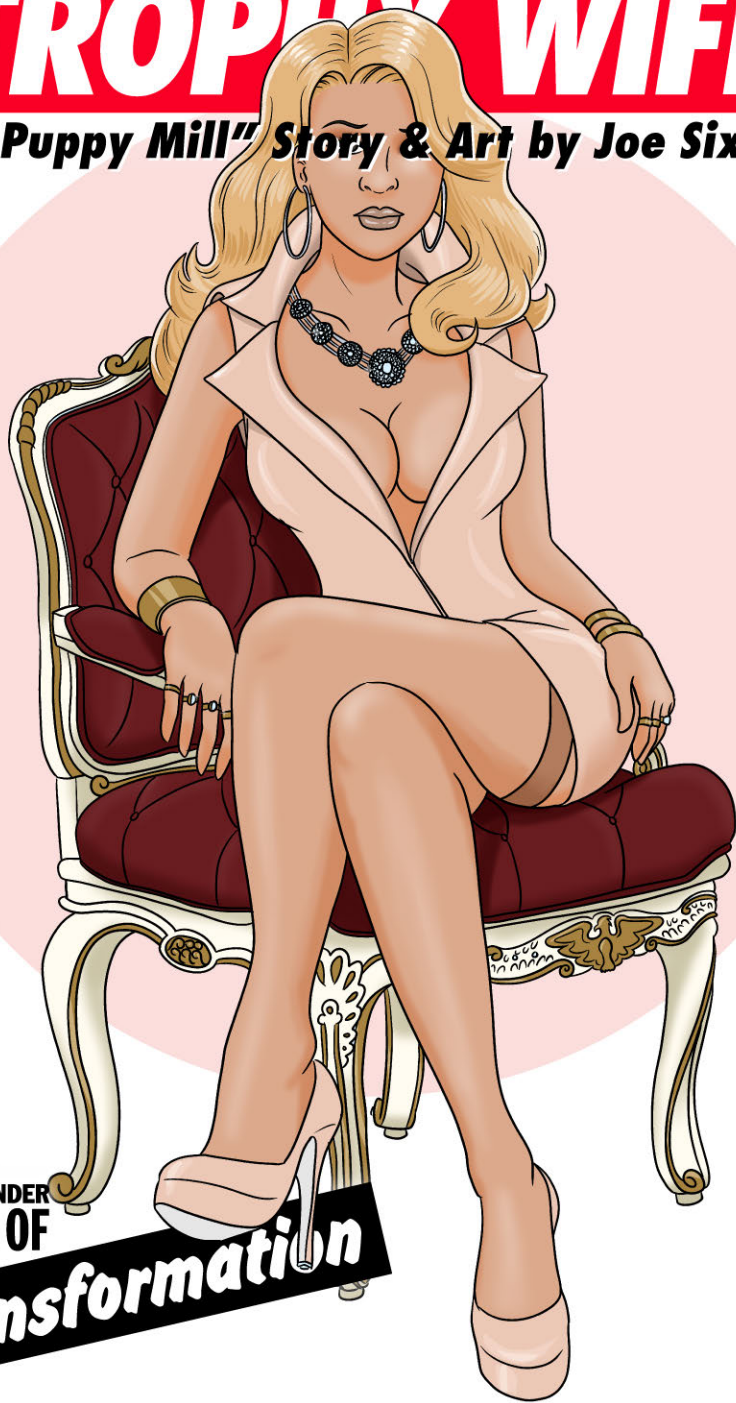


ADULTS ONLY

255 pages 39 illustrations

HIS LIFE AS A TROPHY WIFE

"The Puppy Mill" Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack



TRANSGENDER
TALES OF

Transformation



J O E S I X P A C K

***HIS LIFE AS
A TROPHY
WIFE***

**“The Puppy Mill”
Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack
A Tales of Transformation story**



2018 Digital Edition

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THE PUPPY MILL

CHAPTER 1

As was the custom for Saturday night at the Pacific Grand Theater, the seats were crammed with Martians. From wall to wall, with barely enough room to maneuver down the aisles, Martians were dressed in silver jumpsuits, ray guns drawn, ready to for the show to begin.

The reason for this intergalactic incursion in this small, squalid theater in Los Angeles was the weekly showing of *King Kong Versus the Martians*. It was a horrible film, a truly terrible piece of entertainment that let the viewer stupefied at the level of its' incompetence. It's only entertainment value was as a specimen of horrible 1950's B-film moviemaking.

It was such an acutely bad film that it had gained a following just on that single, sad, attribute. A big cult following, as a matter of fact. For the last two years, on Saturday night at 12 midnight, the theater showed the film to a group of crazed fans, who could recite every line in the film by heart. The crowd was well within the hundreds, all regulars.

In those two years, the moviegoers had tried to out-do each other every night. Maybe one would come with a home-made prop from the film. The next week, another would want to top him and arrive with a helmet made to resemble the one the Martians wore. Another would top that the next week. After two years of this, now the patrons would show up in full, elaborately made costumes. It had also evolved into its' own live performance, as regular fans eventually were brought up on stage to act out the parts as the movie showed behind them.

One of the people who had been there from the very beginning was a struggling actress by the name of Sasha Davies. Sasha was senior in college back when she was killing a dateless night at the Saturday midnight shows, and was now the keeper of the website and social media accounts dedicated to the show. She also played "Wendy" the 12-year old girl in the film who takes in one of the Martians and shows them human kindness. She was one of the old-timers, at the age of 24, having been there from the first show. She enjoyed the sense of responsibility she felt as one of the organizers, and lived her whole week for Saturday night.

Which is why, when she met Nicholas O'Brien, she had a hard time explaining why she wasn't available for dinner on the weekend. In fact, she had been seeing him for well over a month before she decided she had to come clean about her other life.

This was actually a relief for Nick, as he was sure that yet another girlfriend was going to break up with him. When he learned the reason why he was never

able to get a hold of her at certain days and times, learning that Sasha was just out pantomiming a film was the least worrisome reason behind that kind of behavior.

Nick was from the East Coast, having grown up in and around New York for a long time. But once his parents had passed away, he realized he had little to tie him to his home town. He decided upon trying his luck in Los Angeles as a TV writer. Work wasn't too hard to find if you didn't mind writing junk for fools. He did a few public service spots, a couple of never-to-be-aired sit-coms and some other miscellaneous work before the Writers' Guild went on strike.

With no work, Nick's fortunes took a definite turn for the worse. A small check from the union at least kept him from starving, but that was all it did. As the weeks and then months went on, Nick found himself more and more dependent on Sasha for everyday living expenses. He was eating her food, using her car and living in her apartment most of the time. Finally, Nick suggested that they move in together.

Sasha took the suggestion as a positive step forward in a relationship, but with the strong suspicion that it was because Nick could no longer survive on his own. She knew she was right, but her emotions led her to letting Nick move in.

Living together was easy. They had similar interests and liked the same music, movies and TV shows. Splitting costs between them worked better, just as Nick hoped. Things started to normalize, and he just had to wait until the strike was over. Things would get even better when that happened.

Meanwhile, Nick was pretty much powerless to resist his girlfriends' suggestion that he come with her to the Saturday night showings. He was a little nervous about Sasha's odd attachment to that movie and was content to let her have that part of her life to herself. But he capitulated.

Two months later, he was in costume and performing on stage just like Sasha. He had gotten into the event just as deep as his girlfriend.

In fact, when Sasha announced she had accepted a role in a downtown stage production, it was often Nick going by himself to the Saturday night shows.

Sasha was sick that she missed her very first shows at the Pacific Grand, but her dream was always to act in a big play, and she couldn't refuse the opportunity. She kept in touch with everybody else involved, and interrogated Nick about every last detail of every show she missed — who had flubbed a line, who had the weirdest costume, who played which parts. She wanted to know every last bit of information.

Nick was happy to tell her everything he could. He knew how much those shows meant to her, and the demands of being in a stage production were stealing every last minute of her time. The truth was, he was starting to miss her. She wasn't home for more than an hour or two before she was asleep and

up early the next morning. Sasha seemed to thrive on the work, but Nick was lonely.

Then came the stunner. The production Sasha was in was going to tour. A long six-month traveling show... In Europe. She would be able to fly back for a few days here and there... but...

Nick did what he thought a man should do. He told her to follow her dream. Sasha almost took it the wrong way, as he seemed so resolute in telling her to leave. But Nick told her in no uncertain terms why it needed to happen.

“It’s what you worked for, it’s what you deserve, and I’ll be here when you get back,” he said.

“I don’t want you thinking I want to leave you,” she replied.

“You’re not leaving me. You’re just going to be working for a little while,” he held her small trembling hands firmly. “You know this will be worth it. You can’t turn your back on this for me or anything else.”

“You know I would. You know if you asked me I’d stay.”

“I’d never ask you that. I’d never hurt you like that.”

“I won’t go. I’m not going to go.”

Nick knew that if she didn’t take this chance, she’d regret it for the rest of her life — and he’d regret being the one who stopped her.

“Maybe we shouldn’t be seeing each other, then,” he said, trying to sound like he meant it.

Sasha’s delicate and beautiful face looked like it had shattered in horror.

“What? What are you...”

“I’m saying that if you think I want to be in a suffocating relationship with someone who can’t let go, you’re crazy.” Nick was practically choking on the words, every sound stinging him as he spoke.

“Nick, you’re kidding, right?”

Nick, wanting desperately to say ‘yes,’ said “no.” He was pushing the love of his life right to edge, but it was for her own good. “I don’t want some clingy girlfriend who can’t support herself. Besides, I’ve been thinking that maybe we shouldn’t be confined by this



whole ‘relationship’ thing.”

The life seemed to escape Sasha’s face, and she dipped her head. Staring down at her shoes, she just said, “oh.”

She was off and on a flight just two days later. Nick watched from the terminal as the plane pulled away, unsure if he had just destroyed the best thing that had ever happened to him. Not only was he feeling like some part of his insides had been ripped from him violently, but he knew the cold reality of the situation. Sasha was going to have to live out of hotels for a while, and he could no longer expect much money at all from her. He was going to need to find work.

With nothing but time on his hands, Nick looked for a job. He had little luck. He didn’t have a very good skill set in the first place, and because of the strike, the whole entertainment economy was too depressed to be hiring.

Of course, he still had *King Kong versus the Martians*. With so much idleness, it wasn’t long before he had taken Sasha’s leadership spot in the group. He was even making costumes and re-designing the website. After all, it was all he really had now of his girlfriend — besides the occasional text message.

One night, he did everything up special. He sunk his heart and soul into making a big splash at the show for that week.

He made his own costume by hand, meticulously sewing it to match the 1950’s original in every detail. He paid special attention to his stage makeup, doing it over and over again to get it just right. He ordered some boots and other accessories over the internet, and even found a wig identical to the character he was going to play. Night after night, he practiced his role until he had it perfect. Nick was determined to be the hit of the show.



CHAPTER 2

Although he didn't know it, the first time Nick had met Roger Van der Slyke, he was wearing a dress.

Roger was in his early forties, with a little bit of grey at the temples of his well-groomed dark head of hair. He countenance and cool demeanor spoke of a man sure of himself and always in control. He gave every appearance of being cultured and refined. But that didn't explain why he was at this particular low-brow bar at two in the morning.

Mr. Van der Slyke was a man who could be easily described as handsome. He had the right amount of wrinkles in his face to make it interesting. He was ruggedly built, with strong, sharp shoulders that looked like he could carry quite a burden. Then, his slow, measuring gaze let you know he had you sized up and figured out before he even had spoken a word to you.

