

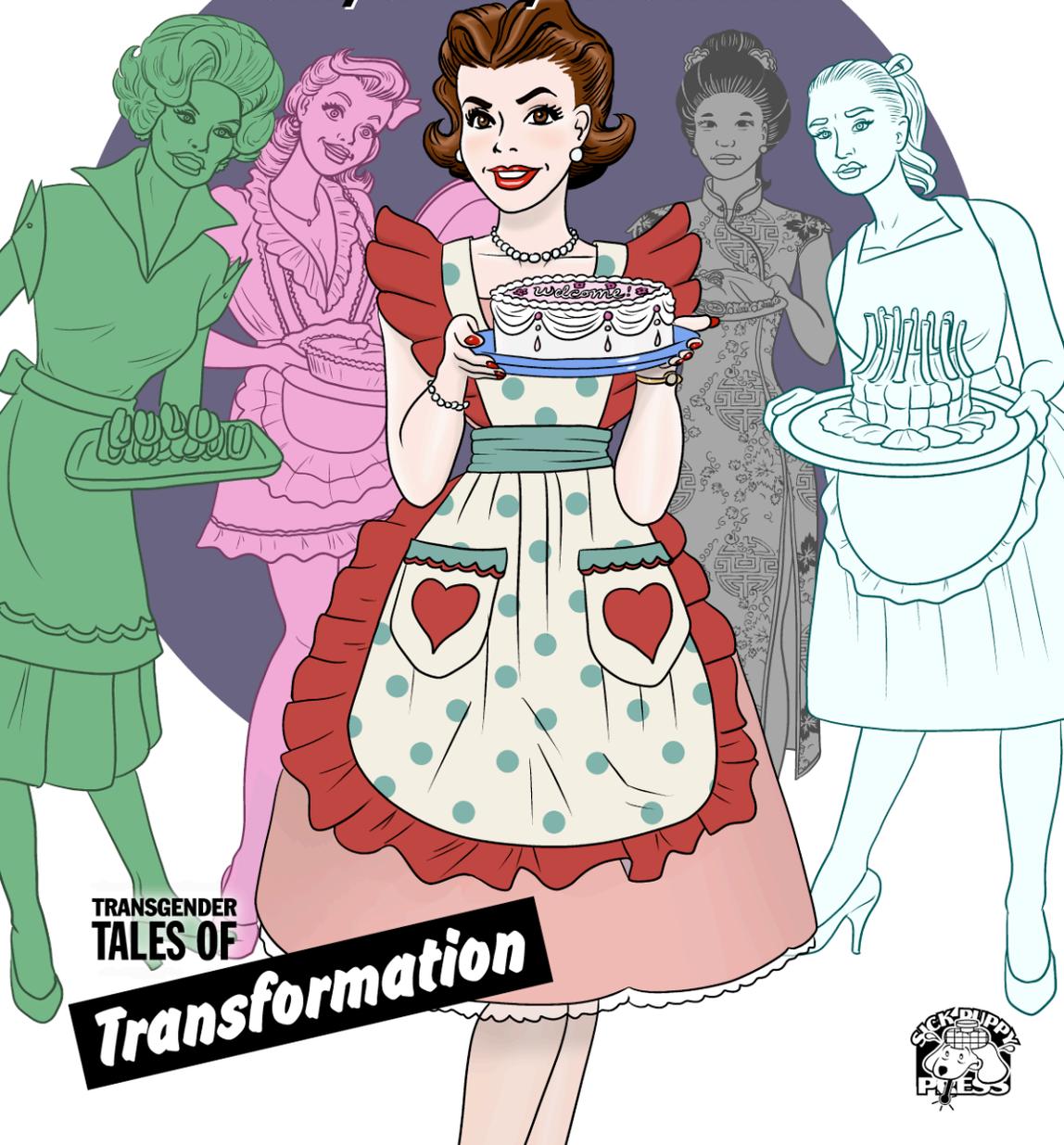
ADULTS ONLY

149 pages **30** illustrations

WELCOME TO CANDLEWICK

THE HOUSEWIVES OF CANDLEWICK COURT SERIES #1

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack



**TRANSGENDER
TALES OF**

Transformation



J O E S I X - P A C K

WELCOME TO CANDLEWICK

**Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack
Book One of the “Housewives of
Candlewick Court” series
A Tales of Transformation story**



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WELCOME TO CANDLEWICK



THROUGH THE GATES

Vance Wentworth the Third, the heir to the vast Wentworth estate and the patriarch of the venerable Wentworth family slid into Quentin Stillman's office under the cloak of darkness — and under a real cloak as well.

He didn't have much of a choice, in his position.

The time was late, but as Vance knew from years of experience, his former employee was going to be burning the midnight oil. Stillman was always that way, since the day he had hired him on as the lead architect of Emerald Estates.

From Vance's standpoint, though, this dedication to work was why he regarded Quentin as a sucker. A loser. A chump.

Other people might have thought Quentin was some kind of hero, but he wasn't. To Vance Wentworth, all that work and sweat for so little gain was just running around in circles. To be rich, successful and prosperous, you didn't have to work. You just needed to be smart. Smart and willing to make tough decisions. Life was about risk, not sweat.

If Quentin Stillman didn't have the guts to make those kinds of choices, then he was just as weak-minded a man as any given mouth-breather begging for change on the street, in Vance's opinion.

Hearing the door, Quentin looked up from his computer. "Carolyn? Is that you?" He checked again. "Carolyn?"

Not getting any reply, but definitely hearing noises, Quentin immediately snapped off all the lights, turning the office pitch black.

In the dark office, Quentin stood up from his chair. "Hello?" He called out again. "Is that the blueprint courier?"

"No, Stillman," said Vance, stepping out of the shadow into the weak light of the office.

"Mister... Wentworth?" Quentin asked, puzzled.

Puzzled for a couple of reasons. First, the last time he had seen Mr. Wentworth, it was when he was summarily and angrily fired from his job as lead architect of the Emerald Estates development. His last words to him had been something along the lines of "You won't even be able to get a job



designing doghouses in this town!” Then he was grabbed by burly security men and dragged out of the office he had worked in for three years and literally tossed onto the street. He figured that was the last he’d ever see of the imperious Mr. Wentworth.

The second reason Quentin found himself puzzled was that Vance Wentworth was supposed to be dead.

Or at least, assumed to be dead. His yacht had gone missing seven days ago, with him aboard. The coast guard had been searching with no sign of it.

“Stillman,” Vance replied. The shocked young man reached for his pocket. “Don’t use your phone,” Wentworth instructed. “I locked the front door. No one’s going to bother us.” He took off his cloak and tossed it over the back of a chair. He unbuttoned his suit jacket button and sat down, kicking out the tails of his coat. “You seem surprised to see me, Stillman.” He grinned a smug little smile as he adjusted his tie.

“You’re faking a disappearance,” Quentin said, quickly figuring it out.

“An unplanned extended sabbatical.” The man leaned back in the chair to get comfortable. “I can’t help what the media assumes is a death at sea.”

“There are Coast Guard ships braving high seas off Nantucket looking for you.”

“That’s what they get paid for.”

Quentin finally felt at ease enough to sit back down in his seat, but he did so slowly. When dealing with Vance Wentworth, Quentin had learned, one always needed to move cautiously and never let their guard down. “I see.”

“I won’t waste your time. I’ll get to the point.” Wentworth crossed his legs. “There’s a hit out on me. Someone wants me dead.”

“Someone’s trying to kill you?”

“That’s what I said. Keep up.” Wentworth was a large man, his girth hid by a fine Italian suit, and he had a knack for looking relaxed no matter where he found himself. As he looked right now, he was a portrait of smugness. “*So what do I do?*” I asked myself. Well, I need a place to hide for a while. Until I can figure it out.”

Quentin looked like he didn’t believe the words coming out of the man’s mouth. “And you came to me? For help? You do remember that you fired me.”

“Nothing personal, Stillman. Just business. Besides, who better to ask for help than you? No one would ever suspect it.”

“No one. Let alone me. I don’t think I’d be particularly inclined to help, especially after the way you treated me.”

Wentworth was prepared for this objection. “I’ll have you design the new tower I’m putting up in New York. More business than you could ever dream

of. The centerpiece of your career. The prestige project you've always wanted. It's yours."

Stillman contemplated the offer for a moment. "That's a pretty big thing to just give away, and you never give anything away for free. Who's after you? They must be dangerous."

"Wish I knew. I have private eyes working on it. My best people. Top people. I'll find out. Could be any time. I have my suspects, though."

"Who?"

"Ex-wife? Thalia was always talking a mean game. Threatened to kill me almost every day we were married. Maybe she took her settlement and bought herself a hit."

"She was always nice to me," Quentin said.

"She was nice to the little people," Wentworth commented. "Maybe it's her, maybe not. It could also be my business partner."

"Craig Luger?" Quentin asked. The accusation of being in cahoots with Luger would have sent any self-respecting businessman into a rage. Wentworth's expression didn't change. A lifetime of hearing that harmful allegation had dulled his emotions on the subject.

Craig Luger was a wanted man, a billionaire fugitive. He had been implicated in everything from drug smuggling to sponsoring terrorists, had more money than God and used it to stay one step ahead of the authorities. He hadn't been seen in public in ten years, but that didn't stop the cable TV networks from constantly speculating what nefarious deeds he was up to, like a modern-day Billy the Kid.

"You got a big mouth on you, Stillman. That'll get you in trouble one of these days." And that was all Wentworth had to say about that.

The association wasn't hard to understand as it had been rumored for years that Wentworth's operations had a line of credit financed exclusively by Craig Luger. Of course, if anyone could prove that, it would destroy Wentworth.

Vance was essentially beyond the reach of law enforcement, due to his position in society and huge bankroll. He feared no one, with one exception. If there was anyone who could get to him, it was a man with even bigger pockets, like his alleged partner, Luger. So, it stood to reason that if Wentworth was in business with him, and he had double-crossed Luger, he would be rightly terrified. That seemed like a good reason he'd be desperate enough to darken the doorstep of an ex-employee he had fired with extreme prejudice.

"So what do you want from me?" Quentin said.

"I need a place. Somewhere no one is going to find me. Got the best in security. A fortress. That's what I need. So, I figure who knows about such places? Well, an architect would. He knows buildings."

“So I find you a place to hide in exchange for the tower project?”

“I’ll need to stay for a little while. Maybe a couple of months. And make sure it’s nice. I’m used to staying at the classiest places in the world.”

Quentin Stillman folded his hands on his desk as he took a moment to think about it. “I’ll need some money up front.”

Wentworth reached inside his suit and produced an improbably fat stack of one hundred dollar bills. He tossed it on to Quentin’s desk. “Money’s not a problem.”

Contemplating the situation, Quentin stuck out his jaw and let his lids fall over his eyes. “I’ll need a couple of days. How do I get in touch with you? Who do I need to talk to?”

“No one,” Vance Wentworth said, sternly. He stood back up, and buttoned his coat. “You talk to no one but me. And I’ll see you in 48 to 72 hours. I’ll be ready to move then.”

“I can’t say if...” Quentin stood up.

“Sit down.” Wentworth commanded. He grabbed his cloak from the chair. “You stay right where you are. I don’t want you to see where I’m going.”

Quentin sat again, gritting his teeth. It was not hard to read into the look on his face a feeling of instant regret. Vance Wentworth was trouble waiting to happen, and as abrasive as they came. “Fine. You can see yourself out?”

“I’m trusting you to take care of all the details.” Vance said as he covered himself up. “Do good and I’ll take care of you. You’ve got my word.”

He strode on out of the office and into the night air, leaving behind a conflicted and pained expression on Quentin’s face. He got up, headed to the front door and locked it shut. Looking outside, there was no sign of Wentworth, with the small office park looking as still as a graveyard.



Three days later, an unmarked black SUV drove through the gates of the Emerald Estates development.

In the front seat, driving, was Quentin. In the back seat, yapping, was Vance Wentworth III. “This place really came out beautiful. First class. Gorgeous. The best.”

“It’s been a while since I was here last,” Quentin said. Indeed, Emerald Estates was the project he was working on when Wentworth fired him, but had never been back to it since.

An enormous development situated in rolling, tree-lined hills, Emerald Estates was one of the hottest properties in the country. Located adjacent to a

highway, it was ten minutes to downtown and twenty minutes from the mountains and lakes. At one time it had actually been a part of the national parks system, but a few well-placed campaign donations in Washington got the site decommissioned and ready for the trees to be cleared and houses to be built.

Wentworth, on behalf of the development company Magnum Properties, had bid for the property, and lost, but sued the winning bidder out of his land rights, thanks to a battery of high-powered attorneys he kept on retainer. The courts awarded him the deed and Quentin was brought in to design the houses.

“Nice idea,” Wentworth said to Quentin. “Have me hide out in my very own development. Last place anyone would look.”

“That’s the plan,” Quentin said.

“But we have 100% occupancy here with a waiting list. Did you kick someone out? Where are you even gonna put me?”

“Candlewick Court.”

“Ah.” The mention of Candlewick Court broke Vance Wentworth’s spirit for a moment. “That thing.”

‘That thing’ was a sub-development of the larger Emerald Estates site. A failure, by every account. A dismal failure. Although the low-range, mid-range and high-end houses had all sold out, the ultra-premium Candlewick Court houses remained completely unsold to this day.

The Candlewick Court houses had been built, demolished, re-built and the plans for them revised several times. The houses were nowhere near ready on time, blowing through innumerable deadlines. They were years behind schedule.

These were Quentin’s houses, the ones he was personally in charge of designing — and the delay and cost over-runs were exactly why he and Vance Wentworth had come into conflict.

Quentin had guarded their development jealously, and had been given authority to take as much time as needed to make sure it was all perfect. When he finally did reveal his plans, they were strange and bizarre, and Wentworth could never get him to properly explain why he had made the choices he had. Quentin was adamant that houses had to face a certain way, that the windows had to be a certain size, that the walls had to be made of certain materials. Even on his own internal blueprints, there were whole rooms that were blacked out, redacted so no one could see what they were built for. In addition, the arrangement of the houses was done in a particular pattern, arranged almost like Stonehenge, and the roads built with rare materials that had to be imported from the other side of the globe.

From Wentworth's perspective, these so-called 'premium' houses appeared, at first glance, to be no different from the mid-range houses on sale. For all the care used in building them, they appeared to be plain houses at inflated prices, starting at 2.8 million dollars. No buyer would pay that kind of money for the exact same house they could get for under \$600,000. Vance had argued, quite rightly, that they would never sell at that price, or even a quarter of that. These last six houses were dragging the entire development into ruin. Without the premium profit from those residences, the entire enterprise was in fiscal jeopardy.

In Wentworth's opinion, if he could just add in premium features to the houses of Candlewick Court, they would be sure sellers. Add swimming pools, decks, and guest houses along with upscale landscaping and lighting, and they might have a winner.

But every time Wentworth would direct Quentin to change the plans, he would get overridden. His wishes were constantly being subverted and vetoed. Quentin would be told to go back to his original blueprints and ignore Wentworth's demands.

That was because Quentin had two bosses, essentially. One was Wentworth and the other was someone neither of them had ever met, and only heard from through email. Those emails were from "Magnum Properties," who were Wentworth's financial backers in all his development endeavors — a company many suspected was being run by Craig Luger.

No one at Wentworth's firm or Quentin's firm had actually met with anyone at Magnum, and they had no physical presence at the job site. They were like phantoms, directing everyone remotely by texts and emails, and bypassing Vance Wentworth III at every turn.

That made Wentworth furious, because he had been working with Magnum Properties for years, trouble-free, and never had so much as a text message from them. All of the sudden, on this Candlewick Court project, they acted like Wentworth didn't even exist. "They're pissing in my mouth!" He bellowed at the time. "Magnum is treating me like an illegitimate retarded child!" He told his confidants. His anger built and built through the two-year scope of the project, and the only person he could take it out on was Quentin. Which he did, repeatedly, until he finally dismissed Quentin from the project entirely.

Quentin Stillman had every right to sue, but never did. He walked away from the project, and returned to running his firm. Fortunately from the development, his plans were already finished, and Magnum Properties kept Wentworth from any further interference. It wasn't long before Wentworth himself moved on, too frustrated to bother with the troubled project.

As they stopped at the gates for Candlewick Court, Quentin swiped a card through a reader and the heavy gates opened.

“Security. I see. That’s why you chose this place,” Vance Wentworth said. “And a little bit of irony, I suppose.”

Quentin kept his mouth shut as he drove through the gates.

The small complex of six houses usually didn’t see much activity. Ever since these residences had been built, they were almost forgotten. Regularly maintained, kept clean, and the lawns mowed, but otherwise ignored, which was easy to do when it was sealed off like it was, with heavily-reinforced castle-like walls wrapping around it.

Even though this part of the Emerald Estates development was already walled off and gated from the rest of the houses with inappropriate levels of security, yet another wall wrapped around 105 Candlewick Court.

It was thick iron, fifteen feet high, with spikes at the top. Not ornamental spikes — the piercing-the-internal-organs-of-an-interloper kind of spikes. It was nicely disguised with ornate touches and a red brick base, but it was definitely designed to stop anyone from attempting to get inside.

If one looked closely, they would have noted that the windows didn’t just have the blinds drawn, but had been painted over in white from the inside. There was no mailbox. There was no knob on the front door. Everything about 105 had been engineered — architected — to be as secure a site as possible.

The trees were far enough away from the house so no one could use them to climb inside. The driveway was curved to prevent anyone from speeding a car to crash through the gate. Cement pillars also prevented a car from getting too close. Black shrouded cameras were mounted just away from sight, covering every inch of the grounds.

The thick concrete abutments and structures, along with the dull appearance of the house, made the place look dreary, especially on this overcast day. It was a very grey house.

The SUV had come to a stop inside the gates at 105, and Quentin had stepped out. He had to open Vance Wentworth’s door for him before the mogul bothered to leave the car.

“This is it? Is this it?” Vance said, looking up. It wasn’t a very big house by his standards, although it was the largest in the entire Emerald Estates complex.

“Yes, sir,” Quentin said. “This’ll be your home for...”

“Save it,” Vance said looking around. “Let’s take it inside where no one can see us.”

Quentin pressed a button in his pocket and the door opened by itself. Wentworth wasted no time and raced inside as if he were being chased by daylight.

Inside the doorway, the house was dim and moody, and Wentworth was more at ease. “What about food? Are the sheets clean?”

“Everything’s taken care of,” Quentin said.

“I don’t want anyone to be able to call me. But I need a contact to pick things up for me.”

“There’s a mobile phone in the bedroom if you need it. An untraceable line.”

“Internet?”

“If you need it, give me a call.” Stillman made a curious trip across the foyer to the far wall of the room. He looked up into the skylight, and continued to stare at it for several seconds.

Confused, Wentworth followed, trying to figure out what was so important.

“I’m the only one here, right, Stillman?”

“No one but me even knows you’re here – or even alive.” Quentin continued to stare into the light, just shielding his eyes slightly.

“Do you see something up there?” Wentworth asked. He gave it look for himself.

It was nothing remarkable, just a stained-glass-like window that was mounted as a skylight. It covered the entryway to the house in light and shadows, and made it look a bit like a church.

“It’s a classy touch,” Wentworth observed. “Is there something wrong with it?”

“I think it’s working fine,” Quentin replied.

Wentworth headed towards to hallway. “Let’s take a look at...”

Quentin blocked his departure with his arm. “Just a second,” he said.

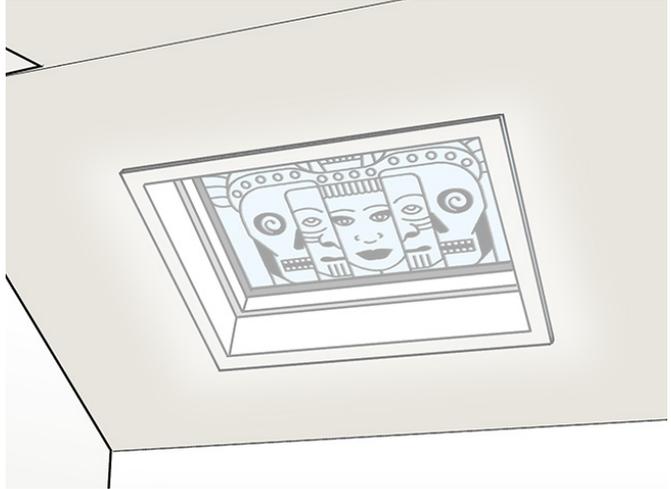
“A second for what?”

Quentin remained silent, still looking up at the window. Finally, he seemed to be satisfied with whatever it was he was looking at. “Okay. What were you saying?”

“What about TV? I watch a lot of TV. Gotta have my Hannity.”

“The cable is hooked up, but they need to turn it on at the main office. It won’t be long.”

“Perfect, perfect.”



Quentin took Wentworth on a quick tour, covering the kitchen, the garage, the living room, family room and the upstairs with bedrooms and bathrooms. They ended at the master suite.

“Clothes? I’m not brining anything. I need...”

“Everything is taken care of. I’ve thought of everything.” Quentin turned around and headed back downstairs to the front door. “You’ve got the place for as long as it takes.”

“Yeah, great. Perfect. Got it.”

They returned to the foyer, and Quentin picked up the remote entry device from where he had left it when they arrived.

“You can leave that with me,” Vance said.

“Don’t worry about it,” Quentin replied, keeping it.

Quentin exited through the large, heavy door and turned around as he hit the button in his pocket again, and waved goodbye to his former boss. The door closed slowly. “I’ll see you later, Mr. Wentworth.”

“Yeah. High security. Good stuff.”

The heavy metal door closed with a thud. As it did, Quentin listened for the four metal doors that enclosed the foyer to close as well. Now, Wentworth would find himself trapped in a small room with no light and no way out.

The industrial burners in the basement fired to life, creating a low rumble, shaking the ground where Quentin stood. Inside, the fire they produced should have been flooding the foyer with 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit of heat right about then.

Even with the metal enclosure, for a moment the painted-over windows flickered red from the inside as the light from the impossibly intense fire radiated throughout the house.

Then, a fierce rush of air from the house’s powerful exhaust fans coursed through the building, and as Quentin looked up at the roof, he saw the black smoke and ash pour out of the chimney. Inside, nothing but a light bit of dust would be on the tile floor where Wentworth once stood.

“To think... *We* were trying to find *you*,” Quentin said with a laugh, “And you walk right into my office.” He shrugged and walked back to his car, his task complete. They had built 105 Candlewick Court to be a top security facility, in the likely eventuality that they would have to abduct Wentworth and hold him until he released the rights to Candlewick Court. Now, with the world assuming he as dead, there was no reason to worry about keeping him alive. No one was going to miss him, and the contracts would all default to Magnum Properties.

As of this moment, there was nothing to prevent the company from finally green-lighting the Candlewick operation. “Mr. Luger sends his regards,” Stillman said to the smoke in the sky.



IN THE FAMILY WAY

PART 1

“Ping,” the computer said.

The sound of the ping meant that an email had come in. Not one of the dozen or so unwanted advertisements that came in every single day, nor communication from a friend. This was the email Colin Finch had been waiting for all year long.

“We got him!” He yelled into the hallway of his apartment. “*Woo hoo!*” He shouted, slamming his fist into his door in celebration.

“What, he emailed back?” His 19 year old brother, Elliot said, emerging from the living room.

“He wants to meet her,” Colin said. “He wants a date! I finally hooked me a big one!”

It had been just over a year, actually, that his grand master plan had been in effect. He had dreamed up the scheme after hearing about something called “catfishing” on the news. You trick men into giving you money over the internet by posing as a female. The idea was so simple Colin had to try it.

He set up dating profiles on various dating sites and waited for the responses. Colin would text chat with the desperate men who replied for a while, and could get ten, twenty, even a hundred dollars from time to time, but he was after bigger fish. Over time, he learned a few tricks and refined the profiles to try and attract only the loneliest, wealthiest, and most gullible of men.

Colin had created profiles for various women; like Natasha, an eager, assertive Russian bride, or Penelope, a young homesick French student. It was the profile he had created for “Ms. F” — a fictional woman in her early thirties with a daughter — that had gotten the most feedback. There was just something about a sexy single MILF that lured the most trusting and wealthiest of lonely men.

Colin Finch, aged 23, and a community college drop-out, was a schemer. Multitudes of folks search their entire lives to find their passion, and he had found his. The appeal of making money off of people who were dumb enough to give it to him was that one true passion. He wasn’t quite what one could call a “con man” as his plans weren’t that sophisticated. He was just a petty criminal who liked to trick people.

Ever since his mother was killed in an accident working at the chemical plant, it had just been him and his brother. His father had been sent to jail years ago

and they hadn't spoken in over a decade, so he wasn't much help. Both Colin and his brother still lived in the same apartment where they had grown up, and the insurance settlement with the chemical company kept the rent paid and the lights on, but it wouldn't last forever.

The last thing Colin wanted to do was get a job, and his younger brother Elliot was even less motivated to do so.

"What was that all about?" Said Sloane, Colin's girlfriend. She was in the bathroom, getting ready for her shift at Burger Boom when she had heard the shouting. Her greasy shirt and smock were already in place, and her hair was tucked under the regulation Burger Boom visor.

"Brundell emailed back. He wants to meet Ms. F!" Colin said, with pride and excitement.

"He's paying for everything?" Sloane replied, only half-curious about it. She was fully informed on what Colin was up to, but even then, this was her boyfriend's thing, not hers.

"Everything. Full ride. He just wants to know where he can send the cash." It wasn't the big payday Colin was planning and waiting for, this was just a few bucks. He had claimed that 'Mrs. F' needed to pay for a sitter, go to a salon and buy some nice clothes for the date — at least the part about needing money to buy a dress was true. The rest was profit.

What Colin ultimately had in mind was much, much bigger than this. A date was just the first step. It was a simple plan: First win him over, then develop trust, then date, get engaged, then move in and clean up. Once they'd taken up residence in the chump's house, then they'd pull off the really big haul.

"So what are you going to do next?" Sloane asked as she stuffed her phone and keys in her pockets.

"Well, we choose a day and time for the date, and then you go out with him."

"Oh, no babe. We've gone over this." She feathered some stray hairs behind her ear. "I told you, I'm not doing it. You need to find someone else!"

When Colin had set up the dating profile, it needed photos, so the logical person to use was the only girl he really knew well enough to do it — which was Sloane. They made her up with heavy makeup to obscure her features a little and then got a brunette wig for her to wear over her red hair. She looked quite convincing as a thirty-three year old woman, eleven years older than she really was.

"No, you said you *were* going to do it," Colin countered.

"Uh, I think *you* said I was, and you didn't let me talk. But I never actually said I would. You know I'm on probation! I already have two strikes!"

"You can't back out on me now! This whole thing needs you! It can't happen without you!"



Sloane pulled a hoodie on and headed for the front door. “We’ll talk about this when I get back from work, okay? But I *never* told you I was doing it.”

“C’mon babe! You can’t let me down!”

“We’ll talk later!” Sloane repeated and left.

“Sloane... Baby...” Colin called after her as the door clicked shut. “Fuckin’ cunt,” he added, when he couldn’t be heard.

“I told you she’d back out,” Elliot teased, yelling from the living room.

“Shut up!” Colin snapped back. He stomped all the way down the hall to face his younger brother. “If she isn’t going to do it, you know what my fallback plan is,” he said, deliberately staring right at Elliot.

The nineteen year old didn’t bother to wrest his eyes away from the TV. “Hey, I’m all in, and you know that. I’m far too deep into this train wreck of a plan to back out now. But I’m not dressing up like a woman.”

“Well, if Sloane isn’t going to do it, you may not have a choice!” Colin called back as he returned to his room.

“Like fuck I don’t!” Elliot replied.

Colin sat down at his laptop and hammered out the details. He wrote an email to this Martin Brundell character asking for him to pick the time and place for the date. Brundell selected a coffee shop downtown, and wanted to do it two days from today. Colin told him that ‘she’ would be on time and was ‘very excited to meet him’ and that ‘she’ would be wearing a blue dress.



Two days later, sitting in Colin’s van outside the coffee shop, he was coming to a very stark conclusion. His girlfriend was not showing up.

“Don’t say no until you hear the whole plan,” he had told her yesterday.

“I’m saying it anyway,” was her reply. “I’m not doing it.”

“You just have to think about it,” Colin had said to her, trying to cajole and guilt her into doing it. “You know I trust you. Even if you say no now, you’ll be there for me. I know you will.”

“Screw that.”

“I’ll be waiting for you, all you have to do is show up.”

So now, minutes from the rendezvous, Colin had to face the fact that Sloane had not, in fact, shown up — and he was in deep, deep trouble.

“Hey, uh, Elliot...” He said to his brother, who was playing his portable game system with all the focus he could muster. “Elliot!” Colin had to say again.

The game made a “pause” sound as he hit a button. “What?” Elliot answered, peeved.

“I really need you to come through for me, bro,” Colin said, putting his hand on his shoulder. “I’m really counting on you to man up and take on this challenge.”

Elliot already knew what his brother wanted. “Why don’t *you* do it? You can wear the dress.” He gestured over to the assembled supplies they had taken with them to prep Sloane. She was supposed to be coming off her job and wasn’t going to have time to change on the way, so they were going to give her the makeover in the van. At least, that was the original plan. “It’s because you think I look more like a girl than you do, isn’t it?”

The answer to that question was a resounding ‘yes,’ but Colin was far too smart to say so. The fact was that the Finch boys, Colin Finch and Elliot Finch, had not been blessed with height or muscle. Colin was five foot nine on his driver’s license and five seven in reality. Elliot, in addition to being only five foot five, was a downright slender one hundred and ten pounds and still retained the smoothness and roundness of childhood in his skin. He also kept his hair long to the point where it covered his eyes most of the time.

“You? No,” Colin said, lying. “It’s because you’re just a far better actor than I am. It’s really all about attitude. You can do it way better than I ever could. I believe in you!”

Unfortunately for Elliot, even though he had heard this BS from his brother all his life, he was still a dupe for this kind of compliment-laden pep talk.

“You *really* think I can?” He replied.

“Absolutely,” Colin said. “I just wish I had a fraction of your acting talent! Let’s get you in the outfit and then you can see for yourself.”

“I guess... No promises, though.”

“Oh, I think you’ll be more than convinced,” Colin said, seeing the reluctant grimace on his kid brother’s face. He helped Elliot out of his clothes, which were just jeans and a t-shirt, and sat him down on the floor of the van to do his face. Not that Colin had a lot of experience doing makeup, but he knew enough to do the basics of lipstick and mascara. Fortunately, puberty had barely even laid a finger on Elliot, and he had no beard or rough skin that needed covering.

Once he had Elliot made up, he worked very quickly to get the dress and wig on him, just to keep Elliot from getting second thoughts. He knew it was a matter of time before Elliot fought back.

He was too late. “I’m not doing this,” Elliot said. “Gimme my clothes back. I’m not doing this.”

“Give it a chance, Elliot, I know you can do it!”

“Like fuck. This was a bad idea. A stupid idea. Get this junk offa me!”

Colin's reassuring hand on his brother's arm quickly turned into a wrestling hold and Elliot was squirming to get out of the grasp. He started to kick and Colin twisted himself sideways to try and subdue his frightened brother, but the scuffle was just a mess of limbs and cursing for about a minute. Elliot got free and lurched for the door, letting himself out.

"Fuck this!" He yelled, before slamming the door behind him.

Just seconds later, Elliot re-entered the van through the front door, sat in the front seat and pulled a blanket over him, aware that he still had a face full of makeup and lingering outside was not a good idea.

That was that. Colin was out of options. If he was going to make this happen, he was going to have to take total control.

"All right, buddy, it's down to you," Colin said to himself. "Nothing to lose now."

He brushed his hair back and out of the way as he checked the time. He only had ten minutes. His skin wasn't quite in as good a condition as his brother's, but fortunately he had shaved that morning, and there was only a hint of masculine hairs on his chin.

Some mascara, a dash of blush on his cheeks and a careful coat of lipstick on his lips was all he had time for. He fit the wig over his head and, seeing the whole picture, was hopeful that this Brundell guy had some bad eyes.

He stripped himself down to his underwear and pulled the dress on like a t-shirt. The young man stuffed the backside of his briefs with his folded-over shirt to give him the appearance of a female butt and then used the built-in bra in the dress to pad out his chest, filling it with his socks.

He had bought a cheap gold-finished necklace, earrings and bracelets, common to middle-aged women, and picked up a pair of calf-length boots at the thrift shop. With those on, he was complete, and turned to his brother. "How do I look?" He said. Colin cleared his throat and tried it again with a falsetto and a smile. "How do I look?"

Getting no reply from the blanket, Colin had to look in the mirror and see if there were any details he need to take care of. He was a mess. Unfortunately, his time had run out and there was nothing he could do about it.

"Let's just go home," the blanket said.

"Too close," Colin answered, as he untucked the long wig hair from the collar of his dress. "I'm going to be late."

"Seriously, let's get outta here before we do something stupid," Elliot threw the blanket off of him and leapt into the driver's seat. He started the van. "I'm serious, Colin, let's not get ourselves in any deeper, okay? I don't want to break the law."

“I don’t want to break the law!” Colin said, mocking his brother’s choice of words in a whiny voice. “This is what’s going to pay for the next ten years, Elliot. The settlement is going to run out sooner or later.”

His single-minded dedication to seeing his plans through was usually Colin’s most powerful asset, however on this occasion, it was sending him headlong into disaster. Yes, he fit some basic requirements of what a woman might look like, but his overall appearance was of a girl who had gotten into her mommy’s makeup case and was playing dress-up.

He threw open the rear door and stepped out — into the rain. The clouds opened up the bomb bay doors and it had just started to downpour the moment he got out of the van. Colin ignored the cosmic intervention and tugged his dress into place.

“Colin! Don’t!” Elliot yelled. Colin just slammed the door shut on him.

Even as the rain started to increase in intensity, Colin was determined to soldier on. He took a deep breath, swelled up his chest, squared his shoulders and headed to cross the street.

He stumbled as he walked in the raised heels for the first time, almost spilling over onto the wet pavement.

With desperation, Elliot jumped out of the van and ran over to Colin, grabbing him by the hand and pulling on it. “This is messed up, man! Let’s just call the guy and say we got lost or sick or something!”

“Don’t pull on me!” Colin said, trying to shake his brother off. “I’m *doing* this, okay?” By this time, both young men were sopping wet, as the intensity of the rain was making it impossible to see or hear very well. It was the kind of intense rain that was not only a sheet of water from the sky, but it created a mist from how hard it was hitting the ground.

“C’mon! Let’s go!”

“Keep your hands to yourself!”

“Oh, hello,” said a man who had approached the two boys, unseen. He was holding a folded newspaper over his head to shield himself from the rain. “Are you... Ms. F?”

Both Colin and Elliot were too shocked to do much more than stand there, looking stupid.

“I recognize you from your profile,” the man said. It had to have been Doug Brundell, the contact from the dating site. He was a tall man, but slightly out of shape, and wearing a department store suit. “I’m Doug,” he said, offering his hand for a shake.

Still unable to really say anything, Colin fought to get his fist back from Elliot and shook Doug’s hand. “Yeah,” he squeaked.



Then Doug turned to Elliot. "And this must be your daughter," he said.

Elliot and Colin exchanged a quick, confused glance at each other. They couldn't quite understand how Brundell had marked them as the women he was supposed to meet, but here it was, happening. The fact was that the rain was obscuring vision like fog, and it had matted their hair down as well as smudged their makeup to the point where they didn't look any worse than any real female, wet from the rain.

"I didn't know you'd be bringing her, she's adorable," Doug said. "I hate to do this, but a meeting popped up at the last minute. All I had time for was to come by and express my regrets personally. I was really looking forward to this. You don't know how much."

"Oh... Uh... Okay," Colin said in his wildly undulating falsetto.

"Can I give you a... Uh, rain check?" Doug said with a smile.

"Sure."

Doug sighed. "Phew. I can't tell you how much that means to me..." He was searching for something to call Colin. "I still don't know your name."

"Cuh..." Colin started to say, about to give his real name like he had every other time he'd been asked that question. With no time to think, he just spat out the first thing that came to his mind. "Dorothy." Shoot, why had he watched the Wizard of Oz last night? Now he needed a last name... What had he called this profile? Ms. F? "Dorothy Farmer."

"Very pretty name." Doug looked at Elliot, also searching for something to call him.

"Ehhhhhmily," Colin quickly improvised.

"Good to meet you, Emily," Doug said.

Elliot took a step back to hide behind his brother.

Doug turned, in anticipation of leaving. "Anyway, I have your email. I think maybe the zoo. We can bring the kids. I'll get in contact with you... Dorothy."

"Okay," Colin said.

"You don't need a ride or..."

"I'm good."

"I look forward to seeing you again... Dorothy." It was not lost on Colin that Doug was saying the name "Dorothy" as if he was immediately smitten. Doug headed back across the street and disappeared into a crowd of umbrellas.

As soon as he was out of sight, the two boys ran back to the van and locked the door behind them. They sat, huddled against the wall of the van, side by side, looking like they had just survived a hundred foot ride off a waterfall.

Elliot was the first to speak. "I can't believe he thought I was your daughter..." he grabbed the hand mirror and had to check for himself. He had to be honest and say that dripping wet, there wasn't much to distinguish him male or female.

"All right. So far, so good," Colin said, regaining his confidence.

"You're lucky we even got through that without getting the cops called on us."

"Lucky nothing!" Colin declared, getting up and maneuvering to the front seat. "I don't believe in luck." He started up the van and put it into gear, which he found a bit difficult in the boots.

