Hindlick's flew by, and both Trevor and Reg were actively pursuing the favor of the new girls in town. Girls they knew only as "Tina" and "Julia." For their part, Martin and Julian didn't mind the attention. In fact, they were kind of craving it. They couldn't explain why... But whenever other boys were around, their hearts seemed to pump a little faster, and their bodies seemed to feel a little numb and tingly. Especially in their chests... Specifically the nipple areas, which were so swollen and tender as of late. It would have been worse, if not for the support of the bras they were wearing.

Julian kind of liked Reg. He was a nice guy, and very sweet... Though he didn't know why he chose to use a word like that to describe another guy. It was "sweet" of him to drop by the Diner on Monday for lunch. It was "sweet" of him to drop by on Tuesday too. And even "sweet" to see him on Wednesday and Thursday. And on Friday, when he offered to meet Julian at the Diner after work for a milkshake... That very "sweet" too.

Julian, Connie and Martin were lounging around Julian's bedroom that morning gabbing about the weeks' goings on.

"You think he likes you?" Connie asked, "I mean... Like, more than a friend?"

Julian blushed. He knew the consequences of being more than a friend. He still knew he wasn't really the kind of person that Reg believed him to be, and that could lead to complications... To say the least.

"I dunno" Julian began, "It all kinda started back after the party when he gave me a ride home in his pick-up truck. He was like... So..." his voice trailed off as he batted his eyelashes.

"What!?" the other two girls asked, "What was he so like!?" Julian blushed and looked away, which only made the other two more curious.

"What? What?" Martin chimed. "Tell us!" Connie piped.

"It's no big deal... Really. I mean you *know* that Trevor spiked the punch... So we were both a little tipsy... especially me." Julian glanced down at the painted pink toenails at the ends of his cutesy little feet.

"Oh my gawd Jules!" Martin crooned, "Did you..." his voice trailed off.

Julian blushed a deeper shade of red, "We were just parked on the street... Up the street from my house and... He had been so nice to me all night and..." he smiled as he recounted the events, "it was really very innocent... It was just a spur of the moment thing..." He paused to look over at his friends, who were hanging off his every word.

"He just kind of leaned over and... He um... Kissed me." He blushed a deep crimson that even a thin layer of beige foundation couldn't conceal.

"And?" Martin probed.

Julian thought back to the previous Saturday... To Reg's hands all over his body... Teasing his swollen nipples... Ticking his inner thighs... Kissing his neck and earlobe. Julian had been powerless to resist. In fact, as he recalled, he was kissing the boy back.

It just kind of happened. It wasn't anyone's fault. Reg just couldn't help himself, and Julian understood. As far as Reg knew, Julia was cute girl... A *really* cute girl. And as long as the he thought Julian was Julia, he would be powerless to resist. And if Reg couldn't resist Julian... Julian was powerless to resist Reg. It was a vicious circle... And Julian loved it. To have that kind of power over someone was irresistible to Julian... Not to mention kind of fun. It wasn't like he was making any progress with anyone else. How could have even thought about trying to attract Connie? That just seemed like such a strange idea now. And anyway, he was going to be hanging out with Reg again this Saturday night... He smiled sighed as he thought about seeing Reg again.

"Did you like it?"

Memories of the past week flooded Julian's head. Reg flirting with him daily at work, the two teenagers walking hand-in-hand from the Diner. Reg's pride at having Julian on his arm was obvious to all. Julian had tilted his head slightly to the left, leaning it on his boyfriend's shoulder. He sighed as the word melted in his mind... *His boyfriend*. He blushed as the realization hit him how he thought of Reg.

"Oh my Gawd Jules!" Martin crooned, "You *did*! You liked it! You like him!"

"So!?", Julian retorted, "Its not like you haven't been playing *two* guys, leading them on like you are you little slut."

Now it was Martin's turn to blush. It was true that he got butterflies in his stomach the very first time he met Dillon. And again at the party when Trevor kept trying to flirt with him. And again when Martin was at work with Dillon and he kept touching him on the but. And again when Trevor dropped by the following Tuesday, pretending to shop to for shoes for Laura. And again on every other day of the week.

"Its not my fault that guys like me?" Martin pouted.

"Oh!?" Julian scowled "And what are you saying? That I can't get two guys?"

Martin tossed a pillow across the bed at his friend and stormed out of the room in huff.

"God," Julian said, "He can be such a bitch sometimes! Right Con?"

Connie was decidedly quiet. Truth be told, Connie couldn't care less about boys. She and her new friends were getting along *great*! They were meeting almost all the time to gossip and play with Connie's huge assortment of Bambi dolls and accessories. Who cares that they were just barely old enough to wear training bras?! They thought that Connie was the coolest girl ever. She had a drivers license, and a cell phone... And boobs! The giggling and gawking that came from Connie's room was enough to drive the adults nuts. But the adults... Namely Connie's "daddy" Ira was beyond nuts.

"Sure" Connie replied, rolling a lollipop around in her mouth, "Whatever"

Both Martin and Julian were going to be on a "double-date" with Reg and Trevor, though they were calling it "just hanging out." Trevor's girlfriend Laura was out of town, and the temptation was too great to resist. Martin was looking forward to flaunting his date with Trevor in front of his dad.

Connie was hanging out at a friend's house for a slumber party, which left Martin and Julian alone to help each other to get ready for their dates. The two neighbors had been dressing and making themselves up for so many weeks now that it was second nature.

Predictably, Ira was royally pissed. Even though Martin had gotten a job ... make that *two* jobs, the boy was dressing like a girl... Using a girl name, and worse of all... Now he was going to date boys. *Is he trying to make me go nuts!?*

When Dillon at work found out that Martin planned to go on a date with Trevor, he was extremely nuts.

"What do you want with that little punk that I haven't got?" he asked point blank, as if he had assumed that they were already dating.

Martin just sighed, "It nothing Dill, we're just friends. I'm just doing it for Julian. She really liked Reg and we had this fight and I got all mad and so this is how I'm making it up to her."

"Did you say Julian?" Dillon asked.

"What? Me?" Martin paused, "Julia. You know... Julia... My best friend Julia."

And so with that out of the way, Dillon begrudgingly started to help Martin find something appropriate to wear on his 'non-date' date with Trevor that night.



Meanwhile, in another part of town... Scott Penner was taking stock of his accomplishments. He had inherited CEO title of a company in disrepair. Sure, Dr. Dunney had started to turn the failing company's fortunes, but the "old Man" as people still called him had pulled them out of bankruptcy, but at what cost? The Edenwood "thing", cost them millions, and then there was the lawsuit, not to mention the multiple settlements out of court. Scott was hoping that reorganizing several divisions, shipping some of its manufacturing to cheaper overseas contractors, acquiring some promising start-up companies... And the new Thames Greene development, of course... Would show Wall Street investors that he was putting the past behind him and moving Lan-Cor forward as a profitable, scandal-free corporation.

As the "New Face" of Lan-cor, Penner decided to go out and show his face in public much more than any Lan-cor CEO had ever done. One such "photo op" was the tour of Lan-Cor's Central Region operations. He started his day visiting the regional offices, giving an early morning pep talk to under-motivated employees, telling them how important they were to Lan-Cor's continued return to profitability. Then he met with the Region's senior managers to review plans to lay off hundreds of those same important employees. Just before lunch, he was on hand for the Grand Opening Celebration of the new Central Filing and Distribution Center to deliver the same speech he had given earlier in the morning. The cameras were clicking and flashing everywhere as reporters took notes and made calls to their papers. By the time he headed for lunch, Lan-Cor shares were up by fifteen cents.

The grand opening of the new Central Filing and Distribution Center (CFDC) had been long on speeches (from the governor, the mayor, the vice president of operations, the regional manager, the site manager, and of course, Scott Penner CEO) and short on refreshments, so after a quick jaunt up the newly constructed interstate bypass (thank you Mr. Governor) to the Thames Greene site, Scott could hear his stomach rumbling. He quickly and impatiently surveyed the project's progress, toured the model homes, and met with all the (pre-arranged, pre-scripted) happy homeowners that were gushing with praise for Lan-Cor's commitment to quality, and to family life, and community, etc., etc. It was almost two o'clock when the hungry CEO and his entourage had entered the downtown diner.

He had looked his menu over then smiled as he looked his server over. She was a pleasant enough girl, likely in her late teens by Scott's estimation, and probably one that drove the boys wild when she wasn't wearing the boring white blouse and simple black skirt that seemed to be the diner's uniform. She had added a little bit "pizzazz" to her look by wearing sexy black-heeled ankle boots with snow white stockings, instead of the dreary black sneakers of her co-workers.

The girl seemed to pick up on his learning smile and offered a flirtatious smile of her own as she took his order. Scott couldn't help but let his eyes be drawn to her budding round breasts and curvy hips. The girl just kept smiling.

She's going to get a heck of a tip, he chuckled to himself. *If only I was ten or twenty years younger...* He let his mind wander off.



Meanwhile, in another part of town, Ira Heath had just typed "Lan-Cor turned into girl" into his "goggle" search engine and hit "enter." Much to his chagrin, there were twenty-two hits. His face lit up, *Ha-ha*, he thought to himself as he started to read, *now we're getting somewhere*. Most of the pages were about the strange goings on at Lan-Cor's Edenwood Facility in Colorado, where it is *alleged* that then-CEO Jim Dunney used chemical concoctions to nearly eliminate the company's workforce by turning them into teenagers! *Hmm*, he mused to himself, *interesting*. But even more interesting were the allegations that many of the men that worked there, began to exhibit ever-increasing signs of femininity, including one Edwyn Gretzalynik who, according to a lawsuit filed by his Family, was unwittingly subjected to such chemicals that caused Mr. Gretzalynik to take on the characteristics of a teenaged girl. The chemicals were never found. *How convenient*, Ira thought. The lawsuit was settled out of court for an undisclosed amount, and with the exception of the occasional blog of some former Lan-Cor employees, the matter was buried. Literally.