Dempsey's Bar was Nick's usual watering hole, and he was here on this night every week. Everyone knew him by name, and he knew everyone who came to Dempsey's. That's why Nick had spotted him immediately when he had come in. He had never seen this guy before, and didn't want to look like a weirdo, even to strangers. The man's presence made him more than a little uncomfortable. Especially as he was dressed.

Every Saturday, after the movie, the "cast" of the show and a few long-timers would come to Dempsey's to celebrate another fun night. They'd still be talking about the show, and still be dressed in costume. Which usually wasn't a big deal, as everyone in Los Angeles was used to the bizarre by now. A bar full of silver-lame'd jump-suited, green-skinned people wasn't really that out of the ordinary.

The problem for Nick was that tonight, he was in a dress. A white pleather dress, with white go-go boots, long green legs and shocking sea-green hair down to the small of his back. He had decided to shock the group by playing the part of the Martian queen — and doing it convincingly.

The group was indeed surprised, not only that Nick had shown up in drag, but by being so good at it. Nick had the voice, the look, the mannerisms and the lines all down. He was sexy and vivacious. They had never had a better performance in all the months and years they had been doing this show.

"Is it wrong to be attracted to this dude?" One of the cast members asked another.

"One-time exception," replied his friend. "You agree, Matt?"

Matt, a scraggly but good-natured office worker and one of the longer-serving members of the cast just grinned. "Hey, it's not gay if they look cute," he said. "And Nick is a fucking knockout."

Sure, he was probably a little tall for the role of a female queen, but his slender build, big eyes and boyish face looked great under the make-up. Plus, his long, shapely green legs (in tights) were making most of the men in the show seriously reconsider their stance on heterosexuality.

To make the night even more interesting, Nick had spent the whole night in character, as the gorgeous actress Alexis Summers, who played the original part. Nick carried on as if he really was Alexis, in town for an “acting gig” and just “doing a job.” He refused to answer to his name and would only speak as Alexis, down to her famously dramatic laugh, dry wit and penchant for flirting with men.

But his friends all played along, even returning some of the playful faux come-ons and having fun with it. Everyone in the show had a blast with Nick’s performance.

However, Nick suddenly realized how convincing he was when Roger Van der Slyke sat down next to him and started to talk.

“Haven’t I met you somewhere before?” Roger said, “And if I have, how did I ever let you go?”

Nick suddenly sat up straight in his seat and inched away. “I’m not interested,” he said in his regular, deep, speaking voice.

Expecting more of an outraged outburst, Nick was surprised to see that the man’s only reaction was to raise an eyebrow and let a smirk gradually crook his lips.

“Fascinating,” Roger said. He laughed a brief, but genial laugh. “I hope you don’t think I come on to all the men in dresses I meet.”

Taken aback by his reply, Nick relaxed and smiled. “No problem,” he said.

Roger then quickly excused himself and returned to his own table seat. Nick, by the end of the night, barely even remembered the encounter, as it was one of a dozen passes made at him by other men. He also had a few of his own friends have a go at him after they had three or four drinks that night.

“I suppose I should take it as a compliment,” he said before leaving for home. Nick had expected to have to deal with a few misguided males that night, and he had fended them off like a seasoned pro.

Eventually, it was time to head back to the apartment, and Nick gave his friends a dramatically overdone air kiss as he left. The night was everything he had hoped. He and his friends had a great laugh, he had been the hit of the show, and had successfully topped everyone else with his amazing impersonation. He had already committed to the cast to do the same performance next week, and he was wondering if he could pull off this act again.

He was eager to get in from the cold air and get out of the incredibly uncomfortable boots by the time he had gotten back to the apartment. Checking his

messages, Sasha had already left two. She was probably eager to know how the show went. How was he even going to tell her what he had done? Well, it was bound to get to her sooner or later. Heck, the guys at the show were probably already texting her about it right now.

Deciding to go all out, Nick got back into the boots and checked the make-up and hair. He set up a tripod and camera in front of Sasha's *King Kong vs the Martians* posters and struck a few poses as the Martian Queen.

"I knew I shouldn't have left you alone," Sasha replied by email when she saw the pictures. "I don't want you using my lipstick," she teased. Nick was eager to tell her everything that had happened that night, and went on in detail about every last bit of information he could recall.

"Sounds like you had the night of your life. I bet they want you to do it again next week." Sasha replied.

"Of course," he wrote back. "They need their queen."



A week later he was even better. He had the whole act down, and carried off his performance without a snag. They even applauded him when he was done for the night. He had never seen anyone get that kind of reaction in all the shows he had attended.

"That was crazy, dude," Matt said to him. "You're so good as a woman, you've messed up my relationships for the rest of my life!"

Nick had gotten a lot of comments like that all night long. But he was still having fun with it. Someone had even given him a bouquet of martian-green roses tonight. If he was going to have to come to each show as the Martian Queen, so be it. He was having a great time.

When the after-show party had broken up, Nick found himself not wanting to leave. He had grown addicted to the comments and compliments.

When he realized this, he was really quite embarrassed. Maybe he needed to take a break from this, after all. Just for a little while.



For Nick in the real world, work was still tough to find. It didn't help that he was sinking so much time and effort into his performance at the movie show that his check on want ads often skipped a day or two. Or three.

But he did manage to get an interview or two a week. After all, it had been almost a month since Sasha left, and the bills still kept coming in.

Just as he had feared, the money needed to pay for rent and basic utilities, added to Sasha's expensive living expenses in hotels, left virtually nothing for Nick. He was beyond struggling. Nick was essentially destitute. He was selling some old CDs and DVDs to have enough money for cheap meals. He knew he had to do something, and it was going to have to happen fast.

It was time for him to consider taking whatever work he could find. Even minimum wage would help at this point. He resolved himself to just do whatever he needed to do to make it right. He couldn't ask Sasha for more money, and being self-supportive was just the mature thing to do. Monday morning, he'd get it done. He'd rejoin the workforce.

Just after he had one more night as the Martian Queen.



There wasn't more than one or two people left at the bar Saturday night, and Nick was finishing off his last drink of the evening. He was alone, all of his friends had gone home. That left Nick with his thoughts about getting work. He really did need the money, but he hated having to get a job. That was one of the reasons he was a writer. He just did what he needed to do, make a few jokes, write some trite dialogue and he got paid for it. He didn't even have to go in to most places he worked for. He just sent them the scripts.

Now, that was about to change, and he was desperately trying to think a way out of it. That was when the bartender dropped off another drink.

"From the guy over in the corner," he told Nick.

But by the time Nick had bothered to look in the corner, the man who sent the drink was sitting down across the table from him.

"I'm not who you think I am," Nick said.

"I think you're a man in green wig and tights," the man replied.

"Well then, I guess I *am* who you think I am."

He pointed at the drink. "I just ordered that for you. My mistake. I didn't recognize you."

"Do I know you?" Nick asked.

"Not really. I accidentally tried to pick you up a few weeks ago."

"You and about a hundred lonely guys at this bar."

The man offered his hand. "Name's Roger."

Nick shook it. "Nick."

"You must be a part of that midnight show they do around the corner."

"What if I said if I wasn't?" Nick responded.

"Then you've got some issues," Roger leaned back in his seat.

The two men had struck up an easy friendship. Quickly, Roger started in on his background. He was an executive at a local chain of hospitals, and was divorced. He and his wife hadn't gotten along for a long time, and had separated years ago, only making it official recently. He said it was going to hurt him at work, and was trying to drink away the sense of dread he had about losing his job.

Nick told him his own story about being out of work and his girlfriend half a continent away for the next several months. Both understood, and both were sympathetic to each others' plight.

"Does she know what her boyfriend is doing in his spare time?" Roger asked.

"She's the one who started this whole thing," Nick answered.

"Did she have anything to do with the costume? With the training?"

"Training?" Nick said. "No, this was all my doing. I'd be too embarrassed to ask anyone for help. Let alone a woman."

"If you don't mind me saying, and please don't take this the wrong way, you make one hell of a beautiful woman."

Nick batted his eyelashes. "Tell me something I don't know." He took a swig of his drink. "My mother would be so proud."

"You've really gone all-out," Roger said, looking Nick up and down. "Shaved your legs, can't see any stubble on your chin... Long nails... " He stared at the appearance of cleavage in what really wasn't Nick's bosom. "Quite a job."

"I've got a lot of free time recently."

"The dress fits you perfectly. Did you have it made for you?"

"I can sew. Learned in high school."

"High school?"

"It was either that or auto repair. The sewing class had much better looking girls in it."

“Gotcha.” Roger smiled. “Another drink?”

“Better not,” Nick shook his head. “I’m a bit out of it.”

“You live far from here? I can drive you home.”

“That’s okay.”

“If you’re drunk, you really shouldn’t get in your car.”

“You were drinking, too.”

“I’ve been having a little tonic water.” Roger then lifted Nick’s key in the air.

“Besides, I stole these, and you’re not getting them back.”

Nick sighed heavily. “Fine.”

“It won’t be so bad. You ever taken a ride in a Porsche Carrera?”

“Lead the way,” Nick said, getting up.



On the way home, once Nick had been able to give coherent directions, the two started to talk again.

“You can’t be too sad about the divorce if you get to keep this baby,” Nick rubbed his hands along the sleek, smooth leather seat he was in.

“It really doesn’t make up for the loss of a companion,” Roger said. “It’s hard to snuggle up with a car at night.”

“Did you love her?” Nick asked.

“For a while. But she had different interests. Especially when it came to men. The people I work for couldn’t learn about it, so I tried to keep it quiet as long as possible. But it eventually came out. No I’m not going to get any farther up the chain. And forget about starting over. It’s too late.”

“Who do you work for that would care about a divorce?”

“St. McGivens Hospitals,” Roger replied. “They own about a dozen hospitals in the state, another thirty-eight around the country.”

“Why would they give a damn?”

“Because they’re majority owned by the Church.”

“Oh.”

“They’ve all heard about my marriage and how it went south. They know I was going to have to get a divorce, although I don’t think they’ve figured out that it’s actually happened. Sooner or later someone’s going to invite my wife to a party or something, or drop by. Then they’ll know. It’s just a matter of time.”

“The church guys don’t like divorce?”

“Legally, they can’t discriminate like that. In reality, though, no one has ever become an executive of that company who had anything less than a one-hundred-percent rock-solid home life.”

“It’s not your fault, was it? They can’t blame you.”

“They can and they do,” Roger said, curtly. “It’s their religious conviction. It’s not like I can fight the word of God.”

“That would pose its’ challenges,” Nick admitted.

“What about you? You a big B-movie fan?”

“Not really. Just something Sasha, my girlfriend, got me into.”

“Why do you do it?”

“Oh, the people who come are really great, they have a lot of weird, funny ideas and...”

“No, I mean why dress up like this? Like a woman?”

Nick looked over at Roger to see what the expression on his face was. There was no malice or ridicule there. He seemed to really want to know.

“Well, I could have gone as one of the kids in the story, but I’m a few feet too tall for that. The only other major adult character is the Queen.”

“You don’t do bit parts, in other words.”

Nick laughed. “I guess not.”

The car pulled to the gate for Nick’s apartment building, and Nick got out. “Thanks for the ride. Hey, do you come to that bar often?”

“Once and a while. It’s on the way home from work.”

“Well, we’re there every Saturday night. You might even like seeing the show.”

“Thanks. Maybe I’ll drop by.”