"That was all luck!" Elliot said. "And if you're smart, you'll just let it go, okay? Just try coming up with a safer way to make money! This is crazy!"

"Hell no! This just tells me we're on the right track!"

Elliot joined his brother in front, climbing into the passenger seat. "Don't be stupid!"

"Listen, you better get used to it, because you're going on that date to the zoo, as Dorothy's daughter, like it or not!"

"Fuck that shit!"

Colin used his free hand to grab his brother by the shirt. "Listen, unless you want to get some crap job somewhere, you'll do what I tell you to do! I'm sick of your whining and not helping!"

"Back off!" Elliot said, trying to free his brother's grip on his clothes.

"You never help pay for anything, you're always complaining, and you just eat, play games and watch TV all day! What good are you?"

"Stop it!" Elliot said, almost sounding like he was whimpering a little bit. His brother knew what nerves to strike when he wanted to.

Colin released Elliot and put both hands on the steering wheel. "Your problem is you don't know who's boss. If I'm the one bringing home the money, then I'm the one calling the shots!"

Elliot just turned away and stared out the side window, his arms folded.

Colin wasn't finished. "You're going to help me out, and you're going to do the best you can! We're in this together, and I need you to pull your weight!"

The younger of the Finch brothers began to wipe his finger in the fogged window. His brother was a royal asshole, especially when he was right.



The next day, Colin was still drying out his clothes and the wig as they hung in the bathroom. There was no question in his mind that he had some kind of

insane good fortune in pulling off his little ruse as “Dorothy.” He still was waiting for Doug to email him and tell him he saw through it all, but instead he had already gotten two messages from Brundell saying he was “so sorry” and “really wanted to make it up to her.”

So now, with a new date only a couple of days away, he needed to figure out how to do the job professionally. Without that rain shower, there was no realistic way that things could have worked out so well.

“Hey, Sloane, this is Colin. I need your help. Can you come over? Call me.” He had been leaving messages and texting her for over two days now and still didn’t have a reply. It felt like maybe he was being given the final brush-off. Granted, the only thing he wanted from her was help in getting dressed up to look like a real woman, so maybe it was for the best right now.

His brother was still locked up in his room this morning, and without anyone to bounce ideas off of, he went to the tried and true replacement for human interaction, the internet.

Colin needed to know how he could look his best, as a woman, and at the same time, make Elliot look a girl. Doing the math, he figured that since “Dorothy” was supposed to be 34, the earliest he could have her giving birth would be at 18 or 19, so that made “Emily” to be about fifteen years old. Elliot was nineteen, and looked younger — but not as young as a fifteen year old girl. He was going to need some help on that front.

Then there was his own appearance. Socks and balled-up shirts were not going to work this time around to “fill out” his figure, so he needed to find better equipment. He also hoped that this date was just going to be the first of many, if things went the way he planned, so spending a few extra dollars to get it right was going to be worth it.

To his surprise, there was a whole industry devoted to his problem. Not only was he able to find the things he needed to disguise himself as female, he had to actually had several choices as to which ones he liked.

His first concern was the padding. Wrap-around butt enhancers and breast forms were the first things he bought. He figured on a B sized bust at first, but the C cups were a little cheaper, so he got those. According to the measurements on various sites he was visiting, Colin had a slender enough waist for a decent figure, but he did buy an elastic waist cincher to make sure he’d look great. After all, if he was going to disguise himself as a woman, he wanted to be good looking one.

That was the easy part, though. The young man then had to make some decisions about his face. On one hand, he thought he should buy some stage makeup to make him look older and middle-aged, but his ego and vanity kept him from doing it. He wanted to look cute, not old. So instead, he bought the

“deluxe” makeup kit and a few pairs of false eyelashes. Because that’s what middle-aged women used, to the best of his knowledge.

When it came to choosing clothes, he had so many choices that it became impossible for him to figure things out. There were way too many styles, colors and trends for him to even begin to understand. Was Dorothy going to need a formal outfit? A casual outfit? Was she sporty? Outdoorsy? Trendy? Classic? There was no answer to these questions.

So what Colin decided to do was build a profile of who Dorothy Farmer was, and the best place to start was to figure out what kind of woman Doug Brundell wanted.

He had previously found a lot of information on Brundell, in his research on the man, making sure he was wealthy enough to pursue. He was very well-to-do, much more than he appeared to be. His name came up often when it came to medical advances. He had received a lot of notoriety in the field of experimental gene splicing, and was a “pioneer” in genetic manipulation. Colin didn’t quite know what that all meant, but it sounded impressive.

Colin also tripped across old “personals” ads Brundell had placed. By searching his email address, dozens of brief ads came up from almost all the local papers and news sites. The ads told a story all by themselves. In his own words, he was looking for “a kind soul” who was “great with kids.” One ad asked for an “easy laugher” and a “wholesome girl next door” with “classic family values.”

Colin made a checklist. Nice person, likes kids, laughs, wholesome, classic and wants a family. He could picture that type of woman in his head: A motherly type who was the nicest mom on the block. She laughed at anything even close to being funny, liked the timeless classic look and was very protective of her family.

That made his decisions much easier. He found lots of “vintage style” clothing and bought enough for a couple of complete outfits. He picked out high heels, because that was definitely the sort of woman Dorothy was. He selected just a basic set of jewelry, including a classic pearl necklace. That was going to be her style. Kind of like a modern June Cleaver, but a little more light-hearted. Doug Brundell was going to eat that crap up.

“Heee hee hee,” he said aloud. He needed to develop a convincing feminine giggle, but it sounded forced. He was going to practice until he got it right. “Heee hee hee,” he repeated. Any bystander would have assumed the boy had lost his mind.

What he also found in his research on Brundell was a history of posted ads to look after Doug’s son. He couldn’t find a name for the kid, but Colin saw several posts for a nanny, an au pair and a “minder.” That didn’t sound good.

Either Brundell was a snob and never satisfied, or the responders had quit after dealing with the little runt, and Brundell didn't seem like the picky type.

So he made himself a promise: no matter how awful that kid was, he was going to be the picture of tolerance and composure. His whole scheme might just depend on it.

Just as important was Elliot and his ability to imitate a young girl. Not only was the Brundell guy evaluating "Dorothy" as a girlfriend and potential wife, but he was evaluating "Emily" as a daughter. No matter how Elliot felt about it, Colin was going to have to make his brother play the part, and play it convincingly.

Once Brundell trusted them completely, then Colin would take advantage of it. Colin hadn't decided if he was going to just loot his house, steal valuables or just blackmail him. Stealing seemed the easiest, but blackmail had a big upside, too. Maybe he'd do them all.

For now, though, he would need something for Elliot to wear and become the young girl he had to be. Also, since the things he ordered weren't going to arrive for a couple of days, he needed to locally buy the things "Dorothy" was going to wear on the first date. "Back tonight," he wrote on a note and stuck it to the living room TV, the surest place Elliot would look. He grabbed his coat, wrote down Elliot's shirt, pant and shoe sizes, and headed out shopping.



The next morning, Elliot was in the living room, having fallen asleep in front of the TV the previous night. Colin had come home, gone to his room, and left his sleeping brother undisturbed. It wasn't until nine that he thought he should try and wake him up.

"Let's go!" Colin said kicking his brother's legs off the coffee table. Or, at least, the pile of pizza boxes that was about coffee-table height.

"Stop it!" Elliot responded, waving his brother away and rolling over. Only he stopped halfway when he began processing the slight glimpse he had just seen. Then he opened his shocked eyes wide open and took another look.

"Let's get a move on, lazy bones!" Colin sang, with a mischievous smile.

"Oh, God," Elliot said, sitting up straight. "Why are you dressed like that?"

Colin was in a blue striped shirt dress, tied at the waist and a hem down to mid-calf.

He had on a pair of black two-inch heels and the long dark-hair wig, now dried out. "Because I need the practice. I don't want to feel like I'm wearing something weird. I have to be comfortable."

“Or you just decided the hell with it and become the woman you always yearned to be,” Elliot quipped.

“Uh huh. Let’s see how funny you think it is when you put on your outfit for the day.”

“Get out of my face,” Elliot said as he turned around and tried to go back to sleep.

“I’m not kidding, Elliot. Get up and get dressed. I want to see what it looks like on you.”

“Fuck off.”

Even in his heels, Colin had the strength and stability to grab his brother by the shirt and yank him off the couch and up onto his feet. “Don’t let the dress fool you, asswipe. I can still fuck you up something nasty.”

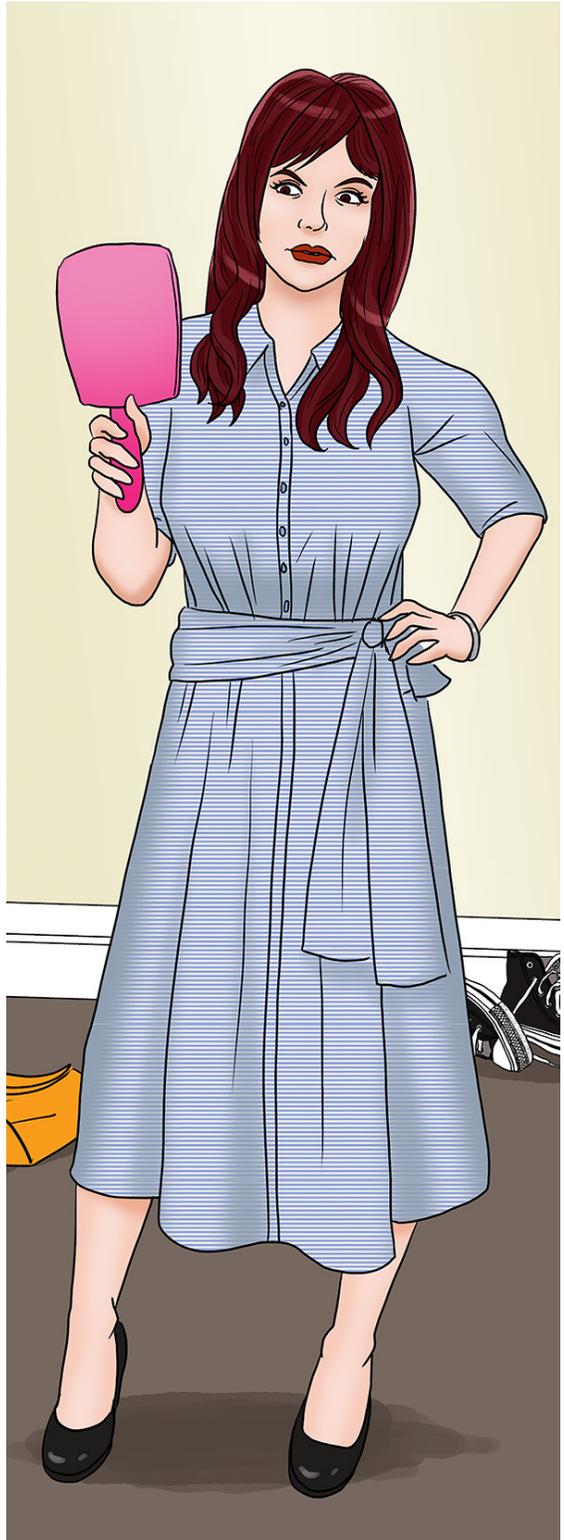
“Jesus Christ, Colin...”

Not taking any more delays and insults, Colin pulled on his brother’s shirt until he got moving toward his room and then pushed him the rest of the way there.

“Knock it off! I’m serious!” Elliot was saying to no avail.

“So scared,” Colin replied. “I’m shaking.”

Finally, with one broad swipe of his arm to get Colin to stop pushing him, Elliot stood his ground. “I’m not doing this, okay? This fuckin’ plan of yours is fuckin’ crazy! Now leave me the fuck alone!”



“Leave you alone?” Colin said pushing his brother one last time with a big, powerful shove. “Yeah, I can leave you alone! I can leave you alone on the street, okay? You’re nineteen, Elliot! You don’t even have a right to live here! It’s all in my name and I can kick you out any time I want to!” He hovered over his brother, even taller in the heels, and set his jaw hard. “You eat, you sleep, you watch TV and play video games! That’s all you ever do, and you whine and cry every time I get the crazy idea you might help!”

“I help a lot!”

“You help emptying out the fridge! You help drinking my beer! You help taking up space and consuming oxygen! Now I have this one shot at getting out of this rut, paying our own way and trying to get ahead, and all you can do is give me crap for it! Well, let me tell you, if you don’t do what I tell you to do, we’re both screwed when the settlement money stops coming in! Six months! That’s all we have!”

“Six months! You never said that! I didn’t know it was six months!”

“I’m saying it now!” Colin straightened his back and wanted to regain his composure. Truth was, they still had five years of income, but Elliot needed a good scare. “Look, I know this is weird, I know it’s even a little perverted. This isn’t my best idea I’ve ever had. But it’s the one that’s *working*. We got a real chance here. I have to ask you for your help.” He could see by the lack of an angry response that he was getting through. “I can’t do this without you, and really, I don’t want to. I gotta have you by my side on this one, dude.”

“I’m not doing it,” Elliot said, softly.

“Elliot. It’s all we got right now. It’s all we got.”

After a moment more of introspection, Elliot took his shirt off.

Colin pumped his fist while his brother had his eyes closed. “I’m gonna make this as easy as possible, okay? No reason to make this too tough on you.” He took the shirt as Elliot got it off and he tossed it on the laundry pile in the corner. The jeans were next. “Shoes and socks too.”

Colin fetched a few bags from his shopping trip and dropped them on the ground. “We’ll go with this,” Colin grabbed a polka-dot long-sleeve dress in purple and handed it over. Elliot pulled it on as Colin chose a pair of purple tights and a sequined purple shirt to match.

Elliot just sighed as he put it all on. He finished up with a pair of black flats.

“Now let me comb your hair out a little...” Colin said, doing his best. It still wasn’t quite what he wanted. “And put on this hairband.”

Elliot had to figure out how to do it right, as he never knew a hairband could have teeth, but they did. He slipped it on, keeping his long hair out of his eyes for once. “Well?” He asked.

Colin waited a little too long to make his answer sound confident. “Good...” He said, not completing the thought. “So, what do you think about having someone do it professionally?”

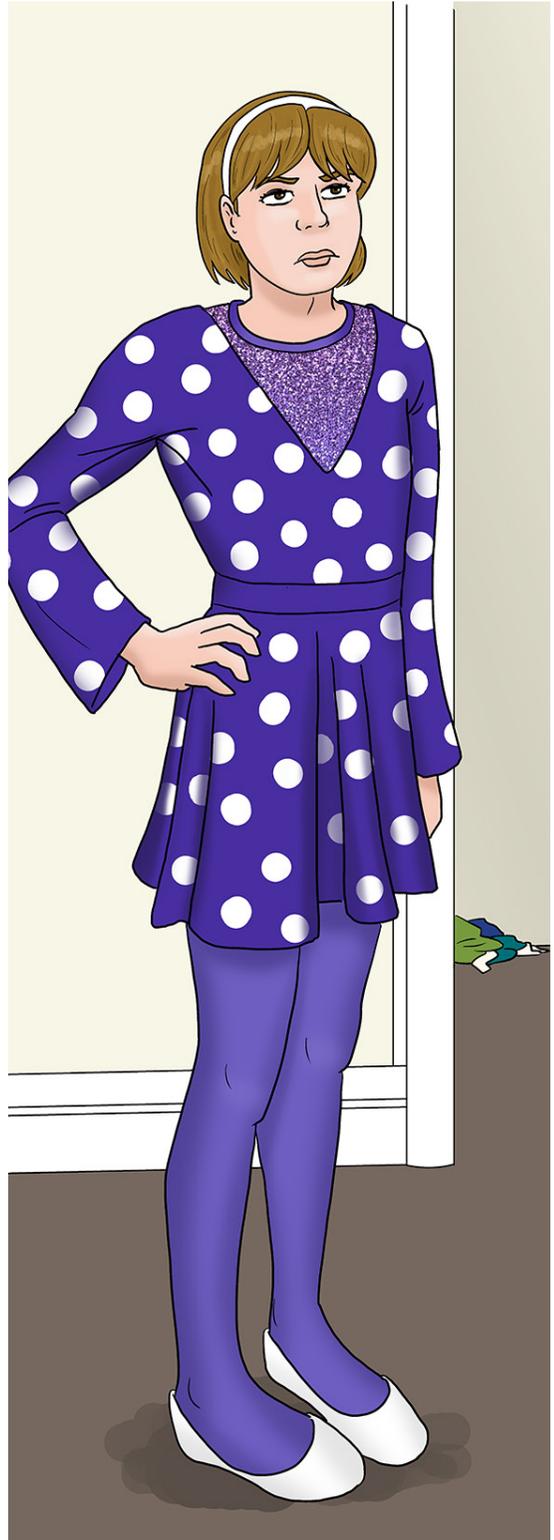
“I’m not going out in public like this.”

“It’s easy. You can just be a shy little girl. Just ‘yes mommy’ this, and ‘no mommy’ that. Easy stuff.”

Elliot snorted out some air in disdain. “Look, for one, only little girls say ‘Mommy.’ If I’m supposed to be fifteen, and a girl, then I’d be calling you ‘Mother.’ Second, these are clothes for, like, an eleven year old. Fifteen year olds would not be wearing something like this. So, if we go out, I need to get some better looking stuff.”

It was hard for Colin to keep from smiling. Even though his brother had been fighting this every step of the way, seemingly disgusted, he had independently done the same age math that Colin had done to arrive at Emily’s fifteen year old age. Not only that, but he had already pictured who Emily was, and how she would dress. His little brother was way more into this than he let on.

“Well, I guess we can do that,” Colin said. “I don’t have a lot of money, but we could get another outfit or two. Maybe.”



“We have to,” Elliot said, “or this isn’t going to work.”

Colin tried to look put out. “I *suppose* I understand. Man, I just hope we can do it.” He still had hundreds to spend, he just had to make it sound like it was going to be tough. “But you should probably keep that on to go shopping.”

“I guess,” Elliot said.

“No, that’s ‘Yes Mother.’”

Elliot smiled. “Hah. Yes, Mother, dear.”

“So, uh...” Colin was now the one at a loss for words. “I don’t know how to say this, but...” He took a moment to force the words out. “In your opinion, do I look convincing enough, looking like this?”

“If you told me you were a man, I’d probably believe it,” Elliot said. “But if I wasn’t looking for it, I’d probably not be able to tell.”

“So what am I getting wrong?”

“Well... It’s not just like a single ‘thing’ it’s kind of the whole package. It’s more like an impression you get.”

“Huh. So, like the way I talk?”

“More like the way you act. You don’t use your hands like a woman, or move like a woman, and you don’t react like a woman.”

“React?”

“Women smile or frown or look intense or... They just always have something going on with their face. You just kind of have a blank, dead, look.”

“All the time?”

“No, sometimes you look like you’re smelling a fart.”

“So women are more expressive, is what you’re saying.”

“That’s it.” Elliot pointed to Colin’s hands. “But it wouldn’t kill you to get some long nails, too.”

“Good idea,” Colin said. “Do you think they can do nails at the salon?”

“Besides hair, I think that’s *all* they do at salons.”

“Great. Let’s go while we still have the nerve, okay?”

“Yes, *Mother*,” Elliot replied, with dripping sarcasm.



“You go in,” Colin said.

“No, ladies first!” Elliot said, pushing.

“I insist!”

“No, you...”

Now it was staring to look ridiculous, as the two boys were right up against the glass front door at Second Looks Salon, and they were perfectly visible to everyone inside.

With a swift side-step, Colin got behind Elliot and guided him through the door first. They only took about five steps inside and waited for a moment, to see if anyone was going to jump out of their chairs and yell “impostors!” No one did, so they continued on to the reception desk.

The receptionist was chipper and ridiculously cute. “Hi, there! Welcome! Do you have an appointment?”

“Oh...” Colin said in his ear-withering falsetto. “No we don’t”

“Hair or nails or both?”

“One of each. Hair for my... *Daughter*... And nails for me.”

“No problem, I have a spot open for your daughter and I should have a nail spot open in ten. Let me go check,” the receptionist said, and walked into the back.

“So far, so good,” Colin whispered.

“I can’t feel my legs,” Elliot said. “I’m so fuckin’ scared.”

“Good little girls don’t swear.”

“Fuck you, *Mother*.”

The receptionist returned. “I do have a spot for you right now, sweetie. What’s your name?”

Elliot looked like he was about to turn to stone, he was so scared.

Colin stepped in. “Her name is Emily, and she’s just a little scared. It’s her first trip to a salon.”

The receptionist felt the need to bend over to talk to Elliot, even though he was just a few inches shorter than Colin. “Oh, I see. Don’t worry, we don’t bite. You’ll be with Sharon. She’s nice. Follow me.” She turned and beckoned Elliot to follow her.

Colin had to physically grab Elliot and pull him forward by the hand to get him to move.

Colin and Elliot were introduced to the stylist, a woman who obviously had been smoking a butt just five seconds ago, but looked pleasant enough. Colin handled the introductions as he gently pushed his brother forward, trying to get him up on the chair. “This is my daughter, Emily, it’s her first time at a salon and she’s just a little tongue-tied at the moment.”

“Hi Emily, I’m Sharon.”

“...” Elliot replied.

Colin had to fill in the silence to keep it from getting too awkward. “Emily’s been a bit of a tomboy for most of her life, and now she wants to try and see what she’d look like with a hairstyle more common for girl her age.”

“I see. Anything in mind?”

“Nothing too drastic. Something that’s cute, but easy to maintain.” Colin stood closer to Sharon so he could whisper in her ear. “She’s kind of self-conscious about how masculine she looks. Anything to try and make her look as feminine as possible.”

“Got it,” Sharon said, adding a wink. “I know just what to do.”

“Are you going to be okay by yourself, Emily?” Colin said, patting his brother’s knee.

Elliot glowered back. “Yes, Mother,” he said with only a trace of a feminine tone.

“I’ll just be over here,” Colin said, pointing in the direction of the nail stations.

Elliot clenched his jaw, feeling absolutely ridiculous. “I *got* it, Mother.”

With a smirk, Colin headed away. A Korean woman was standing by, looking a little impatient, so Colin assumed that she was waiting on him.

“Nails?” The woman asked.

“Yes,” Colin replied.

“Long?” She asked.

“Uh, okay.”

“Almond? French?”

“Almonds?” He could go for some almonds right now. He didn’t know they served shacks here.

“Feet?”

“My feet?” He was not expecting there to be this many questions. “Yes, I have feet.”

“Facial?”

“Sure, okay.”

“Wax?”

“Wax.” He was agreeing to everything, just because he figured they knew best.

“Brazilian?”

“No, I’m an American.” Did he look Brazilian? He was just trying to look like a woman.

“Massage?”

“Uh huh.”

“Hair?”

“Uh. It’s a wig, actually.”

“We do wigs.”

“Not today.”

“Have seat,” the woman commanded.

Nothing in the world could have prepared Colin for what he was in for. Hours passed in what seemed like seconds. From the moment he sat down at the nail station, he was bombarded with a furious onslaught of activity, smells, occasional pain and luxurious comfort.

“Are you finished yet, Mother?” he heard. Colin opened his sleepy, over-relaxed eyes and looked over to see Elliot standing next to him.

“What?” he mumbled in his usual deep voice. He was far too laid back to remember to use his female voice. As he eased up the reclining chair, he was in back to an upright position, Colin tried to get himself back to reality.

He was dressed in a pale pink terrycloth robe, his hands sporting new bright red oval tips, one inch in length. His face was aglow, smooth and shiny. His legs were also smooth, and his toenails were red, just like his fingernails. He also felt a sense of relaxation and contentment he had never quite known before. The pampering had worn him down to the point where it would have taken a lightning strike to get him moving.

It was only after a few moments of enjoying his contented state that he realized that Elliot was done and ready to go. Then he got a good look at his hair.

Elliot’s longish hair was now curled in little ringlets at the end, and parted in the middle. He had straight-cut bangs the length of his forehead, ending just above his eyes. The stylist also added a touch of gloss to his lips and a sprinkle of glitter to his eyelids. He was absolutely precious.

“You told her I was fifteen, right?” Elliot said. “I look like a tweeny bopper.”

Colin wanted to gush about how good he looked, but held it in, knowing it would set his brother off. He honestly did have the face of a twelve or thirteen year old. “I think you look very convincing. It really does make you look like a real girl.”

“I know,” Elliot said, his voice dipping down to almost a whisper. “Don’t make fun of me, please.” He scrunched up his shoulders and looked down at his feet, feeling very vulnerable.

“You’re doing great,” Colin said with a little punch to the shoulder. “I gotta go get dressed again, so wait for me, okay?”

Elliot took two steps before turning back to Colin. “I’m kinda freaked out a little, you know what I mean? Mind if I come with you?”

Colin thought about it and decided that wouldn't raise any eyebrows. Everyone thought they were just a mother and daughter. He got up and pointed to the back. "Sure, the dressing area is this way."

"I'm not gonna be able to go out like this," Elliot said, flicking a curled ringlet with his finger.

"Wear a cap. You'll be fine."

They both got into the changing room and Elliot took a seat on a small bench. He watched as his brother took off the robe and revealed the bra and panty set he was wearing.

"You, uh, are just wearing that for the disguise, right?" Elliot asked.

"I've always looked at women closely, curious to see the lines and creases that indicate what they're wearing under their clothes. I figure if *I'm* doing that, and I'm not a perv, most other men certainly are." Colin smirked nervously at his brother. "So I don't want anyone to see boxers under my dress. That'd give everything away."

"I guess that makes sense. But it sure is weird."

"Tell me about it." Colin stepped out of his salon-provided slippers and kicked them aside.

"They did your toes, too?"

"I got kinda carried away," Colin picked up his dress and turned to the mirror. Before he put it over his head, he saw himself in the mirror for the first time since his beauty treatments, and almost gasped. He had no idea they had done so much work on him. His face was totally made over in a sophisticated but basic style. The coral lipstick and bargain mascara he had been using were clearly inferior to a real, professional, make up job. "Crap! Do I look like that for real?" He said.

"Yeah, it really makes you look more like... Well... A mom."

Colin took a second look after he got the dress on. His face did have that sort of maturity to it that middle aged women have. Not a "aged" look, but a kind of placid and wise kind of look. He liked it. "I'm going to get whatever they used on me. I really like the color."

"They did a great job," Elliot agreed.

"On both me and you, right?"

Elliot turned away from the mirror. "Don't remind me."

Colin stepped into his boots. "I'm ready to go if you are. I just need to pay. Meet me in the van."

"I'll just stick around with you, okay?"

Colin figured his brother's nerves were responsible for making him a little clingy at the moment. "Yeah, okay, fine. You still want to go shopping?"

"Actually, maybe we should just go home."

"Yeah, this is a lot to process," Colin said, taking one last admiring glance at himself in the mirror.



As Colin drove the van along the highway back to the apartment, he was beginning to get the idea that he could actually pull this off. It was completely disconcerting to look in the rear view mirror and see a mature, grown woman staring back. So every time he got a little flustered about his own appearance, he would glance over at his brother.

He hadn't noticed it before, but Elliot's hair was not only styled in a new, childishly feminine way, but the hair itself was lighter. He wondered if that was intentional or just a product of being styled. At the very least, the lighter hair made him look more like a young girl.

Colin also wondered what Elliot was going to do with his hair after this was over, as those severe, wide bangs were going to take a while to grow out. He might even have to consider getting a short buzz cut and starting over.

Right now, Colin really had no idea what might be on Elliot's mind as he was being unusually quiet and keeping to himself. Maybe he was having just as difficult a time as Colin was, believing that such a simple thing as clothes, makeup and hair could transform someone so completely.

From the neck up, he'd swear he was looking at any average mom he'd ever known. He could easily see himself at home or at a PTA meeting or baking cookies for a school bake sale. He might just try showing up at a school soccer game fully dressed up and cheering on a random kid, if he was feeling mischievous.

As Colin pulled the van into his assigned parking spot at the apartment building, Elliot was out of the van like a shot and headed up the stairs. *Must not want anyone to see him*, Colin said to himself.

He wasn't that worried, as he had come to trust his disguise. He had fooled a whole business at the salon, and if trained beauticians couldn't spot a wolf amongst the sheep, he was going to be fine taking the elevator up at his leisure, as routinely as he always did.



On the morning of the big date, Colin woke his brother up from his spot in front of the laptop. A game of Call of Duty had been in progress, and a “disconnected” message was on screen. Once again, he had probably spent all night campaigning and fallen asleep in the middle of it.

“Come on, dude. Big day today,” Colin said, snapping the earpad of Elliot’s headset against his head. Elliot woke in a quick furious shake, and then slumped back in his chair.

He checked the time on the computer clock. “Man, it’s like two hours away. Why’d you wake me up?”

“If my girlfriend is anything to go by, two hours is barely enough. She takes forever.”

“Ex girlfriend.”

“Maybe. I guess.” Colin shrugged. “We’ll see. You wanna get started?”

“No.”

“Great. I was thinking we should get in character early enough that we don’t screw things up this afternoon. So I’m going to just call you Emily for now, and you call me Mother.”

“In character? Like, acting?”

“Might as well.” Colin cleared his throat. “Now, let’s get dressed Emily, sweetie. Mommy has a lot of work to do.”

Elliot groaned. “This is gonna be a long day.”

“Pardon?”

“Nothing, *Mother*,” Elliot answered. “Just don’t push it, okay?”

“Somebody woke up a grumpy-puss.”

“See? Just like that.”

“I put your outfit on your bed. I’ll be squeezing into my bodyshaping stuff.”

“Do I have to put the dress on *now*?”

“If you want to be comfortable, yes.”

A few minutes later, as Colin went about getting dressed, and was kicking off his pants, his brother came storming into his room. “What the hell is this?” Elliot yelled, holding his assigned clothing.

“Don’t cuss. Do you want a time out?”

“Colin!” Elliot snapped, not playing along.

“It’s a romper. A one-piece that’s like a shirt and shorts...”

“I know what a romper is. Girls my age don’t wear this kind of thing!”

Colin noted that he was putting himself in ‘Emily’s’ place again. “Girls of any age wear rompers. They’re very popular. Coming back in style.”

“I’m not wearing it.”

“You don’t have to wear it, Elliot. It’s for Emily to wear. Emily would wear it.”

“No I wouldn’t! I mean, *she* wouldn’t!”

“Look, you don’t decide who Emily is. I don’t get to decide who Emily is. Doug Brundell is the only person who gets to decide who Emily is. He’s the one who needs to fall in love with her. So Emily has to be the adorable, lovable, cute-as-a-button, sickeningly delightful little girl he’s going to invite into his home, along with her vivacious mother, so we can rob him blind.”

“It’s pink,” Elliot pointed out.

“It’s salmon.”

“Salmon *are* pink.”

“Not on the outside.”

Elliot emitted some sort of a noise between an annoyed grunt and a whimper. He gripped the romper in one hand, turned and left. “If one person laughs at me, I’m going to punch their teeth out one by one!” He said, returning to his room.

Finally, it was time for Colin to get dressed. He was feeling a bit divided, with one half dreading the process of making himself up as a woman again, and the other half intensely curious to see how all the new stuff he had to put on, and new tricks he had learned, would look. He decided to let the curious side of him take control.

He had a new padded panty brief that would also keep him “under control,” as well had give him the wide hips he needed. Figuring out what to do with the extra loops of fabric in the crotch of the “gaff” was a mystery until he read the directions — then he was a little horrified. Still, he went through with it, and when he was done, he saw no trace of his manhood. He was freaking uncomfortable, but it did the job.

Next was a “waist nipper” to try and take in his sides in a little and give him that female contour to the midsection. That was awfully tight as well, and once on, it made it nearly impossible to bend over. After that, he had a bra that was supposed to be a perfect fit, but felt a little snug, pinching his shoulders. He dropped in the breast forms, spent a minute pushing them into place, and decided on using a dab of the included adhesive jut to keep them from moving around on him.

His legs were still baby smooth from the salon waxing and the pantyhose slid up his legs quickly without fuss and he tussled with them to get them straight. That meant it was time for the dress, and Colin took a deep breath and yanked it over his head. It fit well, which was pure luck, because he had no idea how to order for the right size. It was shorter than he thought, ending just above the knees. The previous dress covered his knees, and he felt a little exposed

wearing this new one. This dress made him almost feel naked.

He got the wig on, but just before he was ready to get a look at himself, he heard another loud yell from his brother's room.

"This is not working!" Elliot yelled.

"Hang on," Colin said, coming to the rescue. "What's not working?"

"Look!" Elliot said, displaying himself in the romper. But before he could get all melodramatic about it, he saw his older brother. "Whoa," he said.

"What?" Colin thought maybe he had put the wig on backwards or something.

"Whatever you bought makes a big difference."

"Really?" Colin said, smiling in satisfaction. He almost got to take a peek in a mirror, but Elliot was back on topic.

"This is a joke!" He complained. "I look like a freak!"

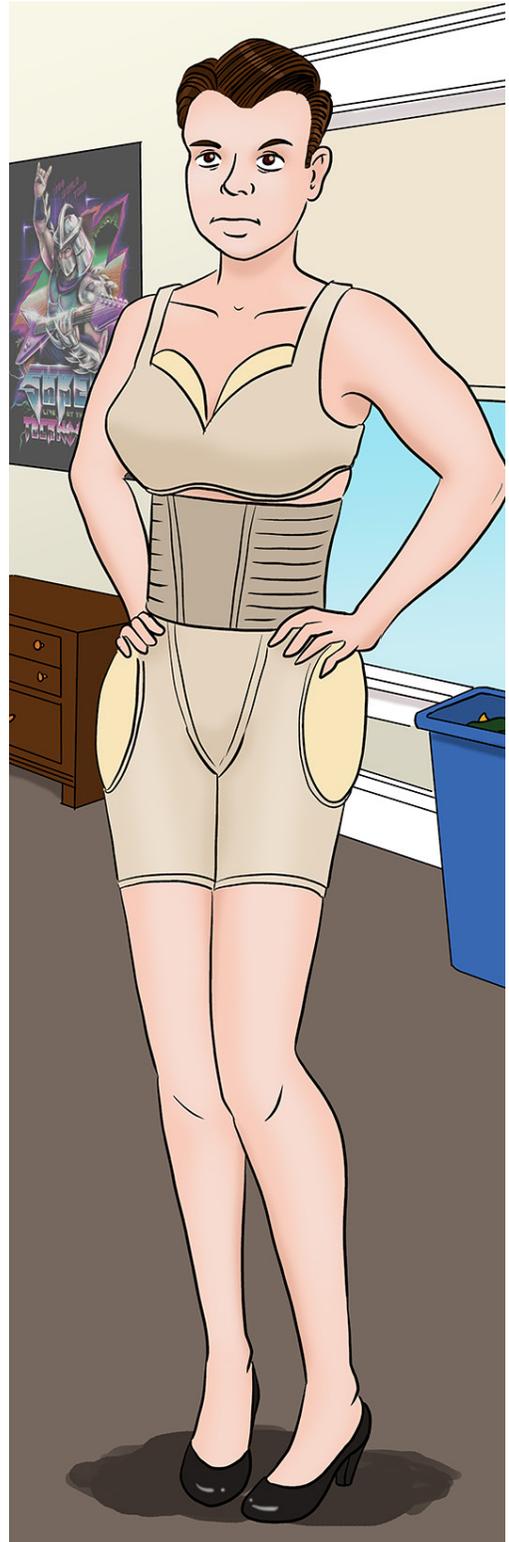
"You need to put on the full outfit, including the tights, okay?" Colin said, pointing to the other stuff left on the bed. "So take that off and we'll get started again."

"It took me ten minutes to figure how to even get this far."

"Now you know, so it'll go faster the next time."

Elliot got out of the romper and the first thing Colin did was hand him the panties he had ignored. "Step one," he said.

"No way."



“It only fits right if you’re wearing these. It bunches up if you don’t.”

Colin shed his underwear and put on the panties. “This just gets better and better,” he said, frustrated.

“Now the tights.”

Elliot sat down on the bed and fought with the white tights to get them up his legs.

“See, the tights, being white, make your legs look bigger and thicker. Without them, you look like a beanpole.”

“Yeah, all right. Fine.”

“Now the romper again,” Colin instructed, taking Elliot’s usual clothes, folding them and putting them neatly aside. “Now how does it fit?”

“Better,” Elliot mumbled.

“Pardon?”

“Better, Mother,” Elliot said, louder.

“Now I assume you can handle the rest. I have to finish up.” Colin went back to his room.

Finished with the clothes, it was time for the detail work. The private bathroom was an ungodly mess of unwashed tiles and a scum-ridden sink and tub. The young brothers had high tolerances for uncleanliness, or at least low tolerances for cleaning. As Colin leaned over the sink and started to apply his makeup, he saw his brother behind him in the mirror, looking on. He had put the hairband in his hair and put on his flats, and was leaning against the door jam.

“What is it?” Colin asked as he started to powder his face.

“Nothing. I just... You know... You sure do look a lot like...” Elliot stopped himself and then walked away.

Colin took a second look at himself. He kinda guessed what Elliot was about to say: ‘You sure do look a lot like mom.’ The resemblance hadn’t gone unnoticed. Colin had seen it the first time he tried the wig on. He had been trying to put it out of his mind, though. Dressing up like this and pretending to be a woman was stressful enough. He didn’t need to have the ghost of his mother staring back at him in the mirror.

As he got to doing his fake eyelashes, he could see Elliot hanging around outside the bathroom again, just kind of staring on. “This takes a while, you know,” Colin said. “There’s much more to it than you think.”