Ira was certain that Lan-Cor's problems in Colorado and the strange happenings in Thames Greene were more than just a coincidence. But he needed proof. He needed evidence. He needed access to Lan-Cor files. *But how?* He racked his brain until something popped into his head. He knew just the guy who could help him get the files.



Back at the diner, Ira's neighbor's son Julian had just finished a fantastic shift. The "rich guy who, like, owns this place or something" as one of the other waitresses had called him, had been smiling at him the whole time... Which at first seemed a little weird... But as time went on Julian realized it was inevitable that his cute little black skirt would generate a certain amount of attention. It *was* so cute, after all.

So after counting his tip... His very, *very* large tip, the biggest tip he'd ever gotten, a new question dawned on Julian Anderson... *Just how far would he go to get more money from them?*

He blushed as several answers came to mind, many of them quite inappropriate for young man to be thinking.

Does this make me... Bad? He wondered to himself.

He was wondering aloud later that night when he and Martin went out for ice cream with Trevor and Reg.

Martin was wearing some kind of shiny latex mini-dress with high matching boots and mesh stockings and looked very much like a dominatrix in training. Especially with his dark hair done straight to his shoulders, with bangs cut short and sharp, and his pale face decorated with smoldering dark eyes, long lashes and shiny red lips. Martin looked so good in fact that Dillon had tried his best to convince the teen to forget about his 'double date' and go into the city with him instead. That ticked Martin off, as he definitely didn't like being told what to do. He told Dillon what he could do with himself, and that was the final word. Besides, he had promised to be there for Julian, who wasn't sure he wanted to be alone with Reg again... Quite yet.

Julian had opted to wear a flirty pleated denim micro skirt over his new white tights, with a pink halter front top and the snazzy platform peep-toe pumps he had first worn for Connie weeks ago. Not wanting to over-do it, he left his blonde hair straight and wore minimal makeup – pale pink lips, blush, liner and mascara. But even in his 'minimalist' fashion, Reg and just about every other guy they passed at the dairy parlor thought he was 'smoking hot.'

The only person more impressed by all the heads turning than Julian was Reg, who couldn't believe his good fortune to have met a girl like 'Julia.' He spent most of the night trying to hint that the two of them should take off, but she never seemed to get his jest.

Julian was too busy watching his best friend 'Tina' fend off the blatant advances of Trevor to pay much attention to his own suitor.

For his part, Trevor couldn't quantify what it was about this sexy goth goddess that mesmerized him so. And furthermore made him act so obsessive about impressing her. Especially since he had a girlfriend already. It seemed a little bit strange, and yet... Here he was... Mesmerized, obsessed and worse of all... Knowing it.

He opened every door for Tina, and paid every bill. And until that moment arose, he thought that he was actually making progress. Yes, until *that* moment, Trevor was *the* man... In his own mind at least. And all it would take to burst his little bubble would be to accidentally bump into... His girlfriend.

The moment she saw him with his arm around ‘her’ was the moment that everything turned bad... And fast. Laura had suspected that Trevor might try and pull something. He had been giving that goth bitch the eyes ever since he first saw her in the town square all that time ago. But Laura never forgot. The time she arrived at his party and he immediately dropped everything to go over and see her... Laura never forgot that either. And so with that in mind, she laid the trap. The fake story of ‘being away for the weekend’, was the perfect bait for an unfaithful fool like Trevor, and of course he had fallen for it and asked that goth bitch out to *their* favorite spot. The Ice Cream parlor.

And after the moment whereby Laura effectively told both Tina and Trevor where they could collectively go... Trevor folded like a cheap suit. He quickly abandoned Tina to chase after Laura, causing a Tina to call Dillon to pick her up, causing Reg and Julia to be left alone, causing Reg to offer to drive Julia to the local make-out spot where they smoked a joint and made out like the teenagers they were.

All because of *that* moment.



It was just a *moment* lunch the next day when Ira arrived at the newly opened Lan-Cor Central Filing and Distribution Center. The building had once housed some kind of manufacturing facility, but after lengthy (and evidently *costly*) renovations, had been transformed into a delicate blend of classic industrial and modern futuristic architecture. He looked up and around the huge airy atrium which housed the main reception and couldn’t help but be impressed. He approached the main counter and asked the smiling girl if she could find Hank Anderson for him. She looked at him blankly, “Who?”

“Uh, Hank Anderson?” Ira replied. “I’m supposed to meet him here, at the reception desk,”

The girl continued to look baffled by Ira’s request, “Um... just one sec.” She turned to the woman next to her, who’s back was turned to them. “Um, Hanna, this guy’s looking for some guy,” She turned back to Ira, “You said his name was... Hank... Anderson?” Ira nodded as the perplexed girl turned back to her coworker. The other woman spun around without warning and blurted out... “Ira? Hi!”

Ira’s jaw fell to the floor. “Hank” was dressed in a light orange knee length skirt with a cream colored cashmere sweater and matching hosiery that disappeared into two cute orange pumps with modest 2 1/2 inch heels. Hank’s glowing blonde hair was elegantly styled, and his makeup done in tones to match his citrus-colored outfit.

“Hank?” Ira sputtered.

Hank blushed, looking around then whispered, “It’s actually *Hanna* now Ira, at least at work” he extended his hand as if inviting Ira to shake it. Ira marveled at his long sorbet colored nails. “It’s kind of a long story” he said in a hushed voice.

“Wow... Um...” Ira could feel his own face beginning to flush as his body began to betray his thoughts. He had to admit that “Hanna” was a pretty... A pretty-pretty looking woman. If he hadn’t known better, he would have sworn that the lady be-

fore him was in way possibly the muscle bound man that he had met those many months ago. "You look very... Um... Nice"

"Is this person bothering you Ms. Anderson?" a loud voice thundered from behind.

Ira turned to see a large security guard standing over him. Hank turned to the man with a disarming feminine smile, "No Earl... He's fine. He's with me."

The guard's facial expression changed from gruff to smiles as he extending his hand for Ira to shake, "Ohhhh, well I'm sorry Mr. Anderson. Its nice to finally meet the man who's lucky enough to call this lovely young lady his wife."

Ira's eyes almost bulged out of his head, "Husband!?" he sputtered.

Hank recovered the fumble before Ira ruined the momentum, "Oh Earl, Ira here is so modern thinking... He prefers that we call each other equal partners." Hank gave Ira a nudge in the arm.

"Oh, um... Yes." Ira finally took the hint, "Equal... Partners." He managed to choke the words out.

"So I'm just going to be showing my man here around the new place, okay Earl?" Hank smiled at the guard with that same disarming smile he had used before.

Earl was clearly powerless to resist Hank's charms. "Well you know, it is kind of breaking the rules... But... If you two just keep out of trouble..."

Hank smiled and leaned forward to kiss the older man on the cheek, while Ira tried not to gag.

"Nice to have met you Mr. Anderson," Earl said with a smile, "You're one lucky guy." With that, the guard continued on his way.

"Oh yeah," Ira muttered, "I sure am... I'm so lucky."



Hank wasted no time, "Come on dear" he smiled, "I'll show you around." Hank took Ira's hand and led him off to an elevator. Ira could feel his skin crawling as his neighbor interlocked his palm with his own.

As the elevator door closed, Ira exhaled loudly as he pulled his hand apart from Hank's.

"What the *hell* are you doing?!" he said, "Are you *insane*?!"

"You don't want to blow my cover now do you?" Hank asked with a smile, "Besides... You want to know something funny?" Before Ira could answer, Hank continued, "Earl used to work on my line back when this was an assembly line over here," he motioned to the area outside of the glass elevator that was rising in the air. "He and I *never* got along. He was the shop steward for the union... And I was the line manager. So we butted heads all the time. But now since we all got hired back... Well lets just say he's a big sweetheart. Its *so* funny!" Hank used a high pitched giggle to punctuate his sentence.

"Funny?" Ira said, "He thinks you're a girl! Hell, if I didn't know better *I* would think you are a girl too!"

"Thanks Hun!" Hank smiled, giving Ira a quick wink.

Ira thought he could feel vomit rising up into the back of his throat. He swallowed it down and tried to probe Hank for more information. "So um... Why *does* everyone think you're a girl Hank?"

Hank just smiled at him blankly.

"Hank?" Ira asked.

"Oh sorry dear," Hank finally came around, "I'm not used to anyone calling me that. Even Joan's been calling me Hanna at home. It's so weird to hear someone using my old name again." Hank chuckled.

Old name? Ira thought to himself. *He's completely lost it!*

"It really wasn't my fault," Hank began as the elevator stopped and the two neighbors got out to begin the long walk to the file rooms, "I applied for the receptionist job, you know, just as something different... New. I had worked in the plant for all these years but you know, I'm still young... I'm not even 40 yet... So I thought why not go for it. You know?"

Ira nodded.

"So anyhow I never thought I'd get it," Hank continued, his voice sounding high and soft and feminine, "But then all of a sudden I get this call and they want to interview me. So I got this really nice new outfit... Actually you're daughter helped me pick it out... It was this awesome pantsuit... anyhow, to I went and they seemed to like me. But through the whole thing they kept calling me Hanna. The computer system had goofed or something and *Hank* got shortened to *Han* so when they saw me they assumed it was *Hanna*. Anyhow, the interview went *so* well that they hired me right there on the spot. So what could I do? You know?"

Ira shrugged his shoulders, unable to come up with an adequate answer, aside from the screaming voice in his head that said *tell them the truth!!*

"I really wanted the job, but I was afraid that if I corrected them, and told them who I really was, they would change their minds," Hank paused at an intersection of two hallways, looking right then left, then straight ahead. "Um... I think *its this*

way” he motioned to the right, his heeled shoes clicking as the carpet gave way to tile flooring.