“Thanks again,” Nick said, before walking to the gate. He punched in his code to open the door, not getting the response he wanted. He tried it again. And again.

“Having problems?” Roger called from the car.

“Must be hitting the wrong buttons,” Nick replied. He hit another button.

“Hello?” The crackling speaker on the door said.

“Hey, this is Nick in 213. Your neighbor. The code’s not working. Can you buzz me in?”

“It’s three thirty AM!” The speaker replied.

“Sorry,” Nick said. The door buzzed open.

As Nick headed in the door, Roger dashed in behind him. “Hey, hold up a minute. That isn’t your stuff on the street, is it?” Roger pointed back out the door at a small pile of furniture and clothing placed on the curb.

“What?” Nick replied, straining his vision for a moment to see what Roger was talking about. “No... Aw, fuck!” He immediately recognized the things on the curb as his stuff. He dashed for it quickly, then realized that he needed to check the apartment as well. “Could you just keep an eye on that for a moment?” Nick asked Roger. “Just for a sec? I’ll be right back!”

Nick reversed direction and ran up the stairs to his apartment, putting his keys in the lock. Or at least trying to. They didn’t fit. “Goddamn!” Nick yelled. He struck the door with his fist and then grabbed his green-haired head in exasperation. “I don’t fuckin’ believe it! The locks are changed!”

Suddenly, the doorknob jiggled and the door cracked open, held in place by the security chain.

“What do you want, Nick?” The voice on the other side of the door said.

“Chet?” Nick yelped, hardly able to believe who it was. “What the fuck!”

Chet was Sasha’s older brother of 24, who Nick rarely saw. He rarely saw him because he couldn’t stand the guys’ guts. Neither could Sasha, for that matter. She barely even talked to him, except when she had to go to a family dinner or when Chet needed a few bucks to pay a “loan” off.

“You ask me? You’re the faggot in the dress,” Chet responded.

“It’s for the show, you asshole! Sasha’s movie show!”

There was a pause from Chet. “Look, all I know is that Sasha called me to get your stuff out of her apartment. Something about dressing up like a woman while she was gone.”

“She knows why! You’re making this up!” Nick kicked the door.

“Dude! She doesn’t want you here! I’m gonna call the cops, okay? You’re trespassing!”

Nick was fiery red with anger. “This is my place! I’m gonna call the cops on you!”

“Not here, not now,” Roger said, suddenly appearing from behind Nick. He pointed around the hallway where all of the neighbors had stuck their heads out of their doors, curious to see what was causing all the noise.

Nick looked back at the slice of Chet’s face visible through the crack in the door. Chet quickly slammed it shut.

“Fuck!” Nick yelled loudly.

Roger put his arm behind Nick and started to escort him away. “We’ll sort this out in the morning. You can spend the night at my place.”

Without even breaking his eye contact with the door of his apartment, Roger led Nick down the hallway.

“Jesus Fuck!” Nick yelled out again, because he had to let the world know how angry he was.



Nick dropped the handset in the cradle of the phone. He had been calling people all morning.

“What’d he say?” Roger asked, from the couch where he was watching a football game.

Nick had just gotten off the phone with a lawyer, and was \$200 poorer for the consultation. “He said there’s not much I can do, unless I want to go to trial about it.”

“You should.”

“I’m not going to sue my own girlfriend. It’s her name on the lease.”

He had spent the night at Roger’s house, a surprisingly luxurious and large place. If one had used the term “mansion” they might have been overstating things, but not by much. It was unsettling to be in such a strange place under such stressful circumstances.

Roger took a sip of beer. “Have you been able to get in touch with her?”

“She’s not taking my calls, and she’s not responding to emails or texts.”

Roger took a moment to look away from the TV. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m not giving up that easy. I’m pretty sure that turd Chet is at the bottom of this. He probably fed her a line and got her to believe what he wanted him to. Now he’s got a place to stay. The lying little pipsqueak probably thinks he’s real smart. Well, as soon as I can get in touch with Sasha, we’ll see who’s smarter.”

“Meanwhile, why don’t you just take it easy,” Roger suggested. He was lying back with his feet up on the coffee table. “This is getting to be a pretty good game. Have a beer.”

“I guess,” Nick said, moving over to the adjoining couch. He popped open a can and took a sip. “This a projection?” He asked about the TV. “60 inches?”

“102. And it’s plasma. Biggest one they make.”

“Damn,” Nick said in awe. “You’re not hurting for money, are you?”

“I do alright. Did you see this QB in college last year? They couldn’t stop him. Now, in the pro’s he can’t do a damn thing.”

“That’s the transition to the pro game and the speed. Hey, maybe I need to start looking for a room right now. I’ll probably have to get one of the guys to put me up for the night tonight.”

“Stay here. I have a big house and I’m always having friends and associates over.”

“I appreciate it, Roger, but we just met and I don’t even know when I’ll be able to get a place of my own. Thanks for the offer, but...”

“Yeah, I didn’t think you’d go for it, but I thought I’d just put it out there.”

“Again, I appreciate it, but I’ve got to make a go of this on my own.”

“Understood.” Roger took another swig of his beer. “Of course, if you’re looking for work, I can help there.”

“You’re not going to offer me a job, are you?” Nick replied.

“No, I’m about to offer you a very serious proposal.” He paused. “I’m not kidding about this. It’s going to sound weird, and I don’t want to freak you out. But it’s a very real, very serious offer.”

That sounded chillingly strange. Nick’s eyes glanced over the room looking for an escape route. He didn’t think he’d really need it, but he was already feeling a little creeped out. If Roger popped up with an axe, he knew where he needed to go.

“Shoot,” Nick said.

Roger chuckled. “This is going to be difficult to even say.” He cleared his throat. “You seem to have a talent for imitating women, Nick. You do a very good job. And I’m having women problems in my life.”

Nick shivered involuntarily. He nonchalantly sniffed his beer for any drugs and checked his escape route again. He sensed trouble. Big trouble.

“I’m not sure how to phrase this without it seeming completely irrational, but...”

“You probably should stop right there, don’t you think?” Nick suggested.

“I’ve been working up the courage to say this for the last day or so, so I’m going to finish.” Roger took a deep breath. “I’d like to pay you good money to go out in public as my girlfriend.”

“I gotta go,” Nick said, getting on his feet.

“Look, I know it sounds stupid, but I’m really desperate.”

Nick grabbed his coat. “Thanks for the beer and a place to stay last night. I’ll pick up my stuff later.”

“Five thousands dollars for just an afternoon’s work. One time. A few hours at a basketball game and it’d be over with.”

“Hey, I’m sorry, dude — but that’s really nuts.” Nick slipped a baseball cap on his head and headed out the door.



Four days later, after staying on five different couches and not one step closer to getting in contact with Sasha, Nick’s initial brick-wall resistance to Roger’s proposal was now paper-thin.

Every time he looked at the ever-scarcer assortment of dollar bills in his wallet, he could only hear that figure again. Five thousand dollars.

After all, he was already doing an impersonation of a woman every week. Some of the newbies at the show didn’t even know that he really was really a guy. So it wasn’t like he couldn’t get away with it. How long is a basketball game anyway? Two hours? He’d be in and out in a blink.

Roger was a decent guy. He liked sports, bought the good kind of beer and...
Five thousand dollars.

It would sure solve a lot of problems. His aching back told him that one more night on a couch was going to be his limit.

“If I was going to do this — and I’m not saying I am — exactly what would we be talking about?” He asked Roger when he called him up.

Roger, sounding slightly stunned to even be discussing the matter, seemed to be less than totally prepared for an answer. “Uh... Well, I have these two tickets to the Anaheim Shock game next week. I got them from my boss, and he expects for me to bring someone.”

“Your wife.”

“No. He knows about me and Kathy. But I’ve been generally leading him to believe that I’m in another really serious relationship. Well, engaged, to be specific.”

“I thought you said that you were in trouble no matter what with a divorce.”

“If I can convince the higher-ups that my marriage never meant much, they could pull some strings and have it annulled. But I have to convince them that I’m on my way into a real, for-keeps marriage. Someone stable and down to Earth.”

“That would be the part I’d be playing — if I were to do this?”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t you just get an actual, real woman to do this?”

“I don’t know a lot of real women, Nick. I’m sorry to say.”

“You could hire an actress cheaper than me.”

“And pay extortion for the rest of my life?”

“Yeah, I guess I wouldn’t exactly be making a federal case out of this, would I?” Nick realized.

“Right. As for what it would involve.... I uh...”

Nick interrupted. “I figure it’s just showing up for two hours, you be seen with me, we leave and that’s the story.”

“Uh, yes. I suppose so.”

“Do you have five thousand dollars to pay me?”

“Yes.”

“Will you pay me in advance?”

“Yes.”

“Can I pick out the clothes?”

“Y...Yes.”

“If I don’t think I can pull this off, can I back out?”

“Just give me fair warning.”

“When’s the game?” Nick said, not really even believing he was agreeing to this.

“Next Friday. That’s about... Eleven, no, twelve days away.”

“I need a place to stay while I work on this. I don’t want to have to get a hotel room for two weeks as I practice, and I sure as hell am not going to be in the same house as you.”

“I have a cottage out back. You can use that. It’s not part of the house, and you’ll have complete privacy.”

Nick let out a deep breath and pinched the bridge of his nose. How had his life come to this? “I don’t have a car. Can you pick me up?”



True to his word, Roger set Nick up in a small two-room cottage that was out behind the house. It obviously hadn’t been used in a while and everything had a layer of dust on it. It was furnished plainly, with simple tables, chairs and a bed.

After stewing for a few days, unhappy with himself and the very odd situation he now found himself in, Nick finally got around to the business at hand. He needed to make himself over as a female.

He asked Roger exactly what he was expecting.

“Something a lot like the woman you pretend to be Saturday nights.” Was the quick answer. “A nice sense of humor, a warm personality and a dazzling smile.”

Nick was quite leery that Roger was more than a little taken with the character he had been playing. But it was just two hours. The world wasn’t going to come to an end over two lousy hours.

Nick took an examination of himself in the mirror. One of the reasons he had been bale to get away with his impersonation was his slender build. The other was that the Martian Queen was somewhat Amazonian in her proportions, which suited him.

But now, he wasn’t going to have that to fall back on. He was going to have to look like a real woman in the real world. Whatever he chose, he was going to have to make sure his clothes covered him fairly loosely. A dress didn’t seem right to wear to a game. A blouse or something was way too formal. After thinking about it for a while, he came upon a clever solution. He’d just wear an oversized, loose basketball jersey. It would cover his male body thoroughly and be appropriate to wear to a game. Simple and effective.

He’d get some tight jeans, and a pair of tennis shoes. Voila! Done. No sweat.

The next day, Nick went out and bought everything he needed. That included a dark blond wig that went down to his shoulders. The same place where he had gotten his Martian Queen costume thought nothing about selling him more women’s stuff.

He tried it all on that night. It was not what he had hoped for. He originally thought that the combination of a big head of hair and ample bosom was enough to get the job done. The sight of himself in the mirror wasn’t going to fool many.

Why could he look like a woman in the Queen getup and not in regular clothes? It wasn’t the green skin, was it?

No. Or rather, a partial “Yes.” Nick decided that it wasn’t the green, but the skin. He showed a lot of “leg” in his Queen outfit, bared his arms and featured a deep valley of cleavage. He was a con-



vincing female because he was showing off his body, not because he was dressed appropriately. He had to re-think his approach.