Elliot wasn’t replying, but Colin was used to one-way conversations.

“Hopefully, this will just be a first date. There will be others, so I need to be good at this.” He looked back to see Elliot pretending like he wasn’t paying attention. “You might have to be Emily once or twice more. That’s why I want

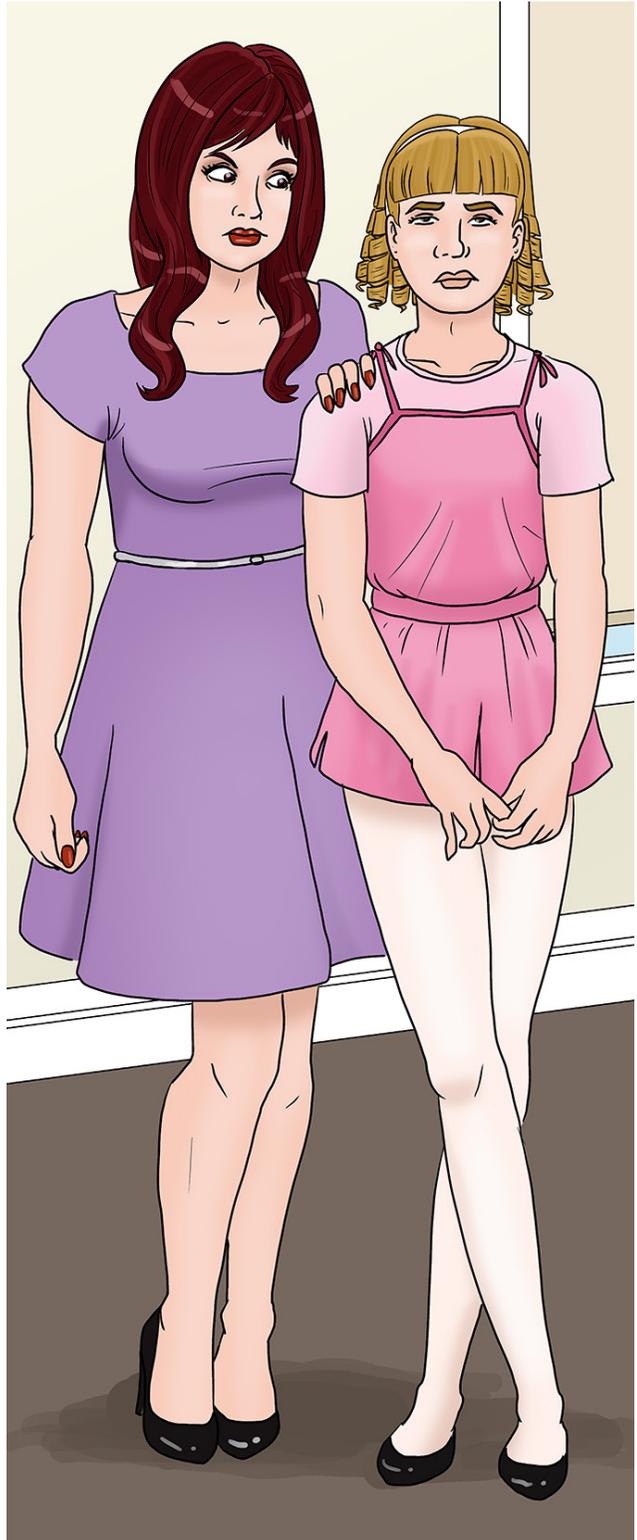
us to be in character. We need to be familiar with these roles.”

“You’re serious about wanting me to call you mother?” Elliot asked.

“Yes I do. It’s better than blurting out our real names later on... Emily.” Colin ran the red lipstick around his lips to fill in the outline he had just painted. He puckered and then blotted them on a piece of tissue. “Okay, now I want to get a look at us in the closet mirror.”

Colin left the bathroom and stepped into his heels. He had chosen a slightly higher heel this time, as he was comfortable in the more modest heels he had worn the last time, and could take a risk. When he walked over to the mirror, he could tell he was going to need to get the hang of them.

Standing side by side, it was disconcerting, seeing their reflections. Colin was blown away at how the new undergarments had turned his straight-as-a-board male body into a curvier feminine figure. His face was so different, it



wasn't at all like he was seeing an image in a mirror, it was like looking at another person behind glass. He was almost embarrassed to make eye contact with her.

Looking down at Elliot was also odd. Elliot looked for all the world like this woman's real daughter. She was a younger, smaller version of the mother. Maybe it was just the heels, but Elliot looked shorter than he usually did, and the difference in their appearance was unsettling. Colin almost felt like he had graduated into adulthood while Elliot was being sent back to childhood.

"Mom?" Elliot finally said, breaking the stunned boy's fixated stares.

"Yes, Emily?" Colin replied.

"I think you'd look better with some jewelry."

"You might be right," Colin said. "Why don't you watch some TV?"

"Okay," Elliot said, walking out and heading for the living room. He glanced back three times to look at his reflection and at Colin.

Once the TV was on, Colin walked down the hallway to the big doors, where the master bedroom was. It was his mom's room. His dad also lived here for a little while before he was sent away, but he only thought of it as his mom's room. The room had a musty smell to it, and only half the light bulbs worked. The boys almost never went in here, as it was like a shrine in some ways. It was left exactly like it was the night their mother died. Her things were still hanging in the coset, a jacket left on the bed.

Colin walked over to her vanity, and aside from the yellowing and tarnished bottles of creams and lotions, there was a small box of jewelry. He picked out a pair of clip-on hoop earrings. He saw a nice silver bracelet and added that to his wrist. As he passed the closet, he saw a black purse. That was one thing he had forgotten about. He picked it up and carried it out with him. Quietly, he left the room and shut the door behind him. He didn't want Elliot to know what he had just done, disturbing the sanctity of their late Mother's room.

Back in his own room, with everything in place, he looked at the new woman in the mirror. "I'm Dorothy Farmer," he said. "I'm Dorothy Farmer," he said again, but with more confidence. "I'm Dorothy Farmer," he said with a bright smile. "Look out, Doug Brundell. You don't have a chance." He added a near perfect feminine giggle at the end of his line. He had been practicing.

"You went into Mom's room, didn't you?" Elliot said from the hallway. Startled, Colin turned to see his brother looking on. "Yeah, you did," Elliot answered the question himself, recognizing the purse. He turned away without another word and returned to the living room.

Colin didn't feel quite right with himself. He had never stolen anything out of that room before. Still, it was necessary. It wasn't frivolous. Disguising himself was the biggest part of providing for both him and his brother. He had always

been the one to make the decisions, and now... Well, it felt like he was the only adult here. The ends justified the means, and he had no one he needed to answer to but himself.

Twenty minutes later, after figuring out what a normal woman might put in a purse, and adding what he might need for the trip, it was time. "Are you ready to go, Emily?" Colin asked as he put the car keys into the purse and walked over to where his brother was sitting.

Elliot looked up at Colin with just a hint of awe in his eyes. To him, he looked bigger than he had before. Was it the shoes? It just struck him that his big brother, as Dorothy Farmer, was almost a different kind of person. A grown-up. More than that, he looked like... A parent.

The realization caused his heart to wither for a moment. His first impulse was to reach out for her, for a helping, warm hand that only a mom could offer. Elliot had to remind himself that Colin was still Colin, just in a different guise. But seeing him like this only made it startling clear how much he missed having a mother in his life. He didn't know until that moment what a huge hole there was in his heart.

"Do I look okay?" Elliot replied, getting to his feet.

"You look fine, sweetie," Colin said, pushing a strand of hair up behind Elliot's ear. "Let's go, I don't want to be late."

After a squabble about if Emily was old enough to sit in the front seat, the two were off for the zoo. Colin wanted to be a little early, so he could park his rusty van far away enough that Brundell would never see it. It didn't fit with the image of Dorothy Farmer he wanted to project.

"So how old are you, Emily?" Colin asked his brother.

"Whut?" Elliot replied.

"For practice. You're gonna get some questions," Colin told him. "So, Emily, how old are you?"

"Fifteen."

Colin gave Elliot a little bit of a look. "Let's go with fourteen."

"Fine," the younger brother said.

"And what grade are you in?"

"Eight." The boys had worked this out over the past couple of days, coming up with answers to all the stupid questions they might be asked.

"Where do you go to school?"

"Ridgeview Middle School."

"What's your favorite food?"

"Ice Cream."

“Do you have a favorite book?”

“The Cupcake Diaries.”

“Oh, do *you* keep a diary?”

“Yes, I write in it every day.”

After practicing for the past two days, both of them were not only feeling comfortable in their roles as mother and daughter, but they were almost bored by these questions. Fortunately, as a by-product they were sounding much more natural, less like the helium-fueled screechy mental patient voices they had used at the beginning. Their female voices were now carefree and almost pleasant to listen to.

“So what do you do for a living, Mother?” Elliot asked, turning the tables.

“I’m a full-time homemaker and raising my beautiful daughter Emily,” was Colin’s confident reply.

“If you could have anything in the world, what would it be?”

“I already have what I want, a beautiful daughter.”

Elliot groaned at that sappy reply. “How do you make your money?”

“Settlement from my ex husband.”

“Oh, I see. What was his name?”

“Uh... I...” Colin hadn’t worked that one out yet. “Shit.”

“Mother, you said a bad word!” Elliot teased in his little-girl voice. “I’m telling!”

“You are so asking for a spanking, young lady!” Colin replied as he pulled into the zoo parking lot.



Doug Brundell had a rewarding and fulfilling career as a genetic scientist. Amongst his peers, his work stood out with cutting-edge thinking from a razor-sharp intellect with the innovation of a turn-of-the-century industrialist. His work was the cornerstone of his entire profession. He was the rock star of genetic science conventions and the authority to be consulted by international medical governing bodies to set policies for future work and roadmaps for where the field was headed.

Outside of the lab, however, Doug was a marshmallow.

Like a lot of organizations, when there’s someone working so far ahead of the curve, the management has no idea what to do with them. In the course of working for Regent Medical for the past fifteen years, Doug had practically built the very industry that they profited from, but at the same time, his

breakneck pace of developing new technologies created chaos for the executives. With one announcement, Doug Brundell could destroy an entire aspect of their business and replace it with something new. That was exactly the sort of thing middle managers live in fear of, and it made tensions between Doug and his superiors strained and volatile.

All Doug wanted to do was work in his lab, but he was constantly being pushed and pulled between his managers and embroiled in the politics of Regent Medical. He had absolutely no talent for it, and just did what he was told to do by whoever said it loudest.

Even though he was on the precipice of some truly mind-bending breakthroughs like limb regeneration and nerve self-repair, things that would change the very foundations of the human condition, Doug was very worried he was about to be fired. With his nose so deep into his work, he had no allies in his company, and almost everyone wanted to see him dismissed for one reason or another. Some were scared, some were jealous, others greedy and just about everyone was intimidated by his genius.

He had been married once, to a nice woman who had no trouble telling Doug what to do, and making him miserable. It was only after three years that she grew bored and moved on to a younger, more assertive man and Doug was free. The divorce was swift, and Doug got to keep most of what he wanted, but was also now the single father of their son Aiden. That in itself was a new level of misery.

So that's where his life stood at the moment, he was stressed out with every aspect of his life, and had the thinning hair and expanding paunch to prove it. The only thing that gave him any joy was doing his work, and lately, he was finding that wasn't enough to keep away the blues.

Fortunately, he was just socially adept enough to know that what he needed in his life was a partner — a wife — but he lacked any insight as to how to go about it. Posting on dating sites was actually the at very outer edge of his understanding of modern relationships. Beyond that, he had no ideas, so he was a little desperate.

As Doug pulled into the zoo parking lot, his son kicking the back of his seat as he did so, he was hoping beyond hope that this date was going to work out. “Stop doing that, please,” he asked his son. He didn't comply.

Doug needed this. He *really* did, and he was having severe reservations about bringing Aiden with him. He was just enough trouble to screw this up.

This was far as he had gotten with a date since the divorce, and his palms were sweating. He made a note to himself to find a cure for sweaty palms when he got back to work on Monday.

Not that he didn't have reservations about this “Dorothy Farmer” person. She seemed awfully young, maybe too young for a 40 year old man like himself.

Besides that, even though they had only seen each other once, in the rain, he had come away with a couple of impressions. She seemed nervous and distracted, although maybe that was just because it was a first date. She also appeared to be uncomfortable in her own skin, yet that could just be the effects of being drenched in a downpour.

But raising a kid on her own was a big plus, one trait that outweighed all the others. If she had the fortitude to raise a girl, single, then he the most important attribute he was looking for: motherhood.

Aiden, his 14 year old son, was very close to being a lost cause. He had trouble in school, and Doug had been called in to more than a few parent-teacher conferences to talk about his son's anti-social behavior. His son's testing showed an intelligent mind, but his schoolwork was abysmal, and his grades were almost bad enough to hold him back a year. He had no friends that Doug knew of, and spent most of his time in his room, listening to the most awful music one could imagine.

Doug was convinced that in a year or so, he'd go full goth. Aiden had already gotten a black trench coat for his birthday. The boy needed a caring touch, a woman's touch, to keep him from sinking into the abyss of introversion and alienation he was surely headed for.

"Please be on your best behavior," he asked his son as they got out of the car. "Please," he begged.

Aiden just shrugged while he looked away.

At a bench outside the Zoo entrance, Colin and Elliot were waiting impatiently. Doug and "Dorothy" had agreed to meet at this spot, and the two disguised boys had been there for about five minutes.

"Everyone is looking at us," Elliot said, under his breath.

"No one is looking at us," Colin muttered back. "At least no more than you'd expect for any other mother and daughter out for a day at the zoo."

Elliot gripped the edge of the bench and grunted. "I hate this!" he said in a quietly restrained shout.

"The whole point of this is for the both of us to be charming and wonderful," Colin said for the fourth time since they sat down. "Stop being so anxious and pour on the cuteness."

"I know," Elliot agreed. "I'm sorry, Mother."

"It's all right, honey. Just keep smiling." Colin suddenly sat up straight. "I think I see them."

"Where?"

"There," Colin pointed at a car that was parking. It was a shiny new Lexus. "Yeah, he's loaded."

“This is really going to happen, isn’t it?”

“Yes. Now, one last time. Your name is Emily, you are fourteen and you are as sweet as sucking on a stalk of sugar cane.”

“Yes, Mother!” Elliot replied with a cheerful eagerness that even surprised Colin. “I can’t wait! I hope he likes me!”

Colin had to linger for moment in consideration that he was being set up by his younger brother, but he seemed sincere in his attempt to be authentically Emily. He matched it. “I’m sure he will, sweetie. You have nothing to worry about, my pretty little girl.”

“Here they come!” Elliot grabbed his brother’s red-nailed hand and hung on.

It was a slow approach as they were a fair distance away. Colin noted that Brundell was dressed in jeans and a Tommy Bahama shirt, and looked completely out of his element. He didn’t take to the casual look very well, and he may have been trying to oversell it a bit. Maybe he was trying to play down his wealth. His son was in all gloom, with a grey T, dark jeans and a black trench coat, and looked like a handful.

Doug, for his part, recognized Dorothy immediately, and gave a little wave to acknowledge her. It was the first time he’d been able to get a clear view of her. As he got closer, he noted that she was a sturdy woman, but not chunky, who looked more than anxious. He still hoped that was just because they were essentially meeting for the first time. Her daughter, though, was as cute as a button, standing by her mother’s side, clutching her hand.

Finally, Brundell was close enough that they could start talking. “You made it!” Colin sang out, loudly.

“You haven’t been waiting for long, have you?” Doug replied.

“Not that long. We wanted to be early,” Colin said, Doug now within casual conversation distance.

“You look great,” Doug said. “Oh, this is my son, Aiden.” He put his hands on the shoulders of his boy, who shrugged them off immediately. Aiden didn’t even bother to make eye contact with Colin.

“I hate the zoo. I told you that. Why do I have to be here?” He whined.

“This is Dorothy, I told you about her,” Doug said, trying to steer the conversation. “And her daughter Emily. She’s about your age.”

“Great. Can I wait in the car?” Aiden asked. “Who are these people?”

“Shut it!” Doug barked, already tired with his son’s attitude.

“Sucks,” Aiden mumbled.

“I said shut it!” Doug repeated, louder.



Colin knew this was an opportunity to demonstrate some “mothering” skills and show he was good with kids. In fact, considering the law of first impressions, this was likely the most important moment in the whole scam.

“Hi, Colin. I know the zoo’s a little dorky for young adults like you, but there’s something everyone can like about this place.” Colin lowered his voice, like he was about to tell a secret. “In fact, did you know they slaughter hundreds of animals every day here and then feed them to the exhibits in front of everyone to watch? You might just get lucky.”

That got Aiden’s attention. He was rightly suspicious of “Dorothy” and didn’t like being talked to like he was a gullible kid, easily swayed with patronizing promises. But he didn’t interrupt.

Colin recognized skepticism when he saw it, so he backed off that approach. He thought of something a little more sneaky. “Oh, Doug, that reminds me — please make sure we don’t go to the reptile exhibit. I get a little queasy when they feed the live mice to the snakes.”

“Where’s that?” Aiden asked. “Just, you know, curious.”

Gotcha, Colin thought to himself. “Oh, we won’t go there. So don’t worry about it.”

“Yeah,” Aiden replied. He walked over to a large map of the zoo mounted on the gates and started scanning it. While he was doing that, they finished up introductions.

“It’s nice to be able to meet you, Emily,” Doug said to Elliot. He bent over to talk to him, even if he wasn’t that much shorter. “You look much cuter when you’re dry.” He added a chuckle to indicate he was joking.

“Thank you, Mr. Brundell!” Elliot replied with enthusiasm. “You look better, too.”

“She’s a charmer, that’s for sure,” Brundell said to Colin.

“Emily has always had a way with people,” Colin said.

Then the easy topics of conversation dried up and an awkward, lengthy silence followed. “Uh, let me go get the tickets,” Doug said to break the moment.

“How tall are you?” Aiden asked Elliot, apropos of nothing.

“Um... Five foot five inches,” Elliot answered.

“And when were you born?”

“June 3rd, two thousand...”

Aiden interrupted with a superior smirk. “Good. I’m taller *and* older than you.”

Eager to stem Aiden’s bad attitude, Colin made a suggestion. “Well, why don’t you look after little Emily, then, Aiden. Your father and I may want to talk a little.”

“I’m in charge?” Aiden said, a toothy, wicked smile came across his face, as he glared at Elliot. Elliot looked back at his brother, trying to impart every way he could say “no” though the glare in his eyes. Of course, that’s what Colin expected, but he wasn’t about to change his mind.

“For the afternoon, yes. I’d consider it a favor.”

Elliot, for all his good acting so far, couldn’t help but slump and let his face fall. He dared not speak a word, so all he could do was go along with Colin’s lame plan. “I’ve never been to this zoo before. Could you show me around?” he said, like a death row prisoner politely asking for his last meal.

“We’re gonna do what I want to do!” Aiden asserted.

“Here we go,” Doug said, returning with the tickets. “Two adults and two students.”

Aiden quickly grabbed the two student tickets and headed for the entrance. “C’mon Emily. You’re with me.”

As Elliot trudged his way behind Aiden, who had grabbed his hand and was tugging at it, an astonished Doug turned to his date.

“He was cussing me out not ten minutes ago about coming to the zoo. Now he’s never been more excited,” Doug said. “You sure do have a way with kids, Dorothy.”

“I’m just like any other mom,” Colin responded with faux humility. “Now let’s go in before they get too far ahead of us.”

A brisk low-speed chase through the first few exhibits ended with Doug and Colin finding the “kids” in front of the lion den, watching as two men threw large hunks of meat over a wall and into the enclosure. Aiden was pointing things out, obviously enjoying the show. Elliot looked to be holding steady.

That gave Colin a chance to sit down, as his heels did not work well for walking quickly, and he needed a blow. Doug joined him. “I’m glad we could make this work,” Doug said.

“Me too. So tell me about yourself,” Colin asked, not missing the opportunity to get his date talking.

“Well, I’m a doctor of sorts, but I mostly work in the lab.”

“Oh, so it’s technical kind of work?” Colin asked, playing as dumb as he could get away with.

“It might be a little heady for most people,” Doug conceded. “I do a lot of medical research.”

“Like curing cancer and things like that?”

“More or less. Same idea.”

“Oh, it must be fascinating!” Colin gushed. He was probably pouring it on a little thick, but Doug seemed to be the sort of person who needed things to be obvious, especially when it came to social interaction.

“Well, I mean, I find it endlessly engaging and challenging, or else I wouldn’t do it. Of course.”

“You must be very smart.”

“I try not to think of it like that. I do very well in my field, though.”

“Do I sense a little modesty, Doug?” Colin wanted to start using his first name as much as possible.

“I’m not much of a boaster, I guess,” he replied.

“Go on, you can boast a little. I give you permission,” Colin then threw in one of his giggles because ‘Dorothy’ was an easy laugher.

Colin’s brain was in overdrive. Not only was he trying to hit one of a dozen points he wanted to hit during this encounter, like touching Doug on the arm, making eye contact, looking shy and demure, and others, but he was also coping with his appearance. He never really thought about it before, but women don’t just “wear” clothes or “look” good. They have to constantly maintain and supervise their appearance. They have to manage their skirt, maneuver in the heels, keep their hair from flying apart, avoid quick movement so the breasts don’t squirm out from their resting place, and still look like they have everything calm and under control. Was he giving off the right body language? Was he sitting fully upright and at attention? Was he smiling hard enough? Too hard? It was a test of Colin’s powers of concentration to not only do all these things but also keep listening.

“...manipulating a person’s DNA, which has endless potential.” Doug said, completing a sentence that Colin completely missed.

“Oh, it certainly does,” Colin quickly added, not knowing quite what he was commenting on. “The kids are moving on. We better keep up with them, so we don’t lose them.”

“It’d be okay if we did,” Doug suggested. “Just kidding.”

The attempt at humor was just the opportunity Colin was looking for to make physical contact. He slapped Doug on the thigh. “Don’t be silly,” he said, adding another giggle. He was getting good at that. They got up and headed in Aiden and Elliot’s direction.

“It’s tough being a parent, sometimes,” Doug said, as he had to quicken his pace to stay in sight of the ‘kids.’

Colin didn’t want to sound in any way like a beleaguered parent. “Well, I won’t say it’s easy. Still, there’s nothing more rewarding than being a parent.”

“Even alone?”

“It has it’s challenges. How about you?”

“I’ve been raising Aiden by myself for a long time now, and I know I’m not doing the best job in the world.”

“He looks like a fine young man to me,” Colin said, to butter Doug up. “Kids go through some difficult things at that age.” Elliot and Aiden were getting farther away and they had to pick their pace up. It wasn’t easy as Colin was limited to small steps in uncertain footwear, but he was just able to do it.

“I’m not going to lie,” Doug said, huffing a little. “Being a single father is difficult. Especially with a job like mine. And I’m just tired of doing it alone.”

Colin had little sympathy for Doug, being filthy rich and sad because he didn’t know what to do with it all. Heck, he should just put the little brat at a boarding

school somewhere, in his opinion. Let your money solve your problems for you, was Colin's attitude. However, Dorothy had to be understanding and very sympathetic. "I know it can't be easy. My father raised me alone too." That was a flat-out lie, but he was trying to form a little bit of a bond between them.

"Really? You were an only child?"

"My mother died in childbirth. We lost her and what would have been my baby sister. I was only three at the time, so I don't remember it. From then on it was just me and him."

"He never remarried."

"No, he never had another relationship again. It was probably the biggest mistake he ever made. So lonely." That little stinger would hopefully would plant the right idea in Doug's mind. Maybe it would also get him some sympathy points. Dorothy was a blank slate, and Colin had every intention of making her fake history as compelling as possible. "I don't want the same thing for Emily. When her father left us, we never saw him again. Six months later I was told he'd been lost at sea on an oil rig."

"I'm sorry," Doug offered.

"He wasn't the best husband or father, but he provided for us. We still live off a settlement from the oil company. Until it runs out, anyway. I just wanted to make a fresh start for Emily and me. To get a second chance at having a family." That explanation was a little close to the truth, as the loss of his mother was almost the very same story. Still, Colin figured it would be easier to keep his story straight if it was familiar.

"So is that what you're looking for?" Doug asked. "A father figure?"

"That would be high on the list. What about you?"

"Well, I guess kind of a mother figure. I've always wanted someone to look after the kid. Raise him in a traditional way with traditional values, and not afraid of... Well, not be afraid of women."

Check, check and double check. Colin had read the man like a book, and Dorothy was going to be that woman he wanted. "I think they're slowing down, finally," Colin said, watching Elliot and Aiden run up to look at the monkey habitat.

Doug slowed to a stop and put his hand on his knees as he bent over. "Oh, thank God. I'm completely out of shape."

"Here, let's get a seat," Colin said, directing him to a bench. As he sat down, Colin went to go fetch a bottle or water from a nearby vendor. Doug was obviously not just "out of shape," but in poor health. He wasn't drastically overweight, but he had a belly that was going to just get bigger if he didn't start some kind of exercise. "Water," Colin said to Doug, handing him the open bottle. Doug guzzled it, pausing to take big gulps of air.

“Thank you. Thank you so much.” Doug was halfway through the bottle before he was able to stop gasping and settle down. “Embarrassing. Sorry.”

“You just need a little encouragement to be in shape, that’s all.”

“I never have time. I work all day long.”

“That sounds rough!” Colin said, sounding as compassionate as he could.

“They have to let you have some personal time, you know.”

“I’m probably going to quit, anyway. Then I’ll have lots of personal time.”

Doug straightened some wrinkles out of his shirt. “I should have quit years ago. The office politics are killing that place.”

That set off alarm bells in Colin’s mind. He was a rich guy making bank. Quitting his job, right now, was the last thing he wanted Doug to do. He wanted him getting as much income as he could, like a farmer stuffing a goose before making them a holiday dinner. “You shouldn’t say things like that,” Colin countered. “Everyone feels like quitting their jobs, but it’s never a good idea.”

“I can get any genetic research job in the country. I wouldn’t be out of work for long. I hear a new company is starting up in Fargo.”

“But you can’t!” Colin objected. If he was going to steal from Doug, he wanted him to stay where he was and as rich as possible. “You can’t... *Give up...* Like that.”

Not until that moment did Colin truly understand the influence a woman has on a man. Because as soon as he said it, Doug sat up straighter and nodded. “You’re right. I shouldn’t give up on a job I’ve had for this long. I can’t throw it all away without giving it one more shot.”

“That’s the spirit!” Colin chirped in a high-pitched, effusive tone of voice he reached for the very first time. “You’ll do great!”

“I’m going to go right in there Monday morning and...”

Both Colin and Doug’s attention turned to Elliot and Aiden, as they heard some squabbling coming from their general direction, but they couldn’t make anything out from here.

“Oh, here we go,” Doug said.

Aiden and Elliot were arguing, but it was definitely Aiden who was being the more demonstrative of the two. “You might want to stop your son,” Colin said to Doug.

“Like there’s anything I can do. He does what he wants. If I get in his way, it’s another month of therapy for the both of us.”

Aiden started to tussle and push Elliot, and it looked like something physical was about to get started. Colin was concerned that Elliot might start fighting back, and even at his marginally smaller size, he was still a nineteen year old man, and could easily deck a fourteen year old kid.

“Doug, you have to stop your son!” Colin implored, deciding Doug better handle it. He was not going to try and get in a struggle when wearing his heels. Colin got up and headed in their direction, forcing Doug to get up and follow.

“I’m sure they’re just being kids,” Doug said.

“Well, it needs to stop before it gets worse,” Colin said. He knew that he might be putting a damper on the date, but if Elliot swung back at the twerp, this was going to get nasty, and fast. “Please, Doug!”

“All right, all right.” He was close enough to talk to his son, but he didn’t get in his way. Instead, he just leaned into Aiden’s field of vision. “Hey, champ. What say we, uh... Hey... You want a snow cone? You like grape. We can get...”

“Move!” Aiden commanded his father. “I’m talking to this skanky know-it-all! You’re in my way!”

Doug got clear of his son, and turned back to Colin and said, “See?”

Frustrated, Colin had to take command from the ineffectual Doug. He got in between the two, just as Elliot was raising his fist. “Let’s stop this right now!” He said. Turning to his brother, he said, “This is not the way a young lady behaves!” Copying something he had heard said by mothers throughout time.

“Yeah!” Aiden snarked.

She quickly stuck a finger in Aiden’s face. “As for you, you’re the older one here and I expected you to look out for my daughter!” Colin was trying not to think about how ludicrous and bizarre his position was, and just tried to say the things a mother in this situation would say.

“She started it!”

“It’s easy to win a fight when you pick on little girls!”

Aiden looked to his dad for some kind of intervention, but he wasn’t going to get any. “She’s being a smart ass!”

“And you’re being a dumb one! What were you fighting about anyway?”

Looking sheepish all of the sudden, Aiden just folded his arms and looked at his feet.

Elliot spoke up. “He said the monkeys had hemorrhoids, and that’s why their butts looked like that.”

Colin and Doug glanced at each other, confused, and then took a look at the exhibit. “Those are Macaques,” Doug said. “They just look like that, naturally.”

“That’s a lie. It has to be,” Aiden said. “Those monkeys have a problem. I don’t care what people call it. That’s not normal.”

“Is that what this is all about?” Colin said. “You’re arguing about *monkey butts*?” Immediately as Colin said the words, both Aiden and Elliot started to smirk. It was something about hearing the term out loud that broke the

tension, and they started to snicker. Colin then walked away, heading back to the bench where they had been seated. “Ridiculous. Come on, Doug.”

By the time they had wandered through most of the park, Doug had spilled most of his life and his ambitions to Colin, and he couldn't be happier. With every word, he was just providing another opportunity to take advantage of later. It became pretty clear to Colin that Doug was basically looking for a combination of a Stepford wife and Mary Poppins. He'd become that woman, and more, to trap Doug.

Coming to the end of the afternoon, and the end of the visit, Colin noted that Aiden and Elliot had steered them towards the Cave exhibit, where they kept the bats and the snakes.

“Oh, no,” Colin was forced to protest, “I specifically asked not to come here!” He tried to make it sound as if he really meant it.

“Too late!” Aiden proclaimed, dragging Elliot inside and forcing the “parents” to follow.

Colin played along, trying to stay in character as he walked inside the dark exhibit hall. He hammed it up a little, acting timid and uncertain.

Aiden was enjoying it, looking like he had just won a major victory in “tricking” “Dorothy” into the one place she didn't want to go. Fact was that Colin always liked this exhibit when he was a kid and his mother brought him to the zoo, and he was actually looking forward to seeing it again for the first time in years.

“Now, don't be nervous, Dorothy,” Doug said, trying to console his date.

“Are you sure?” Colin replied, putting a trembling uncertainty in his voice.

Aiden was sure enjoying the moment, but that was the whole idea. By giving him a rare taste of responsibility, hopefully a brat like Aiden would respond well. So far, so good. He might be able to turn the kid around.

As for Doug, it was clear to Colin that he was not a very attentive father, and just a broken man, emotionally speaking. His wife must have been a shrew, destroying him, and now his son and job were chipping away at whatever was left. He was just lovesick, and was wide open emotionally. Colin almost felt guilty taking advantage of him — but not quite.

“Eeek!” Colin shrieked when they came to the snakes. He recoiled and covered his eyes, just like any stupid girl would.

“Hold on, we're just passing through,” Doug said, guiding Colin through. He was holding Colin by the upper arms, and navigating the way. “Just another few steps.”

As soon as they were out in the daylight again, Colin dropped his hands and smiled thankfully at her date. “Oh, my knight in shining armor,” he said.

“Uh... Well...” Doug stammered as his cheeks blushed red.

This was just too easy, from Colin’s point of view.

“Listen, do you want to go grab dinner tonight?” Doug asked.

“Dinner?” Colin replied. Hell no, he was lucky enough to get this far without blowing the disguise. Besides, he didn’t have anything to wear. “I’m just a little tired. I need to take it easy tonight.”

“Oh, okay,” Doug frowned like a puppy who’s nose had just been batted with a newspaper.

“But, tomorrow or the next day, yes.” Colin didn’t want him to think he was shooting him down.

“Oh, good,” Doug replied, a smile back on his face. “Listen, if you’re tired, I might just have something for you...” He fished around in his pockets for a moment before finding a small pill bottle. “Vitamins. I take these to keep my stamina up. Made them myself. Some of the latest research.” He pressed the bottle into Colin’s hands. “Take one a day, Emily too, and you’ll both feel like new people in no time.”

“Vitamins?” Colin asked, skeptically.

“Well, okay, not your traditional vitamins, but they do the same job. You’ll be amazed at the positive effects they’ll have on your life. Like I said, you’ll feel like a new person. Literally.”

“Well, okay...”

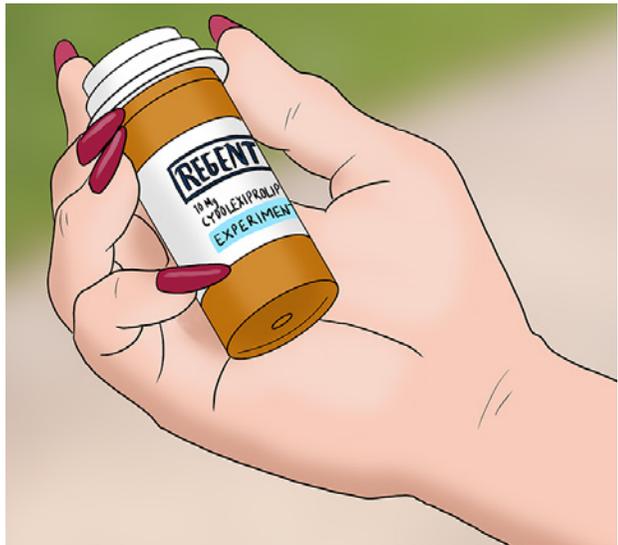
“And don’t forget, Emily too. One tablet every day. No more, no less.”

“Uh, sure. Got it.” Colin was puzzled as to why

Doug was being so specific about it, but he put the bottle in his purse. “I really enjoyed our afternoon together.”

“Me too. I really did. I can’t wait to see you again.”

“You will,” Colin said, knowing he had won the day. “You will.”



AGENT OF CHANGE

PART 1

Dr. Susan Hackstaff, M.D., had barely put her white coat on when she heard a shout.

“*Hey!*” Yelled a loud, piercing voice from outside her exam room. “Is there anyone here?”

The doctor leapt to her feet and scurried out into the hallway. “Oh, hello,” she said, greeting the visitor and potential patient. “The receptionist must have stepped out for a moment.”

“C’mon in, Dad!” the visitor yelled out the front door. “They’re actually open!”

It was true that they were open, but only by about three minutes. Total.

Dr. Susan Hackstaff had just opened her new clinic 180 seconds earlier, for the very first time. Seasons Recuperative Solutions was the name she had chosen for it, and had spent the better part of a month filling it with equipment and working on the interior. Finding a staff had proven more difficult. People were far more expensive than office chairs.

So yes, the receptionist was not at the front desk, but that was because there was no actual receptionist.

“All right, all right,” said the father as he came through the front door. “Don’t get excited,” he told his son. He gave a quick look at the doctor. “You the nurse?”

“I’m the doctor,” Susan replied, curtly. “Dr. Sus...”

“Yeah, okay, look. Here’s the deal. My boy here wants an operation. What’s it gonna cost?”

“Well, why don’t we go into the exam room and...”

“What’s *that* gonna cost? Insurance said they ain’t gonna cover this.”

“If you could just...”

“Dad!” The younger teenager whined. “Don’t ruin this for me! You always ruin everything!”

“Let the adults talk!” The father barked back at his son. “What’s it gonna cost?”

“No cost to talk,” Susan said, adding on a sigh. This was her first potential patient, and she needed the money bad. “Follow me, if you would.”



“You heard her,” the father said, pointing his son down the hallway. “That way.”

“I *know*, Dad.”

Bert Thurman, as the father introduced himself to Dr. Hackstaff, was not in the mood to listen to anyone. “The kid says he wants to lose some weight,” he told the doctor. “I think he’s fine, but...”

“Let me tell her, Dad!” the son whined. His name was Logan Thurman, and was just sixteen. “I inherited a lot of money from my grandma’s death, and Dad said I could get anything I want so I told him that really really wanted to get thin so I started working out and I didn’t lose any weight and then I went on a diet and...”

“Okay, okay,” Susan said, trying to slow the kid down.

Logan continued. “But my Dad said, and he *promised* me, that if I couldn’t lose weight any other way, I could see a doctor and do it that way. That’s what he said, he said. He *promised* me.”

Susan already didn’t like these two. The boy was a spoiled brat, and the father was an overbearing lunkhead. If they weren’t her first possible patients, she would have declined. Lord knows that she didn’t want her first Yelp review to be a negative one.

“So let’s have you take off your shirt,” Susan asked the kid.

“Wait. What’s the cost?” Mr. Thurman asked, yet again.

“I’ll let you know when I’ll need to charge for something,” Dr. Hackstaff said. She then took a seat in the only other chair available, intentionally blocking out the father. “Oh, if you want to have a seat, there’s a brand new comfy sofa out in the hallway,” she informed him.

Given how unsettled the father looked, Susan was willing to bet that the man’s deep love of sitting outweighed his desire to keep being a nuisance, and she was right. “I’ll be right outside if you need me, Logan.”

“*Okay*, Dad!” Logan moaned.

Once he was gone, the doctor started in on her usual routine questions. “So you have a concern about your weight?”