“So anyhow... That’s how I kind of became Hanna” he concluded with a sweet sounding giggle.

Ira wasn’t sure how to respond, so he simply nodded. This was only more proof that something odd was going on. How else could it be explained? There was no way that guy like Hank... The macho guy that he had met back in June... Who worked on the factory floor for eighteen years... Would just spontaneously turn into a cross dressing secretary. Something was *definitely* going on around here.

“Here we are” Hank said as he swiped his pass card through the reader, “File room ‘E’.”

As he swung open the door, Ira suddenly felt slightly overwhelmed. The file room looked to be as long as his house. Maybe even longer. As he followed Hank – or should he call him Hanna? – to about a quarter of the way down the isle he looked over the hundreds and hundreds of file boxes all neatly shelved around him. *Oh boy*, he thought, *this might take a while*.

“Here it is!” Hank chimed, “Edenwood. You want operations, accounting or de-commissioning?”

Ira’s eyes lit up. Hank was apparently one hell of a secretary. “Um, lets look at decommissioning”

Hank opened the file box to discover one small file inside. “Hmmm” he furrowed his brow as if deep in thought. Ira noted how thin and delicate his brows looked... Even furrowed. “You wanted to look at the Thames Greene file too, right?”

Ira nodded.

“Why don’t we grab this file... And the other one and make some copies?” Hank smiled, “Then I’ll put them back later and no-one will ever know we were even here.”

Ira smiled, “You know, you’re pretty smart... For a *girl*,” he joked.

Hank giggled as he grabbed the file and headed off to the “T” room. His skills at finding the Thames Greene “pre-development” file were equally good and soon he and Ira were in the small copy room at the end of the hall, making Xeroxes of confidential Lan-Cor documents. Hank had just finished copying the first file... And was about to start copying the second, when the jingle of keys was heard coming from outside the file room door. Ira felt the blood draining from his head. They were going to be caught, and likely Hank would be fired... If not charged with several counts of industrial espionage... If not sued by Lan-Cor. But Hank’s quick mind was already light-years ahead. He had slipped the two files onto the glass copy panel and covered them with the copier’s top door, then with great agility hopped up on top of the copier while grabbing Ira’s tie and pulling it towards him. Ira was completely unprepared, as he heard the door opening behind him; he felt Hank’s lips brush against his own, then again... And again. Hank was kissing him! Hank was kissing him on the *mouth*! Ira’s mind raced as he heard a familiar voice booming from behind him, “Hey! What are you two...”



The voice dropped off as Hank pulled away from Ira. “Oh” Earl the security guard said with a surprised expression, “Oh I’m sorry Ms. Anderson. I didn’t know it was you. Ira looked at Hank, who was smiling past him at the guard.

“I’ll let you two kids be alone, just don’t take too long in here. If someone other than me ever caught you...” Earl’s voice trailed off again.

“Thanks Earl.” Hank said sweetly, “We’ll be careful.” With that Hank turned back to Ira, ignoring Ira’s terrified expression, and leaned in for another kiss. Ira knew his life depended on this kiss, so he held his breath, closed his eyes... And kissed Hanna back. Earl had closed the door behind him several seconds before the two neighbors realized they were again alone.

There was an awkward silence as Ira looked into Hanna’s eyes and Hanna into Ira’s for only a few seconds. Ira gasped when he realized instantaneously that he had just French kissed the man next door and that that same man... Who looked very much like a woman... Had just saved his ass. For his part, Hanna just smiled as Ira offered him a hand to dismount the copier. He then straightened his skirt and continued to copy the files for Ira.

Soon Hank was showing Ira back to the atrium, manila envelope in hand, where the two staged a very public goodbye... Mostly for the eyes of Earl the snooping security guard. Ira smiled as Hank planted a final kiss on his lips before turning back to his reception desk. Ira kept the smile firmly planted on his face as he left the building, as if he somehow thought that relaxing his lips would allow whatever girly toxins that had taken over his neighbor to enter his own mouth.

The rest of Ira's day was a haze as memories of the copy room, and Hank's kisses kept replaying in his head. He tried to focus on something else by reading through the copied files, but with great difficulty. Until of course, he came across a report for the results of a blood test and physical for one Edwin Gretzalynik, the plaintiff in the Edenwood lawsuit. The report showed sky-high levels of estrogen and practically no testosterone, something that was disturbing to say the least in what was otherwise a healthy twenty-something man. The report went further to describe that Mr. Gretzalynik was showing fatty build up in his pectoral region and a shrinking of the male genetalia. Ira's smile widened. This was the smoking gun in the lawsuit that could have buried Lan-Cor. And now it was his. Ira kept reading.



Hanna Anderson had quite the story to tell his wife when he got home that night. He and Joan were seated around the table as he told of his and Ira's exploits to copy files and avoid detection. "He's actually a really good kisser" Hanna exclaimed. Joan scrunched up her face and shook her head, "Ewwww!" I don't want to hear about two guys kissing" she said, "its like... Totally gross!"

Hanna looked puzzled. His wife, a very well educated, very formal, very proper lady, as long as he had known her, had just said "Ewww... Gross." *Boy*, he thought to himself as he crossed his stockinged legs and tugged down on his skirt to make sure nothing was showing that wasn't supposed to be, *she sure is acting strange lately.*

Julia had missed the dinner entirely. After her date last night took an unexpected turn, she had agreed to meet Reg again at the fancy-ish restaurant in the town square for a bite to eat before heading back to Reg's place. Reg had suggested that two of them might "hook-up" after dinner. Julia was completely ignorant to the fact that "hooking up" did not mean simply hanging out, but something rather more ominous, and after a quick dinner of chicken Caesar salad and another joint, Reg drove them back to his place.

"Where are your parents?" Julia asked as they entered the darkened bungalow.

Reg smiled, "Oh... They're out of town for the weekend."

He helped Julia out of his shawl and showed him to the den. He was very much looking forward to spending some time with Julia alone. Julia was just happy to be spending time with anyone, since Tina had scrapped earlier plans to hang out together at the last minute in favor of hanging out with Dillon again. Connie was hanging out with Trevor's little sister, *whatever that's about*. Thank goodness for work, or he would have been truly and dangerously bored. Work, and Reg of course. Thank goodness for Reg. Julia smiled at his friend as he sat beside him on the sofa. He thought back to their short truck-ride home.

Reg had put his arm around him as they drove. Julia's pink crocheted shawl had allowed only Reg's finger tips to occasionally graze over the soft skin his shoulderless pink and white striped tube top exposed. Julia had reacted by snuggling closer to Reg as they drove. Now the two teens were alone, in the dimly lit den, on the sofa. Reg suddenly jumped up and offered Julia a beer. Not wanting the other boy to think any less of him, he gratefully accepted and watched as Reg left the room to fetch them cold beverages. He realized that his eyes were locked on Reg's ass.

He blushed and fanned himself with a limp-wristed hand until Reg returned and twisted the cap from the brown glass bottle with his strong hands. The two would spend the next hour drinking and watching some soft-core porn that Reg's parents supposedly didn't know he could get off the satellite. It was nothing that Julia hadn't seen already... Mostly girls giving boys head. Nothing too hard-core. It was even kind of arousing, though he wasn't sure if it was the beer or the porn that was making his head feel light and his nipples tingle.

Tina was another boy with tingling nipples. He had gone home from work with Dillon that day, after having spent the night clubbing with him twenty-four hours previous, and was now making with his boss for the better part of an hour on the couch in Dillon's apartment. It had all started when Dillon had asked Tina if he could kiss him, which he had allowed... And it had gotten completely out of control from there. Tina straightened up his hair and pulled a compact from his purse to check his makeup. His dark violet lipstick was slightly smudged, but that could be quickly fixed. He looked over at Dillon and realized where the lipstick had rubbed off.

"What?" Dillon asked.

"Nothing," Tina said coyly, eyeing the purple ring around Dillon's cock. His boss smiled.

"I never knew that your lipstick would look so good on me" he chuckled.

Tina blushed again. He knew what he had had done was bad. It was beyond bad in fact... It was evil, and yet... He didn't care. If only his Dad could have been a fly on the wall. He would freak out for sure!

Dillon smiled again as he turned back towards his newest employee, who returned the smile and returned to the position he had just been in.



Ira was indeed freaking out... But not for the reasons his son had thought, but because the files that he and Hank had obtained were a veritable gold mine of information. Apparently a number of barrels of an unnamed substance were moved from Edenwood to Thames Greene in a rented van just after the Edenwood facility was closed. The person that rented the van was former CEO Jim Dunney himself. There were also expense sheets for a rented excavator, to be delivered to the Greene farm property, that were submitted and approved by Dunney a day later. Ira was convinced this was the smoking gun. Whatever Lan-Cor had used in Colorado, had been brought to Thames Greene and buried. And now he had the proof. But there was more.

In the Edenwood file, documents showed blood tests done on male employees showed elevated estrogen and diminished testosterone levels. So much so that the lab technician had requested verification that the subjects were in fact men.

I bet the same thing is going on here, Ira thought to himself.

There was only one way to find out. The next day, he would arrange through his neighbor, Joan Anderson, to have his family's blood tested. Joan would be reluctant at first, saying that she might get in trouble "for-sure", but Ira would plead with her for a few minutes, until she would cave. Judging from the way that she spoke, and from her mannerisms and dress... Ira would have a hard time believing that Joan was not somehow affected by this too.

When the results would come back a day later, Ira wouldn't be surprised at all to see Martin's testosterone levels nearly nonexistent and his and Connie *and* Margie's estrogen levels nearly double what a woman's would be.