It went through a few versions and re-starts before Nick was satisfied with the result. Then, finally, after five days of preparation, he was ready for Roger to see what he had done.

As Roger had said, he wanted a chance to back out of this deal if Nick couldn't pull it off. "It's probably more of a risk for me than it is for you," Roger quipped. He wanted to see the "look" while he could still gracefully get out of going to the game.

Seeing how this was still kind of a "rough draft" version, Nick didn't go too crazy getting ready. He knew that when he finally did go to the game, he'd have to be meticulously careful over every last detail. But for right now, he did the bare minimums. He lotioned up his skin, he shaved closely on his face and legs, applied the shaping undergarments, the padding undergarments, and finally the undergarment undergarments. He used a little bit of concealer to blend the edge of the wig into his scalp, and drew the hair down to frame his face. He put on his bra and used the pads he wore for being the Martian Queen, which Nick thought for some reason looked twice as big as they usually looked. It was probably just his paranoia about someone paying him to dress like this.

Nick also decided to invest in a pair of panties for this exercise, since the bottom half of his costume was going to be much tighter than his Martian dress. He always seemed to check girls out for VPL himself, so he was well aware that he'd better be showing some. Visible panty line, that is.

"All right, here we go," Nick announced as he came into the living room, ready for inspection. He was more than a little nervous. This whole exercise had started as a dress-up game, but it was beginning to feel a lot more serious. Besides, he really did need that money. He stepped around the corner, into full view. "What do you think?" He asked.

Nick had chosen an outfit that reveal the best parts of his body and conceal the worst. He had gone to a smaller, cropped version of an Anaheim Shock top, tied off in a big knot under his so-called breasts. The sleeveless top bared his shoulders and thin arms well.

This left his midsection without coverage, but a yellow t-shirt hugged his thin — even slender — tummy. His body then billowed out to show a seemingly well-developed and well-rounded butt. He wore a denim skirt that ended a few inches above his knees, and revealed his long and shapely legs for the world to admire. He wore a pair of grey leather two-and-a-half inch ankle boots which he had little trouble walking in, thanks to his high-heel experience.

"What can I say?" Roger remarked. "Wow." He shook his head in amazement. "You look incredible. I think you could really break someone's heart."



Nick grimaced, knowing Roger was laying it on a little thick. Nick had spent enough time in front of the mirror over the past few days to know he didn't make for a stunningly attractive woman. There was something to be said for covering your face with green make-up — it hid quite a bit. With his mannish shape and features, he knew at best he looked like a the sort of woman who was going to have to get by on having a great personality.

“How did you get your...” Roger searched for a polite word, but then realized he didn't need to be polite. “How did you get your ass to look like that?”

“Padding. You can pad your butt just as easily as padding a bra.”

“And your waist?”

“A body-shaper is taking it down to twenty-eight inches.”

“Absolutely amazing.” Roger's eyes lingered on Nick, looking him over from head to toe.

“I think it's still missing something,” Nick said, nervously scratching his arm.

Roger leaned back to consider this, a look of concentration on his face.

“Maybe. I'm not sure.” He thought about it for another few seconds, and snapped his fingers. “Jewelry.”

Nick nodded. “I just don't have the money to go out and buy a lot of stuff. Especially just for one night. Does it make that much of a difference?”

“It would be stranger to see a woman without wearing some sort of jewelry than with it.”

Nick thought about it. “I guess you're right. I still can't afford it, though.”

“I'll cover it. A ring, a necklace and a bracelet or two.”

“And earrings.”

“Ha. You're already spending money like a woman.”

“And you're going to help me spend it. Let's go to the mall.”

“Now?” Roger replied.

“Better sooner than later.” Nick advanced towards the front door.

“Looking like that?”

“We probably should practice being a... Well, being a couple.”

“Right now?”

“Don't chicken out, Roger. If you want this to succeed, we're going to have to work at it.”

“I guess you're right.” Roger went for his jacket and his car keys.



The automatic glass doors to Woodfield Mills Mall whisked open and Nick tugged Roger inside. It was clear to Nick that his companion wasn't looking forward to this visit.

"So where's the closest jewelry store?" Roger asked, headed for a directory. Nick led him away. "We'll just find it as we do a little window shopping."

Roger groaned.

Nick had been out in public several times in a dress, and he was used to the feeling of a skirt on his legs and the cool air passing over his exposed skin. He had learned a lesson as the Martian Queen, which was that as long as he just acted like nothing was wrong, no one was going to accuse him of being dressed in drag. He merrily clicked along the tiles in his heels.

Roger, meanwhile, had his head on a swivel and was looking every which way. "I don't think anyone suspects." He said to Nick.

"Of course they don't," Nick stopped by the window of the Coach store. "Half the women here look like overdressed drag queens anyway. I'm going to get a better purse in here, bring your credit card."

"I've got five hundred in cash in my pocket."

Nick took a second look at the purse he had in mind. "We'll need the card."

"What's wrong with the one you already have?"

"It's too big and clunky. Smaller is better."

When they finally arrived at a jewelry store, Nick was swinging his new bag back and forth under his arm. He was also sporting a nice new white leather jacket and had filled his new purse to the top with new make-up, hairbrushes and a sparkly pink cell phone. "Everything a real woman would need," Nick told Roger.

Roger knew this was neither the time or place for him to get into a fight about money. Nick pretty much had him over a barrel.

"I'd like to see your engagement rings," Nick said, in his most lilting female voice

The salesgirl's face immediately lit up. "This must be a very special day for you two!"

"You have no idea." Nick fed his arm through Roger's and leaned in tight. Then, he looked up, smiled, and batted his false eyelashes at him.

Roger's head jerked back in surprise. He then looked at the salesgirl. "You got anything used?"



Once the two returned to Roger's house, he made Nick promise to not lose the receipts for anything they had purchased. "Otherwise, I thought that went pretty well," Roger said.

Nick took off his small jacket and put it away. "It took forever for you to loosen up," he kicked off his boots and went over to the kitchen for a beer.

Roger followed him. "I loosened up? When was that? I'm still scared stiff."

Nick held out his hand to show the ring on it. "I don't know why I let you buy me the cheapest ring they had. I'm beginning to feel like this engagement is a sham!"

"I'm sure your heart is shattered."

"My finger is shattered. This thing is way too tight." Nick worked it around his finger.

"It'll be okay tomorrow." Roger took an offered beer from Nick and popped the top. "But seriously, you do one damn good job of impersonating a woman."

"Well, that's nice of you to say so, but I made a ton of mistakes today." He popped his beer. "Did you see me get in and out of the car? I looked like a drunkard. I nearly fell off my heels a half dozen times. That guy in the leather store? He had me read all the way."

"Really? I thought we were great."

"We won't last half an hour unless we get a lot of practice in." Nick examined his beer can, and then put it aside. "Let's get started right now. From this moment on, you and I are going to be living together as a couple." Nick took an opened bottle of white wine from the fridge and poured himself a modest glass. "Until we get home from the game, we're going to stay in character."

"Isn't that a bit extreme?"

"Yes, but if you say this is as important to you as it is, then spending the next..." Nick did the math. "56 hours as a couple will be worth it."

Roger took a deep breath. "No. I won't do it. You're fine as it is."

"I'll pull out of this deal right now."

"Okay, okay. Fine. We'll have it your way. We'll be a couple through the game."

"Good." Nick took a sip of his wine, leaving a red lip imprint on the glass. "Now, what do you want to have for dinner, sweetie?"

Roger rolled his eyes. "It really doesn't matter... uh..." Roger thought for a moment. "What should I call you, anyway?"

"Sweetie, honeybunch, dearest, babycakes, snuggle-wuggums..."

"No, no, no. The name. What's my fiancée's name?"

"Did you give them a name? The people at work? What did you tell them?"

"I... Uh... I guess I did." Roger scratched his chin. "I must have." Roger put down his beer and checked his phone. "Let me check my calendar..." He scrolled through a few appointments. "Here it is. '7:30, Game with...' Oh yeah. Now I remember. *Crap.*"

"What?"

"'Game with Dee Dee.'"

"*Dee Dee?* Are you serious?"

Roger threw up his hands. "I used to have a girlfriend named Dee Dee... It was just the first name I thought of..."

"Whatever. It's just for show, right? I get to choose the last name at least. We'll go with Dee Dee..."

"Summers." Roger interrupted.

"What?"

"Dee Dee Summers. I had to give a name for picking up the tickets at the Will Call booth."

"When were you going to tell me this?"

"I was hoping never."

"Fine. Roger Van der Slyke, I'm Dee Dee Summers."

Roger shook Nick's hand. "Hi Dee Dee. How about we order out for dinner?"

Nick wrapped his arms around Roger's neck. "I think that's a wonderful idea, honey."

"You enjoy making me sweat, don't you?"

"Absolutely."



By the time the Friday night game came around, both Nick and Roger were feeling well prepared. Although Roger couldn't have been more uncomfortable with having a fake girlfriend, he eventually got into the swing of things. He even helped with the dishes as Nick washed and Roger dried.

"Are we ready to go yet?" Roger asked.

"Here I come!" Nick said, putting the final touches on. He looked even better than the first time, this time accented by some modest jewelry and more practice in the skirt and heels. The time had done him well, as he carried himself as convincingly as a man was able to. It was time to meet the boss.

"You ready?" Roger asked Nick.

"I'm as ready as I could possibly be. You nervous?"

“Extremely.”

“So am I. But all we need to do is just not screw this up, and we’ll be fine.”

They drove the thirty-five minutes to downtown, then spent another hour finding parking. The center was packed tonight, full of enthusiastic fans. Nick looked like any other female fan, wearing team colors and showing a little sex appeal.

By the time they had gotten to their seats, Roger’s co-worker was already waiting for them.

“Well, look who finally decided to show up!” said the man, good-naturedly.

“I forgot how bad parking was downtown during the game,” Roger said, apologizing. “Gene, this is my fiancée, Dee Dee. Dee Dee, this is the Senior VP of personnel, Gene Kramer.”

“Ah, the famous Dee Dee. Good to finally meet you!” Gene shook Nick’s hand. Nick made sure for his hand to be girlishly limp. “This is my wife, Margot.”

“Hi Margot,” Nick sang in his practiced female voice. “I love your earrings.” In truth, they were a little gaudy, but Nick had learned that women always compliment other women when they meet.

“Hello, Dee Dee. I’m so glad we had a chance to finally meet Roger’s elusive fiancée!”

Elusive? Nick wasn’t sure how long Roger must have been telling them this story. It didn’t really matter though. It wasn’t going to be for long.

When they had exchanged pleasantries and settled into their seats, Nick whispered over to Roger, “Executive VP of Personnel? I thought we were meeting the Chairman of the Board.”

“I guess they must have switched on me. We’ll just go with it.”

They all sat down to watch the game, almost sounding natural and relaxed. Roger less so than Nick. Roger was clearly sweating this one through. Nick was trying to stay chatty, and he was probably even a bit annoying at times. But that was in character for Dee Dee. Even when Roger and Gene went for food, Nick was able to bluff his way through a conversation with Margot about what seeds to plant in the garden for the upcoming winter.

By the end of the night, with both Roger and Nick desperately watching the clock tick down second by second, they felt free and clear. In fact, the pressure they had both put on themselves was probably much more than they needed worry about. There hadn’t even been a hint of a problem.

The most uncomfortable moment of the night was watching the Shocker Girls cheerleaders strut their stuff on the court. Nick was worried that compared to the sexy, ultra-feminine girls on the squad, he fared so badly, one might doubt

his disguise. They had some real lookers on that cheerleading team, he thought to himself.