“I’m fat,” Logan said. “Everyone says so.”

“Let’s have you step on the scale,” she asked. Logan came up as 185 pounds and 5’ 6” tall. “That’s not *that* overweight. At your age, I’d expect you to be only fifteen pounds lighter, and you’re still within normal numbers for...”

“My Dad promised me!” Logan interrupted. “If you don’t do it...”

“Now, hold on there. What exactly do you want me to do?”

“Lipo!” The boy said with a smile. “Suck all the fat out and make me thin! Suck it all out! *Shhhlorp!* You can do that, right?”

“Well, yes, it’s technically feasible. I’d want to ask you a few more questions, do some tests, the usual procedure. Normally, this is an operation I’d do on mature women, not on a teenage boy.”

“You mean overweight women like you?”

Susan narrowed her eyes, but tried to just breeze on through that incredibly offensive comment. “Women who had fat that resisted diet and exercise. Now you say that you’ve been exercising?”

“I bought a gym membership for after school. I didn’t lose anything!”

“How often did you work out?”

“I went twice and I didn’t lose any weight at all. It was a total rip-off.”

“I see. You also tried dieting.”

“I’m practically a vegetarian. Except for bacon and hamburgers. And pizza rolls.”

This was clearly shaping up, in Susan’s mind, as a textbook case of resetting her patient’s expectations. This boy wanted the easy way out, and she wasn’t that kind of doctor.

...*Anymore...*

“Maybe you should take some time to think about...”

“Dad! She won’t do it!” Logan yelled out loud so he could be heard through the exam room door. “*Daaaad!*”

“I didn’t...” Susan began to speak.

“What’s going on in here?” Bert Thurman said, bursting into the room. “What are you telling my boy?”

Susan really wanted this time to be different. She had hoped she was going to make a new start in this town. That’s why she had moved out here and taken up the offer to start the clinic.

But these two were pushing her buttons, and awakening the fire that burned within Dr. Susan Hackstaff, a fire which burned with an intensity that few could even comprehend. A fire which burned for justice. Justice against men. Horrible, stinking, rotten men.

“Let’s talk about scheduling,” she said.



Logan Thurman strutted down the hallway of his school with a cocky smile. He was scheduled for liposuction tomorrow, and he felt like he was on top of

the world. No one would make fun of him when they saw him next. By then, he'd be skinny and fit, just like the popular jocks that always got all the girls. This was his last day as a pudgy kid, never to be ridiculed again.

"Hey, Lard-ass Logan," said Greg, his best friend, as he caught up to Logan. "What you smilin' for? Find a spare cupcake in your pocket?"

"No!" Logan replied, as if it were a serious question. Then he imagined how nice it would be if he did, indeed, find a bonus cupcake in his pocket one day. "No," he repeated.

"Anyway," Greg said, as he pushed Logan into a metal locker, roughly. "I'm going to kick your ass in the parking lot after school."

This was the person Logan referred to as his best friend. People who *really* hated him didn't even bother to beat him up, most of the time.

"I can't... My Dad's picking me up and I'm going to be out of school. For, like, a week or more," Logan said, as he rubbed his newly bruised shoulder. "You won't even recognize me when I get back."

"Well, I better just kick your ass *now*, I guess," Greg said as he slammed Logan back into the lockers.



"Is that where you're going to cut me open?" Logan asked as Dr. Hackstaff drew a short dotted line on Logan's waist. "Because blood makes me throw up."

"You'll be anesthetized," Susan explained to her patient. "You won't be awake."

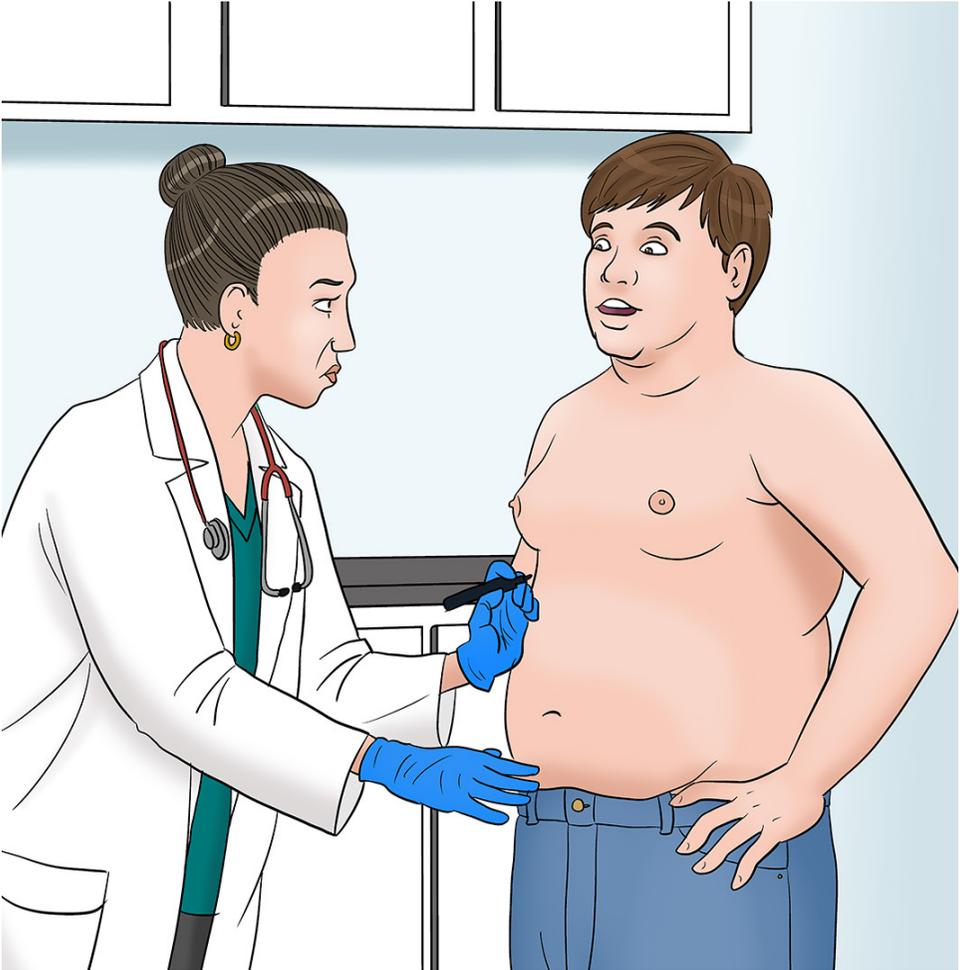
It was the day of Logan's surgery, and he was giddy. He couldn't keep his hands still in anticipation of what was about to happen. No more fat jokes. No more being called "husky." No more splitting his pants in public. No more feeling guilty about eating a whole quart of Cherry Garcia while on the toilet. No more being picked on because of his weight.

"What kinda drugs are you gonna give me? Can I take them at home, too?"

Dr. Hackstaff had rarely heard such a blatant attempt to get hard drugs from her, so she just smiled back, knowing what she was about to do was going to make her feel a lot better.

"We'll talk after the procedure," she said. She found a spot and injected Logan with a syringe. "This may pinch," she said, after she stuck it in. "You'll start to feel a little drowsy."

However, the good doctor hadn't injected her patient with something that was supposed to put him to sleep. She had put a powerful hypnotic drug into his system that was about to leave him very suggestible.



“Now today, I’ll be removing the fat along your waistline — do you understand, Logan?”

The boy nodded as his eyes were losing their focus.

“Later on,” Susan said, “we’ll take care of the other parts of your body, and we’ll have different appointments for future procedures. For now, it’s just your tummy.”

“Yeah... Just my tummy...” Logan replied, as the drug had already kicked in. “I thought we were going to do the whole thing?”

“No, no. That would be dangerous. One thing at a time. You agree, don’t you?”

“I... I guess...”

“Good, good.”

“Think how sexy you’re going to look with that slim waist of yours. I bet you can’t wait to show it off.”

“Sexy?” Logan responded. He really hadn’t thought of it that way, but that certainly could be true, he decided. “Yeah... Totally sexy.”

“I bet you’ve bought yourself some tight-fitting clothes to show everyone how good you look. Stretchy pants and skin-tight tops. You’ll want to let everyone see the new you.”

“You think I should?” Logan asked.

“Of course you should. Why, if I were you, I’d be wearing nothing but skin-tight clothes so everyone can see how you’re changing. That’s what you want, right?”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what I want. I want everyone to see the new me. I’m going to get some tight clothes right away.”

“I knew you would,” Dr. Hackstaff replied with a smile. Of course he was going to, because that hypnotic drug wasn’t any old drug, but an exotic cocktail of mind-controlling substances direct from the deepest forests of the Amazon — her special blend.

She had sworn she’d never use the stuff again, but it was just taking up space in the office drug cabinet, and this little turd really did deserve everything that was coming to him. Now, for the next few minutes, the boy was helpless but to obey her commands.

“Okay, how much should we remove from your waist? If we take out too much, it might look a bit unusual, but we’d have to do fewer procedures.”

“I don’t want to look weird,” Logan said.

“So, all right, we’ll do it in three more tummy operations, then. After a while, you won’t even feel the pain. Then we can do the rest of it.”

“Three more?” Logan was clearly imagining how much pain he’d be in, and how much time he’d be recuperating. “Maybe we should do it all at once then.”

“Medically speaking, I shouldn’t allow it to be done at once. A gradual change in your shape is the best path. Of course, people might not notice the changes, because they’ll happen so slowly, but this will be safer.”

“No! I want people to notice!” Logan objected. “And you just said you could do it all at once!”

“You’re going to have a very narrow waist, and your legs and chest will still have fat. Is that what you want?”

“Yes!” Logan replied. “Suck out all the fat in my waist! Get it all! Make me thin!”

“Only if you’re sure.”

“Please! I want to have the thinnest waist of anyone in school!”

“It’s against my better judgement, but I’ll do it.” Now, Susan had made sure that Logan would have a very precise memory of begging for this procedure. He’d just convinced himself that it was exactly what he wanted. That was important, because the result of this operation would be dramatic and even a little humiliating. Now, though, Logan would ignore any taunts because he was convinced that looking thin at the waist was what he wanted most in the world.

Susan gave Logan the injection to put him under. “Well, then, let’s get started.”

“I can’t wait!” Logan said with a giddy grin.



Logan was only half awake when he came out of surgery, and his entire midsection was wrapped in thick gauze, held together by an elastic compression garment. He couldn’t even lift his head enough to see it for himself.

Dr. Hackstaff was in good spirits, though. “You’ll be in bandages for a week,” she said, “there will be a little swelling.”

“Can I have a mirror?” Logan asked.

“When you get home and have had a good nap. You need to rest up.”

“Ho-kaay...” Logan replied, his voice unable to stay strong.

“I want you to take these painkiller pills,” she said, handing him a large, unmarked brown pill bottle full of hormones and anti-androgens. “And rub this cream on your skin. It will help you recover faster,” she said, producing a tall skin creme bottle.

“Just on my belly?”

“All over,” Susan clarified. “You want to keep you skin looking even. So, stay off your feet for the rest of the week, and I’ll see you back here on Friday. You are going to look so sexy!”

“Sexy...” Logan said as he drifted off to sleep.



“Sexy!” Logan said to himself, as he liked what he saw.

After a week of recovery, the bandages needed to be changed, and Logan finally had the strength to take a look at himself.

His reflection in his full-length mirror was not kind. The roly-polly physique was unchanged from his ankles to his neck, with the singular exception of his midsection. It was thin and taught, and looked like a giant had gnawed on his body like a fresh juicy apple, leaving the core.

What was even worse was that it left him with a distinctly shapely profile. That profile was quite reminiscent of a woman's hourglass figure. His chest stuck out, his hips flared and he was thin in the middle.

However, Logan was focused only on the thinness of his waist, and ignored all the rest. "Wow, it looks so great!" He said, turning side to side in the mirror. He was spellbound. "My waist is so thin! It's even better than I thought it was going to look!"

He grabbed on of the new stretch tops from his dresser and slipped into it. It showed off his new shape very well. "Look, Dad!" Logan said as he walked out into the living room. "It worked! Tell me how great I look!"

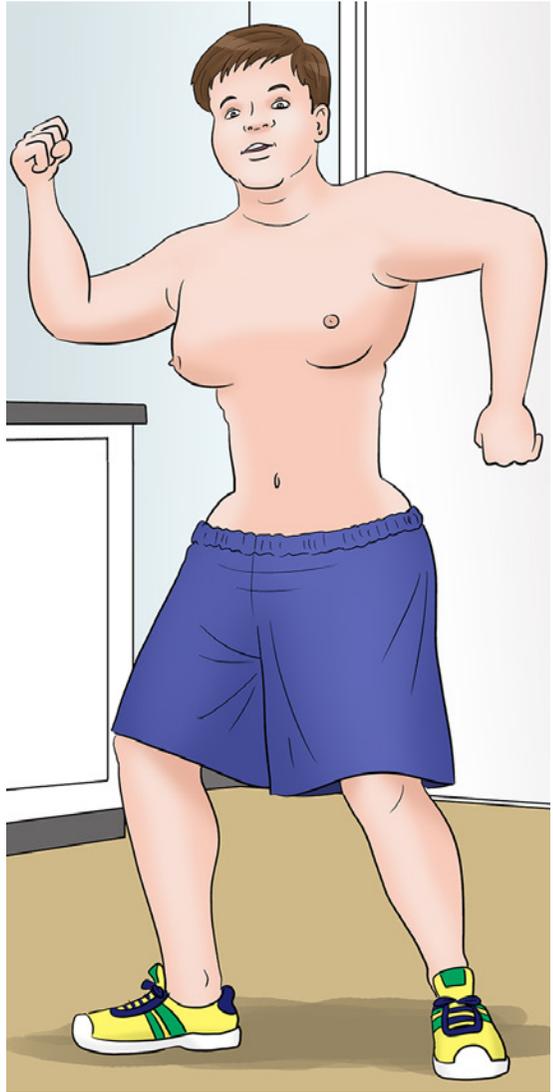
Bert Thurman looked over to the side, diverting his attention from Fox News for a moment, to take a look at his son. "Yeah. When did that doctor say you were going to do the chest... and the butt?"

"Soon."

"Not soon enough," Burt said, before going back the the TV.

"Dad! I went through a lot! Why can't you tell me I look good, huh?"

"Because it's not true," Bert replied.



“What? I finally lost weight and all you can say is mean stuff?” He started to tear up. “Fuh... Fuh... *Fuck you*, Dad!” Logan then stormed off, back to his room and slammed his door behind him.

Bert turned up the volume so he couldn’t hear his son crying. “Jeez, grow up, why don’t you?”



On the following Friday, Logan was back in the exam room, eager to hear positive news.

“Well, you’re healing quickly,” Dr. Hackstaff said. She looked at the incisions where she she had inserted the liposuction nozzle, and found them in good shape. “And the bruising looks like it’s already faded.”

She also noted that Logan’s skin was very dry, just as she hoped it would be. The skin lotion she had given him was not intended to help him recover, but to dry his skin and make it brittle.

“You might consider a tanning session or two, being indoors for so long has drained your skin of color and vitamin D.”

“Huh?”

“It’s not healthy to be indoors as long as you have, recuperating. Book a few sessions in a tanning bed, and be sure to use that skin lotion I gave you.”

“Oh... Okay...” Logan was impatient and wanted to hear about the next surgery, not about skin care.

“Promise me,” Susan asked.

“Yeah, yeah! Fine! What about the next part of the surgery?”

“Well, I’m not sure we’re ready to tackle the upper torso just yet. I’d like that to settle a little more before we attempt that.”

Logan was upset. “But I was really good! I didn’t move, I healed up, I took the pills, I used the cream — I did everything you said!”

“And I do appreciate your hard work. But we simply can’t proceed with more body liposuction at the moment,” Susan said, doing her best imitation of being sympathetic. “Meanwhile, because your chest is bulging like it is, I’d like you to wear a support garment.”

She turned to a cabinet and pulled out a sports bra.

“That’s a bra!” Logan keenly observed.

“It’s a medical support garment, for the pectorals. It just looks like a bra.” Susan had been very careful to clip the tag from inside that read ‘Low-Impact Sports Bra Size B.’

“My Dad is gonna give me shit for this,” Logan said, taking the bra.

“Don’t worry about him. He’ll understand it’s for your health and safety.”

“*Sure* he will,” Logan said with deep skepticism.

“I’ll tell you what. If you agree to wear that every day, keep taking the pills, use the lotion and do some tanning... I’ll do some work on you today. Deal?”

“Today? Right now?” Logan said, excitedly. He had already written off today as a waste of time, and now there was a sign of hope that he’d have more lipo done. His enthusiasm was irrepressible.

“Yes. Right now. What do you say?”

“I’m in!” Logan replied, grabbing his side. He nearly popped a stitch, he was so thrilled. “What are we gonna do?”

“Your face. Even after a dramatic natural weight loss, your face and neck can still retain a lot of fat. We’ll take some out of your cheeks, and a little more from under the chin.”

“Will it hurt?”

“You’ll have your face wrapped in bandages for a week, and you’ll need to eat everything through a straw.”

“Oh, I don’t know...”

“But you get out of school for a week.”

“Well... Maybe...”

“You’re right. I’m sure when you go back to school on Monday, your friends will accept the new you, even if you aren’t quite complete. And they won’t ask about your bra. They’ll have your back, right?”

“No!” Logan hastily blurted. “Let’s do it.”



After she had completed the facial work on Logan, Dr. Susan Hackstaff wrapped her patient’s face with medical tape. The boy was still asleep, and it gave her some time to think.

Her thoughts drifted back to coming to this part of the country. Her previous job had ended badly, and she had found herself sentenced to a three year prison term, stripped of her medical license. Maybe ‘badly’ was an understatement.

It wasn’t her fault that her male boss at the hospital had gotten nosy, and uncovered the side business she was running for organized crime. It wasn’t like she *wanted* to drug her boss and then surgically transform him into a female

prostitute – but by threatening to expose her, he had forced her to do it. It was all his fault, but still, she was the one unfairly who had to go to jail.

She had gotten parole after eight months, and was released back out on the streets, but with no license, she had been working as a pharmacy technician in a ghetto drug store.

That's when she found that peculiar email on her phone one day, an invitation by Magnum Properties to open a clinic on the other side of the country. They were willing to give her a second chance, paying the lease on a building, no strings attached. She thought it was too good to be true, but Magnum had come through with everything they promised, including finding a new identity for her and producing a shiny new medical license to go with it.

Still, she didn't quite understand exactly why a business like Magnum would invest so much money in someone like her, who had been sued several times for unnecessary cosmetic surgery and even thrown in jail for doing gender reassignment to her boss. So far, they hadn't asked for any favors from her, and honestly, she didn't mind if they would in the future. Susan was very grateful to get the opportunity to continue her work.

Her work, of course, was to rid the planet of men and masculinity. Even if it was just one person at a time.

Logan's eyes came back to life, and he felt around his head to find the bandages.

"Careful now, you don't want to undo all my hard work," Dr. Hackstaff said. "So let's get you out to the lobby and your father can drive you home."

"What in...?" Bert Thurman said upon seeing his son. He dropped the *Us Magazine* he had been leafing through and stood up, unsure if he should be angry or concerned. "What the hell happened to you?" He asked his son. He then faced the doctor. "What the hell did you do to him?"

"It's all right," said Dr. Hackstaff, putting her hands up, defensively. "Your son is just fine."

Bert was not agreeable. "This was liposuction! What happened to his fuckin' face, lady?"

"No!" Logan said, his voice muffled by the bandages. "This was my idea!"

It was only though Logan's continued insistence that Bert didn't unleash his full wrath on the doctor. Even after they had explained it to him three times, Bert was still angry, and his son, bandaged and all, had to push him out of the clinic.



One week later, Dr. Hackstaff was using pair of shiny silver safety scissors to clip away the wrapped bandages from Logan's face. In actuality, she didn't really need to use as many bandages as she had, as he had only made four short incisions, and two of them were inside the cheeks. She just liked these dramatic unveilings, that was all.

If anything, Logan was just as excited as he was last time to see the results. He was moving around so much that Susan had to put her hand on the top of his head to keep him still.

The bandages gradually fell away, and as they did, Dr. Hackstaff was becoming more and more pleased with her work.

Logan, though, grew more and more puzzled.

"What's going on?" he asked.

In the mirror set up across from him, he saw a face he barely recognized. The fat in his cheeks had indeed been sucked out, but that had made his cheeks look fallow. So much fat had been removed, and his skin so dry, that distinct wrinkles extended from the corners of his nose down to his mouth.

The underside of his chin, too, had been stripped of fat, and loose skin hung from his neck. His eyes were deeper-set than before, and there were dark bags under them.

Susan knew the wrinkles would develop after so much fat being removed, but she also knew that Logan was young enough that the skin would adjust quickly. So the lotion she had been having him use would negate elasticity in his skin, and his wrinkled skin would stay. In addition, she'd injected a little drug that would dilate the blood vessels under and around his eyes, leaving them looking dark and saggy. Finally, she had been very careful not to remove the fat on his upper cheeks and on his



lips.

“I look like I’m old,” Logan observed. “*Really* old... Like you!”

Susan couldn’t believe that anyone had this level of unawareness, but she had heard him very clearly. If she harbored any doubts about what she was doing — and she didn’t — her conscience was now cleared. In fact, maybe she was letting off Logan a little too easy, in her opinion.

“Here’s a quick shot for the pain,” she said, injecting Logan with another dose of her hypnotic cocktail. “You do look more mature,” Dr. Lockwood said. “Don’t you agree?”

Logan wobbled for a moment as the drug began to affect him. “Mature? I look old.”

“You look sophisticated. Wise. No longer a foolish little kid. I bet everyone at your school would respect you now.”

Logan squinted his eyes as he took another look. “Sophisticated?”

“No one is going to treat you like a child with that look. You have the bearing of someone who’s got the authority of adulthood.”

“Authority?”

“Yes, don’t you see it? Only adults have that kind of look. Do you think any of the kids in your school would give an adult any trouble? No. Adults tell the kids what to do. That’s why you want to look like an adult.”

“I... *Wanted* this?” His memory wasn’t clear on the subject.

“Wanted it? Why, I couldn’t talk you out of it. You’ve grown so tired of being teased by the kids in your school. Being an adult gives you the respect you deserve.”

“It would, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes, it would. And it does. I don’t think anyone will be treating you like a teenager anymore, will they?”

“No. No they won’t.” Logan said, with a certain amount of certainty and satisfaction. He understood now, he wanted to look more sophisticated. He wanted the authority. He wanted to be an adult, and he always had.

“Thank you, doctor,” he said. “You’ve done a great job.”

“Please! Call me Susan. We’re all adults, here.”



Logan was walking home, returning from his tanning session, enjoying being outdoors for a change. He had followed through on his promise to Susan that he would book a couple of tanning sessions. Of course, they only sold them in

packs of ten visits, so he had just returned from his fourth session. He saw little sense in just wasting the whole package he had purchased. His skin had a nice sun-kissed tone to it now.

He had been inside for several days, waiting for the last of his incisions to heal, but now they were small enough that he could cover them up while taking it easy, like laying on a tanning bed. Next week, he'd probably have to go back to school, and he couldn't wait to show off his sophisticated new look to his schoolmates, and see the respect in their eyes.

Fortunately for Logan, he didn't have to wait for school, because as he got closer to home, he ran into his best friend, Greg.

"Greg," Logan said as he walked beside the young man, who was walking along, tapping his phone.

"Huh?" Greg replied, looking away. "Who are you?"

Logan immediately felt validated. He had changed himself so much that the boy who punched him at least three times a day for the past two years didn't even identify him. "It's me, don't you recognize me? I told you that you wouldn't."

"Yeah... I got stuff to do, okay?" Greg answered, skeptical of the apparent stranger. "Crazy bitch," he added under his breath.

Then he went back to his phone and walked away.

For exactly three steps.

Greg stopped dead and turned around, his mind clearly in the process of being blown. "Lard-ass?" he said.

"Logan," the proud young man replied.

"What the fuuuuh..." Greg said. His jaw went slack and his arms dropped to his side, limp. He couldn't believe what he was seeing.

Logan was dressed in what had become his standard set of clothes, a pair of stretchy pants, in this case snug grey sweat pants, and a pair of white sneakers. Up top, he had on a form-fitting black t-shirt that showed off that svelte waist he had become so proud of, and the sports bra emphasized what looked like a modest pair of breasts.

His face had retained all the wrinkles and sags that he had gained a week ago, and the bags under his eyes had become even more pronounced.

Greg was searching for some kind of explanation. "Were you... In an accident or something? AIDS? Cancer?"

"I've never felt better," Logan said. "Look at me! I'm not someone you can push around anymore, can you?"

"You look so... *Old*..."

“Thank you.”

“And... *Tired*. You look like an old lady. What the fuck, man?”

“Old lady!” Logan fumed. “Tired!” He had just been insulted. This wasn’t respectful at all. Maybe adults didn’t always get respect from kids. Or, maybe, he wasn’t adult *enough*. “You apologize to me right now!” Logan demanded.

Greg just turned and ran. He was too scared to do anything else.

Somehow that pleased Logan. No one had ever been scared of him before.



“You really didn’t have to come by,” Logan said as he let Dr. Hackstaff in the front door.

Susan was dressed normally for her, without her lab coat. She wore a simple persimmon dress with a pair of black flats. “I was in the neighborhood, and you sounded so distraught on the phone,” the doctor said as she came into the Thurman home.

Just as soon as he got home, after his encounter with Greg, he called the doctor. Logan was feeling awful, and Dr. Hackstaff was the only person he felt comfortable enough to talk to.

Susan looked around. “Is your father here?”

“He’s in the living room. He wanted to be left out of this. I don’t think he’s dealing with my new look very well.” Susan could hear the muffled sounds of a TV playing in a distant room. Logan shrugged. “He watches Fox News all day and I’m not supposed to interrupt him. He’s so angry with me, I don’t want to even try.”

“It’s your money and your life, you know. You’re adult enough to make your own decisions.”

“Really?” Logan said, unsure.

“Really, Logan.”

“Yes,” Logan said with confidence. “I’m an adult.”

“And if your father, or this little boy that bothered you earlier can’t see that, then you have to show them.”

“Yeah... *Yeah!*”

“I tell you what, why don’t we have an adult’s day out. You and me.”

“What? You’d really do that?”

“Of course! Let’s go.”

“*Now?* I have to ask my Dad...”

“Since when does an adult need to ask permission?” Susan said with a laugh. “If you want to do something, you just do it.” She tossed her keys at Logan, who caught them. “You can drive.”

He was only sixteen, and he had just gotten his learner’s permit. “But...”

“Let’s go!” Susan said, pushing Logan out the door.

“Let me grab my stuff!” he said. He picked up his wallet and house keys, but he realized that his new pants didn’t have pockets.

Seeing his difficulty, Susan took them from his hands. “I’ll look after those.”

Susan showed nerves of steel as she sat in the passenger seat of her car, seemingly unconcerned with Logan’s abysmal driving skills. He made several mistakes, putting her car into harm’s way more than a few times as they made their way across town. Still, Susan just chatted as if it were a Sunday drive in the country.

“Is this the right place?” Logan asked as he put the car into park, crossing two parking spaces.

Dr. Hackstaff looked out the window to see the sign for Second Looks Salon. “This is it!” She said as she got out of the car.

“A salon?” Logan asked as he got out.

“An *oasis*. Have you spent a day at a salon? Heaven. Trust me.”

Susan locked arms with Logan and led him inside. She took him right up to the front counter.

“Do you take walk-ins?” Susan asked.

The receptionist, who had been too busy to look up, finally did get a chance to see the two new customers in front of her. She saw a middle-aged woman and... Well, she had a tough time figuring out exactly what the other person was. She didn’t take very long to decide who they should see.

“You want Hildy,” she said, pointing her pen at Logan.

“Hildy” was one the stylists, a woman who was immaculately made up in a forties-fifties style, and had a rockabilly flair about her. “Oh, a challenge!” She said with a bright smile as she welcomed Logan.

“Now, my friend here has never been to a salon, and wants the full treatment,” Susan said. She still had her arms intertwined with Logan’s, and could feel him starting to pull away.

“No problem,” Hildy said to Logan. She took possession of the young man and guided him with both hands on his shoulders into the chair. “We’ll have a shampoo girl get you started, okay, sweetie?” She wrapped a cape around his neck.

Once he was leaning back with his hair in the sink, Susan motioned for Hildy to follow her.

Susan made sure they were far enough away that they couldn't be heard. "My friend, there..."

"Is a young man, yes," Hildy interrupted. "A hairdresser knows. Don't worry. That's kind of a specialty of mine."

"Oh? Well, his name is Logan, but we're trying not to use it. He's gotten very sensitive lately. He's transitioning not just from male to female, but into being a middle-aged woman."

Hildy didn't bat an eye. "I see, and?"

"He-she is feeling a bit antsy about this, and is somewhat in denial. If he's reminded what he's doing, he tends to get very skittish. So, please don't mention anything about it to him. It kind of breaks the spell, if you know what I mean."

"Got it!" Hildy replied. "You came to the right girl!"

Susan was immediately at ease. She could tell right away that "Hildy" was all-in on what she was trying to do.

"Are you comfortable?" Susan asked Logan as returned to where he was seated.

"I guess, kinda?" He said with uncertainty.

"Don't worry one bit," she said. "This is the kind of thing we adults love." Out of sight, with her spare hand, she cracked open a disposable pen syringe and stuck it in Logan's arm.

"Ow!" He said.

"Oh, sorry," Susan replied. "I got you with my belt buckle there. You okay?"

"Yeah."

"Sorry about that. Anyway, have fun and do what the stylist tells you, okay?"

The hypnotic drug that Susan had just injected him with started to take effect quickly.

"Okay..." Logan replied, with his voice getting a little distant.

"Now be sure to explain everything that you're doing to my friend here, Hildy. Step by step to learn how to do it." That would make sure Logan knew how to maintain what was about to be his new look.

"Can do!" the hairdresser replied with a smile.

Susan got a stylist of her own, and was seated in the chair right next to Logan's.

"Are you sure about this?" Logan asked as a towel was wrapped around his head, like a turban.

“Just sit back and relax,” Susan assured him.

Susan could overhear the conversations Logan was having with Hildy, and she couldn't have been more delighted. She listened as Hildy talked Logan into having extensions put in his hair, to, as she put it, “explore the full range of hairstyles.”

“You definitely want that,” Susan said.

“Okay, let's do it,” Logan agreed.

Then Hildy talked him into a full makeover, telling him that makeup was something he'd regret not trying at least once. With the powerful drug running through his system, he was unable to do anything but what he was told to do.

He didn't even remember consenting to leg waxing and brow shaping.

“And don't forget the nails,” Susan reminded them.

“You want the French tips,” Hildy told Logan.

“Yes... I want them,” a somewhat spaced-out Logan replied. He was helpless but to follow every suggestion the women made.

When they were done, a few hours later, Logan was presented with the final product. There, in the mirror, he stood looking like a woman in her late thirties or early forties.

He looked at himself with a mixture of satisfaction and confusion. He was confused why he looked so female, but satisfied that he had achieved just what he wanted – maturity.

The skin-tight black top that displayed his hourglass figure and stretchy jeans that wrapped his fatty rear end looked bizarre on a sixteen year old boy, but perfectly normal on an older woman. He wasn't focusing on his clothes, though. Logan was looking at his hair, which was now long and straight, reaching well below his shoulders. It was styled simply, with a part in the middle and long bangs that reached down to his eyes.

His face had been coated in thick foundation, with heavy mascara and smoky eyeshadow, with pale flesh color on his full lips. His eyebrows had been thinned to the point of looking drawn-on with a single swipe of a pencil. Combined with his tan skin, he might as well have been cruising the supermarket for single dads.

He pushed some of the bangs out of his eyes with his French-tipped nails and turned to Susan.

“Don't you love it?” Susan said.

“Susan,” Logan said, “I think I look like a woman.”

“Is it everything you dreamed it would be?”

“I didn't want to look like this. I wanted to look like an adult...”

“...And don’t you?” Susan finished his thought for him. “That’s why we’re doing all this, remember?” As she led Logan out of the salon, she turned to wave goodbye to Hildy. “See you next time!” She said.

“I can’t go outside, looking like this!” Logan objected. The effects of the drug had clearly worn off.

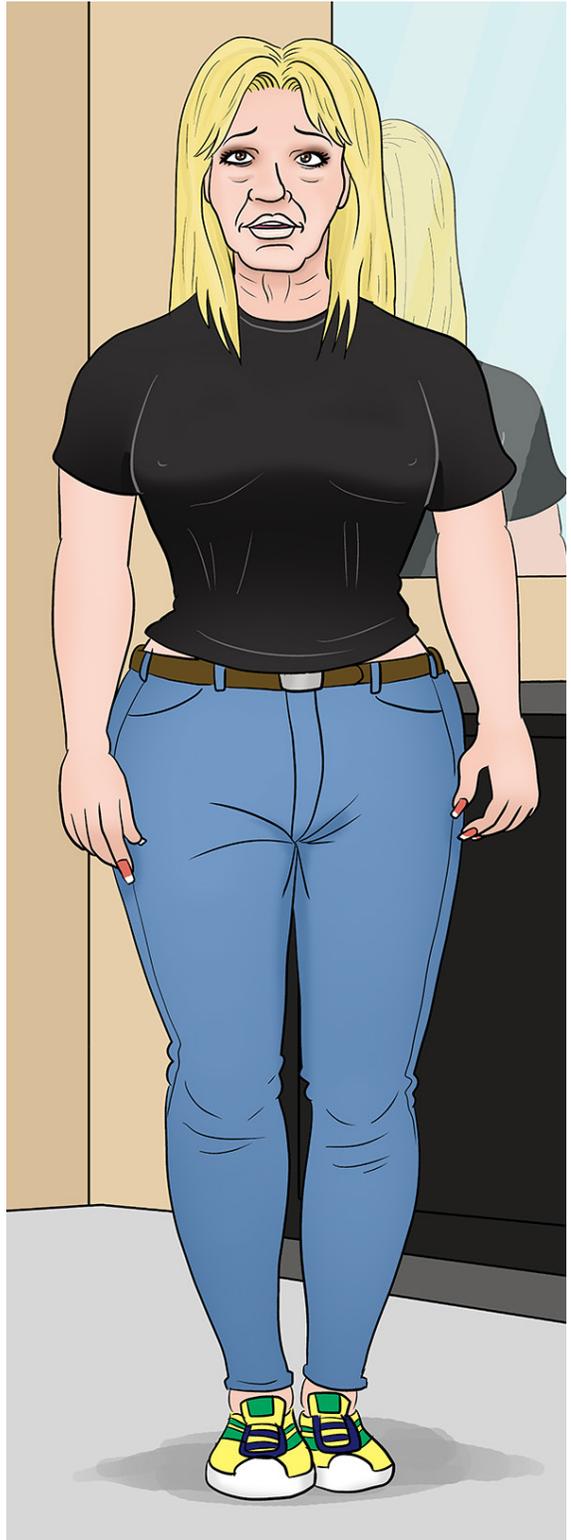
“You look great!” She handed a small plastic sack to Logan, who took it. “Besides, it’s just a short walk to the car.”

“But Doctor...”

“Susan. I’ve told you, please call me Susan.” She patted Logan on the back as she led him outside. Logan immediately tried to shield his face with the sack, scared to be recognized. Susan got into the driver’s seat and intentionally took a little extra time to undo the passenger’s side lock as Logan clawed at the handle.

By the time Logan had gotten in, he was more certain that something had gone very wrong with his new look.

“Susan, I don’t understand... I... All I wanted was to lose some weight. How did this happen to me?” He just now realized the sack he had been handed was full of makeup and hair supplies. “What are



you doing to me?”

“I’m doing exactly what we agreed on.”

“That’s bogus! I never agreed to this!” Logan objected.

Susan started up the car and backed out. “Look, I don’t want to get in argument. Did you or did you not come to see me to change your body?”

“Y... Yes...” Logan said, carefully considering the answer. “But I didn’t...”

“And did you not want to look more mature?”

“Well, yes!” Logan replied. “I do want to look mature.”

“And sexy.”

“Yes, and sexy. Of course.”

“So what’s sexier? Look in the mirror and tell me you’re not sexy.”

Logan flipped down the makeup mirror in the passenger’s side visor and took another look at himself. He flinched for a moment when he saw the heavily made-up face looking back at him.

“Okay, I admit, that’s a sexy look, but...”

“What, you think men are sexier than women?”

“No! Women are sexy! I’m not like that, I don’t like guys!”

“So why would you want to look like one?”

Logan was so busy trying to untangle that bit of counterclockwise logic he barely even noticed when Susan jabbed him with another pen syringe in the leg.

“Ow!” He said, rubbing the spot where it hurt. “I think there’s a bee in the car.”

“I’ll have it fumigated,” Susan replied, dismissively. “Anyway, you were saying how sexy you looked.”

Logan’s mind was starting to fall under the influence of the drug and he was very suggestible. “Was I?” Logan wondered. He took another look in the mirror. “I guess I am sexy.”

“Look, I understand that this kind of transition is difficult, but becoming the adult you were meant to be was never going to be easy.”

“Well I guess...” Logan said.

“Adulthood isn’t something you just get, you have to earn it, and developing into a successful, confident adult woman is difficult, but will be ultimately rewarding. That’s really what you want, isn’t it?”

“Yes, that is what I want.”

“Being an adult woman is the best, let me tell you from experience. It’s super sexy. You said you wanted to be sexy, right?”