Smoking gun indeed, he would grin, *this is a smoking howitzer!*



Back at Reg's place, Julia's mind was racing. He was so flush with arousal, intoxication and excitement that it almost covered up the guilt and disgust he felt inside. Reg had zipped up his trousers and was heading to the fridge for another pair of beers. Julia was still on the floor, his stocking clad knees having been ground into the fibers of the carpet. What exactly had he just done? He knew the answer but wished he was wrong. Why had he done it? He again, knew the answer but wished he was wrong. Was it okay, what he had done? Was it okay to *like* it? Again he knew the answer as he licked his lips and smiled, he blushed from the embarrassment of it all.

I sure hope Reg doesn't think I'm dirty, he thought. *Because I'm not that kind of girl.*



Back in Virginia, sitting in his executive office, watching his company's stock price inch ever upward, Scott Penner was pretty pleased with himself. Everything was finally starting to go his way. In addition to Lan-Cor's stock price being up, the profits were up... *Slightly*, and morale was up... *Slightly*. The buzz on the street was that he was finally bringing the company around. Yes, it was shaping up to be Scott Penner's year. That was until his executive assistant popped her head into his office with an important call on line two.

Scott picked up the receiver, "Scott Penner" he said.

"I know what happened in Edenwood, and I know you bastards are doing it again in Thames Greene, and I'm going to media" the man's voice on the other side of the phone spoke with an angry aggressive tone that instantly convinced Scott that he meant business... And that his banner year was in deep trouble.

"I'm sorry... What was your name again... Mister..." Scott waited for the man to reply.

"It doesn't matter... All that matters is that you listen up..." the voice replied. Scott interjected before the voice could continue.

"No-no, *you* listen up... I don't know what you think you might know, but you obviously don't know me... Because if you did," Scott paused, "You would know that I don't do anything over the phone. If you want to talk then lets talk, but unless you want to talk face to face... Then this conversation is over!"

There! Scott thought, *I showed him!*

On the other end of the phone line, Ira was fuming. "Fine then," he replied as he hung up the phone.



As Martin checked his makeup, he made sure he had that 'just fucked' look. Because that's what had just happened. Or at close as he could come. Trevor, over on his couch, was drifting off to sleep with a goofy look on his face, and more of Martin's purple lipstick smeared all over him. He also wore nothing but a pair of Martin's purple silk panties. He had insisted that Trevor replace his boxer shorts with what Martin was wearing. Trevor, was completely powerless to resist. It was as if Tina had placed him in some kind of trance. He knew that Trevor's relationship with Laura, his girlfriend of two years, was now finally over. Trevor was all his now.

Martin also knew that although Dillon was a fun guy, he was old and acted like he was the boss of him. Which, of course, he was. Still, Martin was all about sticking it to authority. And if he had to choose between the boy who'd do anything he wanted him to do and his boss, well...

Hopefully he'd be able to string them along for a while before he had to make that choice.

With a blissful smile he couldn't wipe off his face, Martin helped himself out of the Hindlick's house, and walked back home. Along the way, he picked up his ID out of his small black purse, and looked at it.

"Who the fuck is that?" He asked himself. "I wonder where I picked this up?" He tossed it aside, into a ditch. "Hope he doesn't need it back." She giggled, and Tina was on her way.



Ira headed for the city, unaware that he was under close observation from the moment he got in his car. He arrived on the sprawling grounds of Lan-Cor Global Inc.'s headquarters. He told the receptionist that he was here to meet Scott Penner for an "in-person meeting" regarding Edenwood and that he would be expecting him. By the time Ira stepped off the elevator at the top story executive office, his face had been scanned thirty-two digital security cameras, run through four different face recognition programs and his entire life and history printed out on Scott Penner's computer monitor.

As his secretary strutted by, Scott let the phone's handset rest on its cradle. His perceptive assistant noted how nervous he looked.

"Something wrong, Scott?" he asked.

Penner didn't look away from his monitor, "This Ira Heath guy claims to *know* things about Edenwood." He paused then looked up at his predecessor, "Bad things." Scott then proceeded to give thumbnail version of what Ira had told him on the phone.

"Hmmm," she replied, "that sounds pretty serious."

"Serious!?" Scott asked, "It could end my career! It could shut us down!"

The girl only smiled, with an empty look on her face, "Don't worry. I'm sure it will all work out!" She then left for her desk, swaying that ass he had hired her for.

Scott opened a drawer with a key. It held the documents that dis-proved everything that this Ira character was claiming. They were entirely false, of course, but it was his first and best weapon of defense.

A knock at the door ended the conversation, as Ira Heath was shown into the room by a Scott's lovely executive assistant.

The door closed, and Ira wasted no time in accusing Lan-Cor of turning his son into a girl and ruining the lives of his family members and his neighbors. Scott Penner began to argue back saying that there was no way that Lan-Cor would behave so irresponsibly, and that they would never improperly dispose of chemicals from Edenwood by dumping them at the Thames Greene site.

Ira was flabbergasted, "What the hell are you talking about!?" He threw a file of photocopied documents down on Penner's desk, "Jim Dunney's signatures are all over these!"

Jim Dunney. The name burned in Penner's ears. Dunney had virtually destroyed this company with his crazy ideas and theories. They were still trying to fix everything that crazy fool had done. And now, here was another mess.

Ira was about to turn up his anger, directing a full blast towards the man responsible for the whole mess that had ruined his family, when there was a knock at the door again.

Scott's execu-



tive assistant entered with a tray of coffee mugs, cream and sugar. "Ah! Misha, just in time," Scott spoke loudly as the young lady set down the tray and poured cup for each man.

"What do you take Mr. Heath?" the girl asked sweetly, smiling up at Ira.

Ira blushed, stammered and stuttered, "Uh, oh... Um... Just black is fine thank you."

Misha smiled and poured a cup for each Ira, handed it to him, then poured another for Scott, before showing herself out.

"Sweet girl, don't you think Ira?" Scott said, smiling as he lifted the mug to his mouth, but did not drink.

Ira nodded nervously, as if embarrassed to admit that he had checked her out on the way out. Then a light went on in his head. He fumbled through the papers he had. "Misha." He had heard that name before.

Then he found what he was looking for. "Hard to believe that she used to be a thirty-year-old man, huh?" Ira said.

Scott almost spit out his coffee, caught totally off-guard by the statement. "What!?"

"It's true," Ira carried on, "When Lan-Cor first hired her, her name was Mark. Mark Parnell according to these records. Back at Edenwood. But you had to have known that, hadn't you?" He tossed the document on Scott's desk.

Scott couldn't believe it. He picked up the paper, showing in clear language, how "Mark Parnell" was re-assigned company ID from being a sub-supervisor in the Edenwood division to being part of "Research and Development – Edenwood HS" And most amazing of all, two photos, one of a young man, and one of his secretary. The resemblance was obvious to see.

CEO Penner was ready to pass out, as the blood drained from his head. Ira stood and placed the whole file on Scott's desk. It was marked "Project Lancer." Ira then showed himself out. "I've got copies. Let me know when you want to talk."

Scott Penner sat in his executive leather office chair, the whole world disintegrating before him. His secretary was a man? Thames Green was built on a bio-toxic dump? A vast experiment had transformed men into young girls? His secretary was a man? He was so distracted, he didn't even tell security to stop the man before he left. Besides, with a conspiracy this deep, he wasn't sure at all that it wouldn't have gotten *himself* into just as much trouble as Ira was in.



Ira returned to a busy house. And that was strange in itself. He was used to a mostly empty place, with the kids and his wife all out living it up without him. That didn't stop him from walking over to his favorite chair and going 'plop' into it. He adjusted the recliner so he was almost totally horizontal and squeeze his eyes shut. He wanted to close out the world.

"Hi." A voice said. He got a kiss on his cheek, but he was too tired to open his eyes. Besides, he recognized his wife's voice.

He felt another kiss on his cheek. "Hi Daddy," said a chipper voice. It was Connie. "Hi Daddy," and another kiss. Ira desperately wanted to clock his son for doing that, but he knew damn well that he wasn't going to cave into Martin's crazy games.

He tried to relax and let the anger go. He was going to need his strength. Fighting Lan-Cor was beyond anything he had attempted before. And he knew he was well out of his depth. But he'd keep on fighting. For his family.

Interrupting his train of thought came another kiss, another "Hi Daddy." He tried to ignore it. Couldn't he have just a moment of peace without being bothered by his family?

"Hi Daddy," and yet another kiss. What was the deal with these people? Couldn't they see that... Hold on. He only had three women... Uh, two women and a mixed-up kid... In this house. How many kisses was that? 1, 2, 3... 4? *Five* kisses?

Ira's eyes shot open and he looked around. But he was alone again. He wanted to go get up and see what had just happened, but the chair was pretty damn comfortable. It was probably just Connie playing her childish tricks on him anyway.

He settled back in, only to catch something in the air... It suddenly dawned on him that he could hear something going on in the kitchen. Someone was cooking. He could smell it. With his pavlovian sense of appetite, Ira got off his chair and wandered towards the kitchen. He could hear sizzling. Ah, sizzling. Meat. Yes, it was meat. How long had it been since Marjorie prepared food for him? It felt like forever.

Ira turned the corner and started to smell it. Smoky, sweet, salty meat. So good. So tasty.

"Hank?" Ira said, as he saw who was cooking. Then Hank turned around, somewhat surprised to see someone was watching him.

"Ira?" Hank replied.

"What are you doing in my house?" Ira asked. Upon further inspection, he also added "and why are you dressed in my wife's kimono?" Hank's long, wet hair was tied up in a bun, showing a thin, feminine neck. The short kimono wrap revealed Hank's long, thin, smooth legs.

"It's a long story, Ira. It started yesterday morning."

"Is that bacon?" He inquired, and then back on subject, "What do you mean, 'started yesterday?' Why did..."

"Is dinner ready yet, Mom?" Connie asked, as she skipped into the room.