As the buzzer sounded to signal the end of the game, the crowd started to filter out. The Shock had lost by ten. "Well, you can't win 'em all," Gene said, imparting sage wisdom.

"I guess you can't. I'll see you Monday at work, Gene."

Margot leaned forward towards Nick, and Nick had to think for a moment why, but he quickly realized it was a farewell gesture. Nick leaned forward, too, as they lightly hugged each other. "I hope your garden comes out well in the spring!" Margot said to Nick.

"Yours too, Margot," Nick replied. "I'll see you."

"We'll be at the Anniversary Ball," Margot answered.

"I always look forward to it," Roger said.

"Can't miss it," Nick said. "Good-bye, guys!"

"Good night, you two!" Gene answered.

Once they were out of earshot, Roger grasped Nick by the arm, tightly. "Why did you say that?"

"Ow!" Nick answered. "Say what?"

Roger had to shout over the din of the crowd. "That we can't miss the ball?"

"I didn't say that!"

"What?"

"I said, I didn't say that!"

"Yes you did!"

"We'll talk about it in the car!"

By the time they did reach the car, both were so beat and exhausted that neither of them remembered to bring the subject up.

CHAPTER 3

Nick quickly used the five thousand dollars to try and get back in his apartment. He phoned Chet up, and Chet said that he'd need enough to move Sasha's things out of the apartment "for the time being" and Sasha had extended her trip and wasn't planning on coming back for a while. After that, Chet agreed to let Nick take over the lease.

Nick still had no luck getting in touch with Sasha, and was of half a mind to put a thousand down and go fly out there and confront her. He was just about to do it, too, when Chet told him of some sort of "court order" that would have him arrested on sight if he got within 500 feet of Sasha.

What had happened? Nick had no idea how this seemingly wonderful relationship had soured so fast. Whatever the cause, he was still sure that Chet was feeding her stories. He was a little twerp who never worked a day of labor in his life. He was always trying to weasel his way in on Sasha and what money she had. Now, Chet had three thousand dollars of Nick's money, as well.

Then, only a day after he had packed up his stuff from Roger's house, he got a call.

"I'm just asking for one more quick appearance," Roger said on his end of the phone.

Nick wasn't sure he was actually hearing correctly. "You have to be kidding me," he replied.

"The office now knows that I have a fiancée, and now the chairman of the board wants to meet you personally."

"I clearly told you that I..."

"And then you said you'd see Gene and Margot at the ball!"

"No I didn't!"

"Well, they said they were looking forward to seeing you there. I have an invitation in your name!" Roger said, getting angry. "I mean, Dee Dee's name. Anyway, I really need you. Five thousand's my offer."

"I can't let this be a regular thing, Roger. Once I can explain away as a lark. Twice and it becomes serial behavior."

"I'll do whatever it takes, Nick. You really have me in a tough spot. I need to produce Dee Dee one more time."

"That idiot who stole my apartment already told my girlfriend what I was up to, what if he finds out that I'm pretending to be someone's fiancée? I'll never see her again!"

"We didn't get caught the first time, and we can do it again. I'm begging you."

“Same terms as last time?” Nick said, hating himself instantly.

“All the way.”

It wasn't but six more hours when Nick found himself moving back in to Roger's cottage. He was none too happy about the situation, and he was sour enough that he didn't even talk to Roger for two days solid.

This time, Nick found himself faced with a new challenge. His previous appearance was in a casual setting, wearing casual clothes. Now, as Roger told him, this was a formal affair. It was a black-tie event. That meant he was going to be on display. He was going to have to look good. Beautiful, even. A great dress. Impeccable make-up. Elegant hair.

“Ten thousand dollars,” Nick said, when he finally spoke to Roger.

“Uh... I don't know if...” Roger was slow to reply.

“I'm going to really have to go even farther this time. I'm going to have to drop weight, buy a whole new set of shoes, a dress, jewelry, a new wig... Everything needs to be done over and done better.

“Six thousand?” Roger offered.

“Seven. Or I'm out of here.”

“Seven, then.”

“And no dancing.”

“That goes without saying.”

Nick took a new tactic for finding his dress this time. Since changing in a dress shop was just far too risky, he opted to buy as many dresses as Roger's credit card could hold, and then try them out at home. He'd then return the rest. After a lot of trips, he had finally found something that didn't make him look like a longshoreman in a dress or a semi-finalist in a cross-dressing pageant. He found a black velvet dress with a cream colored collar that went around the sides and covered the upper arm, giving the dress an off-the-shoulders look. A long split on the right side compensated for its tight fit.

The dress managed to show off his best assets, and conceal his nonexistent assets, while still looking attractive. He added a pair of velvet black pumps with an adventurous three-inch heel, pearl earrings and bracelets.

He worked on this new type of evening look, and it was about three days of makeup work until he was satisfied with his darker mix of colors and more strikingly defined appearance. As for his wig, Nick managed to find a close cousin to his “original” Dee Dee wig, but this one was parted to the side, and broke into waves and curls below the chin line.

He had picked a small clutch purse in the same cream color and had stuffed it with a few emergency repair items. Once he had worked up the courage, it was time for Roger to see the results. He had let him sweat it out this time, and

didn't let him see the finished product until the night of the ball.

"Dammit," Roger said when he saw his date. "You may be too good to be true."

"Of course I am, darling," Nick said in his feminine voice, "at least you have the good taste to know it."

"You've even got panty hose on."

"Silk stockings and garters, Roger. Only the best when you're paying for it."

"You're wearing a garter belt?" Roger opened the front door for them to leave.

"And the body-shaper has my waist down to twenty seven inches."

"That's unnatural."

"Well, I'll explode in five hours, so we better get back as quick as we can."

The conversation was sparse between the two as they drove in, but Roger did let Nick know about what to expect from the evening. It was an annual event, the Anniversary Ball, celebrating the founding of the first hospital owned by the church. There would be a few members of the clergy there, but most would be other executives at St. McGivens. There would be



cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, a dinner served, and some dancing with live music afterwards.

The first people they saw when they entered were Gene and Margot, who immediately welcomed them. Nick even got the womanly double-kiss-on-the-cheeks treatment from Margot, which he was able to return without looking awkward.

Gene then led them over to another, older man who was already eyeing them. "Dick, look who's here. It's Roger, and his fiancée. Dee Dee, meet our Chairman, Dick Porter."

The older man smiled broadly as he adjusted his bifocals. He removed a cigar from his fat lips and moved it to the hand that was holding a martini. "Dee Dee...?" He asked, as he offered his free hand.

"Summers. Dee Dee Summers." Nick shook Dick's meaty paw. Dick then took the opportunity to turn Nick's hand to examine the engagement ring.

"So our Roger here is going to make an honest woman out of you, hmmm?" Dick said. "He must be quite a guy to reign in a filly like yourself."

This was the man who was the chairman of the board on a church-run hospital chain? Nick was trying not to look as put off as he felt. The man drank, smoked and was rudely suggesting Dee Dee was a bit of a slut. Double standards, anyone?

"Yes, Roger is quite the... Man," Nick choked out.

Sensing a truly awkward moment about to hit, Roger quickly placed his hand around Nick and swept him away. "I'll catch up with you later, Dick! I promised Dee Dee I'd get her some caviar before it was all gone!"

"That was your boss?" Nick asked.

"The one and only," Roger said, still gently guiding Nick along to a table.

"We're trying to impress... Him?"

"He's sharper than he looks." Roger then pulled out a chair for Nick and motioned for him to sit down. "You can have a seat while I go out and mingle."

"Sit here? By myself? I'd almost think you're ditching me."

"Do you have a problem with that?"

"None at all."

Nick quickly got the attention of a server and had a drink and a plate of hors d'oeuvres delivered, and he read and re-read the program for entertainment. That lasted only for a short while, before he started to get a little anxious. He checked his cell phone and regretted not putting any games on it.

Looking around, he had already lost track of Roger, and started to look a little closer at the decor. It was a very extravagant affair. Not one of those "trying to

look expensive” type of business parties, but an honest-to-goodness formal ball. In fact, as he looked around at what the women were wearing, it occurred to Nick that his dress probably looked a bit cheap in comparison.

“Dee Dee, there you are!” A voice said, interrupting Nick’s thoughts. It was Margot. “I can’t have you all alone like this! I must introduce you to the other wives!”

“I really don’t want to...”

“Impose? This is a social event, and we’re just being social!” She stuck out her hand to help Nick up, and Nick was powerless but to take it.

Margot led Nick over through the crowd, saying pleasant but quick ‘hellos’ to people as she passed by. Eventually, they found a group of women who looked like they owned the place. They stood tall and proud, surveying the room with skeptical eyes. As Nick and Margot approached, they were given just a moment of attention, before the eyes of the women went back to scanning the crowd.

“Girls, I’d like you to meet Dee Dee Summers,” Margot said.

None of the women even blinked or bothered to face them.

“She’s the fiancée of Roger Van der Slyke!” Margot added.

That grabbed the attention of all four women in the group and immediately turned to look.

“You don’t say!” One of the women said.

“The famous Dee Dee in the flesh!” said another.

“I’m Brenda Gardner, my husband is Carl, the CFO.” She was a slightly aged woman with a heavily made up face. Brenda looked Nick over carefully, even looking closely over each of Nick’s shoulders. “I was beginning to think you were just a figment of Roger’s imagination.”

“Oh,” Nick replied, unwilling to expand on the subject.

“I was thinking that our Roger wasn’t into girls,” said another woman. She was in her thirties, with a reddish tint to her black hair. “But I suppose that’s why you’re here. Isn’t that right... Dee Dee?” That sentence contained at least two insults, an insinuation that Nick wasn’t who he said he was and a subtle test to try and uncover any deception. Nick immediately started to realize that this was going to be an interrogation, with only surface pleasantries.

Nick decided to keep his answers short and simple. “I’m not sure I quite understand what you’re talking about.”

The one woman who hadn’t spoken yet gently shook Nick’s hand. She was a very striking woman with auburn hair and a warm smile. She was noticeably younger than the others. “Never mind Gwen, Dee Dee. She’s a suspicious old bat.” The woman with black-red hair smiled back. That must have been the

Gwen she was referring to. "I'm very glad to meet you and I'm so glad Roger has finally found someone to settle down with. Have you two set a date?"

"No, I don't think we have," Nick replied.

"You don't *think* you have? Don't you *know*?" Gwen interrupted.

"Well, it all depends on Roger's schedule. He's so busy." Nick quickly said, trying to patch his error.

"Of course," the auburn-haired woman said, with no trace of suspicion. "The company can work the executives so hard sometimes."

"Yes," Nick said. Desperate to fill the conversation, he then added, "He tries so hard to impress. He's especially concerned about making an impression with that chairman of the board over there. He'd do anything to..."

"You mean my husband, Dick?" The auburn-haired woman said, innocently.

"Your *husband*?" Nick clarified.

"Yes, I'm Hayley. Hayley Porter."

Nick gathered himself. He had no idea. Now he was on the hot seat with the woman who could easily ruin Roger's career. He quickly rewound over the things he had just said in her presence. Had he screwed up? Well, had he screwed up enough to cause real damage? He hoped not.

"I hope you're not insinuating that my husband is susceptible to brown-nosing or would curry favors for a promotion," Hayley said.

Nick had just stepped in it. "Uh... I... I... I..."

"Actually," Hayley continued, "that sounds exactly like my husband. The little toad."