“Right. Sexy.”

“And what’s sexier than a woman?”

Logan had to agree. Nothing was sexier to him than a woman. “Nothing.”

“That’s why becoming the sexy, mature, adult woman you always wanted to be is going to be worth all of this.”

“Do you think so?” Logan asked.

“I know so. But I want to hear it from you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I want to hear you say it. That you want to be... an adult.”

“I do. I want to be an adult.”

“A sexy adult.”

“Yes, a sexy adult.”

“A very sexy, mature, adult.”

Logan was getting turned on, visualizing it in his head. “A super sexy, mature, adult.”

“I don’t know, maybe we’re doing the wrong thing...” Susan said, as she weaved in and out of traffic. “I don’t know if you really want it.”

“No!” Logan replied. “I do want it!”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes! I really want to become a sexy adult!”

“I’m still not convinced.”

“Please, Susan!” Logan said. He paused to make sure he spoke with total conviction. “I want what you said I wanted: to be a sexy, mature, adult woman.”

“Well... Maybe you do want it. But as a doctor, I need to be convinced that this isn’t some flighty whim. Tell you what.” Susan reached over to the glove compartment and popped it open. She took a DVD case out. “This is a personal favorite of mine. Buns of Legend 5.”

“Huh? It is a baking show?”

“It’s a porno, silly,” Susan said with a smile. “Watch this, and I want to know how you react to it. As a mature sexy adult, I find it sexy. To a young boy, they’d find it gross and stupid.”

Logan looked at the case like it was a live eel. He didn’t want anything to do with it. “I don’t know... It looks like it’s...”

“It’s just what a mature, adult woman needs to feel sexy. You need to give it try.”

Those words changed his entire perception of the DVD. He now saw it as a rite of passage. A gateway into a larger world. “Okay, if you say so.”

“I do. I know you’re going to love it.” She winked at Logan. “I’ll put it in your purse.”

She dropped it in a black leather purse at her feet and handed it to Logan.

He was about to ask if he even owned a purse, but he wasn’t sure he wanted to have another debate with Susan, so he accepted it, and it rested on his lap. Curious, he peeked inside. He saw his wallet and his keys, so that must have meant it was his.

“Don’t lose your purse, now.”

“I won’t,” Logan replied.



Late that night, in his room, Logan waited until he was absolutely sure his father had gone to bed. Usually, once the TV was off and he could no longer hear Fox News and ads for catheters and gold coins coming down the hallway, his dad was done for the night.

His dad had been so angry when he saw his new salon look that he hadn’t even spoken since Logan had gotten home.

The boy picked up his purse, got the DVD of “Buns of Legend 5” out and slipped it into his laptop. He kept the volume low, embarrassed to even doing this. But he had promised Susan.

“We’re behind schedule on the construction project!” The buxom lady executive shouted into her phone. “Send your workers to my office so I can give them a piece of my mind!”

Logan had watched a porno before – well, most of one – and this seemed all along what he would expect. Cheap boxy sets, flimsy plot and droning music.

“You wanted to see us? Me and my crew are working as... *Hard...* as we can!” said the lead construction worker who was dressed in cutoff jean shorts and a flannel with no undershirt. he took off his helmet and tucked it under his arm.

“It’s not good enough! We’re going to miss the bonus if we can’t get on schedule!”

“Maybe we need the right motivation!” said the construction worker.

Whatever came after that wasn’t important. It mostly involved the sexy female executive, closely examining her employee, running her long-nailed fingers all over his sweaty chest.

Quickly, they were out of their clothes, and he was on the floor as she rode him like a bucking bull.

“My boys need some motivation too, ma’am,” the worker said. “They’re right outside.”

“By all means send them in,” she replied, as she licked semen off her fingers.

Logan was definitely getting worked up, already starting to pleasure himself. He found it odd that he wasn’t getting the usual excitement from his dick, but instead, was just all-over sensitive. His skin was electric to the touch, and his hands eventually found extra-sensitive places that got amazing results. His nipples were especially responsive and were swelling up. Pinching them was driving him crazy.

“Fuck me!” The woman moaned on screen. “Fuck me harder! *Harder!*” She was on all fours, as the crew of construction workers were taking turns.

Logan was sweating, watching the woman on screen as her eyes rolled up into her head. She grabbed a nearby dick and pulled it to her mouth.

“She really wants it!” One of the boys said.

“Can she take much more?” Another asked.

“We’ll just have to find out, boys,” the lead worker said.

It was man after man plunging themselves into the lady, and then she was grabbing cock after cock to suck on, the jizz spilling out of her mouth.

Logan really didn’t know what to make of all this. He didn’t see much difference between this “porn for women” and what he pictured porn for men looked like. So, was he turned on imagining himself as the man or as the woman? And why did he find it all so gross and disgusting?

Then, as clear as anything he’d ever remembered, he recalled Susan’s words to him. Was he sure he wanted to be an adult? A sexy adult? Or was he a boy who was found it gross?

“Oh, yes...” Logan moaned, as he watched the action. He imagined himself as the woman.

Susan had asked if wanted to be sexy.

“Yes!” Logan said, a little louder.

Did he want to be mature?

“Oh God, yes, yes!” Logan said even louder.

Did he want to be a sexy, mature, adult woman?

“God oh God oh God...”

Did he *really* want it?

“*Come to Mama, you dirty, dirty boys!*” Logan shouted out loud enough to rattle the windows. It was hitting him all at once. His back arched as he felt a

massive surge of pleasure go through his body. He started to writhe so hard that he knocked the bottle of hormones off his bedside table. He had found it. He had found an answer to Susan's question. "I want your cocks in me! Make it hurt! Drown me in your sweet, sweet cum!"

IN THE FAMILY WAY

PART 2

On the way home from the zoo trip, in the van, Colin almost felt like singing. His plan, as bizarre and unconventional as it was, was working so much better than he could have ever wished for. Doug was practically begging him for a relationship. He could already see him driving up a big rental van to the Brundell house and unloading everything they had.

“How did they do it?” The cops will ask, as Colin saw it in his mind.

“The thief must have had a key!” The cops will conclude. “The woman must have done it! Find Dorothy Farmer!”

“But sir, there is no Dorothy Farmer!” Colin had it all played out. The perfect crime. Besides, Doug was rich and could earn it all back in a month. Big whoop.

“You did an incredible job,” Colin said to his younger brother. He was staring out the window at the scenery go by, like he had been doing lately. “Really,” Colin affirmed, trying to get a response out of Elliot.

Colin kept quiet for a minute or two, but unsatisfied with the silence, took a sharp left turn to force his brother’s head to bop into the window.

“Look out,” Colin warned after he heard the ‘bonk.’

“Give me a warning, okay?” Elliot complained. He was back using his normal voice, which was comical, coming from Emily’s face.

“Stay alert. So how did you like the zoo?”

“It was all right. Been a long time since I’ve been there.”

“Sorry about having Aiden boss you around all day.”

“No big.”

Colin was expecting a blast of anger. He was curious as to why his younger brother wasn’t irate for being tugged around a children’s zoo by a little twerp five years younger than he was. “You’re more patient than I would have been.”

“Oh, I dunno. Aiden talks a lot, but it’s just ego. Once he gets that out of his system, he’s fine. I actually liked him.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Really.”

“Really!” Elliot looked a little annoyed that he was being challenged.

“All right then.”



It was still kind of cool from the early morning frost when Elliot opened his eyes. Something about feeling a bite in the cold, but being wrapped up in warm blankets and being toasty made him feel especially cozy. He was waking up, the morning after the zoo date. He was taking his time, as he had nowhere to go or anything to do, which was normal for the listless nineteen year old.

The last thing he remembered was spending the evening with Colin. They were both dead tired and couldn't be bothered to change out of their outfits, so they spent the remainder of the day dressed up. It didn't feel odd, as they were both quite used to looking like mother & daughter by now.

There was a halfway decent movie on TV that night, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, so while that played, Colin decided it was a night for a treat, and made them both some macaroni and cheese. The movie was old, but it was funny how many of the songs they both knew the words to. After that, they showed *E.T.* and Colin popped some stovetop popcorn they had been saving. Elliot hadn't had a “family movie night” in years, and it was almost like old times.

It used to be a regular Wednesday thing. Their mom would make some stuff to eat and rent a couple of DVDs and both the boys were required to be there, with smiles on, no matter what the circumstances. Elliot and Colin always grumbled about it, but in their heart of hearts, they wouldn't miss it for the world. At least for one night of the week, they didn't feel alone. Since she had passed away, he had missed that sense of warmth and belonging. Every day since, he felt alone.

Elliot eventually got up, raising his head from the pillow. It was then that the reality of his life came crashing back into his head. His room was an absolute horror story. Discarded fast food bags, layers of old clothes, bits and pieces of car parts and sports equipment. The whole room was literally a dump site. It was a far cry from the clean, tidy room he had grown up in. It felt like a million years ago, all filled with regret for how miserable his life had become.

The second blow for Elliot was one he didn't even let himself think about it. It was the disappointment of realizing that his day as a family was over. He was dressed in boxers and a ratty, falling apart t-shirt and life was back to normal. He fell back onto his bed and laid there for a few minutes.

It was then that he realized it was totally quiet. He got up, checked his brother's room, then the living room, and found it all empty. A note was pinned to the TV remote: “Need to get stuff. Be gone all day. Sign for any packages I get. If you want, try the pills on the counter. Doug says they'll pick you up.”

There was a small bottle of pills on the counter, but Elliot wasn't interested in those for the moment. He checked the pockets of his jeans, and found seven dollars. That would be enough for lunch, but he'd have to see what was in the kitchen for dinner. So he looked around, considered his options, felt cold, and went back to bed.

It took him a few more hours to succumb the idea that the day had already gained enough momentum and he was going to have to get up, so he found his way back out to the living room. He brought his blanket with him and wrapped himself up in it while we watched afternoon TV. He couldn't quite understand why he felt so lonely today. He usually preferred days where his pushy brother was out and left him alone. This morning, though, he felt empty.

Unlike last night, where it was dark outside and it felt like the two of them were alone in the universe, it was now the harsh glare of the afternoon blasting through the window and trying to burn away any memory of comfort and tranquility.

Elliot was watching cartoons, which was normal for him, but this particular day's programs did involve more ponies than usual. Once he had grown sick of that, he got his jeans and shirt on, hid his hair under a cap, and headed down to the corner burger joint for a greasy takeout lunch. When he got back, a deliveryman was at the door. He was delivering a vase of flowers for "Dorothy." Sure enough, the card was from Doug Brundell.

The card was simple. "I had a wonderful time. Here's to seeing you again. Love, Doug." Elliot flipped the card away and scoured the vase for anything edible. It was just flowers.

He spent the rest of the night playing GTA and dined on stale Doritos. He was up past 11, but with no sign of Colin. The next thing he remembered was it was dawn again, and he had fallen asleep playing the game once more. A note was affixed to the screen. "Lots to do today. Don't know when I'll be back. You might want to shower. Don't get into trouble. Colin." Two five dollar bills were also stuck to the note. His brother had been home and left already.

Elliot took the money, folded it and stuck it in his pocket. It would be enough for lunch and maybe some snacks. It was a nice thought from his brother.

The day passed slowly, even more so than yesterday. Every ten minutes Elliot would find his eyes checking the time. Sure, he was an adult now, and didn't feel like he needed anyone. However, having Colin home just was going to make him feel better, for some reason he couldn't understand.

Seven hours and forty-three minutes after Elliot first checked the time, the doorknob rattled. The young man immediately slumped back on the sofa and changed the channel from Spongebob to basketball in order to look as slack as he could.

"That you?" Elliot called out from his seat.

“Help me out with all this stuff!” Colin called back.

They piled up the shopping bags in Colin’s room and had to make three trips. He had spent crazy amounts of money, and it was all on women’s clothing. “You’re getting into this, aren’t you?” Elliot asked his brother.

“I did some math. I’m gonna be seeing a lot of Doug, and I had, what? Three outfits. I’m going to need a lot more than that.” He had so many bags piled up in his room that he had to leap from open spot to open spot. “You need undies, shoes, stockings, purses, jewelry, belts and even nail colors to match each outfit. It’s crazy.”

“And the box?” Elliot asked. Amongst the bags was a huge box, towering above everything else.

“Treadmill. I couldn’t find much my size, but take off ten or twenty pounds and the choices really open up. Half of this stuff I’m going to sweat my way into.” He then pointed to some bags over to the side. “Got some workout outfits, too.”

“Wow,” was Elliot’s evaluation.

Colin removed the wool gloves he had been wearing, because, as he was dressed in his usual shirt and jeans, the long red nails would have looked a little odd on him. “I had to tell every damn saleslady that I was buying this for my girlfriend,” Colin said, taking off his coat. “But I can’t wait to try some of this stuff on.” He sat down on his bed and removed his pants. “Not that I really want to wear women’s clothing, but... You know what I mean.”

“Yeah, I guess...” Elliot stood to the side, waiting.

“So, I’m going to get dressed up in these outfits. So... Uh... Why don’t you play some video games?”

“Oh, I... Maybe... Maybe you might need some help?” Elliot asked.

“Um... Sure... I guess.”

“Great!” Elliot said with enthusiasm. “Can I pick the first one?”

“I got stuff for you too.”

“Do you want me to put a dress on?”

“No, we can wait.”

Elliot’s shoulders slumped ever so slightly. “Can I help you with the corset?”

“Sure. Just wait until I get out of this stuff.” His younger brother was kinda following him around this morning. Almost like a puppy.

Colin undressed swiftly, and he was ready to go. He didn’t need to shave his legs, as they were still smooth from the waxing. He looked over what he had bought and almost didn’t know where to begin.

“I guess I should start with underwear,” he said to Elliot. “Hand me the pink bags over there.” He pointed at what he was talking about.

“They’re all pink.”

“The ones by the lamp,” Colin clarified.

Colin dispensed with the ornamental pink paper in the bag and grabbed what he was looking for, a high-waist beige satin panty with six dangling garter straps. It was a tight fit, but he got it up and in place without looking too ridiculous in the attempt. Next, a matching beige lacy bra with underwire support. He plucked out two new “bra inserts” from another bag and stuffed the bra with them. A little manipulation later, and he was able to give himself the illusion of cleavage.

Elliot whistled. “Dude, they look real.”

“Not bad, huh?” Colin replied. “Now help me with the corset.” It was actually a waist cincher, which zipped up in the front. It was still a two-man job as Colin had to hold his breath, lift his arms and suck in his stomach as much as possible as Elliot tugged the zipper up, inch by inch, until it was done.

Colin was not comfortable. “I’m going to crack a rib, I swear.” He paced around in a small circle, trying to regulate his breath.

“I wish there was a pill to make you a woman for a day,” Colin wheezed. “I’d take it.”

“No such luck. Unless you want to spend a year taking hormones.”

“I’ll pass. Hey, did you try any of those vitamins I left on the counter?”

“I thought they were pills.”

“Vitamins, I think.” Once he was ready, he reached for the next bag, but stopped. “Wait,” he said, talking to himself, “do sheer stockings go with this dress or... No, I’ll wear the black stockings.” He switched to another bag and unwrapped a fresh pair of black seamed stockings. “Doug won’t know what hit him with these.”

He got them on and clipped the lacy tops to the garter straps, then made sure the seams were straight. He had started to appreciate the unique feeling of his stocking feet on carpet, and wiggled his toes.

That completed the first part of dressing. Now he had to work on the outer shell. Then his face. Then his hair. Then walking in his new four inch pumps. This was going to take a while.

Later, as he was leaning in front of the bathroom mirror, applying his false eyelashes, he was fielding questions from an increasingly inquisitive Elliot.

“Are you going on another date with Doug?” The younger brother asked.

“Yes... Well, it’s not really a date.”

“What is it?”

“We’re just meeting for drinks after work. Doug has a tight schedule. It’s all he has time for.”

Eyelashes were tricky. They were adhesive, but lighter than feathers, and maneuvering into place was like playing some kind of skill game, where you had to drop something and then watch it waft in the air, hoping it hit on target. But once they were in place, it was well worth the effort. Colin had lashes for days, accentuating his eyes and giving him a mysteriously alluring look. With the eyelashes done, he moved on to his lips. He wanted to make them perfect, with a nice crisp edge to them.

“Why can’t I go?” Elliot asked.

“Unless you want to go as Emily...”

“Okay. When will you be back?”

Colin had to stop talking as he drew a nice, perfect line long the edge of his lips. He surprised himself with how good he got it on the first try. “I’m not sure. I guess before dinner.”

“Can you make something to eat?”

“I can pick something up on the way home.”

“Pizza?”

Colin finished filling in his lips with some lipstick. He smiled at himself in the mirror, and was rewarded with a beguiling and bright, winning smile. “I can do pizza.”

“Yay! Pizza Party!” Elliot said.

That drew a curious sideways glance from the older boy as he started to affix his wig.



Heads were turning as Colin walked into the Regent Medical lab building. Colin was looking much better than he had in their previous zoo trip, today wearing a knee-length black dress with a flared skirt and a square neckline. Though he wasn’t gathering all this attention from being a sharp dresser, nor because of any suspicion of his true gender, but simply because a woman had asked to see Doug Brundell.

Lonely, hopeless, sad-sack Doug Brundell. The staff in the lobby was blown away that Mr. Brundell might actually be dating a woman. It was unprecedented to see him have any trace of a social life. The whispers and emails spread throughout the building quickly, even before Doug showed up to escort his date across the street for drinks.

“Do you believe it?”
The front desk receptionist whispered to the young executive assistant hovering near her desk. “I would have never thought it! The poor guy is actually seeing someone!”

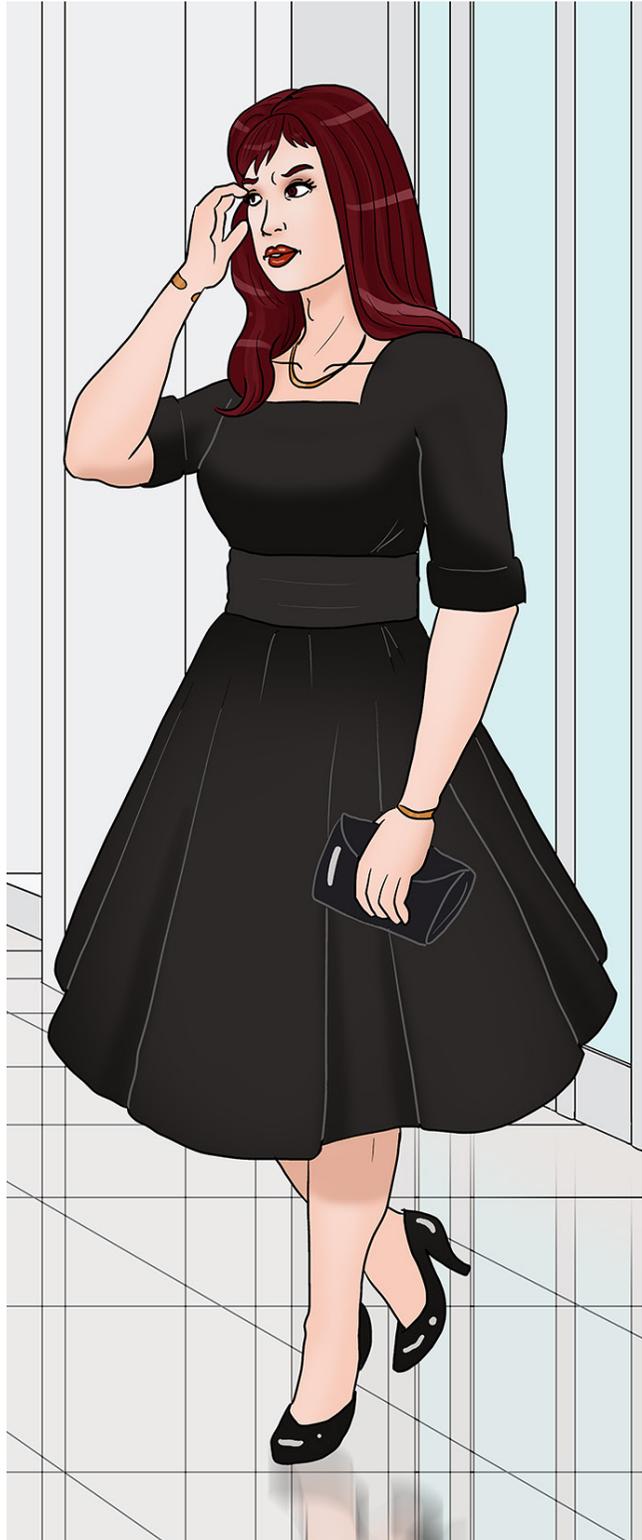
“Maybe it’s his sister or something,” was the assistant’s observation. “Could stand to pass on a few desserts, though.”

Doug led Colin to the door with his hand in the small of Colin’s back. “I’m so glad you could make it, Dorothy.”

“I’ve been looking forward to it all day!” Colin let Doug open the door for him and then proceeded outside and across the street. He had reverted back to three inch heels, as he had managed to twist both his ankles trying the four-inch heels earlier. His long wig hair fluttered in the winds of the concrete canyons, and he clenched up his bare arms a little.

“You cold?” Doug asked. “You can have my coat.”

“I’ll be fine,” Colin said. It was just a little



breeze, after all, he thought to himself. Maybe he should have brought a sweater, though.

“I’ve only been here a couple of times.” Doug said, talking about the bar they were walking into. “Sometimes we have some informal meetings here.”

It was a nice place, with dim lighting, wood decor, low on the background noise but still lively. It was the nicest bar Colin had ever seen. He was used to tables that stuck to you and stepping over people as you made your way to the keno machines. This place actually looked clean and pleasant and didn’t smell like beer vomit.

“I’m sorry we can’t go somewhere nicer and make an evening of it. But I have to report to work at 4:00 in the morning and I can’t stay up late. I have to be in bed by eight.”

“Four AM?” Colin asked. “That’s horrible!”

Doug shook off the suggestion. “It’s the experiment we’re running. It needs 24-hour observation and I have to be there for at least 12 of those hours. It’ll only be for a few weeks.”

“I’ve only known you for a few days, Doug, but I can already tell you that you work too hard.”

“It’s what I have to do. Besides, it keeps me out of meetings. So what will you have?”

He had already done a little research. “Strawberry daiquiri,” Colin replied. He had never had a cocktail before, let alone a ‘woman’s’ cocktail, so this was going to be a first and he had spent a couple of hours deciding what ‘Dorothy’s’ favorite drink was going to be — and he did like strawberries.

A young woman in a clean outfit of black pants, white shirt and red vest came over to the table and deposited a small basket of popcorn. “Can I get you two anything?”

“Gin and tonic for me and a strawberry daiquiri for the lady,” Doug requested.

“I like it when the man orders for me,” Colin said with a sly smile. He wanted Doug to feel like he was in charge.

The girl playfully winked and walked away to fill the order.

“So, now that we’re alone,” Colin said, referring to the absence of the ‘kids,’ “and it’s just us adults... What’s Doug Brundell like when he’s got no responsibilities?” He had stolen this from a list of ‘first date’ questions he read on the internet.

“Oh, I... Uh...” Doug was searching for an answer. “Well... To tell you the truth, I wish I was more responsible, more of the time.”

“Oh?”

“Not that I don’t live up to my responsibilities now, I just would rather I embraced them. Made them my top priority. Stopped being so wishy-washy. Just commit to the things I need to do.” Doug threw some popcorn into his open mouth.

“You aren’t giving yourself enough credit,” Colin said, building his confidence. “You have a very important job. You run a whole laboratory. You speak at conferences year round! You’re a single father. People depend on you, and you don’t let them down.”

“I... Well, I don’t want to burden you with my problems, Dorothy,” Doug said. “I’m the one asking. I wouldn’t ask unless I wanted to know.” He added his patented giggle to keep it lighthearted.

“I... I do a lot of things, but few of them well. I didn’t have a lot of ambition growing up. I just wanted a nice job and a nice family. A decent house. Despite being good at what I do, I hate my job, I couldn’t stop my family from disintegrating, and my house... Well, my ex was the one who chose it and it’s never felt like my home. Things never really worked out for me.”

“You’re only forty, Doug. It’s too early to give up. Besides, you strike me as a premature grown-up. Even when you were a kid, I bet they said you were the mature type. Old beyond his years.”

“I may have heard that once or twice, I have to admit.”

“Now you’re finally as old as you have always been inside. This is your time, Doug.”

Doug Brundell was almost blushing. He had never met anyone who had read him so well. It was almost embarrassing how this woman who he had barely even known for a week had gotten right through to his most private thoughts.

“Well, look who’s decided to drop by the old watering hole!” Said a man in a suit slapping Doug on the back. “Decided to creep out from behind those gene splicers of yours, huh Dougie?”

“They’re sequencing electrophoresis systems, actually...” Doug said, correcting the man.

Since Doug wasn’t doing a proper introduction, the man did it for himself. “I’m Richard Hawkins, Dougie-Doug’s supervisor.” He thrust his hand out for a shake. “And you are...?”

Knowing his place, Colin limply hung his long-nailed hand out to comply with the handshake. “My name’s Dorothy. I’m so glad to meet you, Mr. Hawkins. Doug here was just telling all about his fascinating job and how he loves working for such nice people.”

“All a lie!” Richard said declared loudly and sarcastically. “Don’t believe a word he says!” he slapped Doug on the back again, overselling his good-natured act. Colin had him read immediately as a stuffed suit. He had

such poor insight into the world around him that he could only communicate in tired platitudes and phrases he had used a thousand times before.

Of course, Richard didn't give a crap about Doug, all he really wanted to do was to get a close-up view of whatever miserable creature would so desperate to date a confirmed loser like Brundell, and he had little to offer in conversation beyond that. So he decided to end the conversation by falling back on his job responsibilities.

"Don't drink too much, Doug!" Richard said. "We need you back at the lab bright and early tomorrow AM! This is no time to get sloshed!" He drank down the remainder of his whiskey and turned to leave. "And be nice to Dorlene here, you wouldn't want to tarnish her reputation by getting her home after dark!" He laughed as he headed back to the bar.

After being belittled, ridiculed and made to feel like second-class citizens in just the space of four sentences, it was easy to see why Brundell hated his job. Colin also noted that the 'supervisor' was younger and had apparently little idea of what Doug's job actually involved. If he was going to get Doug to stand up for himself and get a promotion, he was going to have to be clever, up against that kind of opposition.

In Colin's experience, fighting smart people is easy, because they know when they've lost. Fighting dumb people is much harder, since they're just too stupid to know when they've been beaten.

"I'd like to see you again, Doug. How about dinner?"

Doug sighed. "This experiment has me tied to a desk for the rest of the month. I'll have to pass for now."

"Well..." Colin ran his long-nailed finger around the crisp edges of his lipstick in thought. "How about this? Can you meet like this for drinks tomorrow?"

"Sure."

"We can do that then. In fact, why don't we make it a regular thing. You. Me. Here. Every night. Until this experiment is over."

"You have a deal," Doug replied with the smile of a man who felt like the luckiest man alive.

For the next two weeks, that's exactly what they did. Every evening, Colin would dress up in a nice new dress, put on his makeup and wig, arrange his purse and went to go meet Doug at his office. Colin would take his arm as he walked to their bar and then they'd spend the hour talking and laughing.

Colin learned a lot about Doug over drinks. He knew that Aiden had been getting better at home, and that giving him a little bit of responsibility was just the trick to keep him from misbehaving. Doug praised Dorothy's "mothering instinct" for knowing the key to getting through to his troublesome son. Colin encouraged him to let Aiden have a little more responsibility, but in little bits to

keep him engaged and interested — and to not be afraid to let him know when he gets things wrong.

Colin made sure he spent as little time as possible taking about ‘Dorothy’ and her life. He wanted it all focused on Doug. It was Colin’s number one priority to make sure that Doug’s life was on the turnaround, and that he knew being the sympathetic and selfless ‘Dorothy’ was the key to his success and happiness.

It was also a priority to get Doug to loosen up a little. Not to the point where there were public displays of affection, mind you. Doug was certainly the button-up type who would never do anything like that in public. Just the occasional physical contact. A playful slap on Doug’s hands when he said something the slightest bit risqué, a rub on the shoulder when he needed a little encouragement. A hug when the night was over. Just enough to make sure he knew that what they had was more than just platonic.

How long Colin could keep Doug from wanting to get ‘Dorothy’ into bed was another matter, and he was just going to have to deal with when the time came. For now, it was all about leading him on.



Two weeks later, Colin was once again getting dressed for his nightly rendezvous with Doug, and Elliot was sulking on the couch as his older brother packed his purse. As he threaded his earrings through his recently-pierced ears, he couldn’t help but notice that his brother was not in a good mood. He couldn’t help but notice it because Elliot was being as demonstrably disgruntled as he could manage.

“Something up?” Colin asked.

“No,” Elliot grumbled, looking straight forward at the TV.

Colin spritzed the sides of his neck with two quick hits of perfume. “You sure?”

“Yes.”

Knowing that wasn’t the correct answer, all Colin could do was progress on and wait for his brother to spit out what was bugging him. “The rain in Spain falls mainly in the plains,” he said in his feminine voice. He liked to practice a little before he had to use it for the rest of the night. “The rain in Spain...”

“You’re never home anymore!” Elliot suddenly blurted out.

“What do you mean?”

“You’re always out having dinner with that guy.”

“I’m working on the big score, Elliot. Whatever I gotta do, okay?”

“Let’s give up.”

“What?” Colin replied, shocked that he was even making this suggestion. “After all this work?”

“We could have made just as much money working a real job as you get from him. He’s cheap, anyway.”

“He’s practical,” Colin replied, defending Doug. “It’ll make the big payday even more sweet when we can take it all.”

“You’ll never get it. You’ll never be able to fool him that far.”

“I’m already his girlfriend. It’s just a matter of time before we have the keys to his house and then access to his checking account...” Colin’s phone rang, interrupting him. He checked the number. “Speak of the devil.” He cleared his throat. “Hi Douglas!” Colin sang into the phone as Dorothy. “I’m just about ready to go.”

He listened to Doug as Elliot sunk lower into his seat and crossed his arms.

“Tomorrow?” Colin answered. “I’d love to, but aren’t you working...? Oh, that’s great! Sure, I’d love to.” Colin covered the mouthpiece and spoke to his brother. “And yet another date with Doug. This one sounds intimate! Tell me now how I should...”

“Why do I gotta put up with this?” Elliot interrupted. “I hate having to stay here alone every fuckin’ night! It’s been two weeks!”

Colin removed his hand and spoke to Doug again. “Why don’t we bring the kids? Emily feels all cooped up here in the house.” He grinned wickedly at Elliot. “Great! Miniature golf sounds wonderful! I’ll see you in a few minutes, okay? Bye now.”

He then put the phone down and sneered at Elliot. “Careful what you wish for, Emily darling.”

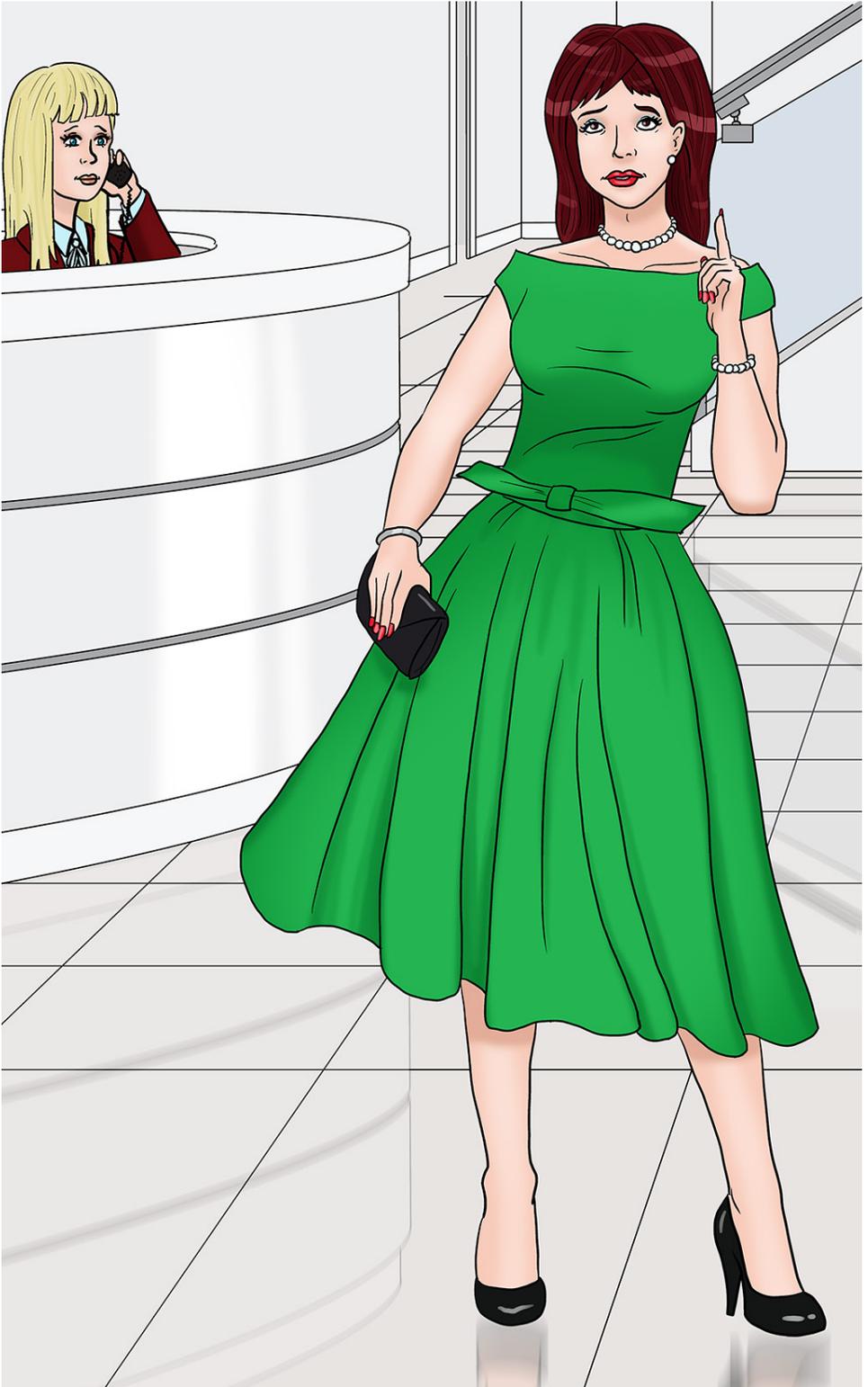
“That’s not what I meant!” Elliot barked. “I’m not even sure if I have the right clothes,” he added, quietly.

“You did ask for it, my dearest daughter.” He dropped the phone in his purse and headed out. “Later loser!”



“Have you noticed something different about Mr. Brundell?” A woman wearing the company blazer said, in a low tone of voice. In the quiet hum of the lobby, she was quietly talking to her desk-mate, her co-worker at the lab’s reception desk. “He’s been... Smiling lately.”

“I know!” Her female co-worker replied, eager to engage in a little office gossip. “I would have never though stuffy old Doug Brundell was capable of it!”



“He certainly comes off as more confident. More easygoing. If I didn’t know better, I’d say he was in love.”

“Doug Brundell in love? Don’t make me laugh.”

“Hello?” Colin said, as he approached the desk in his newest dress, an emerald green cotton dress with a flare skirt that ended below his knees. He clutched his purse in front of him, anxiously. He hated having to talk to real women. “Can you let Douglas Brundell know Dorothy is here?”

“Certainly,” the woman replied, with a pleasant smile.

The other woman put her hand to her lips and whispered. “Speak of the devil.” She got a kick in the shin.

“You can go up to floor four and wait in the lobby, Dorothy,” Said the woman in the blazer. “Doug will be right with you.”

“Uh, yes... Thank you,” Colin said, almost sure these two women were hiding something from him. Women were so conspiratorial, Colin told himself, always keeping secrets and making little catty comments behind your back. He was glad to step into the elevator and leave them behind.

Once at his floor, Colin stepped out and headed to a small seating area with a dusty fern. As he did, he attracted the eyes of some of the junior lab employees, standing just far away not to be heard.

“I hate to say it, Jason,” a young man in a lab coat said to his friend, “But I think Brundell may have found a jewel in the rough.”

“You may be right,” the friend replied. “Dorothy’s definitely grown on me, or maybe I’ve just been single too long.”

“No... She’s definitely stepped it up since she first started seeing Brundell. Something was definitely “off” about her when I first saw her. I’d almost say she looked like a guy in a dress, but no way I’d say that now.”

“I know what you mean. She was kind of clumsy. Uncomfortable in her own skin.”

“Now, I don’t know, maybe she’s relaxed and at ease,” the co-worker turned to his friend. “There’s always something sexy about a confident woman.”

“You think she may have had some work done? She... Her face...”

Both men took a closer look, without giving themselves away. “Hard to say. Maybe she’s just doing her makeup differently.”

“Crap, here comes Brundell! Look busy!” The two almost grown men got back to their jobs and started to examine their clipboards intently.

“Dorothy! Is it five thirty already?” Doug said, as he entered the lobby area. “You look amazing.”

Colin got up and dusted himself off. “I’m a little late actually. Emily was being difficult.” He leaned forward to kiss Douglas on the cheek. “Is it casual day around here?”

“Oh? The shirt?” Doug was wearing another tropical-themed shirt. “I just didn’t feel like putting on the old monkey suit today.”