Hank smiled nervously. "It'll just be a few more minutes, dear." Connie smiled and left just as quickly as she entered.

Ira's eyebrows did a dance of confusion and he looked at Hank for help. "Did my daughter just call you 'Mom?'"

"That's what I was talking about." Hank used a spatula to put a slab of burger on a bun and dropped some bacon on top of it. "My dad's famous bacon burgers," he explained. He set it on a plate and gave it to Ira.

"How did..." Ira's churning stomach commanded him to look at the burger, desperately wanting to take a big, juicy bite out of it. But he had more pressing things to deal with. "Hank, how did you..."

"Just let me try and explain." Hank said. "And I did ask you to call me 'Hanna.'"

"Yeah."

"Anyway, this all started yesterday when Connie and Martin came over for a swim." Hank took a seat by the kitchen counter, crossing his lovely legs to protect his modesty. "I joined them and we were having our usual bit of hi-jinks, when your son asked me if I could pick something up from the grocery store for him."

"I just need some pads.' He said to me."

"I asked him shy. And he said that he had a little bleeding."

Ira finished chewing to ask a question. "He cut himself?"

"He was having his period, Ira."

"Impossible."

"He showed me, Ira. It's very possible. Your son is a beautiful young girl."

The idea was so ridiculous, that Ira didn't even consider that it was true. He chuckled. "My son is a basket case, but he's as much as a girl as I am a fish."

"I'm not kidding, Ira. Martin is every bit a woman as a person can be."

"Sure."

Hank sighed in exasperation. "So I asked him, why did he want me to pick up the pads? Why didn't he ask his mother?"

"And he said, 'I am asking my mother.'"

Ira snorted derisively. "Like I said, the kid is mental."

"I then asked Julian what Martin meant by that, and he didn't seem to understand. I said, 'does Martin really think he's my daughter?'"

"Then Julian said, 'Who's Martin?'"

Ira slowed his pace of eating, becoming ever-so-slightly concerned with what Hank was saying.

"Once we got out of the pool, and had changed, I got Julian by himself. I asked him if this was a joke, and he said no. I asked him why he didn't know what his friend's name was, and he said he did. His friend's name was Tina."

Hank then looked a little overwhelmed. "You can imagine what I was thinking. My son was either trying to pull a fast one on me, or he was having some sort of... I don't know... Some sort of stroke or something."

"Did you take him to the doctor?"

"I did. The doctor told me that he couldn't see him. Because he had no record of a Julia Heath. Which is what Julian insisted his name was."

"I don't get it." Ira said, "They've got to be pulling some sort of stunt. God knows what they're capable of."

"And up to this morning, I was sure of it. Then, I couldn't find my wife."

"Joan run off with a younger crossdresser?" Ira jibed.

"She was over here, at your place." Hank said, ignoring the crude comment. "She and Marjorie were over here, eating breakfast, getting dressed and planning what to do for the day."

"And this is weird, how?"

"She has her own room, Ira." Hank stood up and walked to the stairway. "Let me show you."

Ira cautiously followed, suspicious of what he was about to be shown, and not wanting to leave his half-finished burger behind. But he did, and trudged up the stairs. As he followed Hank, he was able to peek up the kimono, and saw that Hank definitely wasn't wearing boxers.

Hank walked down a few doors to the guest bedroom, and opened the door. "Look," he said.

Ira saw a teenage girl's room decorated with photos, band posters and some knick-knacks. Hank picked up a book resting on the bed, and handed it to Ira. "Read the first page."

"Joanie Heath's Diary, age 18 – HANDS OFF!" Ira said aloud.

Hank took the book from Ira's hands and tossed it back on the bed. "Now look over here." He crossed the hallway and opened another door, this one to Martin's room.

One side of the room was decorated in black, and it was full of the things Martin had been wearing. He had seen this before. But right down the middle of the room, it changed. The rest of the room was decorated pink. Pink bedspread, pink curtains, and pink clothes.

Hank picked up a pair of pink panties off the floor. "Julia Heath" was inscribed on the waistband.

Ira shrugged. "Well, they better put things back the way they found them, or I'll..."

"Don't you get it, Ira!?" Hank yelled, a bit of a feminine screech in his voice. "My kid – my wife, think they're your daughters!" Hank closed the door and faced the wall. "They also think I'm your wife."

"My... Wife? That's hilarious. I've been married to Marjorie for eighteen years. There's no way my kids would forget that."

"Marjorie has," Hank said, opening yet another door. This one was to his wife's hobby room. Inside, Ira saw that his wife's sewing table was pushed to the wall. Teenage miniskirts, crop-tops and spiked heels laid strewn about the place. And on a daybed had been converted into a real bed, rested a teenage girl. She woke from her sleep.

"Mom? Dad? Is something wrong?" Marjorie asked.

"Sorry. Didn't mean to wake you, dear," Hank replied. He closed the door.

Ira stopped him. "Marjorie?" He asked.

"Ugh! What is it, Dad? I'm trying to get some rest!"

"How old are you?"

"Old enough to have some privacy!" She yelled.

Motioning to Hank, Ira said, "this freak tells me you're supposed to be my wife. I'm not buying it, so cut the act."

The girl's facial expression froze. "I..." She paused, fighting what she was thinking. "I am your wife?" She then tried to correct herself. "I am not... I... Honey? Where are the kids? Who is this woman?" She paused again, massaging her temples. "Daddy, Mommy! Why does my head hurt!?"



Hank quickly grabbed Ira by the shirt and pulled him out to the hallway. "Don't you think I tired that!? Don't you think I already tried to get them to think about who they really are!?"

Ira was too phased to reply. He had just seen a girl become his wife go and from 18 to 38 to 18 again in a flash. "Why didn't you try and shake her out of it, then?" He asked.

"The stress is too much. Julian started to go into a fit. Martin fainted. They can't handle thinking about who they used to be."

"How is it possible?" Ira furrowed his brow. "I can't believe that they could do this..."

"They?" Hank asked. "Who is *they*?"

Ira shook his head. "No. I can't trust anyone."

"Tell me Ira, they're my family too. Tell me what you know!"

Ira kept his mouth shut.

"You know what's going on here, don't you! Who did this!?"

Ira slumped against the wall. "The people you work for."

He proceeded to tell Hank all he knew. That the Thames Greene development was built right on top of a dump site that Lan-Cor had used for disposing of bio-genetic waste. When Hank was told where the waste had come from, and what it had done, he looked like someone had punched him in the stomach.

"I don't know how it was done, but somehow they transformed an entire town and its' residents into different people. And they brainwashed them at the same time."

"And now it's come here." Hank said, sickly. "What's to stop them from coming after us, now that we know?"

Ira had no answer.



Trevor was sitting at his booth at the Burger Barn, when his date returned. Julia put the drink on the table for him.

"They didn't have any Dr. Pepper." Julia said. "So I got Pepsi."

Reg snarled at Julia. "Did you even ask?"

"Yes! They said they ran out. They'll have more tomorrow."

Reg grabbed his drink and took a sip. He scowled at the taste. "You're useless." He said.

Julia shrunk back in her seat. "I'm sorry, Reg," she replied in a soft voice.

"How long is our food going to take!?" Reg barked. He was in a sour mood.

"It usually takes a few minutes."

"It takes forever here. I don't know why we even come to this dump." Reg quickly turned to Julia and stuck his tongue down her throat. The reason they came here was for the privacy of the booths.

Once he had gotten what he wanted, he got up off her, leaving Julia breathless and giddy.

"Hey Trevor," a girl said, walking by the booth. She stopped, flashing a winning smile. "Heard you might have a new recruit for the team. Is this her?"

"Yeah. Hey, Tammy." Trevor took a sip of his drink, then used the straw to point at Julia. "This is her. She's going to be a cheerleader."

"Her?" Tammy replied, skeptically. "Let me get a good look at her. Stand up."

Julia, somewhat confused, got to her feet. Tammy took a few steps back and examined her closely. She saw what everyone else did, a spectacularly built young girl with tan skin, blond hair, an incredible smile, and perfect in almost every way. Her thin, lithe body was intimidatingly flawless and radiant, she seemed the archetype of what all girls aspire to be, but are doomed to fail in some small way. She was the living clone of a Bambi doll, just as Connie had turned Julian into.

Tammy shrugged. "She'll do, I guess." Not wanting to look as threatened and jealous as she felt, she turned away to leave. "Be at the practice squad next Monday. Seven AM sharp."

Julia sat back down at the table, still perplexed at what had just happened. "Did you volunteer me for being a cheerleader?" She asked, not believing Trevor's gall. "Why didn't you ask me?"

"Because I don't date girls who aren't the envy of everyone in school, and on the cheerleading squad."



"You should have asked me first! I don't know if I want to be a cheerleader!" Julia objected.

"And another thing," Reg continued, "I think you need a new name. 'Julia' sounds like you're old enough to be my mom. I think you should just go by 'Julie' from now on."

"Julie?" That sounds like some airhead bimbo name! Is that what you want me to be, some airhead cheerleader?"

Reg stuck out his chin. "Look, if you don't want to be my girlfriend, just say so. I can find a dozen more waiting to take your place."

"You... You want me to be your *girlfriend*?" Julia said, taken aback.

"It's up to you."

Julia frowned. Then she swooned, leaning into Reg. "we're really boyfriend-girlfriend?"

"I dunno. Does Julie want to be a cheerleader?"

"Julie will do anything for her boyfriend." She replied, giggling. "I already sound like an airhead, don't I?"

Reg kissed her on the lips. "You worry too much. Just do what I tell you and everything'll work out fine. Let me do the thinking for both of us. Okay, Julie?"

Julie shrugged and giggled again. "Okay, Reg." With her heart aflutter, she placed her head on the shoulder of her boyfriend.



"What do you mean, *you're firing me!*?" Tina yelled at the top of her lungs.