Margot giggled. "Now, now. Hayley. You did marry the man."

"That I did. Now Dee Dee, darling, don't let yourself be dazzled by the elegant surroundings and the smell of power. Only get married if you really love him."

Gwen snorted. "Love is highly overrated. It's security you need. Just don't sign a pre-nup, sweetie."

Brenda then stopped drinking long enough to talk. "So when's the wedding? When do you two make the greatest mistake of your lives?"

"Please, Bren!" Margot said, continuing to giggle, "They might actually be in love, you know. I hear such things are still possible."

"So are you thinking of a spring wedding?" Hayley asked.

"I really... It's not something we've quite worked out... yet..." Nick was searching for any sort of answer. He really was starting to worry that he wasn't nearly as prepared for this as he thought he was.

Gwen spoke. “My first husband strung me along for over two years without setting a date. Of course, now the little weasel pays ten thousand a month in alimony, so it evens out.”

Brenda had one more thing to say before she went back to her cocktail. “As long as you have his balls in a vice, it doesn’t matter if he doesn’t set a date.”

“O... Okay...” Nick stuttered.

“Never mind these crones, Dee Dee,” Hayley said, taking Nick by the arm. “I was hoping you’d have brought Roger’s daughter as well. I was looking forward to meeting her.”

“Daughter?” A confused and edgy Nick blurted.

“Roger hardly ever stops talking about his little pride and joy,” Margot said.

Hayley looked at Nick. “What was it that Roger said? Oh yes, that his darling little girl had just taken runner-up in a teen beauty contest. You must be very proud. Which pageant was that?”

With viper-like action, Nick snatched his cell phone from his small purse and opened it to his ear. “Sorry. Phone call.” He said to the women. He didn’t much care that it didn’t make any sort of a ringing noise. It was the only way out of this. He then quickly made tracks to get away.

As soon as he was out of sight, he put the phone away, spotted Roger, and headed right for him. He grabbed him by the elbow and pulled him away from whoever he was talking to.

“Sorry guys, looks like the little lady needs a word,” Roger said, all smiles.

“What the hell have you been telling people?” Nick growled. “I just learned that I have a daughter! How big is this fantasy world you invented, exactly?”

“Daughter?” Roger said, scratching his chin. “Where...? Oh, shoot. I forgot all about that.”

“Well, you should have told me! And when *are* we getting married, anyway?”

“Pardon?”

“The women over there want a date! What do I tell them?”

Roger peered over to where Nick was indicating and immediately recognized that they were the wives of the four most powerful men in the room. His face went white. “You were talking to *them*?” He said, frightened at the very thought of Nick making any miscue. They were sharks. He had seen those women destroy people with a smile and a wink. Now loomed the possibility that every lie he had ever told about his fake wife could be exposed at any moment. “Why did you go talking to *them*?”

“That Margot woman wanted to meet them, what was I supposed to do?” Nick protested.

“Well, for one thing...” Roger looked towards the gaggle of women and saw them advance towards him. They wanted to talk to him. To him and Nick. Him and his fiancée. Fear grabbed a hold of his expression.

The music started up for another slow song, and desperate for a way out, Roger grabbed Nick by the wrist and led him to the dance floor. “Dance!” he commanded.

“Wait a minute!” Nick said, struggling. “I said no dancing!”

“They’re coming over here! Unless you want to talk to them and try to explain everything...”

Nick then grabbed Roger around the waist and started to waltz. “You lead.”

That tactic gave them a few minutes together, to chew each other out, and then develop a plan to get out of there without looking suspicious. Nick also insisted it was time to get their stories straight.

“They’re looking at us,” Roger said, as he tried not to look like fools dancing to the slow music.

“I know,” Nick said. “They probably think we’re arguing.”

“We are.” Roger pulled Nick in closer. “Put your head on my shoulder.”

“Like hell I will.”

“Please, Nick. If they think that this is just a sham relationship, I’ll never get that job. You don’t know how much it means to me.”

“Five hundred bucks.”

“You want me to pay you to put your head on my shoulder?”

“Five hundred.”

“Done.”

Nick laid his head on Roger’s shoulder, and tried to look like he was at peace. To his point of view, the next two minutes of this took a year off his life, so when the music finally ended, Nick quickly grabbed Roger by the hand and led him to their table.

The rest of the evening went much smoother, and Nick felt much more prepared to engage the wives in small talk, now that he had things scoped out. He knew they were digging for information, maybe even weaknesses, so he kept his answers short and vague.

Dinner was welcome, just for the chance to have everyone stop asking questions while they had to eat. An hour after dessert, Nick was pushing Roger towards the exit.

Waiting there was Dick Porter, huffing away on his cigar, shaking hands with those leaving the ball.

Dick firmly grasped Roger's hand and shook vigorously. "Good to see you and your fiancée, Roger. Very good to see. The retreat is coming up at the end of the month, I'd like to have you there."

"The retreat? Is that a formal invitation?" Roger said, trying to restrain his excitement.

"What's the retreat?" Nick asked.

"Well, little lady," Dick said, "the executives of the company always have a little weekend retreat at the San Barros Mission at the beginning of the quarter. We work out strategy for the next three months."

"It's important," Roger added, whispering in Nick's ear.

"I'm sure you'll be looking forward to it, so I want you to come prepared." Dick said, again talking to Roger. "Don't let me down."

"I won't," Roger said, happy as a puppy.

"And dress warmly, dear," Hayley said to Nick, kissing him on the cheek.

"Warmly?" Nick asked.

"I'll see you Monday morning, Roger." Dick said, slapping Roger on the back.

"I'll see you then."

To Nick's horror, Dick then leaned over for... A kiss. Roger kept his hand firmly on Nick's back, preventing him from recoiling. He just had to smile as best he could as a wet smack from Dick's fat, blubbery, moist and wrinkled lips met his cheek.

As they got in the car, Nick was furiously rubbing the spit off his face with the collar of his dress. "So I hope it went well for you, at least."

"Do you know what that meant? I've just been invited to the retreat! Only the real power brokers at St. McGivens get to go to the retreat! This is big, big, big! You were fantastic!" Roger replied. He then leaned over to hug Nick.

"Don't you even try it," Nick said, holding up his hand.

"Sorry." Roger went back to starting up the car.

"I can't wait to get out of this getup once and for..." Nick stopped himself. "What did Hayley mean by telling me to dress warmly?"

"It's... It's a... *Couples* retreat."



When the car pulled in to Roger's driveway, Nick was still red in the face. Red in the face from the vitriolic cursing and shouting he had just blasted at Roger for even suggesting they do this once again for the retreat.

He was not at all prepared to see what he then saw. Which was Chet, standing at the front door of Roger's home.

Chet took the cigarette from his lips. "Oh, fucking God," he said, upon seeing Nick exit the car in his wig and dress. "Priceless."

"Wait, a second, Chet. I can explain..."

"Explain what? You told me you were dressing up for that movie show. You swore to me that you weren't doing anything else." Chet puffed on his cigarette. "What a load of shit that was, huh?"

"Chet, I'm not..."

"Hey, I'm not against your alternative lifestyle or anything... I'm just not going to let my sister give her apartment back to you, that's all."

Nick walked up the walkway, in his heels, pleading with him. "You said you'd let me move back in if..."

"You don't think this changes things? Looks like you've been out on a date with this guy. You're cheatin' on my sister and doin' it with a dude, fer chris-sakes!"

"I'm not doing anything like that!" Nick was advancing quickly on Chet, getting up close. "I'm earning the money that I have to pay you!"

"The old fashioned way? One quarter at a time?" Chet shot back.

"You stupid..." Nick swiftly raised his fist and was only stopped on his backswing by Roger, who kept him from getting any closer or throwing any punches.

"You wanna *fight*? You think I can't take a sissy-ass fag like you?"

"That's enough!" Roger barked. "You get off my property!"

Chet shot him a look and then gave a superior smirk to Nick. He pulled out an envelope. "I had come by to give you the keys, but now? Not a chance." He tucked it back in his pocket and walked on by.

"You come back here!" Nick yelled. "You have all my money! If you aren't going to let me move in, then give me my money back!"

"Eat shit," Chet said, without bothering to turn around.

"Don't tell Sasha!" Nick begged. "Please! Please! Don't tell her!"

There was no answer. Exhausted and despondent, Nick just slumped, falling into Roger's arms.



Roger was looking over his proposal. His make-or-break proposal. Everything he had was riding on it. He checked the clock on the wall, seeing it was 2 am.

He had put Nick to bed, practically tucking him in out in the cottage. The poor man was a wreck.

But spending all that time trying to calm Nick down had ruined his plans for the night, which was to get this “Malibu Spas” project brief done. Finance was expecting it in the morning, and he was always true to his word.

Just as he was thinking he was making some progress, the his cell phone rang. He checked the ID on the call.

“What do you want?” He said. “Yes, that was what I was looking for.” He glanced again at the time. “Look, can we talk about his in the morning? I have to get some work done.”

He listened to the reply. “No, I’m not trying to pull anything. You’ll have the money, the check will be FedEx’d to you by ten AM tomorrow.”

The sour look on Roger’s face was due to the answer on the other end of the line. “I’m not going to argue about this. Our agreement is still as we negotiated. You’ll have the money before the banks close. I need to go!”

“Yes, and the bonus!”

“Good night!” He barked. The call didn’t seem to be over to the person on the other side. But it was over — as far as Roger was concerned. “Good night, Chet!” He ended the call.

He looked over the papers again, and then the time. “Damn it. I’m never going to get to sleep.”



“Good morning,” Roger said, seeing Nick trudge into the kitchen. He had obviously followed the smell of coffee and bacon.

Nick dropped himself in his chair, only then noticing he was wearing a bra with falsies still in them. “This can’t be happening to me.” He mumbled.

Without comment, Roger poured Nick a cup and put some bacon and toaster hash browns on a plate for him. Nick looked at the plate, his barely alert senses still trying to make out what it was. He was slowly able to solve the puzzle of what to do with the coffee.

Once Nick had gotten his motor skills back and started in on the food, Roger tentatively decided to engage him in conversation. “I can’t thank you enough for what you’ve done for me.”

Nick continued to eat, not paying mind to his table mate.

“Look, I think that guy, Chip, is full of hot air. He’s not going to rat you out. He’s just looking for something to get you on. Something to keep you paying

him money.” Roger was trying his best. “He’s not worth the grief. He’ll never send those pictures. He does that and Chip doesn’t...”

“Chet.”

“Huh?”

“His name is Chet.”

“Right, Chet. He tells on you and he wastes his only bullet. After that, he has nothing to hang over you. He’ll never do anything with those pictures.”

“You’re giving him more credit than he deserves,” Nick said. “He’s such a hot head. He’ll use the pictures if he knows it’ll hurt me. He’ll do anything to hurt anyone at anytime, if he gets double-crossed. He’s loyal to no one.”

“Is that so?” Roger said. “I got that feeling, too.”

A few short hours later, Roger pulled up in his BMW outside Nick’s old apartment building. He rang the number and was let inside.

“Who’s that?” Chet said, from behind the door, the security chain dangling.

“It’s me.”

“I thought you said you didn’t want to be seen with me,” Chet said, unlatching the chain and letting Roger inside.

“I don’t,” Roger replied. “But you’re not doing what you said, either. We had a plan, and you’re not following it.”

“I showed up at your place, just like you asked me to!” Chet said, angrily. “Now you’re all pissed off? You’re...”

“You took photos, Chet. That was not in the plan.”

“I didn’t take any photos. That was just so...”