“Oh?” Colin didn’t like the sound of that. He was going through hours of prep for these little dates and if he was going go through the trouble, the least Doug could do was to make a little bit of an effort. “I think you look good in a suit.”

“Me? No. Besides, they’re a lot of trouble.”

Trouble? Colin thought. He had no idea what trouble was until he’d spent an hour epilating the hair from his armpits, tearing up like a baby. “That’s a shame. I think there’s nothing better than a man in a sharp, crisp, new suit.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Doug said. “Now, let’s not waste a minute. I have to be back here by seven for a meeting.”

“Lead the way,” Colin said with a smile, as he took Doug’s arm. He put a little wiggle in his walk for the benefit of the two young men who had been spying on him since he had arrived.

AGENT OF CHANGE

PART 2

“Big day,” Susan said to herself as she got herself ready for seeing her first patients.

“All right, Steve,” she said to her newly-hired receptionist. “We’re open for business.”

“Sure thing, Dr. Hackstaff,” Steve replied with a smile.

Susan headed for her office and put on a stethoscope around her neck. She never used it. It just made her look professional.

“The Thurmans are here for their 9:00,” Steve said over the intercom.

“Send them to Exam 1, Steve,” she answered back. It had been a couple of weeks since she had seen Logan, and she was looking forward to seeing how things were progressing. Plus, she had a new surprise for them.

Taking a deep breath and putting on her best expression of professional detachment, she headed to meet Logan and his father.

Logan was already seated on the exam bench in a pair of tight yoga pants, a pair of flip flops, and a v-neck cap-sleeve top. Most importantly to Susan, he was completely done up in thick makeup — and he had done a pretty good job, too.

“What have you done to my boy?” Bert Thurman bellowed.

“Why don’t you wait outside, Logan?” Susan immediately suggested.

“Don’t be mean to her, Bert!” Logan said, as he left.

“I’m your father! Stop calling me Bert!” He yelled back as Logan closed the door. He turned his ire back to Dr. Hackstaff. “What in creation have you been doing to that boy? He’s been changed into some kind of freak man-woman!”

“I’ve only done what we agreed upon. Liposuction is a multi-stage process, and we’re still...”

“Don’t try to buffalo me, missy!” Bert growled. “You’re taking him to the cleaners! That inheritance wasn’t for some fool quack to cut him up like a Sunday sausage! He was supposed to use that money for college! Now he’s dropped out of high school!”

Susan tried to get in a few words. “I am a professional medical doctor. I do not...”



“You are a quack and a charlatan! You’ve manipulated him into doing things to his body against his will!”

“Look, I will not stand here and...”

“You will stand there and keep quiet, woman! A man is talking!”

“Okay, that’s all I needed to hear,” Susan said. She launched one of her pen syringes full of her special hypnotic formula right into his neck.

Bert immediately grabbed the spot where he had just been injected. “What did you do to me! What did you just put into me?”

“I didn’t do anything. You don’t remember me injecting you, do you?”

Bert’s eye twitched in confusion. He blinked a few times. “No. I don’t remember.”

Susan had hoped this would go smoother, but she also had a full slate of patients today, and didn’t want to waste time with Logan’s father. She already knew what she wanted to do with him, and this would save time.

“Hold out your hand, Bert,” she instructed.

Bert lifted his arm and held out his hand. “You won’t feel anything,” Susan instructed. She applied a strong clamp to the skin in between his thumb and hand. Bert didn’t make any response to the intense pain it should have caused.

“Good,” she said, removing the clamp. The drug was at full effect and he was totally in her power.

“First of all,” Susan said, puffing up her chest. “You *will* feel this. Punch yourself in the nuts.”

Bert launched his fist and nailed himself right in the family jewels. He immediately started to tear up and couldn’t breathe.

“Second of all, you trust me completely. Whatever I suggest you will agree with. You know I am a doctor, a professional doctor with medical knowledge that you won’t challenge, and I know what’s best for you.”

“Yes. Yes. You know what’s best,” Bert said.

“Whatever changes you see in your son are his decisions, and his alone. Whatever he does is his business and you are not to question it.”

“I won’t question it.”

“And finally, you’ll stop watching your goddamned Fox News, okay? Whenever you want to watch TV, you’ll watch whatever’s on MTV or The Disney Channel. You’ll pay special attention to the teenage girls on those shows. You want to memorize what clothes they wear, how they talk, how they act, how they interact with people. You want to know everything about the characters. You will absorb everything you can about them.”

“Everything?”

“Everything,” Susan confirmed.

Susan left him standing there for a few minutes as the small dose of her drug wore off. Then he suddenly shook his head to clear it. “What... What was I saying? I was... I was... I guess I lost my train of thought.”

“Well, we were talking about Logan. You said you had some questions?”

“Questions? About Logan? No, I don’t have any questions. What he does is his own business.” His eyes shifted as he spoke, as if here were trying to find meaning in the words coming out of his mouth. “Um... Yeah...”

“Oh good,” Susan replied. “I’m glad to hear that you have complete confidence in Logan’s decisions.” Susan could see Mr. Thurman twitch a little, but he raised no objections to that statement. Her hypnotic commands were working wonderfully. “You can come back in,” she said to Logan, as she opened her door a little.

“Is everything all right, Susan?” Logan asked as he walked in.

“Couldn’t be better,” Dr. Hackstaff replied.

“Oh, here,” Logan said, picking the porno out of his purse and handing it over to the doctor. “It was very... Therapeutic.”

“Glad to hear it. What did you learn about yourself?”

“Well,” Logan said with a guilty smile. “I have no doubts about what I want anymore. I want...” He glanced over at his father who was sitting down, and barely paying attention, trying to figure out why he had changed his mind so suddenly.

“Go ahead. It’ll be fine,” Susan reassured Logan.

“I’m a mature adult, a sexy, mature adult, and I want to be even sexier.”

Both Dr. Hackstaff and Logan looked at Mr. Thurman, who was looking back at them, blankly.

“I’m so happy to hear that,” Susan replied. “Now I think the next step is to deal with your upper chest. I’d like to schedule your next appointment for a month from now, and...”

“No!” Logan said. “Now. Do it now.”

“Pardon?”

“I... I really like who I am now... And I want more. Now. I have to have it. I *need* it.”

“Really?”

“I like the way people look at me. I like the authority. I like the power. I love being sexy. Please make me sexier, doctor.”

Susan’s plan to make Logan equate the meanings of the word ‘sexy’ and ‘woman’ had worked to perfection. He was rationalizing that being sexy mean being more like a woman. That was why he was wearing foundation, mascara and lipstick this morning, and even more importantly, he craved all the ‘sexy’ he could get.

“We can do it this afternoon, if I move some things around,” Dr. Hackstaff said. In truth, she had already scheduled the operation weeks ago.

“Perfect!” Logan said with a little hop on his toes. “What are we going to do this time? Tell me, tell me!”

“Well, we’ve dealt with your middle, so now I think we need to deal with your... Upper half. The rest I want to keep as a surprise.”

“Oooh!” Logan responded, eagerly.



Mr. Thurman was so distracted by his own behavior, he didn’t much notice that his son was the one who had driven them home that morning.

Logan went to his room immediately, and as custom for Bert, he landed his butt in his favorite easy chair and turned on the TV.

According to his show, the libtards were trying to pull a fast one on the hard-working American people again, and they thought they could sneak it on by without anyone noticing. But for some reason, Bert's deep-seeded love of conspiracies and demagoguery were not distracting him enough this morning.

There was a real sense that something was wrong with Logan. Something that was getting out of control. Although he wasn't paying full attention to the conversation Logan and the doctor were having back in the office, it sounded like they were scheduling yet another operation, and that it was designed to make his son appear even more feminine.

He had to stop this, and stop it now. If he didn't, who knows what would become of his family. Ever since his divorce, he knew he hadn't exactly been the best father in the world, but his kid was so mixed up, who could blame him? But now, he had a chance at redemption, and if he could save Logan from further mutilating his body, he could be the hero of this situation.

Then, as Bert glanced at the screen, he noticed that he had idly flipped over to some MTV reality show.

He couldn't care less about that, so he got up and began to figure out how he was going to confront Logan and put some sense into that boy's head. It was now or never. He only had until this afternoon to make him change his mind.

As he was ready to burst into Logan's room and give him the riot act, he couldn't help but notice that the girl on TV had the cutest little boots.

But... What did he care about some teenage tramp on TV and what she was wearing? He had serious real-world problems to deal with and...

What was her name? Dalia? That was a unique name. And she was wearing a neat hoodie and...

No... He had to get up right now and...

Was she a natural blond? Dalia had a great little smile and a nice laugh...

This had to end, and tell his boy that it was his way or the highway, and if he didn't shape up...

What *were* those boots? Where did she get them? They were just adorable, and Bert needed to know where they came from... He wanted to get up and go talk to Logan, but maybe just after he quickly searched the internet for those boots. And what show was this? Were there any other pictures of Dalia?

He looked for his phone, which was supposed to do internet stuff. Maybe it could do video, too? Were there other episodes of this show online? He'd get back to Logan in a minute. Or two. An hour at most.



After a long session in the operating room, Dr. Hackstaff had fallen asleep in her office chair, and was only awakened by Steve, the receptionist, as he was locking things up for the night.

They had transferred Logan to a local hospital for overnight recovery, which wasn't in Susan's original plan. Once she had gotten started on Logan, though, she just couldn't stop. A little thing there, a little thing there, and before Susan knew it, Logan was going to need someone to look over him for the night.

She was just heading to her car, fighting a mighty yawn when she heard a voice.

"Working late?" someone said.

It was twilight, and a mix of weak purple and pink color was in the sky, being overpowered by yellow lamps to light the parking lot.

Susan took a step back, unable to make out who was speaking to her in the dim light. Fortunately the person talking stepped forward. "Sorry to startle you," he said.

"And you are?"

"Quentin Stillman. Magnum Properties."

It took a moment, but Susan recognized her mysterious benefactors. She had only communicated in emails with them — up until now.

"Magnum Properties?" She was leading him, hoping he'd provide some explanation.

"Your business partners in this endeavor," Quentin replied with a grin. "But you knew that." He held out a card and kept his other hand in his pocket.

Susan approached cautiously, took the card and verified it. It wasn't exactly government issued ID, but it was enough. "You pick odd places for business meetings."

"I think you understand that we should be keeping a low profile in this kind of thing."

"How so? I run a reputable clinic."

"That's not why we brought you here, Ms. Janson."

"Dr. Hackstaff."

"You forget who provided you with that identity. And that degree."

"Is that a threat?"

"No, not at all. You were in business with the mob for too long, and it's made you suspicious."

"*Cautious* is the word I would choose."

“That too. No, we brought you here to provide a service, and use your talent. We have a number of potential clients for your business and you *particular* talent.”

“And what is my talent?”

“I hate to even say it out loud. It’s like telling an artist what makes them special, and risk them becoming too self-conscious about it. I’d feel like I’m spoiling things.”

“All right. But I have to assume you have a message for me. Otherwise, you’d just send me another email.”

“I didn’t want a trail,” Quentin said. “I represent Magnum Properties and all of their interests in this part of the country. Specifically, a little community we call Candlewick Court. It’s just a couple of blocks away, as a matter of fact.”

He adjusted his glasses. “We have a very keen interest in the health and well-being of the residents of Candlewick Court, and the larger Emerald Estates property, so you were brought here to make sure they were provided the best in medical care. There should not be any barriers in providing those residents with everything they need. If there are financial concerns, just let us know. We’ll be happy to help.”

“I see,” Susan replied. “And what kind of medical services are we talking about?”

“Anything they need. From runny noses to brain tumors and everything in between. But you might find, from time to time, that some of these residents may need something special. Something you have proven yourself uniquely talented in providing. Do you understand?”

Susan had caught on by now. “How will I know who needs these kind of *special* services?”

“It will probably be obvious. If not, we’ll get word to you.”

“All right. I understand, I think.”

“Good, good.” Quentin walked over to a shiny black Mercedes with tinted black windows and beeped open the door. “I do hope you’ll enjoy our little community here, Dr. Hackstaff. Maybe we’ll bump into each other again around town. Things are about to pick up around here.”



The next morning, Dr. Hackstaff was beside Logan’s bed at the hospital when he awoke.

“How’s our patient feeling this morning?” She asked, with a pleasant smile.

Logan was very groggy. “Good morning, doctor... It is morning, isn’t it?”

“Yes, of course. Any pain?”

“A little...”

“Let me give you a shot for that,” Susan replied, injecting Logan with her hypnotic drug. She knew he needed to be in the right frame of mind to see himself. “Now, here’s a mirror.”

Dr. Hackstaff handed her patient a hand mirror to examine himself. Her procedures on the face hadn’t been very invasive, so there were a red red spots, but no bruising.

“My lips!” Logan said. “They’re so big!”

“Those are some luscious, velvety soft lips, aren’t they? I really like how they came out,” Susan said with pride.

Logan’s already full lips were now doubled in size, jutting out from his face in an obviously artificial way. They made him look like a forty year old woman who was desperate to have any kind of sex appeal.

“Do you think they’re sexy?” Logan asked.

“Oh, they are the sexiest,” Susan said. And because she had said it, thanks to the drug, it was Logan’s new reality.

“Yeah, they are super sexy. I love them!”

“And they’re permanent, too.” Hopefully, the new lips hid the other things that Susan had done. She had scraped away some of the natural fat layers in his skin around his eyes and mouth. There were now crows’ feet at the corners of his eyes, laugh lines at the sides of his mouth and extra folds in the eyelids.

“I love how mature I look!” Logan said.

“Okay, now wait until you see the main attraction!” Susan said. She took the mirror out of Logan’s hands. “Now what’s even sexier than lips?”

“I don’t know, what?”

“Think. What’s the sexiest body part you can think of.”

“Um... Boobs. I mean breasts.”

“Well, take a look!”

Logan looked down, and sure enough, where before he had just a small set of mounds left over from his waist and stomach liposuction, he was now sporting a pair of double-D breasts.

His expression practically froze. Even though he was covered by a few layers of bandages and compression garments, he immediately, instinctively, knew that his body had been changed in a way that terrified him.

“What? Are those... Real?” Logan said.

“No, of course not,” Susan said. “Just implants. You are the proud owner of a pair of MediPlus brand Round High Profile 500cc saline implants with a lifetime warranty.”

“They... They’re *inside* of me?”

“That’s how it works.” Susan had her fun, so she calmed her patient down.

“They’re the sexiest thing I’ve ever seen, don’t you agree?”

Logan looked down again. The bandages and garments didn’t cover everything up, and he could see where the breasts attached to his chest. Instead of a gentle slope of a natural breast, these had a obvious angle to them which made it quite plain that they were implants.

“Sexy?” Logan said, not sure that he agreed.

“Think about those gorgeous women on the internet, and how you always wanted to get your hands on the massive mounds. Can you think of anything that says ‘sexy’ more than that?”

“No... I guess not.”

“And now you have some of your very own. It’s sooo sexy. Mature, adult and sexy. Don’t you think so?”

Logan paused. “They really are. I can’t wait to see them when the bandages come off. Are they really going to be this big?”

“Yes.”

“Oh my God, that’s so sexy. I feel so lucky!”

“I made the nipples huge, too. They’re as thick as your pinky finger.”

Logan tried to imagine what they would feel like when pinched. He shivered.

“Whoa there, sweetie. Just you calm down,” Susan said. “Well, I’ve got to get back to the clinic, and they’ll be releasing you later this morning. Try not to play with your new toys until they’ve healed, okay? Call me if you have any questions!”



“Bert, I’m going out,” Logan said to his father, as he packed his purse. It had been two weeks since he had returned from the hospital and his latest round of plastic surgery had healed up. “Did you hear me, Bert? I don’t know when I’ll be home, okay?”

“Yeah, okay! I heard you!” His father called back.

Logan walked into the family room to find his father in his easy chair, his legs curled up under him, glued to the TV as usual. “You can’t spend all day watching TV, you know,” Logan told him. Logan was dressed in a black



plunging V-neck skin-tight top that showed off his new assets in all their glory. His skin, rich and golden, was also something he was proud of. Regular tanning sessions had paid off with a sun chaser's tan. He was quite proud of how sexy he looked and wanted to show it off. He also wore a pair of white knee-length stretch pants to cover his voluptuous bottom and a pair of gladiator sandals on his feet. Looking like a woman, and acting like a woman, was just a part of being mature and sexy to him. He had tucked his withering manhood away, because that looked especially sexy to him. He had done his face in dark evening makeup and added a little volume to his hair. He knew he looked desirably adult and mature, and he was eager to show it all off.

"Shhh!" Bert responded. "This is important! It's the season finale!"

"I'm taking the car and I don't know when I'll be home," Logan told his father.

"Fine, fine, fine!" Bert replied.

With a sigh, Logan took his purse and headed out the door.

Logan arrived at the restaurant Susan had suggested, and was surprised to find that it was more of a nightclub than an eatery. He strutted by the sign that read "no minors" without even thinking about it.

He found Susan already seated, and joined her in a booth at the back.

"You made it!" Susan said.

"Made it? I've been looking forward to this all week!" Logan said. "My first time out in public!"

"And every eye in the place in on you!"

Logan looked around and did see a lot of heads turned his way. Disappointingly, most of them were men.

"Is this a gay bar?" He asked.

"Hardly," Susan answered. "Ooh! Incoming!"

"What?"

"Good evening," a man said holding a beer in his hand. "Waiting for someone?"

"No," Susan replied, "just two friends out for a nice evening of fun."

"Mind if I join you?"

"Actually," Logan said, "we..."

Susan cut him off. "Well, if you'll buy us drinks, you can have a seat, handsome!"

"What are you having?" The man said.

"Gin fizz for me, and..." Susan had to think what kind of drinker she wanted Logan to be. "Wine spritzer for my friend."

"I'll be right back," the gentleman said, heading for the bar.

"Susan! I can't drink!" Logan whispered.

"Do I have to remind you that you're an adult, now?"

"No, but..."

"You'll have to drink sooner or later. Might as well get started now."

"Here we go," the man said, returning to the table. As soon as he set the drinks down, he eased himself into booth, nestling next to Logan. "My name is Rod, by the way." He was tall, with dark hair streaked with grey, probably somewhere in his late thirties or early forties. He had chiseled features and was wearing a dark grey sport jacket over a dress shirt.

"Hi Rod," Susan replied. "I'm Susan and this my friend."

"Does your friend have a name?"

"My friend isn't comfortable giving out a name," said Susan, much to Logan's relief.

"Understood, understood."

Logan took a reluctant, cautious sip of his drink. He giggled when he brought it to his nose, as the bubbles tickled. He liked it. It was a bit harsh on his throat, but it wasn't like this was the very first time he'd ever tasted alcohol, so he expected it. He liked the fruity, tart flavor and took a bigger sip.

"So am I wrong, or do you two look like the kind of people who like to play video games?" Rod said.

Despite his situation, Logan was immediately interested. He sat bolt upright and was way more interested in Rod than he was five seconds ago.

"They have a classic arcade in the back, and I have a pocketful of quarters."

"Lead the way," Logan said.

Two hours later, Susan found herself pulling Logan away from the arcade room with both arms. Logan had been dominating the games, schooling Rod and anyone else who dared play against him. After all, a boy like Logan didn't gain so much weight and become such a social outcast because he was too athletic and outgoing. He had been gaming in his room most of his life.

"C'mon! I need to talk to you!" Susan said as she yanked Logan away.

"What?" Logan asked when they were far enough away. "I was having fun!"

"I didn't come here to watch you play video games all night, okay? I just want to sit and talk."

Logan sighed. "All right, fine." He then leaned in to talk quietly. "You know, I think that Rod thinks, that I'm a woman."

"Really?" Susan responded, falsely.

“Yeah, I’ve been getting a lot of that lately, for some reason.”

“Listen, I know this is gonna sound wild, but hear me out. Maybe you should just go with it. For now.”

“I don’t know.”

“Look, you and Rod are having a great time, right?”

“Sure. He’s really good at Galaga.”

“So, if you told him that you’re a guy, it’s going to break his little heart. If he assumes you’re a woman, just let him assume, that’s all I’m saying.”

“That doesn’t sound like a great idea.”

“It’s the mature thing to do, okay?”

“Really? Okay, I guess it wouldn’t hurt anything.”

“You’re doing it already, anyway, kind of.”

“I already said yes.”

“Great. Oh, here he comes.”

“Had enough, I see,” Rod said as he returned to the table.

“Susan was getting lonely,” Logan said. “You’re lucky, otherwise I’d have kicked your ass.”

“I’d like to see that,” Rod replied with a raised eyebrow. “Now, are you ready to live up to the terms of our bet?”

Logan, in the heat of battle had made a bet he was now regretting. “I should have won that game. You cheated.”

“That’s an attack on my good reputation. Now I expect you to live up to the terms of our bet and tell me your name.”

Logan’s mind was in overdrive, knowing he had to pay up, and knowing that he had to now drop a name that lived up to expectations. He took a long sip of his drink, to stall for time.

“Lorraine,” said Susan. “My friend’s name is Lorraine.”

Logan gave Susan a sharp look of disdain. She just shrugged. “You really needed to tell him, Lorraine,” she said.

Of course, if Logan had suspected that his drink had been spiked with more of Susan’s miracle hypnotic drug, he would have been furious. Instead, he was now becoming susceptible to everything that was being said.

“You sure?” Rod asked. “You took a long time.”

“No, I’m sure. My name is Lorraine,” Logan said. With the drug flowing through his system, he believed it, too. It sounded like a name he would use. Like the name of an older, mature person.

“Tell me about yourself, Lorraine,” Ron said. “You’re single, I presume. No ring.”

“Lorraine’s been married three times, actually,” Susan answered, in Logan’s place. “One kid.”

“What are you doing?” Logan carefully whispered in Susan’s ear.

“Trying to turn him off, genius,” Susan whispered back.

Logan understood and sat back up. “Yes, I’ve been married three times. Fourth time’s the charm, I guess.”

Rod had a knowing smile. “That’s a very mature way of thinking about it.”

“You think so?” Logan replied, flattered by the compliment.

“You can’t give up. There’s always something you’d never expect, waiting for you around the bend.” His eyes seemed to hone right in on the cleavage Logan was showing tonight.

“That’s for sure,” Logan agreed.

“What do you like to do for fun, Lorraine?” Rod asked.

“I like to...” For some reason, the image of Susan’s DVD popped into his head. “I like to do *adult* things...”

“Ah, yes,” Rod replied, “I suppose I like to do *adult* things too.” He was almost sure Logan was flirting with him. “What do you do for a living, Lorraine?”

“Me?” Logan said, thinking about it. “I just spend my day looking after my kid,” he said. “It’s almost time for college, I guess, so once that happens, I guess I’ll be an empty nester. I’ll have a lot of time to fill, all by my lonesome.”

Now Rod was sure he was being flirted with. Truthfully, Logan had no idea what he was doing, just freelancing about his fictional history.

“Surely you have hobbies?”

“Men,” Susan said. “Men are her hobbies. She goes through them like tissue paper.”

Logan assumed she was just trying to scare Rod away again, so he went with it. “I do have a reputation as a bit of a man-eater, I suppose.”

Susan snickered. “Lorraine, you’ve been on the prowl since I’ve known you. If the term ‘cougar’ didn’t exist, they’d have to invent it just for you.”

“You got me there,” Logan said. “That’s me, Lorraine the cougar.” In his head, he started to visualize the character he was describing. A middle-aged woman with serious makeup, great hair, in tight clothes that showed a maturing, sexy figure. She would wear lots of jewelry, have sunglasses in her hair, a latte in one hand, sporting a pair of high heels and always, always flirting with every handsome man she saw. That, in his mind, was who Lorraine the Cougar was.

Right now, Lorraine the Cougar, in the presence of a handsome man, was feeling a little flush – and a little frisky.

“So tell me a little about you, Rod...” Logan said as he rubbed his long-nailed finger around the rim of his glass. “Is that your given name or just what the ladies call you?”

The handsome man blushed and laughed. “It wouldn’t take much to find out for yourself.” Logan noted that Rod’s eyes were still falling right to Logan’s chest. His breaths, that is. They had control over men, and he relished it.

“I don’t know if you can handle me, Rod,” Lorraine said. “I might be too much...” He paused for a beat before he said it, but he went ahead and embraced the moment. It felt like the right thing to say. It felt like the sexy thing to say. “...Woman for you.”

Rod immediately took a big swig of his beer and choked it down. The feeling of power over Rod was intoxicating to Logan. This is what it must feel like to really be an adult — not just people no longer picking on you, but using your maturity like a weapon. Making other people react to you, and what you wanted, was a feeling he had never really had before. He liked it. He had to keep exploring this new power.

Susan, for her part, was overjoyed to watch what was happening, hiding her delighted smile behind her drinking glass. Logan was finally getting over the hump. He had just cast aside his hesitation about appearing female, and was now actively playing it up.

“There’s one way to find out, of course,” Rod replied.

“Actually, I know of at least 24



ways,” Logan replied. He licked his upper lip. “27 if you’re double-jointed.” Watching the man next to him lose his cool was amazing. Just a few words or a little gesture was driving him to distraction. This was adulthood, Logan realized. He was all in on this new sense of strength. It was like the universe had just granted him some kind of new super power. “Too bad I have to get up so early tomorrow. I’d have liked to have seen you try to keep up.”

“Yeah... Too bad...” Rod replied. “Maybe another time?”

Logan reached over and put his hand inside Rod’s jacket. He clumsily bumped around and then retrieved the phone in there. He then added his number to Rod’s contact list, with a selfie for the picture. He then slid it back across the table to him.

“Text me when you’re feeling up for a good workout,” Logan said.

“I can’t believe you did that!” Susan said, genuinely amazed at Logan’s actions. They were headed out to their cars, having left Rod with the bill.

“I admit, I was impressed, too, Susan,” Logan replied, nonchalantly. “But I always knew I had it in me.”

“Honey, you need to check it before you wreck it, understand? Don’t go too fast.”

“I’m a grown adult, Susan.”

“Lorraine, even grown adults make mistakes. I just don’t want to see you get hurt, okay?”

“I’m a big girl! I can take care of myself.” Logan wasn’t acting anymore. This was the person he imagined Lorraine was, and he liked it. Confident, adult, sexy and always in control. This was who he wanted to be. “I’ll see you in a couple of days for my appointment, alright?”

They were headed to their respective cars, deactivating their alarms. “I’ll see you then, Lorraine.” Susan was very satisfied with herself. She was going to save another poor male soul and make them female.

“See you then,” Logan replied. He hadn’t objected at all to using the newly christened female name, and if Susan could see that Logan was applying a new coat of lipstick in the rear view mirror before pulling out, she might have guessed that he would never use his old name again.

IN THE FAMILY WAY

PART 3

“What’s going on?” Elliot said as he was roused from his bed by his brother. “What’s the deal?”

Colin, dressed in his “Mom casual” outfit of a cotton blouse and denim a-line skirt with ballerina flats, was not taking any nonsense from his brother. “We’re going to spend the day playing miniature golf with Douglas and Aiden, and I want you to be relaxed and ready.”

“And that means *what*, exactly?” Elliot asked.

Walking to the bags on the floor that contained “Emily’s” clothing, Colin started to pick out an outfit. “That means I want you comfortable as Emily. So all day today is going to be a mommy-daughter day.”

As Colin put out a dress for Elliot to wear, the younger sibling sighed. “You’re serious.”

“Mommy is very serious, Emily. Now get dressed.”

The polka-dot dress had a wide sash in the middle, and looked about thirty years out of date. “Fine,” Elliot said as he started to strip himself of his bed clothes. He rummaged through the bags and retrieved a bra and panty set.

Colin was taken aback. He was expecting a lot of resistance from Elliot. “Do you need any help?” He asked.

“I think I have enough experience by now.” He glanced at the dress. “I’m not wild about that dress, though.”

“It’s special. You’ll see.” Colin hung around for a moment, anticipating he would be necessary at some point.

“Don’t you have something to do?” Elliot asked as he slipped into a pink cotton bra.

“Oh, uh, sure. I was going to make breakfast. Do you like waffles?”

“Depends. Do you know how to *make* waffles?”

Colin smiled. “I know exactly what setting the toaster uses so they defrost perfectly.”

“Okay,” Elliot said as he changed into a pair of pink panties. “Thank you, Mommy.”

Colin wanted to say something snarky about using ‘mommy,’ but he kept his mouth shut. As long as Elliot was cooperating, he didn’t need to tease and make things difficult.

Back in his room, however, Elliot was having plenty of difficulty. Once he was sure the door was shut, Elliot stood before his closet mirror and got a good look at himself.

What he saw was depressing. He saw a perfectly healthy and happy 14 year old girl.

He had kept telling himself it was a trick of some sort that he could get away with a disguise. That people didn’t examine him too closely. That people were too polite to tell anyone that the 19 year old boy was dressed like a younger girl. This had been the logic he had tried to foster in his mind, even if he knew he was lying to himself.

His face and skin were smooth and even slightly flush. His frame thin. His lips were red. His eyes looked innocent. His hair still retained his ribbon curls. Either the difference between a young adult and a middle-school girl was much more fine than he had ever taken notice of, or it was just they way he was.

There wasn’t any real harm in what he was doing. This wasn’t permanent damage to his life. He could bulk up or shave his head when this was all done. He involuntarily started to graze his hands over the smooth, soft material of his dress. The thin, frilly material of his panties felt strange on his skin, as did the tightness of his nearly flat bra. They were the clothes of a child, yet the fit and feel were natural to him.

A knock came from the door. “Do you need help with your hair?” Called Colin.

In a way, Elliot felt defeated and hopeless to admit that he did. In another way, he liked being fussed over.

He went to open his door. “Yes, please,” he said.

“You look absolutely adorable,” Colin said.

“I know,” Elliot said. He sat down on his bed with his back turned to his brother and let him get started.

“I’m surprised how well your hair has kept itself curled,” Colin said, playing with the ringlets that hung from his brother’s head. “It looks fresh from the salon.”

“It’s embarrassing,” Elliot replied. “I can never go out.”

“Well, you don’t much anyway. I’m sure it’ll wash out in time.”

An hour later, as Colin was throwing the paper plates from breakfast into the trash, he glanced at the time. He had an hour and a half before he and Elliot

needed to show up at the miniature golf park. That was probably more time than he needed to get ready, but he wanted to look perfect. "I'm going to get prepared for the date," Colin announced to Elliot. "You okay? You don't need anything?"

"Need anything? Like what?" Elliot replied, confused.

Colin re-considered what he had just said. He wasn't even sure why he asked. Elliot was more than capable of looking after himself, as he always did. "Whatever," Colin answered back.

He headed over to the TV and flipped it on, turning it to My Little Pony, and turning the volume up. "Just to get you in the right frame of mind," Colin explained.

Elliot grabbed the remote. "Jeez, I'm not a baby." He flipped the channel to *Teen Mom*.

"Of course not," Colin agreed, as he re-examined his handiwork on Elliot's hair. He had given him a headband that matched his dress that pulled the hair back from his face and really showed off his eyes. "I'll be in Mom's room," he said as he walked away.

Colin had been spending more and more time in his mother's old room. He slept in his own room, but his mother's room had the closet space for his new clothes, and a place for him to sit down and do his face and hair. Plus any knick-knacks from his mother's collection of jewelry and accessories were right at his fingertips.

He began by giving himself a thorough shave. Colin wasn't even sure he could feel any hair on his face, but he was constantly fearful of some wild hair sprouting and wanted to make sure. He took a shower, and on whim, he used a little bit of his Mom's old talc to powder himself. He liked it. It made him feel more delicate.

His undies had already been picked out for the day, and he added a slip from his mother's collection. Wanting to look as good as possible, he cinched up his figure shaper as tight as it would go. His dress had a sash to it, and he tried to fasten it as close-fitting as possible. He wasn't satisfied. He felt fat, and maybe he shouldn't have had all those waffles. Colin pledged to make it a small cup of yoghurt for breakfast from now on.

The next half hour he spent on his wig, trying to style it the way he wanted it to look. It was fighting him, and in the end, he would up using a fist full of hairpins to keep everything in order. Then it was time for his face, which turned out to be the easiest part of the whole process.

He remembered back to when he first tried to do himself up as a woman, and how he always had to wash up and start over four or five times before he was satisfied. Now his practiced hand flew over his face, blending his skin perfectly,

drawing his eyes and lips to perfection. He was especially proud of the crisp edge to his lips.

But before the mirror, he wasn't satisfied. "You've looked better, Dorothy," He said to his reflection in Dorothy's voice. He turned over his wrist to check the time. "But it'll have to do. We're going to be late."

He finished up with a pair of black pumps and plastic earrings. "Are you ready to go, sweetie?" He said as he returned to the living room. Colin noted Elliot was still watching *Teen Mom*.

"Yeah," Elliot replied, getting up from the couch. Once he got a glimpse of his brother, though, he rolled his eyes. "You have to be kidding me!"

"You like?" Colin said, swishing around in his dress. It was a virtual copy of Elliot's dress, white with polka dots and cut in a more adult shape. Elliot also noticed that he had on a pair of black mary janes with white socks, and Colin matched them with black pumps.

"This is ridiculous. I'm not going out like this!" Elliot said, crossing his arms in defiance.

"Don't be fussy, Emily. These mommy-daughter outfits are just the kind of crap Doug will eat up! He won't know what to do with himself!"

"We look like idiots!"

"He's a sucker for old-fashioned family stuff. It's perfect. Besides, what do you care? Is anyone ever going to find out it's you?"

"They better not," Elliot replied, grumpy.

As they drove to the mini-golf course, Elliot was trying to get himself right in the head. It didn't help that Colin insisted he sit in the back seat, like a child.

"That's what you are for the day, remember?" Colin had reminded him. "A nice, sweet, young girl."

As angry as he was with Colin sometimes, Elliot had to begrudgingly admit that he admired his older brother. He had been busting his butt to make this work, despite all odds. The truth was, it did seem to be going somewhere, and it wasn't as crazy at it first seemed to think that he might actually pull this con off.

He also felt guilty that his brother was doing all the work, and he was doing was showing up. In dresses, but still, it wasn't like he put a lot of effort into these meetings. Colin hovered over him like a helicopter parent, worrying over him and trying to make him happy. It reminded him of what it used to be like to have a real mother.

Elliot hadn't realized how much he missed his mom, or at least, to have someone who gave a crap about him in his life. It wouldn't be all that horrible if Colin did have to stay like he was for a while, making him meals and helping



him dress. He liked the attention more than he ever realized before — even if he had to pretend to be “Emily” to get it.

“I’m a girl,” he said to himself in a whisper. He needed to be in character, and it was time to put himself in the right frame of mind. “I’m a pretty, happy, cute

little girl.” He repeated it over and over, convincing himself. He wanted this day to be perfect and he wanted “Dorothy” to be happy with him. “I’m a little girl.” He pictured his life, as if he had grown up this way. Instead of living in crappy apartments, he lived in a clean house in the suburbs. He didn’t have a mother who burned out and gave up on him before passing away. He had a doting, attentive mother who loved him more with every day. He didn’t grow up tackling boys in the park, he grew up having tea parties in the house. He didn’t slug baseballs over the fence, he collected wildflowers in a book. He was Emily.

“I’m a pretty, happy little girl,” he told himself, his eyes closed in contemplation. “I’m cute and adorable and I love my mommy,” he said, as a smile crossed his lips. He opened his eyes to see his skirted legs. “I’m just as pretty as mommy, too.”

Putting himself in the mind of Emily was getting easier and easier for him.



Colin held Elliot’s hand as they walked through the parking lot, where Doug and Aiden were waiting for them. Colin gave a friendly little wave of acknowledgment. Quietly, he gave his final instructions to Elliot. “Remember, you’re...”

“I’m Emily Farmer, I’m a fourteen year old girl and I’m so looking forward to playing golf with everyone!” Elliot replied. “Don’t worry, I got this, mommy!”

Colin couldn’t help but smile at his brother.

“You made it!” Doug said, as he stepped forward, his arms welcoming them.

“Of course we did!” Colin stepped up and kissed Doug on the cheek.

Elliot did a double-take. Had his brother just *kissed* this guy?

Realizing that he had just revealed something to his brother, Colin blushed as he avoided eye contact with him. “Don’t you look nice!” He said to Doug.

“You too! The both of you! You’re absolutely bewitching as a mother and daughter!” He turned to Elliot. “It must be a special opportunity to dress up like your mother!”

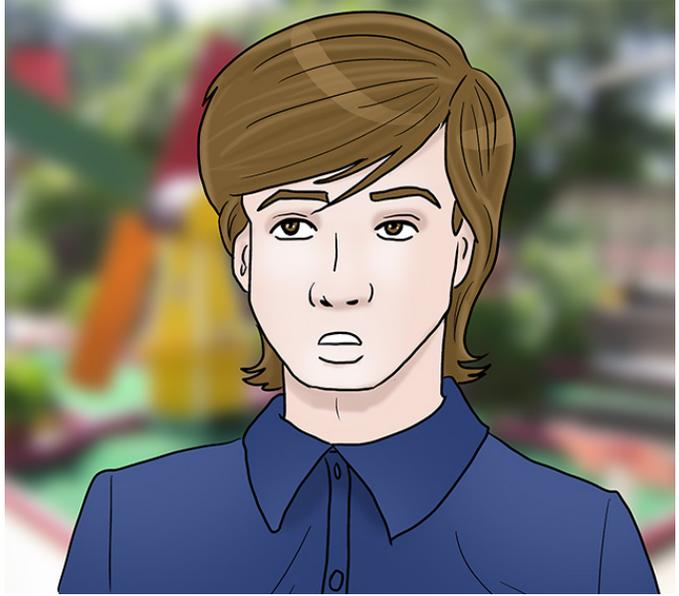
“Oh yes, Mr. Brundell! Mommy and I picked them out together!” Elliot replied in his best sweet-as-syrup voice. “Which one of us is prettier?”