Dillon, his arms crossed in defiance, was standing in the middle of the store, unconcerned that the yelling was sending his customers scurrying out of the store.

"I've been your best salesperson since I got here!" She screeched.

Dillon wasn't moved. "Look, like I said, you're too young to work here, Tina! Your ID says you're sixteen!"

"But you hired me! You never said I was too young!"

"I must have made a mistake!" Dillon countered. "I'm sorry!"

"I know what this is! You just don't want to fire me, you're dumping me!" Tina threw over a display of striped leggings. "You're just too chicken-shit to say so!"

"I'm not... No! I'm *not* dumping you!" Dillon had to clear his mind. He didn't want to get tricked into saying something that would get him in trouble. "But if you really are sixteen, we can't see each other anyway."

"I knew it! I knew it!" Tina shrieked. "You're seeing someone else! Who is she!?"

"I'm not seeing anyone else! You're just too..."

"You didn't have any problems when I was sucking your cock!" She yelled at the top of her lungs, stopping the customers from leaving. "Now I'm too young!?" Tina kicked a rack of tartan plaid miniskirts, tossing them onto the ground.

"Come on, Tina! I'm not going to break the law! I'm the manager here, and I have to..."

"You're a wimp! *A fucking wimp!* If you had any balls, you'd do what you *want!* Who cares about the fucking law!?"

Dillon threw up his hands. "I can't! I need this job!"

"Fine! Screw you! I'm out of here!" She flipped off Dillon and crashed on out the front door. "Asshole!" She yelled.

She grabbed the hand of her sister and pulled her to the car. "C'mon Connie! Let's get outta this place!"

Connie, dressed in a pair of teeny-tiny white shorts, a peach camisole shirt top with an Elmo face on it, knee-high striped socks and high-heeled orange sandals was clumsily tripping along, sending her pigtails bouncing and swaying behind her. With the violent tug, she nearly dropped the all-day sucker she was licking.

"Owie ow ow ow!" Connie objected. "Don't be so bossy!"

She took a seat in the back of the car as Tina gunned the engine. "I can't believe that jerk!" Tina fumed. "He actually fired me! *Me!*"



"He sounds like a dork," Connie said, agreeing with her sister. "He was scary anyway."

"He was a coward," Tina growled, as she threw the car around the road in anger. "He can have that crappy job and that demon-pit of a store if he wants it. See if you can get the store to give you any head, jackass!"

"Can we get some ice cream?" Connie asked.

"We've got ice cream at home," Tina said, then letting out a deep sigh to try and vent off some of the anger. "We'll be home in a few minutes."

They arrived to see their mother lounged on the sofa, lazily surfing the TV, talking like mad on a cell phone. Neither of them thought much about it. Connie ran ahead, into the kitchen. Tina trudged up stairs and headed for her room. When she got there, she already had a guest. Julian was hugging a stuffed bear, with a dippy grin on her face.

"What's got you so happy?" Tina asked, her bad mood obvious to everyone except Julian.

"Reg and I are officially a couple!" She squealed in delight. "I'm his girlfriend!"

"Well, I guess that's good news."

"It's the best news ever!" Julia bubbled. "He really does love me! Isn't that great!?"

This may not have been the best time to bring this up, as Tina was in no mood to hear about love. But her innate sense of bettering Julia kicked in. "Well, I just broke up with Dillon, and Trevor and I are now official."

"Really!? I'm so happy for you!" She hugged Tina hard.

"Yeah. We're a couple too."

"Trevor must be excited!"

Well, he would be, if he knew. Tina resolved to tell him about it later. It wasn't like he had much of a choice. "He's telling all his friends, I'm sure."

"Wow!" Julia said, falling back on her pink bedspread. "Who'd have thought we'd both get boyfriends on the same day?"

"Yeah. Who'd have thought," Tina remarked with sarcasm. She walked over to the connected bathroom and stuck her black hair under the faucet, rinsing out her hair. "I quit my job, too."

"You quit at Langdales!?"

"No, FUSE." She corrected. "Or else, I wouldn't be washing the dye out of my hair. Duh." Every day before her shift at Langdales, Tina had to wash out the black temporary hair dye, tone down her makeup, and dress in something a little more normal. Her bosses at the store didn't like the Goth look.

"I thought you liked working at FUSE." Julia asked.

Tina dried her hair with a towel as she walked back in the room. "It was just a job. I was going to have to quit when school starts up next month anyway."

"I guess I'll have to quit at the diner, too." Julia said, dejectedly. "Besides, Reg told me to quit."

"You shouldn't let him tell you what to do."

"But he's so much smarter than me."

"Don't put yourself down like that. Stick up for yourself."

Suddenly, Julia's eyes went as wide as moonbeams. She pointed right at Tina. "*Oh my gaw!*"

"What?" Tina said, spooked. She looked left and right, trying to see what was being pointed at. "What, what, what?"

"You!" Julia explained. "Look in the mirror!"

Tina turned to the mirror and looked for something out of place. She shrugged. "What?"

"Here. Look again." Julia stood beside her. "I haven't seen you with your natural hair color in so long that..."

"So I don't like being a blond, so what?" She turned back to the mirror.

"*Oh my God!*" they both said.

"Connie get in here!" Tina called. A moment later, she stumbled into the room.

"Whaaat?" She whined. "I was..." Then she saw what was in the mirror.

"*Oh migosh!*" she said. She ran to the mirror to stand beside Tina and Julia.

"We're... we're..."



Ira was sitting at the dinner table, trying to take his mind off things by doing the bills. It wasn't working. Every time he came across a credit card purchase at a department store, he knew it was his "son" who had done it.

And all the women in his house, the cell bill was astronomical.

Breaking his mood, the phone rang. Ira grudgingly made his way to it, and picked up. "Hello?"

"Penner here. We need to talk."

Ira, taking a moment to shift gears, replied, "Scott Penner, right?"

"I'll meet you at the Paramount Deli on Sixth. Three o'clock." Then there was dialtone.

When Ira arrived, he hoped he was at the right place. There were three "Paramount Deli's" in the city, and he hadn't heard Penner tell him what street it was on. But this was the one closest to Lan-Cor.

Sure enough, when he entered, Scott Penner was the lone customer, sitting at one of the table, nursing a cup of coffee. Ira made his way over to the table and sat across from him.

"Mr. Penner?" Ira asked, as it didn't look like he was even seen.

Penner put the mug down and folded his hands on the table in front of him. "Ira, isn't it?" He asked. "I'm sorry, Ira. I owe you more than I can apologize for. Looking at the documents you gave to me and looking over our own records, we're the ones at fault."

"How do you mean?"

"Your family, and the Anderson family next to you, have been exposed to some powerful gene-altering chemicals developed by our company years ago. We had thought we'd dealt with the problem. But according to our information, the chemicals were dumped almost exactly where your two houses were built."

"I live on a toxic dump."

"I can't apologize to you enough, Ira. We'll do everything we can to help. But I have to keep it out of the media. It would ruin the company."

"Can you get my kids back to normal? Can you get me my wife back?"

"Yes we can, Ira. It may take some time, but it can be done."

"Thank God for that."

As they talked, Penner motioned for a refill on his drink. "I just can't go through our official channels. There are people within the company who would sooner see this problem... Eradicated."

"You mean they would kill us?"

"Or just let the chemicals take their course and patch up the mess." The waitress added a mug for Ira as well.

"Do they suspect anything?"

"No. They're halfway across the country and have probably written this all off years ago."

"I didn't even know you could make drugs like this. It seems impossible."

"That's progress for you. But I can't emphasize this enough. This has got to be done outside of the media spotlight. Outside of the company. What we'll need to do is move your families to another location. We have a clinic in Florida that we can use..." Penner yawned. "A clinic that..."

"Didn't get enough sleep last night?" Ira said.

"Well, I was up late..." Penner suddenly couldn't keep his eyes open. His head dipped.

Ira, too, was suddenly very sleepy. He couldn't think straight. Trying to stand, he lost his balance and slid on the slick floor, landing on his backside.

As he tried to fight whatever was happening to him, he looked for help. He saw that the waitress was standing just a few feet away, doing nothing. She was just watching, holding a syringe.

Ira reached out for any help at all. With his last breath, he pleaded. "Help me... Please help me... Hank..."



It like hours later when Ira awoke from a deep sleep. He had dreamt that his son had become his daughter, and that Lan-Cor was somehow behind it... *What a wild dream!* He thought to himself... Until he felt something heavy on his chest.

He looked down to see... An arm around him. Hanna's arm.

He jumped up out of bed, shocked, then looked down to see that he was... Nude. He never slept nude. Then he looked at the bed again. Sure enough... There his feminized neighbor slept. Slowly Hanna's eyes began to flutter open, as a smile formed on her face.

"Good morning" she grinned sweetly as she rolled over and slipped out of the bed.

Ira felt faint again. He couldn't believe that he was in bed with his gay neighbor. What had those Lan-Cor bastards done to him!? He tried to avert his eyes as Hanna came around the side of the bed. *Don't look up, don't look up*, he said to himself. He looked up.

He looked up and saw that Hanna... was not a man. Not in any way shape or form. Every attribute that a woman *should* possess... Was present and accounted for. Soft creamy skin, beautiful golden hair, perfect round breasts and thick nipples, a tight flat stomach, thin waist and curvy hips, and... A vagina. A nice one at that. *He* had a vagina.

Hanna read the expression on Ira's face, "What? You look like you've never seen me naked before." She smiled seductively.



That's because I haven't, Ira thought to himself. He looked around the room. The pictures of his wedding to Marjorie were gone, replaced with pictures of his wedding to... *Gasp...* Hanna?

"What did you do to my house?"

"It's *our* house now, Ira." She walked into the bathroom.

"And you're a girl?"