“You had a camera. I saw the flash.”

“It was all fake!”

Roger walked up to Chet, using his considerable height advantage to intimidate. “You’re trying to play me, Chet.” Roger placed his hand on the smaller man’s shoulder. “You’re blackmailing him. That wasn’t in the plan, either.”

“You’re not paying me enough!”

“You’re getting what we negotiated. Some cash and a free apartment. Or do you want me to stop paying the rent for you?”

“I need money for bills. For food and other stuff!” He argued.

“I suppose the ‘other stuff’ is parties and alcohol. This place looks like a frat house on Monday morning.” Roger looked around at the decor, which had largely been ruined. Furniture was turned over, and a jarringly musky odor of B.O. wafted through the air. “I’m not going to support your social life.”

“I don’t party! I just need more money!” Chet whined. “That little twerp brother in law has it coming! He’s a freak!”

“That doesn’t give you the right to blackmail him. That could ruin everything.” Roger’s eyes, following the wreckage around the room, focused on a small syringe laying on the floor. He suddenly realized he had mis-read Chet. He wasn’t throwing a party, the furniture was in ruins because he had thrown it over. Likely he was having a withdrawal fit. The man was hooked on heroin.

Now, Roger realized, he was out of his drugs and he was desperate for more. This gave him leverage.

“Here’s the deal,” Roger said, “I’ll give you five hundred dollars for the camera, and your assurance that those pictures will never be seen again.”

“A thousand!” Chet countered.

“Four hundred.” Roger answered.

“A thousand!” Chet repeated.

“Three hundred.”

“Four hundred?”

“Fine.”

Chet walked over to the couch where a small one-time camera was laying on a cushion. He grabbed it and tossed it to Roger.

“That’s a good choice you made there, Chet. We shouldn’t be enemies. We should be friends. Because I can be the best friend you ever had.”

“Do you have the money?” Chet asked.

Roger pulled a huge wad of cash from his pocket, and rolled off four one-hundred dollar bills. He started to give them to Chet but then pulled back. “I can give you four hundred now, or I can give you what you really want.”

“Give me the money!” Chet demanded.

“How much heroin does four hundred buy?” Roger said, still holding the money back. “Listen, I run with a pretty rich crowd. I run a hospital. I have sources for this stuff who can get it to me whenever I want — and for less than what you pay some street dealer.”

“What’s your point?” Chet asked, interested.



“I can get you what you need. You just let me know, and I’ll get it for you. I don’t need you trying to screw up our deal by blackmailing poor Nick. I need you happy and healthy.”

“What’s it gonna cost me?”

“Your continued cooperation.”

Chet looked around, diverting his eyes from Roger’s glare. “Fine. Deal. Done.” He said. “How soon can I get some?”

“Give me an hour.”



“Where have you been?” Nick asked when Roger returned.

“Had to mail some letters,” Roger replied. “I also need to know if you’re going to help me out of this retreat mess. If I have to bow out, I’ve got to let them know today. Hopefully I won’t lose all the things we’ve worked to get.”

“We?” Nick said.

“You and I do make a pretty good team. Believe me, I’ve been stuck with some pretty stupid people as partners in business, and the worst partners all have the same thing in common. They just don’t care.”

Nick chuckled. “You’re saying I care?”

“You care about about your end of the deal, and you spend a lot of time making sure you get things right. That’s something I respect, and wether you want to admit it or not, you do care about how this works out for me.”

“I may care, Roger, but don’t think that means I’m going to be Dee Dee for this couples business retreat.”

“Well, like any good business partner, you need incentive. What’s that toad Chip taking you for?”

“Chet. His name is Chet. He’s taking me for two thousand dollars this month. Or at least that’s what he wants.”

“I’ll cover that. Plus another five thousand to make up for the loss.”

The large sum of money made Nick twitch involuntarily. “How many days are we talking about?”

“A weekend. We arrive Friday night and leave Sunday afternoon.”

Nick really, really did not want to do it again. But after the flattery Roger had just thrown his way, Nick couldn’t manage to just say ‘no.’ He figured he’d just price himself out of the market. “I’ll do it for twenty-five thousand dollars.”

“Done,” Roger said, thrusting his hand out for a handshake.

His bluff being called, Nick now tried to sabotage it by adding on some deal-killers. "I'll need a whole new set of clothes for it, Probably a few thousand there, too."

Roger nodded in the affirmative. "Of course."

"And how long away is it?"

"Two weeks from Friday."

"We'll have to be in character for the whole time. Every minute of every day."

"Absolutely."

"They'll need a firm wedding date. Those women almost broke me on that one."

"June 23rd. Women always want a June wedding. Tell people we also wanted my daughter to be out of school."

"I'll need a credit card with direct access to your money. I can't keep getting approval from you."

"I can have a debit card made up by Wednesday."

"And..."

Roger interrupted Nick's blabbering. "Whatever we need to do to pull this off. I'm paying you what I think it's worth to me, and if I need to spend more, I'll quickly earn it back after I get the job. We're not going to let money get in the way of making this work."

"That's good to hear," Nick replied, lying through the insincere smile on his face.

"In fact, I have a suggestion I think will help us out quite a bit."



Nick was waiting patiently. Which was totally appropriate, as he was in a waiting room for patients. He spent his time ignoring the magazines and thinking about his predicament. He continued to think that Roger, being an administrator at a hospital, saw almost all problems as having a medical solution. Because that's why he was here.

"The Doctor will see you now, sir," The receptionist said to Nick, holding the office door open for him.

He nervously rose from his seat and let himself in. It looked like any average therapists' office, with deeply stained wood paneling on the walls, thick carpeting and an assortment of chairs, couches and pillows to provide maximum comfort.

“You must be Nick,” the doctor said, meeting him. The receptionist closed the door behind them.

“That’s me, all right,” Nick replied. “I’m Nick.”

“Nervous?” The doctor said. “Don’t be. Roger’s and old and dear friend. He’s practically responsible for my career, and I’d do anything for him. If he asked me to jump in front of a speeding train, I’d do it.” The doctor patted Nick on the shoulder, and motioned for him to choose a seat. Nick chose a small, thinly padded chair because it was closest.

“I just don’t know even how to explain this, or where to begin, Doctor Pffelter.”

“I understand. You can call me David or Dave, if you prefer.” The doctor found his own seat. “I do have to admit, when Roger explained this whole thing to me, I was more than curious. But I do respect the man’s judgement, and like I said, I owe him a lot, and I’ll do everything in my power to help you and him.”

“But, what exactly are we talking about? I don’t know how a therapist can help me at all.”

“What we can do, Nick, is just discuss things. Whatever’s on your mind. What Roger’s afraid of is that the stress of this whole affair might just start to affect you negatively. He wants to make sure that if you need an outlet for your emotions and thoughts that it’s there for you. It’s like preventative medicine. Dealing with your thoughts now, instead of waiting for something to go wrong.”

Nick sighed. “I guess.”

“I think this is an excellent idea. That’s why Roger is going to be the next CEO of this company, he thinks of everything. Smart as a whip.” The doctor poured Nick a glass of ice water, the clacking of the ice in the pitcher seeming to be the loudest thing in the silent room. The doctor placed it nearby Nick.

Shifting his weight uneasily, Nick was eager to get this over with. “So what do we do?”

“Well, if it’s all right with you, what we’ll do is just do a little inkblot work first. I have a projector in the wall, and I’ll show you a series of slides, and I’ll just have you take a look and give me your impressions of them.”

“If you think it will help,” Nick shrugged. With the flip of a switch, The doctor had turned the lights off, and a screen slowly emerged from the ceiling and the shape of a large blot of ink shone on it.

“Don’t say the first thing that comes to your mind.” The doctor said. “I want you to think about each one for two minutes. Then I’ll ask you for your thoughts.”

The doctor waited two long, dull, silent minutes in the dark — just as he promised. He asked for Nick’s impression and then went to the next slide.

Slide after slide this went on. Nick was extremely bored. Finally, after sixteen slides in, and two sips of water, Nick was out cold.

As the the doctor carefully observed Nick to see if he was truly unconscious, he walked over to his desk and pushed a button on the intercom. "It's okay. He's under."

The office door opened, and Roger Van der Slyke, who had been waiting, entered. "That didn't take too long," he observed.

"I think he'll be a good subject," doctor Pfelter said.

"How much of the hypnotic did you have to give him?"

"Very little," the doctor poked Nick's hand with his pen. Nick didn't even flinch. "Can you hear me, Nick?"

Nick hazily nodded.

The doctor lowered his voice, making it deep and resonant. "I want you to listen and remember Nick. I want you to trust. I want you to be open to new ideas. Can you do that for me, Nick?"

Nick whispered the word "yes."

"He's all yours, Roger." Doctor Pfelter walked to the exit. "Just remember not to do too much. A little bit at a time."

"Got it," Roger replied, and turned to Nick. He sat down next his his head and leaned over to talk into Nick's ear. "Hello, Dee Dee..."



Reluctantly, Nick agreed to a "trial run" at a birthday party for one of Roger's assistants. Nick truly didn't want to go, but for some reason, Roger seemed to be able to talk him into anything lately.

"It's silly to wait for the last minute before we have to spend a weekend as a couple," Roger said. "And you should move your stuff into the guest bedroom across from mine. Living in the guest house really doesn't feel like we're living together."

"I don't think it's really necessary..." Nick said. "We'll be fine as it is..."

"The guest room is made up for a woman with a vanity, mirror, a canopy bed. It's perfect for this. You're the perfectionist here, this is something you'd want to do if you really wanted this to succeed."

Nick had no objection that he could think of, but it just wasn't what he wanted to do. "Maybe later."

Roger sighed. "Well, let me buy some stuff for you that will make it feel more like a woman's room, then."

So, one week before the weekend retreat, he found himself in the cottage, sitting in front of a woman's vanity. Two weeks of practice had made the process easier, but Nick still had to concentrate to make sure everything was done correctly. He tweezed some stray hairs from his eyebrows, which no longer caused him to gasp in pain. His face was hair-free, thanks to a close shave and a light depilatory, and he ran his lotion-softened hand across his cheek to check for stubble. He had little to worry about.

Quickly moisturizing his face, Nick was ready for the foundation. He had to put it on a little heavily, as his rough male skin needed a bit of help to appear smooth. He had opted for a cream foundation, as it gave him the best results, even though it had taken him several tries to find the right shade for his skin. He used concealer in his under-eye area to minimize the dark circles he had never worried about before.

When he had first tried to use blush, he wound up looking less like an alluring woman more like a discount clown. Now, he understood how it was used to shape the cheek, and create an illusion of high-set cheekbones. Fortunately for him, his cheeks already had a good shape to them. If he was a woman, that is.

Nick was still experimenting when it came to eye shadow. He had started out with black and grey, but had now started to blend in some color, to highlight his eyes. The trick was to use the shadow to make his eyes look a little wider set. Trial and error — many errors — had led Nick to choose an eyeliner pencil rather than a liquid. He used a heavy line to make his masculine eyes look younger and more alive, even at the cost of looking a little “overly made up.”

He had a small armada of mascara tubes in his drawers, but after being let down repeatedly by promises of “longer and thicker,” he realized that the secret was in applying it the right way. Slow, steady strokes from the base to the tip.

Nick also lined his lips with pencil, and applied his lip color with a brush. He felt a little less of a sissy that way. No lipstick tubes. His masculine pride also kept his from admitting to himself that he already had developed a small selection of favorite shades of lipstick, preferring lighter shades and shiny glosses.