Doug smiled. “I don’t know, but... I’d have to say you do, Emily!”

Elliot let out a high-itched squeal of delight. “Thank you!” Then, he turned to Aiden. He was decked out in a blue dress shirt with black jeans, and his hair was combed neatly. It was a far cry from the gothy look he had sported when they first met. “You look nice in a real shirt, Aiden,” Elliot said.

“Uh... Thanks,” Aiden said, swinging his shoulders back and forth. “You look... Real nice... Emily...”

“I like the jacket,” Colin said to Doug. He was dressed in a clean navy blue blazer over a white dress shirt with the collar open, along with tan pants and brown loafers. He looked like a businessman who was too uptight at



heart to be truly casual. “Very handsome. Isn’t he, sweetie?”

“Yes, mommy!” Elliot replied.

“You too, Aiden.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” The young man replied, his eyes downcast. Was it a sullen response or did Colin detect a bashfulness in his answer?

“Well, let’s go on in,” Doug said, showing the way. “You two lovely ladies first.”

“Thank you,” Colin said, as he winked at his younger bother, as if to say, ‘I told you the matching dresses would work.’

As much as he wanted to kick Colin in the shin, Elliot stayed in character.

“We can go get the clubs, Emily,” Aiden said as he headed off in another direction. Elliot followed him through a door.

“I barely even recognize Aiden!” Colin said to Doug. “He’s dressed so nice! So well behaved!”

Doug shrugged. “I’m not sure I can take full credit for that. I just did what you told me to do.”

“Oh, don’t sell yourself short. You’re his father! I never would have guessed he could clean up so well.”

“That was his idea, actually. It kind of surprised me this morning. He said he wanted to impress you and Emily.” Doug walked over to the admission window and took out his wallet. “You two have made quite the influence on the Brundell men.”

Colin and Doug met up with Aiden and Elliot at the first hole. "I picked this one out for you," Aiden said to Colin, presenting him with a pink-handled putter.

"Thank you. I love it!" Colin replied, being as polite as he could possibly be.

"Score cards and pencils," Doug said, handing out the scorekeeping tools to the other three. "Looks like we picked a good time to come. Not too busy."

It was probably for the best, as the four of them looked somewhat out of place, if not out of time. There were only a scattered few players amongst the several holes ahead of them.

Aiden ran to the first tee and started to line up a shot. "Aiden!" Doug said sharply. "Ladies first."

Colin braced himself for the sharp and likely vulgar response Aiden was about to reply with.

"Oh." Aiden stepped aside without quarrel. "Sorry."

"Thank you, Aiden," Colin said. "Sweetie, are you ready?" She said to Elliot.

Elliot stepped up and took his shot, watching it zoom around the course before coming to rest a few inches from the hole. Next up was Colin, who promptly knocked the ball clear off the course and into the air, landing in a trash basket. It was probably due to the fact that he had on heels and tight foundation garment that made his swing feel like he was about to fall over head-first and spring out of his clothes at the same time. "I'm just no good at golf," Colin said to excuse himself.

"Here, let me show you," Doug said. He stood behind Colin and grasped his wrists, wrapping him in his arms. "You just want to pivot at the waist." He manipulated Colin by his sheer size, doing the putting for him, as his body almost totally engulfed the smaller, younger man in disguise.

As Elliot watched Aiden take his shot, he couldn't help but take note of how much larger Doug was than Colin. He had never noticed such a discrepancy before; he had always considered them about the same size.

"Your turn," Aiden said to Elliot, breaking his train of thought.

Elliot put his ball in the hole and immediately went back to watching his brother. Colin was beaming, smiling as he appeared to snuggle into Doug's body. They were practically spooning in public. Elliot was concerned his brother was getting way too good at leading Doug on.

"What's it like?" Aiden asked Elliot.

"What's *what* like?" Elliot replied.

"Being a girl?"

Elliot almost fell on his club and impaled himself. How was he supposed to answer that question? “I don’t know,” he said. “I mean...” He needed to recover. “I’ve... Always been a girl. I don’t know how it feels.”

Aiden looked at his feet. “Oh. Yeah, I guess that makes sense.”

Another shot from Colin’s putter sprang into the air and ricocheted off a light post. “I’m so clumsy!” Colin said to Doug, adding a pout. “Could you show me how to do that again?”

The remaining eight holes were much the same. It was very clear that Colin was throwing the game. He had even whispered to Emily that he should “let the men win,” which he begrudgingly did.

They then decided to take a short drive to get some ice cream “for the kids,” and all four got into Doug’s luxurious car. Colin was beside himself as he slid into the car’s soft leather seats. It wasn’t just a cheap crap car that had been dressed up, this was a foreign import with mahogany trim, plush carpet, and sleek metal controls. It was worth more than all the cars he’d been in over the course of his lifetime.

As Doug started it up, Colin could picture himself engaging the throttle, pulling out onto the highway and daring a cop to pull him over for speeding. He was going to so enjoy stealing it. This was what was going to make all this worth the trouble.

He was so enraptured, he couldn’t even hear Elliot and Aiden trading stories of the golf game they had just played. If he had been paying attention, he might have noticed the laughter and giggling the two were producing, far out of character for the both of them.

They stopped at a small walk-up ice cream place, with double scoops for Aiden and Elliot, a vanilla cone for Doug and frozen yogurt for Colin.

“That’s gonna drop off unless you’re careful,” Aiden told Elliot. He was being a little careless with his two scoops.

“Not if I eat it first,” Elliot answered, taking a huge lick. “I should have gotten sprinkles.”

As the two ‘grown-ups’ walked behind, Colin felt Doug take his free hand. Because he felt it was the right thing to do, Colin looked up at him and smiled warmly.

But then, looking into Doug’s eyes, it occurred to Colin for the very first time that the relationship was on the brink of becoming physical. He shivered, suddenly realizing he wasn’t prepared for that — at all.



It was a couple of days later when Colin found himself in front of his mother's full-length mirror, at unease in a way the fast-talking, scheming, young man had never felt before. Doubt was a word other people used, a disease that afflicted everyone else, not Colin. He always knew what he wanted and how to get it. He was confident that he could do anything he set his mind to. The world was just untapped opportunities for him to take advantage of, and uncertainty was just time wasted.

"This is taking too long!" Elliot yelled from the couch.

The complaint shook Colin out of his deliberation. "It's going to take as long as it takes!" He shot back. He decided to go back to what he was doing, which was getting ready for his nightly rendezvous with Douglas.

"We haven't even moved in with him yet!" Elliot yelled.

"I'm *working* on it, okay?"

"How much longer do we have to do this?"

"I said, as long as it takes!"

Elliot appeared in the doorway of their mother's room. Colin was half dressed in his foundation garments and was just clipping his stockings to his garter.

"How long has it been since you dressed in your own clothes?" He asked.

Colin had to think. "I went to go get the mail in my sweats yesterday. Besides, you've been lounging around in Emily's P.J.'s since yesterday."

Elliot looked down at the pair of short-legged cotton pajamas with tiny hearts on them. "They're cleaner than my other stuff," he explained.

"Do you want me to do the wash?" Colin asked, sarcastically.

"Yes, please," Elliot replied.

"I was being sarcastic."

Angry that he had been caught being selfish, Elliot lashed out. "Well, you might as well do the laundry! You've practically turned into a woman!"

Colin was adjusting his bra straps. "What's your problem?"

Elliot was getting irate. "If you're gonna be like this all the time, Maybe I should just start calling you 'Mom!'"

"Well, maybe you should!" Colin shot back. "When we're living at Douglas's place, you'll have to do that anyway!"

"Okay, *Mom!*" Elliot growled. "Thank you *Mom!* I got a boo-boo! Can you kiss and make it better, *Mom?*"

"Why don't you shut up?" Elliot yelled.

"What's the matter, *Mom?* Your time of the month, *Mom?*"

"I said shut up!"

“Or what, you’ll wash my mouth out with soap? Spank me? Give me a time out?” Elliot charged out of the room and headed back to the living room.

Colin chased after him, but first stepped into some slippers so he didn’t risk a run in the stockings. “You knew what we were getting into! This is all for us, okay? This’ll be the biggest payday either of us can imagine! We’ll be set for life!”

“Screw the money! It’s not worth it!”

“Of course it’s worth it! Without it, we’ll have nothing! Soon, the rent will be more than we get from the lawyers, and we’ll be out on the street!”

“There’s another way to do this!”

“Of course there is, but this is the one with the biggest reward!”

Elliot wanted to say something, but it was clear he was weary of the fight. He decided to just let it die, and went back to his TV viewing.

Aware the situation was now calming down, Colin took a few deep breaths. “So, I wanted to ask you about Aiden.”

“What, *Mom*?” Elliot said with emphasis.

Colin didn’t want it to start up again and ignored the jibe. “I thought he was really well behaved.”

“I guess. Maybe to you.”

“Meaning?”

“While you guys were flirting, he was creeping me out the whole time. Always asking me about what being a girl was like. Asking me about my dress. Asking me about my hair. How the hell am I supposed to answer stuff like that? Like I’m an authority on the subject.”

“But otherwise?”

“Otherwise he was okay. Better manners n’ stuff.”

“You think you could get along with him for a few days when we’re living under the same roof?”

“I’ll survive.”

“I’m going to finish getting dressed,” Colin said. “I need to be downtown in fifteen minutes.”

“Fine,” Elliot replied with a grit to his voice. “...*Mom*.”

Colin just let that go, too.

Returning to his mother’s bedroom, he took his dress off the hangar and flipped it up over his head. He adjusted it, finding it a little off, to his eyes. When he had tried it on in the store, it had looked much better. Maybe it was the lighting, he figured. It was a very simple dress, with a slight scoop neck and sleeveless, and Colin especially liked the flare of the skirt.

It also had a thin little belt around the waist, and it hung on him loosely. He was pleasantly surprised that he could tighten the belt a full two ticks. Once he did that, the dress was nice and snug on him and looked a hundred percent better. Although it did feel tight in the chest, but he couldn't do much about that. A necklace, bracelets and earrings had already been picked out, and he put them on swiftly. The wig was quickly pinned on and he was practically ready to go.

He stepped into a pair of matching heels, grabbed his purse and gave himself a spray of perfume.

"Do you have enough money to order a pizza?" Colin asked as he stepped back into the living room.

"No," Elliot replied.

Colin walked the several steps it took to get to where his brother was seated. He pulled a twenty from his purse. "I'll be home by eight."

"I'm sorry I yelled," Elliot said, taking the money from Colin as he bent over.

Colin had to stop in his tracks. He turned around. "No big," he said.

Elliot then did something he'd never done in his life. He hugged Colin. "I'm still sorry."

"Don't worry about it," Colin said he stood back up and headed for the door. He wasn't sure what had just happened. His brother was about as touchy-feely as an electrified porcupine. He'd rather jam lighted cigarettes in his eyes than hug.

Maybe he was finally growing up. Maybe he was finally letting go. Colin did have the sense that maybe, just maybe, he was finally over the hump with Elliot. Was it possible that from now on, he wouldn't have



to fight him anymore?



Colin had Doug's arm around his waist as they waited to cross the street. "You're in a good mood," Doug said to him.

"Oh... Emily," Colin said with a giggle. "She's a good... Kid."

"You know, the only thing better than seeing you smile is hearing you laugh." Doug led him across the road as the cars cleared. "Have I ever mentioned how much I love your voice?"

"Oh, Douglas," Colin said, waving off the obvious flattery.

"No! I'm serious." Douglas pulled him a little closer. "It's the sound of the purest air trilling over the sweetest reed."

He wasn't sure what that meant, but it sounded like a sincere compliment. "You're too much," he said to Doug. He was quite proud of how well he could imitate a female voice. "But let's not talk about me. I wanted to talk to you about Aiden."

As they entered their usual spot, the waitress at the front picked up two menus. "The usual table?" She asked.

Doug gave a nod, and they followed her. "What about Aiden?"

"Well, Emily was talking, and I have to agree, that he sounded a little... obsessed with Emily."

"You know, he's been like that for the past two weeks. Always asking questions." Douglas ordered scotch and a ham & egg sandwich.

Colin ordered an ice tea and asked for a bowl of popcorn. "Emily was a little uncomfortable — I could tell."

"He's been asking a lot of questions. Not necessarily about Emily, but about girls in general. Questions about why they're so different."

"He's 14, he should know that by now."

"It's strange isn't it?"

"Very."

"Do you think I should be concerned?"

"I'd keep an eye on it, that's for sure."

"I think that's why he needs a feminine presence in his life. He hasn't spent a lot of time around girls, around women. I'd hate to think he's growing up abnormal."

That was the window he'd been looking for. Colin pounced. "Why Douglas Brundell, are you asking me to move in?"

“What?” Doug said blurted, as he sat up straight in his chair. He had been caught off-guard. “I... Uh... No... I mean... I’m not saying no, but...”

Colin wanted to push it, but he knew that tricking Doug wasn’t going to work. He let him off the hook. “It’s too soon.”

The relief on Doug’s face told Colin he had made the right move. “Yes... A little too soon. I mean... I’ve been hurt before.” Doug put his hands on Colin’s.

“You take all the time you need. I know what it’s like to be burned,” Colin said, thinking of Sloane, amongst others. He was comforted by the warmth in Doug’s understanding hands.

The food and drinks arrived, and they had to let go to make room for the plates. A hungry Doug had already gone through half his sandwich before he spoke again. “I do want to... Take us to the next level...” He said.

Colin’s toes curled inside his pumps. “Our relationship?”

“Don’t call it that. That makes it seem so antiseptic.” Doug finished chewing. “It’s a courtship. A romance.”

Colin smiled. He liked the sound of that, coming from Doug. The old man was falling for him, and Colin was going to get what he wanted, sooner or later. It was only a matter of time.

Doug was getting nervous, fumbling for words. “I don’t know what you expect, but... I was always taught... I mean, my parents were kind of old-fashioned and...”

He had not recognized it at first, but Doug was proposing exactly what Colin had hoped for. Or, more accurately, exactly what he didn’t want: sex. Once he realized where Doug was heading, Colin grabbed a hold of the topic.

“My folks were very traditional, too,” he said. “They believed in saving yourself for marriage.”

“Yes!” Doug said, recognizing the lifeline he had just been thrown. “So... So... Are you...”

Colin didn’t want make it sound entirely like his idea. “I have been married,” Colin said, using his fictional history for Dorothy, “and I was pregnant with Emily at the time.” He wanted to laugh, but he kept it under control. “And it was a big mistake.”

“So... If I said that...”

“I would say I’d be happy to wait.”

“Phew!” Doug said, mimicking a wipe of his forehead. “I... I really didn’t know how to bring that up.”

“I’m so glad you did. I think we have something special, Doug, and I don’t want to rush it.”

“I’m glad you’re a traditional girl, Dorothy.”

“As traditional as they come,” Colin said with a smirk he just couldn’t hide. He had just leapt over the tallest hurdle in his way to a grand payday.

“You know, back in the day, I think they’d say we’re going steady.”

“Does that make me your girlfriend?” Colin asked.

“I suppose it’s official.”

Colin giggled. “I feel like there should be a ring involved or something.”

“Not until we’re engaged,” Doug replied. “I mean... If. *If* we get engaged... That is...”

“Shush before you get yourself into more trouble,” Colin said with a smile. *Freudian slip*, he thought to himself. He really did have the big lug wrapped around his finger. He looked at his index finger imagining Doug wrapped around it like a curly fry.

“Your hands are one of the things I like most about you,” Doug said, noticing Colin’s attention.

“Pardon?”

“You have such smooth, feminine hands.” He said. “A little medical trivia...” he added. “Men’s index fingers are shorter than their ring fingers.” Doug said, holding up his hand. “Women, though, have longer index fingers than their ring finger. Like you do.”

Startled, Colin closed his right hand. He knew his ring finger was shorter than his index finger, because he was already aware of that little bit of trivia, and used it to win bar bets from time to time. He immediately tried to pull his hand away and hide it, so Doug wouldn’t see that. He didn’t want to risk suspicion. Not now, not when he had just reeled the man in.

“See?” Doug said, taking Colin’s hand before he could yank it away. He placed his hand against Colin’s for comparison. “Your index finger is longer.”

Sure enough, when he looked, it was true. His index finger was longer. Unlike it had been every day of his life up until now.

Just like a woman’s.

AGENT OF CHANGE

CONCLUSION

Bert Thurman woke up late, having stayed up all night to watch the Disney Channel marathon, and yawned as he stumbled his way to the bathroom. He took care of his morning bladder demands, and scratched his armpit. It was hairless.

He then bent down to scratch his leg, which was also hairless.

None of the stars on the show he watched had armpit hair or leg hair, so a couple of days ago, he had decided to get rid of his, as well. Yes, it was something girls did, but he couldn't help but feel like it was gross and dirty to have so much body hair. So he had shaved off everything from his eyebrows down. He had kept it shaven, too. The slightest hint of stubble made him shudder in disgust. Just like his heroes on TV, he wanted to be smooth and clean. If he had to do his beard twice a day, so be it.

He slipped out of the t-shirt and shorts he wore to bed and into the shower. A quick scrub with the lilac-scented body wash that Nessa, the star of MTV's "Prank the House" had endorsed, made him feel fresh. He dried himself off, and used some Clearasil, endorsed by Petra, the star of Disney's "Kiley & June" to deal with that troublesome acne teenagers always complained about in ads. Even if he hadn't had a zit since the Regan administration.

He then returned to his room where he picked out a white ribbed tank top, over which he loosely put on one of his usual flannel shirts and a pair of skinny jeans. He put his feet into the wool-lined tan Ugg boots that he had just ordered from Amazon on Monday.

At 40, Bert was decades too old to be dressing like this, and being a 5' 9" 175 lb. man, too big. But in his mind that didn't matter much. He had already lost about seven pounds, and was down to 168 by eating healthy just like the girls on TV did.

That was Bert's new world, now. Just as he could have told you the name, age and birthplace of every slick-haired reporter on Fox News a few days ago, Bert could now tell you the age, favorite color, zodiac sign and current boyfriend of every teenage girl on his favorite shows.

MTV and Disney took up almost all of his time. He was infatuated with the girls on the shows, and was a sponge for information about them. His poor cell phone was practically glued to his hands, as he searched for more information, joined forums, followed stars' Twitter feeds and texted with fellow fans.

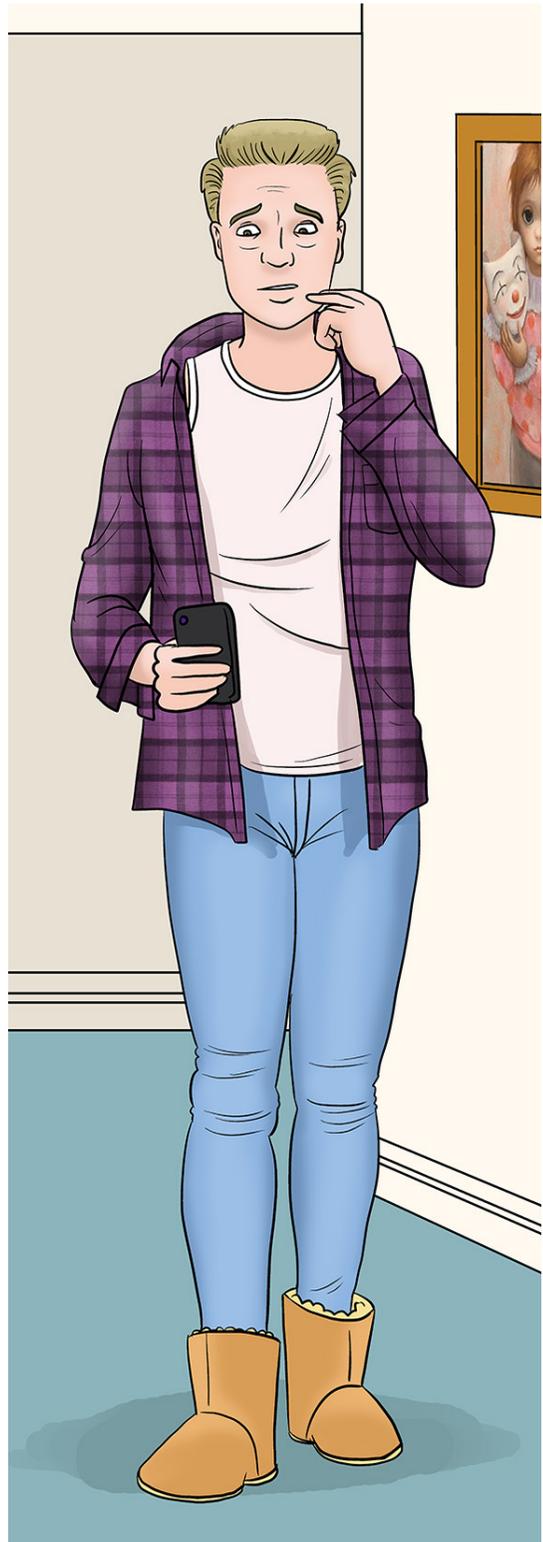
Curiously, though, he didn't like any of it. He wanted to kick off these damn booties, put on his steel-toe work boots, button up his shirt, go back to his trusty Irish Spring soap and let his chest hair grow wild and free — and he desperately missed Fox & Friends.

There was nothing he could do to stop it, though. He felt compelled, beyond what his conscious mind could control, to do the things he was doing.

“Bert, we're going to be late to see Dr. Hackstaff!” his son called through the door.

“I'm coming, okay?” Bert called back. He headed out to meet his son, or at least what used to be his son. He was unable to really focus on that issue, because his life was so packed with his TV shows. Even now, as he followed Logan out to the car, he was holding his phone in his hands, watching an episode of “Zoe & Mandy.”

He did, at some level, recognize that Logan was no longer someone who “resembled” a woman, but was now for all intents and purposes, living as one. Today, his son was wearing a pair of brown leather thigh-high boots over a pair of black leggings, a leopard-print stretch top with a deep-dive v-neck showing off darkly tanned cleavage, a thin black belt pinching in his waist, and a white shawl around his



shoulders. A pair of sunglasses were perched atop his long straight blond hair, and he wore a dozen bracelets, multiple rings, large dangly earrings and a glittering gold necklace.

With his hourglass shape and oversized breasts, there was little mistaking Logan for anything else but what he looked like: a middle-aged woman, a cougar on the prowl.

He had been like this for a few days now, and Mr. Thurman would have made some kind of objection, but he had a lot of TV to watch.

It was Logan who had driven them to the clinic, with Mr. Thurman in the back seat, tapping away at his phone, oblivious to the world.

“Lorraine!” Susan said when they met in the exam room. “It’s so good to see you.”

“Susan!” Logan replied as they hugged and air-kissed each other. He put his purse down and took one last sip of the latte he had bought on the way over. “Now, I had a couple of questions...” He glanced over at his father, who was dialed in on his phone screen. “Bert? Bert, honey?”

“What?” Bert answered, annoyed with being interrupted.

“I’m going to step outside for a moment with the doctor,” Logan said. “Will you be fine by yourself, sweetie?”

“Yes,” was Mr. Thurman’s reply, as if it were the most obvious answer ever given by anyone in the history of mankind.

“Would you mind?” Logan asked Susan, as he opened the door.

“Not at all,” Dr. Hackstaff said, leading the way.

“I... I really have two questions, Susan,” Logan confessed. “One... Do I look... A little old to you?”

“Old?” Susan replied in surprise. “But, that’s what...”

“I know, I know, and I’m so grateful for everything you’ve done to help me become the person I am today. However, I do think one can be mature without looking... Old. And, sister, I look old.” He motioned to the little things on his face that Susan had blessed him with. “Crow’s feet, smile lines, frown lines... I just think that I can be a fully grown adult, as I am, but without all the mileage.”

“Well, I can certainly do something about that, yes,” Susan replied. “A basic facelift, that kind of thing.”

“Is that expensive?”

“Oh, no, not at all. And it can be done quickly with fast recovery.”

“Then maybe we should talk about that,” Logan suggested.

“Okay. What was the other question you had?”

“Well,” Logan took a deep breath. “I was just thinking to myself the other day that... Well life would be a lot simpler if... I know this is kind of a crazy, out of left-field kind of question, but... I really do want to be the sexiest adult I can be and... What are the pros and cons of gender reassignment surgery?”



Dr. Hackstaff returned to the exam room with a bounce in her step. “Bert? It looks like Lorraine will be staying with us for a little *extended* procedure. It’ll take a few hours, but you’re welcome to hang out if you like.”

“Ugh!” Bert replied. “Seriously? I *literally* can’t even.” Endless hours of watching the teen comedies and reality shows were bound to affect his speech, eventually. “What lame thing is he gonna do this time? Forget it. Like I care.”

“Bertie,” Susan said, “Lorraine needs support right now. She’s making a lot of brave decisions about her life, and I think you should support her.”

“Puh-leeze!” Bert responded.

It was all Susan could do to restrain her laughter, hearing teenage speech patters coming out of a forty year old man’s mouth. She was masking her failing attempt to keep a straight face with a clipboard.

“I’m being serious. I don’t want you harassing her as she makes this important transition.”

“Harass? She’s... He *is* my son, and I am still his father! If I want to give him shit, that’s my deal, okay?”

Susan shrugged. She had tried, at least. “Have you had your Hungarian Flu shot?”

“I don’t know. What’s the Hungarian...”

“Vaccine time!” She whipped out a syringe and stuck it in his shoulder.

Bert scrunched up his face. “Like, ow. Warning much?”

It was another dose of Dr. Hackstaff’s mind-altering hypnotic drug, and she needed it to make sure Bert was going to lay off Logan. Plus, she had some further plans for him.

“Sorry, but we must all be vigilant about keeping people inoculated.”

“Whatevrrrr...” Bert replied. Then he continued. “Rrrrrrr...”

Susan recognized the signs of her drug kicking in and snapped her fingers in Bert’s face to stop him.

“Rrrrrrr... Whut?” Bert replied.

“You were saying that you were thinking about quitting your job?” Susan said.

“Oh... Quit my job?” Bert needed his job, but he had been uncomfortable there lately. “Uh, yeah. They’re all jerks anyway. They just make fun of me n’ stuff. They’re weird.”

“Well, I’m sure that’s the right thing to do,” Susan agreed. “Tell me Bertie, since Lorraine is so much older than you, why do you act like you have some kind of authority over him?”

“Older? He’s, like, half my age.”

“Lorraine is older than you, Bertie. Haven’t you noticed?”

“Well, okay, I guess he does look old, but... That doesn’t mean...”

“Lorraine is older than you. Much older, and you know that.”

Bert had to think about it, but the drug convinced him. “Yeah, okay. He is older than me.”

“And you should treat people who are older than you with respect.”

“I guess.”

Recognizing that this was teen speak for “yes,” Susan moved on to the next topic. “And you were also telling me that you felt like you looked old and fat.”

That was true. In all the shows he was watching, his favorite characters were smaller and thinner and much, much younger. Of course they were teenage girls, who he was now using as role models, but that didn’t really seem to compute with Bert. “Sometimes.”

“Well, since you did ask me earlier, I do have some time to do a quick procedure on you to try and turn back the clock.”

“I asked you earlier to have an operation?”

“You have been going on and on about it, Bertie.”

“I have? I don’t... Are you sure I asked you?”

“Bertie, I already reserved the spot. Don’t back out on me now.”

“Well... Okay?”

“Great. Get undressed and we’ll get started!”

“Um... Sure?”

“Oh, while you’re doing that, have been to Second Looks Salon and met Hildy?”

“What and who?”

“You should see Hildy. She’s great at giving you the look you want. She’s amazing. Should I book you an appointment?”

“I don’t know.”

“You really want to see Hildy.”

“Maybe I should see Hildy,” the drugged man agreed. “Could you book me an appointment?”



It had been over a month since their visit to Dr. Hackstaff's clinic, and a new dynamic had emerged in the Thurman household.

“Sweetums,” Lorraine said as she rapped on Bert's door. It used to be Logan's room, but Lorraine had asserted her need to use the master bedroom, especially with her growing wardrobe and need for a larger bed. Bert had moved into the smaller bedroom a few weeks ago at Lorraine's insistence. “Honey, are you up?”

“Yeah, leave me alone, okay?” Bert replied, indignantly.

“All right, just wanted to see if you were up. I'm making eggs if you come down in the next few minutes.”

“I'm on a diet!” Bert yelled back. There was no reply.

Lorraine was already used to Bert's teen attitude, and there was no reason to endure more, this early in the morning. She had a long day ahead of her, as she had to begin work in an hour.

Bills needed to be paid, and ever since Bert had left his job, it was up to the mature adult Lorraine to pick up the slack. She had gotten a job showing real estate for a local realtor, Blue Blazer. She was enjoying being busy and making her own hours, even though she did spend most of the day in her car – and it *was* her car. She had traded in Bert's ridiculous oversized Impala for a nice little Prius.

Her independence was very important to her. Because just about every night, she was seated at a bar somewhere, turning heads and flirting.

“More juice, Rod?” She asked today's overnight guest, seated at the breakfast table. Rod was one of her favorites, always good for a wild night in the sack. There was a mutual appreciation for each other, but it was a no-strings-attached relationship.

“I've got to get going, beautiful,” Rod said, putting on his coat. “It's always wonderful, Lorraine.”

Lorraine kissed him on the cheek. “Keep in touch, Hot Stuff.”

“Always for my best girl,” he said with a wink as he left.

Lorraine sighed contentedly. Rod was a nice guy, but lately her tastes had been trending a little... Younger.

It wasn't every night that a new man would be in Lorraine's bed, but it was *most* nights. Ever since Dr. Hackstaff had given Lorraine the sexual

reassignment surgery, she had been told to keep her new vagina “dilated” with some funny plastic device the doctor had given her. She had figured keeping the walls of her vagina apart would be a lot easier if she just kept fucking, and so far, her theory was working out for her.

Now alone, Lorraine took off her apron and hung it on the back of the pantry door. Dishes were Bert’s chore this week, even if she did have to scold her father into doing it most of the time.

She headed back to the master bedroom where she would have to pull the stained sheets off the bed and stick them in the laundry. After that, she’d check her makeup, step out of her slippers and into her black leather boots, put on her company’s blue blazer, with the name tag that read “Lorraine Thurman,” then head out.

Up in his room, Bert was finally getting out of bed. He reached and stretched as he sat up. The loose T-shirt and pink shorts he wore to bed were wrinkled, and he straightened them out. He undid the sleeping braid in his long blond hair and let it fall to his shoulders.

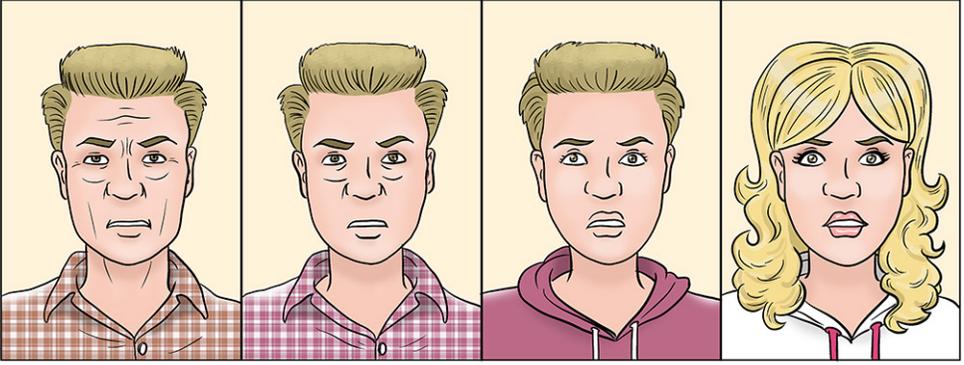
Hildy at Second Looks had done her magic on Bert, and given him a lustrous, full head of hair that any Disney starlet would have been proud of. It was straight but thick, and shimmered in the light. The first time he had seen it, he was horrified, but very quickly, he adjusted to it. Soon he was caring for it with all the hair care products he could find.

Bert walked out of his room to go to the bathroom, and for the first time that morning, got a good look at himself. Dr. Hackstaff’s sublime talents were on display, as the forty year old man now had the face of a seventeen year old girl. His face was smooth and perfect, thanks to the surgeon’s knife, intense skin peels and a regular course of hormones.

It wasn’t the most beautiful face, but it was quite cute, and undeniably young. Bert’s lips were flush and pouty, his nose tiny, his cheeks apple-shaped and his eyes were bright and open. His jaw had been re-contoured in a fetching heart-shape, his forehead shaved down to look smaller, his hairline restored and lowered, brows lifted, eye bags minimized, eyelids opened up, and of course, that pesky Adam’s apple was shaved away.

The doctor’s skill was almost unnatural. Any older woman would have paid a blood fortune to look as young as she had made Bert appear. It almost seemed a shame that Bert himself was practically oblivious to the change.

The only change Bert was interested in was his weight, and he stepped on the scale to see where he was today. He was disappointed to see that he had only lost half a pound since yesterday. He was used to losing much more. He was now down to 138, and appeared to be just a sliver of the man he used to be. A generous round of liposuction had helped considerably, but now his muscles were being drained of their potency and his physique had lost all definition.



Seeing the new, slender, featureless body in the mirror every day actually made him happy. He was resembling, more and more, the young girls that had become his idols. He didn't really understand that this was what he wanted, Bert only knew that the girls on TV were the standards he lived by now. He unconsciously measured himself to their appearance.

He leaned into the mirror and took a closer look at himself. Making sure the bathroom door was locked, he pulled out the secret make-up kit he had stashed away in there. He would have died of embarrassment if anyone knew that he, Bertie, was using make-up. But he just felt sickly without a little color. A little eye liner made his eyes look bigger and stand out, and a tinted bit of lip gloss added just what he wanted to his lips. He quickly put the kit away and put it in the very back of the drawer, a little mortified, but definitely looking more like he liked to look.

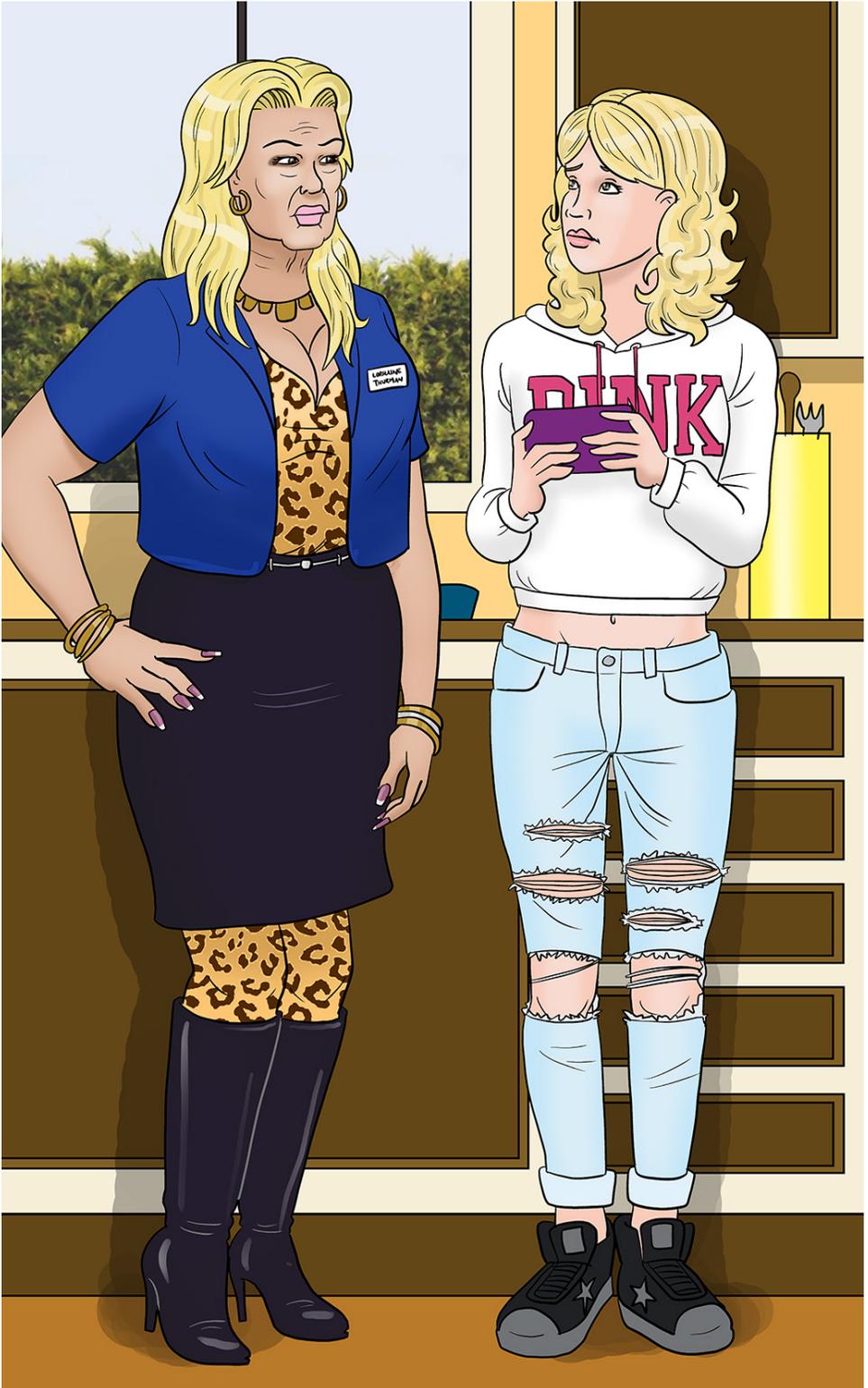
It was time to get dressed, and Bert threw at least eight different items on his bed, trying to decide what to wear. After trying of three different combinations, he settled on a pair of tight jeans with the knees torn and cuffed just above the ankle. He put on a white hoodie over that. Bert made sure his hair fell out over his shoulders just the way it should.