"Oh... *yeah*" Hanna called back out between brushing her teeth, "always have been. As far as anyone is concerned. Hubby." She held up her ring finger to display a simple gold band with an extravagant diamond engagement ring.

"But... how?" Ira pouted, "You're a..."

"Sh-sh-sh" Hanna held a finger, capped in a beautiful French tipped finger nail, to Ira's lips, "You've been through a lot. Maybe its best you just stay in bed another day."

Ira looked angry, "What the hell's going on!?"

Hanna sighed, then proceeded to the closet... A closet filled with clothes he didn't recognize. They weren't Marjorie's drab fare, that was for sure.

"What's going on, Hank!?" he ranted.

"My name is Hanna. And if you keep acting like this, you're going to get us killed!" Hanna answered as she began to dress.

"The Hell's going on here?" he repeated his earlier rant aloud.

"What's that hun?" his lovely "wife" said as she walked from the closet to the bathroom.

"I said... what the *hell* is going on here!?"

Hanna, now dressed in very sexy lingerie... White panties and bra... Walked to the bed and gracefully placed her left foot on the mattress before beginning to roll a delicate looking white stocking up over her leg.

"Its kind of a long story sweetie," she said as she switched legs, "I don't know if you're well enough."

Ira sat up and tried to give her a stern look, but failed when she smiled at him. *What is wrong with me*, he thought.

"I'm fine," he spoke boldly, "Tell me!"

Hanna adjusted the elasticized tops of her stockings then sighed at Ira before walking over to the closet to grab a sheer nightgown and a pair of heeled mule slippers.

"Well it goes like this..." she began, as she sat on the bed next to Ira.

Ira tried not to let the sight of the lovely creature Hank had become, get to him. He tried, but ultimately his body failed him.

Hanna looked down at the bump in the bed-sheets over Ira's groin and giggled before continuing her tale, "You see, after you were so stupid as to go back to Lan-Cor, I had a feeling that you might try something foolish, so I followed and kept an eye on you."

"You... Followed me to..." Ira began.

"The deli on sixth?" Hanna interjected.

"But how did you know..." he continued.

"I work for Lan-Cor, dummy! I emailed his secretary and asked where he was." she said, "Yeah... And a good thing I do too. Do you *know* what those guys would have done to you if I hadn't been there?"

Ira looked confused, "You... Were there?" he racked his brain. He remembered being in the deli... And the waitress... But he couldn't recall seeing Hanna. Come to think of it, he couldn't remember much about the meeting at all.

She smiled and nuzzled up against him, "Yep. I came in just in time." Ira moved slightly away from his new spouse. "A couple minutes later and I'd probably be calling you *Irene* right now." She giggled again.

Ira looked even more confused.

"They spiked the coffee Ira. And to make matters worse, they were going to inject you with the same stuff that was buried under the houses. You're actually pretty lucky to have me, you know?"

Ira was in shock... His head was spinning. Hearing Hanna tell him all this seemed to validate what he had known all along... But it was so incredibly crazy that he wished it wasn't true.

"I waited a couple minutes, but after you didn't come out I got worried," she continued, "So I just barged right in... And just in time too... You had just passed out and that Penner guy was filling a syringe."

"What did you do?" Ira asked, eager to fill the blank parts of his memory.

"I begged and pleaded with them to let you go. I said that they could let me look after you, and that you'd never tell. I even offered to let them take *me* instead."

"And they agreed?" Ira wondered aloud, the idea seeming to impossibly ridiculous.

"No," Hanna replied, "They just laughed and carried on what they were doing"

Ira looked confused. *Did they inject me?* he wondered, *Am I going to end up like Hank, er... Hanna?*

"That's when I had to get serious," Hanna carried on, "I told them that if I didn't call my wife Joan in ten minutes that she was going to fax copies of all those secret documents that you and I copied to all the local media. Which would cause Lan-Cor's stock price to collapse and they would all be out of jobs. And sued into the stone age, to boot."

Ira's worried look turned to elation, "Really!?" he smiled, "Joan was going to do that?"

Hanna smiled, "Maybe when we first were married, but I'm afraid that our Joanie isn't the quickest bunny in the forest anymore." Hanna chuckled, "I don't think she's old enough to even know what a fax is anymore."

"How old is Joan?" Ira asked.

"Seventeen." She disappeared behind the closet door and continued to talk, "But a lot has changed around here in the last little while honey. We got "married," Joanie's about to graduate high school and go to college in an executive assistant program... which is basically a glorified course for girls who want to be secretaries... and of course our Margie is in cosmetology..."

"You mean Margie, like Marjorie... my wife?" Ira called.

Hanna popped her head out from behind the closet door, "You mean your *ex* wife" she said buttoning up a sheer white blouse, "Legally, she's now your 18 year old daughter... *Our* 18 year old daughter. Just like Joanie is our seventeen year old daughter."

Ira winced. *This is fucked up!* "And Martin?" he asked, fearing the answer.

Hanna had slipped into a nice gray tweed high waist skirt, cut to just about the knee. She carried her shoes with her as she exited the closet.

"She is now Tina, she's just turned sixteen, and is slowly making over her jock boyfriend into her ideal Goth boyfr... er... freind. Her twin, Connie, is now back in

high school, also sixteen.” Hanna took a deep breath, “and their other twin, Julie is now on the cheerleading quad, dating the starting quarterback for the school. She’s also sixteen,” she smiled.

“Three sixteen year old girls?”

“Yes. So instead of twins, you now have triplets. *Identical* triplets. Congratulations.”

“Triplets!?” Ira rolled his eyes. *Damn you Lan-Cor!* he said to himself. Ira wanted to retreat. He pulled the covers up over his head and closed his eyes. His life as he knew it was over... Or was it? Maybe this was a dream, a sick twisted, perverted, insane little dream that he would awaken from at any moment.

“You better hurry if you want to see the girls off to school, hun,” Hanna broke Ira’s train of thought.

Nope, no dream. I was screwed.

“Wait a minute!” Ira cried out. “What about the chemicals!? The toxic stuff!?”

“Turns out it was the pool. Whatever it was that changed us was leaking into the pool.” Hanna inserted a pair of simple gold earrings in her lobes. “They drained the waste and filled the pool with cement.”

Ira shook his head. The pool. No wonder it never affected him. If he had been a fan of swimming, he’d have probably ended up like the rest of them.

“Answer me one thing.” Ira said as he began to pull himself out of bed, “Why did you do all this?” He motioned at the two wedding bands, and at the five wallet sized pictures of his ‘daughters’ that were now visible on the dresser.

“Me!?” Hanna said. “This was all the doing of that goop from Lan-Cor. It made Connie lose three years, it made Martin and Julian into girls, made our wives into teens, and turned me into a woman! That bio-waste softened our minds and made us accept whatever reality seemed to be the most convenient.”

“This is too incredible. I just don’t believe it.” Ira got up. “I’m going to call the FBI.”

Hanna swatted the phone from his hands. “You still don’t understand, do you? The only reason we’re still alive is that Lan-Cor thinks we don’t remember a thing. They think that the chemical has done its’ work, and washed our minds of our previous history.”

Ira leaned towards the phone again. Hanna kicked the phone even further away.

“We’re alive because we act like this is our life now,” Hanna said, “and the minute they think we’re on to them, we’re as good as dead.”

“That’s crazy.”

“You think I did this? I found our marriage license in drawer a week ago, where it hadn’t been before. Just out of the blue. And then, presto, one day, I found our pictures had been replaced with new ones. Our names on documents and identification changed to match our new lives! The kids are registered in school, and all have birth records! Someone did this, and they are watching us!”

Ira looked around the room, and the ceiling.

Hanna read his mind. “No, we’re not bugged. I checked that. I don’t think they want to hear all the inane chatter a house full of girls generates.”

"Killing us would have been cheaper."

"They're a rich company," Hanna replied, "look out the window."

Ira got to the window and looked outside.

"See the van?" Hanna asked. "That's them. It's been parked there on and off since I got you home. Close the drapes before they see you!"

Sure enough, a black van was parked across the street. Ira jumped back from the window. He sat down on the bed. He looked at Hanna. "So we're stuck like this? For how long?"

"I don't know. Until they forget about us. I guess."

"So until then?"

"Until then, I'm Mrs. Hanna Heath, you're my husband Ira, and we have five beautiful daughters to look after."

"I can't handle this."

Hanna sat down beside him. "Look, I know this is beyond what anyone could ever expect to happen in a rational world, but we've got to make the best of it. The girls really are great, and they love us. We make good money, we have a nice, big, new home and it's filled with life."

"What about my wife?"

"She still loves you. Just as a daughter. And you owe it to her to be as good a father to her as you can be."

"How can I act like this is normal!?"

"You have to. Everyone's lives depend on it."

Hanna paused, blushed and looked down at the sleek sling back white pumps with the four-inch heels that she had slipped into.

"And I want you to kiss me," she whispered softly.

"You what?" Ira blurted out, as if he wasn't sure he heard correctly.

"We have to love each other, Ira." She looked down at the floor again, "It's just something we have to learn to do. The girls deserve a happy home... And the people watching us have got to know that we're a real husband and wife..."

Hanna looked at Ira's baffled expression. "Real? What's real?"

"So kiss me, Ira." Hanna asked. "Kiss me like... You know... Back at the photo copier."

"Kiss?" He said.

"Yes... Since then. I just had a feeling that... I kind of knew we'd eventually..."

She waited a moment to let it sink in to Ira's head.

"Really, it couldn't have worked out better. I mean you could have moved next to some fat slob or nasty old man... So really... We've got to make the best of this. Right?"

Ira just stared off, hoping beyond hope that somehow, in some small way, this fragmented mess could somehow make sense to him.