He dropped he feet into a pair of overstuffed black hi-tops and was ready for the day. So he then jumped back onto his bed and grabbed his phone, to watch his shows and chat.

"You're not staying in your room all day!" Lorraine called from outside Bert's door, as if she already knew.

"Who died and made her Queen?" Bertie mumbled to himself. He got off the bed and grunted.

Showing his face downstairs, Bert slumped against a kitchen counter and started tapping on his phone again. "Is your *lover* gone?" He asked derisively. In sneakers, he was shorter than his feminized son, who was in tall heels, but didn't think it odd that he had to look up into Lorraine's eyes.



“I’m going to be home by six,” Lorraine replied, ignoring the question. “I want to see the dishes clean and everything put away, okay?”

“Yeah, right,” Bert replied, without a hint of sincerity. “You’re not my mother.”

“I expect you to pull your weight in the household. We all need to do our fair share.”

“Uh, like, why do think you get to tell me what to do?” Even if he had been drugged and hypnotized into deferring to Logan, Bert’s new instinct to be a contrarian, smart-ass teen caused him to ignore his previous instructions.

“While you’re living under my roof...”

“Um, like, it’s my roof,” Bert interrupted. “This is my house n’ stuff.”

“As long as you live here, I make the rules.”

“I make the rules! Like, I’m *literally* your dad!”

Lorraine was getting perturbed. “Don’t talk back to me!”

“You’re losing your mind!” Bert shot back. “Ever since you started getting all those surgeries and...” Something clicked in Bert’s mind. He felt stupid for not seeing it before. “And... You started seeing Dr. Hackstaff...”

It was so plain to him, so shocking, that Bert had to stop talking. His mind felt like it wanted to run away and hide, it was so embarrassed. Had something been deliberately blocking him from seeing the truth? He couldn’t be this stupid naturally, could he?

“You started seeing Dr. Hackstaff and...” Bert was talking his thoughts out loud, just to make sure it was logical. “Then you suddenly started going on and on about becoming an adult... And then a woman...”

“As long as you’re talking to yourself,” Lorraine said, “try and remind yourself to do the dishes, okay?”

“It’s the clinic. It was the clinic that’s changing you.” Bert knew he had to do something. He had to find out why the doctor had done this to his son, and stop her before she started to change him, too.

“I’ll see you tonight,” Lorraine said, slinging her purse over her shoulder. “There’s some leftover pasta in the fridge from last night, if you want it.” She headed out the door, without a further comment.



Dr. Hackstaff’s office was already quite busy, even early in the morning. While it wasn’t the primary purpose of the clinic, several folks and even more families from the local area found it to be a very convenient location to take care of their health needs. The service was also well-reviewed online.

So much to Susan's surprise, and very much to the delight of her wallet, the place was booming. She hadn't been a "regular" doctor since she did her residency, and found it to be unexpectedly rewarding. She had hired on a second doctor and four nurses. She even had two people handling the insurance.

That didn't mean she had gone totally legitimate, though. She still had her special projects to keep her entertained.

"Stevie?" She called to the receptionist. "Could you bring me the files on the afternoon patients?"

"Yes, doctor," Stevie replied.

As the receptionist left the desk, that was the break Bert had been waiting for. Positioned outside the clinic behind some bushes, using his phone as binoculars, he had been looking for an opportunity to get inside. He slipped in the front door unseen.

There were no waiting patients, so the front lobby was empty. Bert didn't know a whole lot about the way doctors' offices worked, but he did know that everyone had a big color-coded file in a huge rack somewhere in the office. What he wanted to do was get his son's record and see what they had been doing to him. Then, maybe take it with him and show it to a lawyer, and see what he could use it for.

He could smell a massive lawsuit coming his way and maybe he could even help Logan in the process.

Bert jumped behind the desk, and saw the big rack of files he was looking for. Unfortunately, they were not alphabetical, and the color coding was nonsensical. He had to go through it one-by-one.

"Here you are doctor," said the bosomy redhead who sashayed into Dr. Hackstaff's office. "These are your afternoon appointments." He dropped a short stack of files on Susan's desk. "Anything else?"

"No, Stevie. Thank you."

"Yes, Ma'am," Stevie said with a smile. Walking away, Dr. Hackstaff watched Stevie's ample butt sway back and forth in the tight white skirt. She was quite fond of how Stevie had turned out.

Back up front, Bert was quickly running through the files, using the technique of pulling each one out, checking the name and then tossing it behind him, scattering everything on the floor.

He heard a door close somewhere and Bert knew his time was up.

"Doctor!" said a panicked Stevie on the intercom. "Come quick! Someone's been in the office!"

"What's wrong?" Susan answered back.

“Please come here!” Stevie replied. “The files are all over the floor!”

Susan came running down the hallway, and found poor Stevie in tears, standing in the middle of a pile of scattered forms and manilla folders. “What in...?”

“What happened?”

“I just left for a s-s-second, and this ha-ha-happened!” Stevie said, sobbing with her mascara running.

“Did you see anyone?”

“N-n-nooooo!” Stevie wailed.

At the back door of the clinic, Bert slipped in, who had just gotten out the front before being seen. Knowing that the doctor was now up front and out of her office, he quietly made his way in.

He hadn’t found anything about Logan in the regular files, and that figured as what she was doing to Logan had to be something Dr. Hackstaff would want to keep private.

Sure enough, there was a short stack of files located in her desk drawer, and the fifth one down, after someone named “Steve” was “Logan Thurman.”

No sooner had he picked it up then he heard the door click behind him. He ran to it and found it locked from the outside.

Who gets a lock that locks from the outside? Bert thought to himself. Well, apparently Dr. Hackstaff had.

“Hello, Bert,” the intercom said. “At least, I assume it’s you, Bert. You’re the only one who’s stubborn enough to still be resisting.”

Bert looked around, for a window escape. There was only one, and it had a grate over the glass.

“I don’t want you in my office all day, so we’re going to have to work this out,” Susan’s voice said through the tinny speaker. “We can handle this two ways, I suppose. We can call the police and see what they’ll do, which would probably create mess neither of us would want, or we can come to an understanding.”

“I don’t bargain with criminals!” Bert yelled at the ceiling.

“You’ll have to shout your righteous indignation into the speaker, Bert,” Susan said.

“Fuck you!” He said. “You mutilated my son!”

“You know, for a person who’s infatuated with those teen comedies you watch, you sure haven’t learned much from them.”

“What?” That got Bert’s attention. It hit him hard. “What do you mean?”

“Those shows are always full of happy people doing nice things,” Susan said. “Not breaking into people’s place of business.”

“That’s not true!” Bert insisted. He had taken this as a personal affront, an insult. “I’m happy!”

“I can hardly tell behind that frown of yours. It’s not cute at all.”

“I do not! I... I... I’m cute! I really am!”

“You’d have to prove it.”

“I’m cute,” Bert said to himself. All his role models were cute. Why would Dr. Hackstaff say he wasn’t cute? He brought up his phone to his eyes. Maybe he needed to pay closer attention to his shows. He resumed watching, intent on finding the answers.

As he did, he turned away and locked his attention on the screen. Unnoticed, the office lock was undone and the doctor quietly entered with a pair of syringes to subdue Bert.

She had hoped to use these more judiciously. They were the last of the batch. Her contacts hadn’t responded to emails in a long time and she wasn’t sure she could get more. Susan had to make this a good one.

Bert threw his arm out and smacked Susan square in the head. Even if he had become engrossed in the phone, he wasn’t dead to the world. He could easily see her approach, and waited until she was close enough.

Susan, thrown on her back, kicked Bert in the stomach, which sent him back against a bookshelf. The doctor then launched herself at Bert in a flying tackle, which was a blatant violation of the hippocratic oath.

Landing on top of him, only then was Bert aware of just how weak he had become, and he couldn’t get out from under the larger woman.

“You’re going to regret that, Bert,” Susan growled. As Bert continued to try and squirm away, Susan spied on of her syringes laying about a foot away. She couldn’t afford to let one of her hands go, because it would give Bert leverage. So, she had to flatten herself to keep the pressure on Bert. She quickly swiped the syringe and just before Bert was able to get his hand free, the needle pierced his shoulder.

“Ow!” Bert yelped, grabbing his shoulder. “What was that? Did you poison me?”

“Maybe it should be poison, you stubborn old asshole!” Susan yelled, angrily. “You are really ticking me off, Bert! This is gonna cost you in ways you can’t even imagine!”

“You’re the one who’s gonna be in trouble!” Bert countered. “I’ll tell the cops what you’re doing!”

As soon as she saw Bert’s eyes lose their focus, she knew the drug was having an effect on him, and she was in control. “Okay, Bert, you won’t fight back and you won’t escape. Is that clear?”

“I won’t... fight back?” Bert replied, confused as to why he agreed to it. The drug had kicked in.

Slowly, panting for breath, Susan let go and got to her knees. Bert didn’t try to escape, just as he had promised.

“Doctor?” A nervous Stevie said from the doorway. “Do I need to call someone?”

“Stevie! Shut the door and lock it!” Susan commanded. “I’ll call you when I need you! Now get out!”

“Y... Yes, doctor,” the pretty girl said, closing the door.

As soon as it shut, Susan turned her focus back to Bert. “All right, genius. You just made the biggest mistake of your life. I was gonna make you a happy little teenybopper. Going back to school, going out for cheerleading, dating boys and being respectful to your mother, Lorraine. You could have led a sweet life, being Lorraine’s teenage daughter, but no, you had to fight it. So I’ve decided you’re going to have a new fate, sweet cheeks. Too bad Lorraine is going to be an old widow, now.”

Bert was still angry, even if he was defeated and under mind control. “You asshole...”

“Shut up!” Susan yelled. She took a deep breath, ready to unleash her vengeance on this putrid excuse for a human. This *man*. “Okay, you think you’re so smart? You’re just a brainless bimbo now. You can’t use words with more than three syllables. You’re just a dumb slut who needs a man to validate their existence. From now on, you’re completely dependent on men. Rich, handsome men with no soul who want to possess you like a trophy.”

Bert’s eyes widened as he soaked it all in. You could practically see the new information seep into his mind, re-writing his consciousness.

Susan looked around for that second syringe and wasn’t seeing it. She figured Bert was lying on top of it or something.

“Your name is now Britnie. Your only ambition in life is to be a trophy wife for a rich man. A strong man who’s impulses make him dangerous but still excite you. You’re obsessed with your looks, spending your life in spas, working out, shopping and doing anything and everything to maintain yourself to keep your man happy! That’s all you are now! Just a pretty little plaything!”

Susan was already planning her next round of operations for Bert. Big tits, a sculpted ass, a tight cunt, plumped lips... She would make him into a high-class man’s wet dream, to make sure she attracted the worst, most shallow companionship possible. Britnie would be a magnet for men who would treat her badly.

“From now on, you’re going to be the most vapid, self-involved and superficial person you can be, Britnie! You understand me? Britnie? Tell me your name, Britnie!”

“I’m Britnie...” Bert said, faintly. “I’m Britnie...”

“And what do you want, Britnie?”

“I want... To be a dumb bimbo...”

“Yes... Yes!” Susan said, gleefully. “And what does a dumb slut like you need more than anything?” She backed away and fell into a plush chair, exhausted.

“A man,” Bert said. “A man who validates me.”

Susan felt a sharp bite where she had sat. She immediately knew what it was and leapt out of the chair in fright. A syringe was sticking out of her butt.



“A rich man who will buy me things...” Bert continued.

“No! No!” Susan said, trying to stop Bert from talking. The doctor knew she was now under the influence of her own drug. But she couldn’t do much of anything. She felt sluggish and slow. Something compelled to to stop what she was doing, what she was thinking, and listen to what she was being told — it felt like it was the most important thing in the world right now.

“A handsome man with no soul who wants to possess me like a trophy...” Bert said.

“No.. Please...” Susan’s voice was dropping off, losing it’s strength. “Stop...”

“A strong man who’s impulses make him dangerous but still excite me...”

Susan plucked out the syringe, but she knew it was too late. She just stared off into the air, resigning herself to her fate.

“Let me tell you all about my ideal man...” Bert spoke.



Lorraine got out of her car and smashed out the cigarette she was smoking into the pavement with her boot. A teenager she had picked up at a bar six months ago had turned her on to smoking, and since it was so mature and sexy to smoke, she just had to do it. Now she was addicted, and her voice was starting to get a little huskier, which she also liked.

It was time for her meeting, so she gave herself one last look in the rear view mirror. Her new facelift had finally healed up, and although it wasn’t the most natural looking face in the world, was a little too tan, and was frozen with botox, Lorraine preferred it to her previous look. After all, as a top agent for Blue Blazer, her picture was on every bus bench and supermarket cart in the county, and she wanted to look good.

In her opinion, Dr. Hackstaff’s facelift had taken years off her appearance, and she thought it looked like she was in her thirties again, even if her driver’s license read 44. She grabbed her latté and her purse, and approached the house she was parked in front of.

“Ah!” Quentin Stillman said, seeing his guest arrive. “Lorraine, isn’t it?”

“Yes, sir,” Lorraine replied. They were inside the vacant 101 Candlewick Court, one of six houses that made up the small but exclusive subdivision inside Emerald Estates. “Are your Mr. Stillman?”

“Yes, indeed. Thank you so much for being on time, Ms. Thurman.”

“Oh, Lordy. 95% of my job is showing up on time.”

“Yes, I suppose that’s true,” Quentin said with a smile. He immediately liked the older, full-figured woman he had just met. She had a friendly demeanor.

Lorraine eased into a standing position, which for her, meant a hip was thrust out to the side as she held her latté up to sip.

Lorraine was being cautious about this. Quentin Stillman was an odd fellow, in a suit and glasses, looking just the slightest bit devious. Lorraine had met worse clients, though. The middle-aged voluptuous woman was in one of her standard outfits, over-the-knee boots, leopard print leggings and black wide-neck top.

“Are you single, Ms. Thurman?” Stillman asked.

“Married, three times,” Lorraine said. “But currently single.” As far as she was concerned, this was absolutely true. She only cared about being Lorraine, now.

“Any kids?”

“No, I never had any kids.”

“Live alone?”

“In fact, I just sold my house and moved into an apartment. It made more sense for me and



my house just felt so empty, living alone.”

“Yes, I see. Well, I ask because there’s a certain level of security we need to maintain. What we talk about here can’t be repeated.” He pointed to a spot on the floor. “Would you come over here, please?”

Lorraine looked at Quentin with a puzzled expression.

“Nothing to be afraid of,” he said. He kept pointing to the same spot.

Timidly, but trying to look confident, Lorraine walked to where Stillman was pointing.

“Excellent.” Quentin looked up into the ceiling, where a skylight was illuminating that patch of the floor. The glass was made in what appeared to be some kind of ancient design. As they both looked up, the clear glass sparkled in the mid-day sun.

“What an odd design,” Lorraine said.

Quentin turned to Lorraine. “I’m prepared to offer you the exclusive on selling these houses, Ms. Thurman.”

“Oh!” Lorraine said, surprised. “Just like that?”

“Just like that.”

Lorraine looked at the skylight again, which was definitely strange-looking. The Aztec or Mayan design was definitely out of place for the rest of the home. “What did that skylight tell you?”

“That is a proprietary secret of my company, Ms. Thurman. All we ask is that when you show off a home, and you will find the same skylight in every Candlewick Court home, make sure that the potential buyer is in the light of the skylight. If it should be amber in color, you are to offer the house at list price. If it shows green, you are to offer it a special, confidential, price.”

“And if it stays clear?”

“It will not stay clear.”

Lorraine looked up, suspiciously, and then back at Stillman. “And who controls the light?”

“Not a ‘who,’ Ms. Thurman, more like a ‘what.’ Think of it as a force of nature.”

“I’m not sure that would stand up in court, if someone were to charge me with discrimination.”

“If you should have any trouble, we would back you up with the full force of Magnum Properties and our very able legal team.”

“That’s a tricky point, ins’t it?” Lorraine said with a smile. She had only been selling houses for a year, now, but she had earned her license and knew the ropes. “There are many Federal statues regarding discrimination.”

“Yes, that’s what makes this situation that calls for a delicate, subtle touch. And that’s why we came to you, Ms. Thurman. You have a unique talent for this kind of work.”

“I do?”

“You indeed do.” Stillman wasn’t about to tell her that it was her odyssey from 16 year old boy to 43 year old woman that was the most important part of her qualifications. That trait would ensure that the skylight, which would highlight people fated to undergo a change in gender, would not misfire for her. She had already undergone her transition. Therefore, it would be as accurate as possible when identifying a buyer, which was essential to the project. “What do you say?”

“I say...” Lorraine smiled. “Let’s talk about it over dinner. Your treat.” This Quentin Stillman wasn’t her usual type, but he looked rich and single.

“Do you like Thai?” Quentin replied.

“I’ll eat anything,” Lorraine said, blowing in his ear. “As long as I get to serve up dessert.”



“Heeey-yaay!” Said the sexy, thin blond who strutted into the office holding four shopping bags in beach hand. “Baby! I got so much cool stuff!” She dropped the bags on the floor and reached inside one of them, bringing out a black lace teddy that was cupless. She held it up to her impossibly perfect body and shimmied her hips. “Super duper sexy! What do you think?”

Simon Hackstaff, M.D., took off his glasses and looked up from the medical journal he was reading. His ruggedly handsome face, left slightly unshaved, was angular and expressionless. “Britnie, I’m reading,” he said in a deep, gravely voice.

The blond pouted her large, puffy lips. “You’re always reading! You never have time for Britnie!”

“My reading pays for you buying all those clothes, you dumb slut,” Dr. Hackstaff said with disdain.

It had been a year since he had thwarted Bert’s attempt to break into his office. That was back when he was Susan Hackstaff, though.

The powerful drug she had been using to control her patients while she converted them from vile, disgusting men into women was even more potent than he had thought.

The morning after Susan had accidentally dosed herself and listened to Britnie’s ramblings about the kind of man she needed, Susan looked in the

mirror and was repulsed by how feminine she looked. That afternoon, he had her hair cut short in a men's style. That night she bought ten pairs of slacks and threw out her skirts.

Unfortunately, being a specialist in gender change, Susan knew all too well how to effectively make herself more masculine through medical science.

Men had always been loathsome and offensive to her, but now she felt compelled to become one. She was powerless to stop it.

She immediately placed herself on the most potent prescription of hormones available to block her estrogen. She bought a gym membership and doubled her calorie intake. She had a double mastectomy within a week.

All her life, Susan had felt nauseous in the presence of men, and was revolted that they even existed. Even so, her drug was powerful enough to have re-wired her mind to make her want to be male. She developed a fear of reflections and was horrified to look at herself, because every day, little by little, she was changing, and an unstoppable part of her unconscious made it so. She tried to resist every tingle time, but until she carried through, her mind would become obsessed and not let her think about anything else.

If she had known her drug was this powerful she would have used it to take over the world, she told herself, but there was no more of it. She had been searching for months to get back in touch with her source, but never heard from him again. She couldn't stop what it was doing to her.

Susan even tried to distract herself by working extra hard on Bert, making him an outrageously feminized woman. She gave him double-D implants, hip and thigh implants, liposuctioned him model-thin, and orchestrated a dozen other surgeries to make him perfect. In a desperate effort to satiate the driving need for transforming men that burned inside her, she made Bert over into the kind of bimbo trophy wife that a rich man would claim — and only when she was done did she understand that she was going to be that rich man.

A week after giving Bert a natural looking and tight pussy, Susan finally gave in and proposed to her. She couldn't stop herself.

By that time, she had started to grow hair on her chin and chest. People called her "sir" and "fella" in public. She was becoming a ruggedly handsome man, and thanks to some HGH, she was six feet two inches tall. Three months ago, she had quietly booked an overseas doctor to do the final, inevitable procedure. Now she was a 'he,' in all senses, and he had changed his name from Susan to Simon.

He lost a few patients, but most stayed and were sympathetic. All who remained complimented Simon on looking so handsome as a man. Indeed, when Simon saw himself, he had to admit, he was a strikingly good-looking guy... It made him sick to his stomach.

Every day, putting on boxer-briefs, slacks, socks, dress shoes, dress shirt and tie was a miserable ordeal. It was disgusting to Simon. He hated running a comb through his hair and spraying musky cologne on his putrid, rough, hairy skin.

Taking a piss was so repellent to him that in the first week of aiming his new dick into the toilet, he fainted three times.

What made it even worse was waking up every morning to the bubbly exuberance of Britnie Hackstaff, who appeared to relish every little bit of her new womanhood.

Britnie spent two hours in the morning doing her hair, shaving her legs, singing in the shower, trying on outfit after outfit, following yoga on the TV, and calling her friends to plan out a day of shopping. All the way through she hummed, smiled and giggled, having the time of her life. She appeared to enjoy every little thing about being a woman.

Even though Simon



was virtually sure that nothing of Bert remained inside of Britnie, every once and a while, he'd catch her staring at herself in the mirror and giggling, as if she was getting away with something. But it wasn't possible that Bert was self-aware and enjoying himself, was it?

His wife was spending half of what he made at the clinic on clothes, shoes, hair, gym classes, trips to resorts and late-night partying with her twenty year old friends. She was shallow and vapid, and couldn't contemplate anything deeper than matching her nails to her lipstick. The superficiality, unfortunately, made Simon desire her more.

When he saw his wife in impossibly expensive clothes and killer heels, he felt his heart race. It was the drug, he knew, but the more of a self-centered airhead she became, the more he wanted her. He'd buy her gifts like chocolate, jewelry and pets, watching her coo and squeal in delight, knowing she'd forget about them in an hour's time. It made him so hard.

Simon had no one but himself to blame for his predicament. Even if Simon could ever learn to tolerate the man he saw in the mirror, the worst part was



feeling his personality change. Patients no longer gave him trouble, they always did what he told them to do, because he was a commanding, good-looking man. It just made him more confident and cocky. He began to treat Britnie worse and worse, just like Susan assumed all men treated all women. What frightened Simon most was how easy it was... And how much he *enjoyed* it. He loved having the power in a relationship, and telling his wife what to wear, how to act, where she could go and who she could be friends with. He had become the very thing Susan hated most about men — a controlling, jealous and abusive jerk — and Simon reveled in it.

“When are you coming home, baby?” Britnie mewed as she sat on the corner of his desk, putting her supple, round butt on his papers.

“I’ll be home when I’m done,” a ticked-off Simon said, with a growl.

“Don’t make Britnie wait too long!” She said. She reached under her short dress and whipped off the thin, wispy panties she had been wearing. Then she dropped them on top of Simon’s head. “Just so you don’t forget, okie-dokie?”

“Get out of my office, you stupid cow!” Simon bellowed. He pointed to the exit.

Britnie scrambled off the desk and grabbed her bags as she sped out.

Simon was in a rage and his brawny chest heaved up and down, breathing heavily as air shot out his nose like an angry bull. He took the panties off his desk, sniffed them, and tossed them in the garbage. He was going to fuck that bitch so hard tonight.

And he would try hard not to enjoy it.

EPILOGUE

With the last hindrance to his plans out of the way, in the form of Vance Wentworth III, and the structure of the new community he was building coming into place, Craig Luger strolled along the road. This was Candlewick Court. His passion project. His reason for being. The payoff to a long life spent avoiding the authorities and accumulating vast sums of wealth.

If anyone had any hint that Luger, internationally wanted criminal financier who lived beyond the law, was roaming the streets of a small town in America, they would have called in the Marines and cratered the whole place. Fortunately for him, no one knew of his whereabouts, not even his most trusted inner circle.

It was finally complete. Decades of work, research, tracking down artifacts and funding projects that were half science and half witchcraft were now at an end. He had done all the work necessary to pull off the unthinkable, and reach the inconceivably unnatural final goal he had in mind.

Six houses lined the road, every one of them ready to accept a new owner. Inside their walls, sights hitherto unseen by mortal eyes would take place. Individually, what would take place in those houses would be metaphysical violations of natural law that would shake the very foundations of reality. The stories these houses would be able to tell would be the kind that were whispered in the back alleys of cities located on the edge of the world. Tales so bizarre and perverted, they were not to be believed by anyone who cared for their sanity.

Put together, the events in these six houses would not just bend nature, but snap it like a twig. When that time came, the time that Craig Luger had planned so meticulously for, which he had spent a sultan's fortune on, and time and again placed his very life on the line for, it would all be worth it. After all, Candlewick Course had a purpose. A purpose only he knew about.

Luger, having walked the round, looped road of Candlewick Court one last time, headed to the front gate. A small, grey enameled metal panel was recessed into the walls of the gate, and he popped it open. Taking a deep breath, Luger paused to acknowledge the moment. This was a huge step for humanity, in some sense, but more important to him, this was the moment he had been waiting a lifetime for. Because, as he often told himself and as a piece of advice to those around him, money has no value unless you are using it to get what you want.

He flipped a set of black and red breaker switches inside the box. The street lights came on, as did the lights in the front yards of the empty houses which came to life. A faint, low-frequency hum began to emanate from the center of

Candlewick Court, some leaves fell from the trees, and then the hum died away. It was now live. The project was a go.

Craig Luger closed the access panel and walked to his car, thrusting his hands into his jean pockets. There was no turning back now. They would be here, soon. The new residents of Candlewick Court would be here very soon.

In the next book in the Candlewick Series, cat-fishing con-men Colin Finch and his brother Elliot begin to suspect that they've lost control of the plan they had for Doug Brundell. Will they realize they're in too deep? The story continues in the next book.

We'll meet the new buyers of 105 Candlewick Court, the Greysons, who plan to raise a family in their new house. The Greysons' story is the story of Candlewick's mysterious, ultimate purpose and will continue throughout the series.

We'll focus on the strange story of the Wrenshaw Primary School, a private school for young children. The tale of Wrenshaw Primary isn't just about the students, but about how the stern and severe headmistress, the elderly Elizabeth Wrenshaw, who couldn't have become the person she was without the help of her grandson.

Plus, we meet more of the characters tangled up in the twisted story of Candlewick Court, with many more surprises and unexpected turns to come.

Be sure to pick up Surrender to Candlewick!

Titles by Sick Puppy Press

Sick Puppy Comics

Making Friends

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. Three college students sign up for a six-month isolation experiment. Things start to get a little strange, and they begin to lose their masculinity day by day. Yet, they don't seem to even notice... Full Color Comic Book / 38 pages

The Pet Sitter

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. Asked to look after a supermodel's pet for a while, James finds himself thrust out of his own apartment and into hers. Day by day, it seems like circumstances adapt James to become the resident of a supermodel's lifestyle. Full Color Comic Book / 29 pages

A Curious Curse

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. When teen goth Brandyn gets his drivers' license, he thinks it's a ticket to adulthood. Unfortunately, he's already cashed a ticket in the opposite direction. Full Color Comic Book / 27 pages

Boys Will Be Girls

Story & Art by Fraylim, Script by KK, Ink & Color by Joe Six-Pack. The "Summer Blossom" camp welcomes anew group of young men. But although it may be an all-boys camp when they arrive, it's girls-only when they leave. Full Color Comic Book / 100 pages

Teens Transformed

She Made Me Into My Sister

"A Little Too Clever" by Joe Six-Pack. Wyatt wanted to help his girlfriend get revenge, but at what cost? As it turns out, a cost greater than any boy could have imagined. Book / 88 pages / 20 illustrations

Gone Girly for Good

"Big in Japan" by James J Craft. Mike and Ken were one-hit-wonder rock stars. Then they discovered they had fans in Japan, so they left to become famous. Then they discovered that the Japanese didn't know they were guys. Book / 77 pages / 26 illustrations

One Year in Tokyo

By James J Craft, illustrations by Kwon Lee Tran. Mickey is forced to spend a year with his father in Japan. However things often get confused when words get translated from English to Japanese, as Mickey soon finds out... Book / 87 pages / 20 illustrations

Students, Exchanged

"French Dupe" by Joe Six-Pack. Kelley Sue's convinced a French exchange student to disguise himself as a girl. What happens when she realizes he has no intention of returning back home? Book / 57 pages / 15 illustrations

He's a Valley Girl, Fer Sure

From the files of TGStories.com: "Corey Taylor's Big Bodacious Adventure" by Joe Six-Pack. For Corey, the only way he can get into college is to pretend to be a girl. But when does it stop being pretend? When he's cheerleader? A girlfriend? A beauty queen? Book / 78 pages / 17 illustrations

From Boys to Bridesmaids

"Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Groom" by James J Craft. Two spoiled and privileged boys are about to be put in their place by their new step-mother. And their place is by her side as her bridesmaids and daughters. Book / 77 Pages / 16 illustrations

Little Mis-ter Popular

"My Two Moms" by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Thanks to his aunt's "Confidence Club," Leon will find a way to become popular, and to get over all his hang-ups... Including his masculinity. Book / 77 Pages / 17 illustrations

Bride to Be

By Joe Six-Pack. Derek and Cole grew up together as kids. One year, though, Cole has to start pitching in at the family wedding business. His life will never be the same. Book / 63 pages / 25 illustrations

Winning is Everything

"Costume drama" by Joe Six-Pack. Seth made a funny little bet for Halloween. He needed to pull off the impersonation of a Cheerleader for a party. What's at stake? 100 million dollars and his manhood. Book / 215 pages / 37 illustrations

Tales of Transformation

He's the Wrong Girl

"Office Chemistry" by Joe Six-Pack. James had to fill in at the reception desk. Problem is, the business is a bio-genetics company. And all of the sudden the coffee tastes funny. Book / 53 pages / 14 illustrations

City Boy, Country Girl

By Joe Six-Pack. Richard's long-forgotten aunt is sick, and he goes to care for her. His calls back home leave his wife Janice confused and unsure about his return. So she goes to find him. But is there much left to be found? Book / 64 pages / 25 illustrations

Thames Greene

By James J Craft. Ira wanted something better for his family. A new start. But in Thames Greene, everyone's getting a new start, whether they want it or not. Book / 77 pages / 26 illustrations

Hiding in High Heels

"How Not to be a Sissy" By Joe Six-Pack. Vince was on the run from people who wanted their millions back. Howard was a friend with a funny little idea and a knack for making subliminal CDs. Mini-Pix / 48 pages / 15 illustrations

A Blessing in Disguise

By KK, illustrations by Kannel. Jay was a witness to a murder, and now he's the target of a vicious criminal. Resorting to a female disguise, he becomes trapped with no way out. Book / 84 pages / 16 illustrations

I'm Your Dolly

"Barbie-in-a-Box" By Joe Six-Pack. Tyler wasn't much of a boyfriend anymore. Jessica wanted to throw him out, but then a better idea came to her, in the form of the Barbie-in-a-Box service. Tyler better get used to pink. Book / 103 pages / 20 illustrations

His Life as a Trophy Wife

"The Puppy Mill" by Joe Six-Pack. Nick had a great life, but then it evaporated. Now he's down on his luck. In steps a wealthy executive willing to pay him handsomely to pretend to be his wife. What can it hurt? Book / 210 pages / 16 illustrations

Male Monday, Girl Friday

"Hey, Cutie!" by James J Craft. Daniel is going to be promoted from his average life to an exciting executive position. At least, that's what his bosses are telling him. They may not be telling him everything. Book / 58 pages / 20 illustrations

The Happiest Place on Earth

From the files of TGStories.com: "The Fairest One of All" By Joe Six-Pack. Will is a kid looking for a job. He gets one, performing as Snow White at a theme park. For Will, he doesn't suspect that playing the role and wearing the costume is slowly changing him, day by day. Book / 51 pages / 21 illustrations

Hello, Nurse

From the files of TGStories.com: "Quality Health Care" Dane is filling in as a nurse for his pal Jimmy at his new office. Although both are doctors, Dane begins to take to his new role as a nurse. Soon, he feels compelled to be the ideal nurse. Book / 44 pages / 15 illustrations

My Boss, The Bimbo

"If I Were a Betting (Wo)Man" By James J Craft, illustrations by blackshirtboy. CEO Lucas has a superiority complex. When his long-suffering secretary is able to feed into Lucas' competitive nature, he'll make any bet to prove his dominance over women. Book / 38 pages / 10 illustrations

He's the Girl They Want

"Rallies" " by Joe Six-Pack. Spencer has a great new executive job in the food service industry, but first he's got to learn the ropes of the business by waiting on tables. He just doesn't quite fit in with the cheerleader theme. Yet. Book / 63 pages / 22 illustrations

Demoted and Degraded

"Trixie the Secretary" by Angela J. Cindy didn't much like Tom Jones attitude and his advances, so when she has the opportunity to help take the wind out of his sails, she takes it. But she had no idea that it was all designed to make Tom into Trixie the secretary. Book / 87 pages / 17 illustrations

I, Candy

"Sissy Sweets" by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Inheriting his family's bakery requires this young man to become the new face of the business. A female face. Book / 45 pages / 15 illustrations

Boyz II Girلز

"The Making of the Ballroom Brats" by Joe Six-Pack. The Ballroom Brats become the newest worldwide celebrity sensation. How did four unsuspecting guys at a fast food joint become the hottest girl group in music? Book / 113 pages / 34 illustrations

His Strangest Desire

"Employee of the Month" by Joe Six-Pack. Mick is declared Employee of the Month, and he's going to find himself hurtling headlong into facing his weirdest inner desire. Book / 59 pages / 19 illustrations

Hard Time or High Heels

"I'm Turning into My Mother" by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Colby got deep into debt to a local gangster. Before long, he's on the arm of that very same gangster as his reluctant girlfriend. Book / 75 pages / 20 illustrations

Seriously Skirted

"The Show Piece" by KK. Illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Mel finds work at a clinic as a secretary. He slowly begins to fit to role. Book / 75 pages / 19 illustrations

Stories of the Supernatural

A Change for the Better

"Do-Overs" by Joe Six-Pack. Evan wants a chance to do over his biggest mistake. He gets the chance, but he keeps wanting his new life to be a little bit better than the last. Book / 59 pages / 18 color illustrations

Changed and Rearranged

"Wrongs Make Wright" By Joe Six-Pack. Chris and Matt were rivals. Then, Matt decided to show everyone how smart he truly was by impersonating a teacher. But the disguise becomes more and more real, much to Chris' dismay. Book / 74 pages / 19 illustrations

From Pals to Gals

From the files of TGStories.com: "Mandate of the People" By Joe Six-Pack. Teens Jeremy and Stewart are good friends, but a bit thick in the noggin. When they jokingly nominate each other for Prom Queen, they slowly become the perfect candidates, thanks to some magic. Book / 45 pages / 16 illustrations

Crossed Fiction

If the Shoes Fit

"Hand Me Downs" By KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Sydney is a teen who is just trying to make it through the summer with no money. He finds himself wearing hand-me-downs from his sister, and that takes his life in a whole new direction. Book / 98 pages / 30 illustrations

Sisters for the Summer

"Camp Counseling" By Joe Six-Pack. Brock McCade always thought of himself as a real man, or at least he would be one, someday. After summer camp, he's no longer so sure. Book / 76 pages / 17 illustrations

They're the Girls for the Job

"Peace and Harmony" By James J Craft. Illustrations by blackshirtboy. Pete and Harmon need jobs bad. How far would they have to go to get them? Book / 64 pages / 19 illustrations

Blondie's Lost Summer

By KK. Illustrations by Fraylim. Carl's dream summer was about to become three months of dresses, heels and makeup. Book / 159 pages / 48 illustrations

Blondie's Lost Year

By KK. Illustrations by Fraylim. Book Two in the Blondie Series. Carl's trip to Florida has been horrible enough, trapped in dresses and makeup. Now, high school has presented a whole new level of humiliation for him. Book / 221 pages / 52 illustrations

I Never Wanted to be a Woman

"Politically Corrected" By Cheryl Lynn. Illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Michael's politically active mother has decided she's going to make her hippie son over into the daughter she always wanted. Book / 64 pages / 19 illustrations

Seriously Sissified

A Family Femmed

"The Femmed Family robinson" by James J. Craft & Cheryl Lynn, illustrations by Sortimid. The Robinson boys all had dreams of their own, once. Now they have new ones, thanks to their stepmother. Book /96 pages / 29 color illustrations

Auntie's Girl Time

By Cheryl Lynn. David was just a young teenage boy who wanted all the things in life a man could look forward to. His aunt, though, is going to make sure he never gets them. Book / 79 pages / 20 illustrations

Revenge of the Cheerleaders

"Pansy Cheers" By Angela J. Patrick Sears was a football player trying to sleep with every cheerleader at his small college. He'd have to pay for his conquests. Book / 116 pages / 19 illustrations

He's Got His Mind Made Up

By James J. Craft. Illustrations by kinkyrocket.
Corey has just a sliver of a chance to get into college, but that chance involves becoming his stepmother's maid. And she wants him to fit both the role and the dress. Book / 68 pages / 16 illustrations

Web Classics Revisited

Two Forms of ID

By Joe Six-Pack. Harvey had the unusual ability to convincingly imitate a teenage girl. In desperation, he has to use that talent to make some money. But when is enough enough? Paperback / 194 pages / text only



Reading is Fun de Mental!