Ira pulled out of the driveway, not exactly sure where he was going. Thankfully, the new car had GPS and directions were already programmed in. He backed out, careful not to look at the black van sitting ominously, waiting for one false move. For today, so far so good. It just rested there, and didn't budge. He watched in the mirror as it disappeared in the distance as he drove away. After a lengthy car ride, what he now understood to be his new commute, he arrived at his new office as the Chief Business Analyst for the Lan-Cor Central Region. He hadn't quite figured out what his title meant yet, nor what his job was supposed to be. But it had an amazing corner office and a company car. Plus, he had one huge, comfy chair. *I could get used to this*, he thought to himself as he looked up and enjoyed the view. The view of his young PA. College girl, likely.

He glanced around his desk. Pictures of his wedding day, his kids and casual times with his wife were everywhere. *Obviously Hanna decorated my office for me.*

He glanced at the wedding picture, as his girl entered his office. She placed a steaming hot mug of coffee on the desk.

"Thank you Gretchen," he said as he took a sip from his mug.

Gretchen curtsied and smiled as she left Ira's office, her four-inch heels forcing her to walk with a very distinctive sway in her hips.

"I've seen that girl before," Ira thought to himself. "I just don't know where..."



In an office far across Lan-Cor's huge complex, secretary Hanna Heath was already at her desk, tending to her office. The coffee was brewing, the plants had been watered and papers were waiting on her bosses' desk for him to read.

Scott's former secretary, Misha walked by. She was the youngest girl in the office, and she was a total airhead. She was obsessed with her looks, and generally rude to other women. Men that didn't shower her with praise or cash were also treated like dirt.

"Good morning, Misha!" Hanna said cheerfully. "How's the new job going?"

Misha just sneered in Hanna's direction. She may have been as dumb as a pile of bricks, but Misha knew that Hanna had something to do with losing her prize job.

"I'll talk to you later, 'kay?" Hanna said as she walked away. She smiled to herself. Poor kid never knew what hit her.

"Good morning Ms Heath." Scott Penner said, as he briskly sped into his office. He was obviously trying to avoid having to deal with his new girl.

"Good morning, Mr. Penner," Hanna said. The door was already shut when she said it, but that didn't stop her from slowly rising to her feet, perched on her spiked heels. She brushed her skirt off and walked slowly into Penner's office and let herself in.

Scott pretended to ignore her, and busied himself with the papers on his desk.

"I have some freshly brewed coffee for you. Would you like cream and sugar with it?"

Hanna received no reply.

Knowing that the boss was trying to avoid her, Hanna sat on the corner of his desk, forcing him to at last acknowledge her presence. "Coffee would be fine." He said.

"Oh good." She said. "By the way, Scotty, I had a little request. I do appreciate what you've done for me. I think Ira and me are going to have a long, wonderful life together."

Penner grit his teeth. "What do you want, Ms. Heath?"

Hanna crossed her long legs and threw her lustrous blond hair back with a toss of her head. "I think Misha out there would probably be a bigger contributor to the company if she were in, say, more like her thirties. And I could stand to lose a couple of years myself."

Penner looked at her with a glare. "I'm not spending millions on lab work just because of your petty jealousy towards a co-worker."

"Do you have a choice?" Hanna smiled. "All I have to do is turn over all those documents Ira collected and you're life is as good as over."

"I thought when I made you into a real woman, and gave you a family, that our business was settled."

Hanna ran her fingers along Penner's red silk tie. "Just this one more thing, Scotty. I won't bother you any more."

Understandably, he didn't believe her. "Misha is one of our most loyal workers. I know what she used to be, but that doesn't mean that..."

"Do what I tell you, or else."

"I can make her thirty-five."

"How about thirty nine? I want to give her a fortieth birthday party."

"You really play hardball, don't you?"

"You know what's nice about being a lady? The lady gets what she wants, Scotty."



Ira pulled in his driveway after a hard day's work. Well, not that hard at all, actually. He scheduled a tee time and bought a DVD on-line. He spent three hours at lunch. If Ira didn't know any better, it was like he didn't actually have any responsibilities at all. But that was crazy. Otherwise, why would they be paying him \$157,000 a month?

As he gave a quick glance to the black van still waiting out in the street, he came in through the kitchen. He was faced straight off by Margie, who was listening to some music on her headphones as she bopped along. She was text-messaging someone on her little cell phone, and barely even saw Ira come in.

It had been a few days since he had awoken to his new life, and strangely, he had already adjusted to seeing this girl who used to be his wife. She was just a teenager now, whining about needing money, being out all hours of the night, and dating like crazy.

She still bore a passing resemblance to the person she used to be, but this girl was definitely... Well, it sounded harsh to Ira's ears, but it was the truth. Margie was an improvement over Marjorie.

If there really was no chance of getting the old Marjorie back, as Hanna said there wasn't, then she was better off starting over. Maybe this time she would learn to relax and take things easy. Maybe this time she'd marry someone who'd be able to stop her from drying up and going cold.

Joanie, who in Ira's opinion was fast turning into an old crone when he first met her, was now a perky little 17 year old bundle of energy. She was always running from one place to another, trying to meet up with her friends, or go to a party. It was always one thing or another with that girl. In contrast to the traces of Marjorie left in Margie, Joanie was a completely different person. Both in looks and in attitude.

As Ira grabbed a beer from the fridge and cracked it open, he frowned at the taste. Light. Hanna wouldn't let him drink anything else anymore.

When he came into the living room, his remaining three daughters were seated in various places. His newest daughter, Julie was on the phone, talking to that jock boyfriend of hers. She was dressed in her cheerleaders' outfit. She barely ever wore anything else these days. Her blonde hair was tied into a high, bouncy ponytail by a few ribbons. As she saw Ira, she waved with a bright, heart-melting smile.

Across from her, in another chair, his Connie was curled up, watching "Bratz Girls" or some juvenile cartoon. She had lost any ambition she once had. Of course, she had also lost that cynicism that was eating her up. He had worried that she was going to become so contemptuous that she'd just become insufferable. Now, as she blew bubbles with her gum, she looked as innocent as a girl could in thigh-high stay-up striped socks, bikini panties and clingy crop-top.

To be honest, she looked like an ad for child porn, but she didn't seem to know it.

And then there was Martin. Or Tina. Or "Tristesse" as she was now calling herself from time to time. Her pale skin and thick black make-up didn't trick you into thinking she was anything else but gorgeous. Even with the black back-combed hair, it was obvious for anyone to see that the girl had the face of an angel. And that's why the increasingly eccentric clothes she wore made her look even more alluring.

The thing was, Ira had more respect for Tina than he ever had for Martin. Martin was easily bullied by kids in school, and easily taken advantage of. The boy had no guts and no confidence. But Tina was as gutsy as they came. She wasn't afraid to tell you what she thought and tell you where to go. Ira was happy for Martin in a way, that he'd have a better life being confrontational and direct. He had always liked that quality in people.

Tina was lying on the sofa, dressing one of Connie's male dolls in women's clothing. Ira shivered at the thought that there was something left over after the transformation that left her a little fixated on gender bending. He had had enough of that to last a lifetime. Although to see the effeminate clothing she was dressing her boyfriend Trevor in, the poor kid better look out for himself.

All in all, he couldn't think of three more different personalities. The cheerleader, the goth punk and the little girl.

Of course, he could have it all wrong. The girls were triplets, after all, and they were identical. After they had discovered that, it was not unusual for them to switch places from time to time. Ira was sure that just yesterday, Connie had dressed in Tina's clothes. And he was sure that Tina had gone out with Trevor at some point on Sunday, dressed in Julie's cheerleading outfit.

But he'd never really know. Triplets shared secrets like that, and they'd never let on. That much he had learned in the past few days. For now, though, all he wanted to do was get upstairs and lie down. As he dropped himself on his bed, and discarded his briefcase, he disrobed down to his boxers.

Ira thought to himself how lucky he was, really. It could have been so much worse. Yes, some of the people closest to him had lost a lot of who they were, but they were happy and healthy. Ira dimmed the lights and played some romantic music on the stereo.

As he thought more about the situation, the more he was able to rationalize things. Maybe after that van stopped watching over them, he could just take a breath and make sense of this all. For now, he'd just have to deal with the insanity day to day.

Ira lit some candles and some incense as he stripped down the bed, putting on the silk sheets.

Suddenly, Ira looked around to see what he had just done. What in the world had gotten into him? It was like he was trying to set the scene for a night of passion. With Hank? He must have been losing his mind or something. Sex with his neighbor? Never in a million years. He pulled off his boxers and laid on the bed with a rose in his teeth.

Outside, Hanna Heath pulled her car into the driveway. She grabbed her purse and got out, checking to see if anyone was watching. Making sure, she then walked over to the black van and rapped on the window. It rolled down.

"Hi Ms. Heath." The young man inside said. "How was your day?"

"Same old, same old, Jay." Hanna replied. "How are you doing out here, anything I can get you? I have some chips and dip."

"That's okay, Ms. Heath. I'm good."

"You're not getting too bored, are you?"

"Nah, I'm getting a lot of work done on my laptop. I'm actually more productive than I am in the office."

"Well, I do appreciate your hard work. Mark will be here for the night shift in about an hour, so you won't have to wait much longer."

"Sounds great! I'll see you later, Ms. Heath!"

"See you later, Jay."

She walked away from the van, swaying her hips and listening to the clackity-clack of her heels. Hanna hoped that some lecherous neighbor was watching her through the drapes as she showed off her new, perfect body. Seeing Ira's car in the garage, she stopped and looked upwards, at her bedroom window. Candle light was flickering.

“Well, well,” she said to herself. It looked like Ira had made a little love nest for the night. That wonderful chemical had softened his mind just enough to take a hint. When she had injected Ira, she had a theory that it wasn’t going to change him, just make him a little more suggestible. She unbuttoned her blouse a little. “Time to put the theory to the test.”

*This story is a continuation of “Testing a Theory,”
available for free on sixpacksite.com*



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