Once he was satisfied with his face, Nick also used a “leg and body cover” makeup on his shoulders, neck and legs. Well, he used it on his legs if he was showing leg. Which he almost always was. Pants did little to “sell” him as a woman.

Tonight, for the party, he had decided on a simple blouse and skirt. He was told it was just a casual get-together, so there was little need for “evening” make-up and “evening” wear. But, as he had learned, there was nothing “simple” about a blouse and skirt.

He had a pair of gel breast forms he had grown fond of, as they were easier to manage than glued forms. He had an expensive silky bra and panty set in “nat-

ural” color he had just purchased the other day. Shopping trips filled most of his days, it seemed. There was little to do in Roger’s large, empty home.

He laid his floppy gel breasts in the cups and reached around back to fasten the clips, with an ease he barely even noticed anymore. He then used a tightly-fit pair of swimming briefs to keep his manhood out of the way, and slid his legs through the flimsy panties, drawing them up his legs.

But something struck him differently today. After doing this same routine day in and day out several times, the only impression that he had of the process was its’ tedious length and repetitive nature. Tonight, though, he felt a shiver down his spine as the silky panties grazed upon his bare leg as he put them on. It felt nice.

The top he had chosen was a silk pale blue blouse with full length sleeves and a wide collar. The shimmering color had caught his eye in the store. Now, as he started to slip it on, the smoothness and softness of the material caused odd sensations to shoot through his skin. It was amazing. He loved the feeling. He ran his hands lightly along the sleeves and had to force himself to stop.

His skirt was a basic black wool skirt, at knee-length. But it had a silk lining. The touch of the silk fluttering over his bare legs was wild. Nick walked around the room, forcing him to move his skin as much as possible against the smooth fabric.

Where had this strange awakening come from? He could recall at least a half a dozen times he had work silk before, but this time, he seemed super-aware of it.

Not that he was complaining, mind you.

Finally, he slid his feet into a pair of simple black pumps with the highest heel he felt safe in — two inches — and left for downstairs. He had to retreat back to his room when he remembered to put on his wig. One of the promises he’d made to stay “in character” was to never been seen by Roger except in full female guise. Though, since he hadn’t cut his hair for a few months now, Nick realized his hair was already longer than a few women he knew.

Roger already had the car running as Nick came downstairs. “We’re going to be late!” He said.

“How can you rush true beauty?” Nick kidded.

Nick collected his purse and took the passenger’s seat in Roger’s Porsche. “You do actually look very nice tonight,” Roger remarked.

“I hope so,” Nick replied, rubbing his sleeve still.

Roger caught a glimpse of Nick, enjoying the feel of the fabric and smiled to himself. He realized that Doctor Pfelter was right. Nick was a good subject.

“So who are these people again?” Nick asked.

“Deidrich has been our best guy in HR for a couple years now.” Roger said, “He’s a great recruiter. He’s married to Selena. They’ve been together for two years.”

“And what did we get them?”

“A gift membership to Downtown Fitness.”

“Will they like it?”

“He’s been talking about joining a fitness club since forever. Now he’ll at least stop talking about it.”

“Good, good.” Nick adjusted his skirt, letting the silk liner caress his legs. “So, how long does it take to get to his place?”

“About twenty minutes.”

Nick checked the car clock. Only one minute had passed. Nineteen more to go. He adjusted the vents so the airflow would hit his face. He looked in his purse to make sure everything he had put in it one minute and thirty seconds ago was still there. He finally gave in and started a conversation.

“So, how’s work?” He asked.

“Same old, same old,” was Roger’s answer.

Nick sighed. “So, I haven’t heard from Chet lately.”

“That’s good news, I suppose.”

“Good and bad. I mean, at least he’s stopped threatening me and blackmailing me. But you never know when he’s going to just turn up and start everything all over again.”

“I’m not worried about him. If he had anything, he’d have used it by now.”

Roger glanced at his passenger. “Besides, he’s a wimp.”

“He’s a tenacious little pip-squeak, though. He’s been nothing but trouble since I ever met him. How he and Sasha could ever be raised in the same house, I don’t know.”

“You really love Sasha, don’t y...”

“Let’s not talk about it, Roger.” Nick cut him off. “I try not to even think about it, or else I’d go nuts.” Diverting his attention from the conversation, Nick did a double-take at a flash of a cute young thing outside his passenger-side window. He was crushed to see it was his own reflection in the rear-view mirror. Even simple pleasures like gawking at a girl were denied him as he kept living this farce. “How the hell did I wind up in this mess?” He said.

“What?” Roger asked, knowing full well what Nick said — and what he meant.

“How long should we stay?”

“Not too long. Deitrich is a good guy, but it’s not my crowd. We’ll beg out early.”

“Good to hear.” Nick turned back to the rear view mirror, but this time he used it to primp his hair.

When they arrived, the party had already been well underway. He had gone over and over in his mind how he would greet Deitrich, and more importantly, his wife. Would he smile, and then kiss cheeks? What would he say? ‘Good to meet you,’ ‘I’ve heard so much about you,’ ‘that’s a lovely dress,’ or would he have to wing it?

Finally, Nick decided he would just have to go with the moment. If he tried too hard, he would certainly

screw up. After all, after spending so much time with Roger “in character,” he should be able to handle something simple like a greeting.

When the moment came, Nick was relieved to just say a simple “hi.” Selena, Deitrich’s wife was dressed in a tight, angle-length sequined dress in greenish blue, and didn’t do much more than shake Nick’s hand. Most of the focus was on Roger. Deitrich, a blond man who looked as German as his name, was obviously trying to bond with his boss, and practically pushed Roger off to where they could talk. Suddenly, Nick found himself alone, surrounded by people he didn’t know and dressed in women’s clothing.

“Dee Dee,” a voice said from behind. Nick turned on his heel, stumbling in his shoes for the briefest of moments. “It’s so good to see you.” It took a moment for him to recognize the woman who was talking to him. He almost had forgotten her name. She had a reddish tint to her black hair, and looked to be in her late thirties, if you could get past the layers of makeup she wore.

“Gwen,” he said as merrily as he could muster, “I love your dress.”



Gwen kissed Nick on the cheek, politely hugging him at the same time. "What a lovely blouse," Gwen replied, "I just adore the feel of real silk."

A little scared that the woman might be reading his mind, Nick reluctantly agreed. "I do too."

Gwen used her drink to gesture around the room. "Isn't this a dreadful affair?"

Nick was hoping he could just spend the evening tagging along with Roger, looking bored. But he was going to have to interact. "I've been to worse," he replied.

"How horrible for you," Gwen said. "They tried to fix their own food." She pointed to a plate on a nearby table. "Haven't they even heard of catering? Let the professionals make you look good. Why you would labor over a stove while you have to watch over the decorators, hire entertainment and spend a day at the stylist I have no idea. The poor woman didn't even have the time to arrange for valet parking."

Gwen was obviously used to more extravagant parties than this. Why was she even here? "Is your husband here?" He asked.

Taking a sip from her drink, Gwen shrugged. "Somewhere, I suppose." She checked her watch. "I've given him until eight to take me home. He has fifteen more minutes, and he knows better than to break his word to me." She frowned, showing off the lines in her face which made it obvious she had frowned often.

Nick, for his part, desperately wanted to detach from Gwen, as he knew that Roger didn't like him talking to the wives of his superiors. But she was the only person he even vaguely knew, and it would have been more dangerous to excuse himself than it would be to stay.

"So, tell me that you've finally made Roger commit to a date."

"June 23rd."

"Good for you. That's still eight months away, but at least it's something."

It was eight months away, and left a lot of time for Roger to get that dumb job, and then break off the engagement. All the time in the world, Nick thought.

"You've fitted for your gown?" Gwen asked. "What church have you reserved?"

Suddenly, it was hot in here. "Church?" Nick blurted.

Gwen smiled. "You poor dear, you haven't even thought about it, have you? Well, if you haven't reserved a church, or even had a bridal gown fitting, you're running out of time, believe me. I remember my first wedding was rushed into

five months and was a disaster. Eight months is when you need to make your reservation, at the minimum.”

“I didn’t know,” Nick replied.

“Yes, that’s quite obvious.” Gwen finished her drink, taking the last part down in a single swig. She placed her glass down and started to go through her purse. “I know that first weddings can seem overwhelming...” She then plucked a business card out. “This is my planner that I use. Her name is Nora. Nora Greenway. She’s absolutely the best. Darling girl. She’s done my last three weddings and they’ve all been fabulous.”

Nick took the card, and as he did, he quickly compared his short, stubby nails to Gwen’s long, polished and immaculate ones. Gwen left a definite impression that she was a class above the rest, and Nick took note.

“What does a planner do?” Nick asked.

Gwen tossed her head back and laughed heartily. “You’re so lucky to have someone like me to guide you through this, Dee Dee. Someone to mentor you. I can see we’re going to be very good friends.” She then stepped alongside Nick and gently placed her hands in the small of Nick’s back and on his arm. “I need another cocktail, and you need a drink.” She guided him to the bar, where she ordered up another drink for herself, and ordered the same for Nick.

The party moved along rather quickly after that. Now that Gwen had found something of interest to her in “Dee Dee,” she actually stayed well beyond her eight o’clock deadline, ironically making her husband wait for her. Even Roger seemed a little put out to have to wait for Nick.

In the car on the way home, Nick checked to make sure that he had retained the card Gwen had given him. “Gwen said that we’d need to reserve a church right away if we’re going to be married in June.”

“But we’re not getting married in June,” Roger said, with a laugh.

“What if someone checks, though? Or asks us questions?” Nick was serious. “We should probably make a reservation.”

Roger thought for a moment. “You may be right. We have to at least go through the motions.”

Nick offered the card to Roger. “Gwen gave me this card for a wedding planner. Maybe you should give her a call.”

Roger just glanced at it. “Listen, I don’t think I even have the time to think about it, let alone deal with a wedding. Why don’t you give her a call? Something to keep you busy.”

Nick sighed heavily. “I really don’t want to. I can’t think of anything more boring than planning a wedding.”

“So instead, you could hang around the house all day, watching Spanish-language soap operas on TV.” Roger grinned.

Nick put the card back in his purse. “Point taken. Maybe I’ll call tomorrow.”

“Otherwise, I think you did really well tonight. I nearly swallowed my tie when I saw you with Gwen, but you two seemed to hit it off.”

“Well, she sure can talk,” Nick answered. “But once you get past that off-putting personality of hers, she’s actually got a wicked sense of humor. She was calling Deitrich’s wife ‘the little mermaid’ all night. That sea-foam dress of hers was ghastly.”

“You don’t say?”

“Horrible! And she clearly wanted to upstage every woman there. Why would you tell people to dress casually and then wear a five hundred dollar gown? Obviously she’s got some insecurity issues!”

“I didn’t notice that,” Roger said. Of course he didn’t — only a woman would.



It was only a day later, and two days before the big retreat that found Nick in the kitchen, cooking dinner. Not that he was trying to emulate being a housewife, but he was getting a little tired of ordering out. Besides, he had been boasting about his 5-alarm chili for a week, and Roger finally called him to task on it.

After the birthday party, and a few missteps that required him grabbing onto furniture to keep his balance, Nick had resolved to wear only his highest heels for the remainder of his “in character” time. These happened to be four inches in height.

The doorbell rang, and Nick instinctively stepped away to hide in the hallway to avoid being seen by anyone. He was perfectly presentable and fully in costume, but he just didn’t want to be seen when he didn’t have to be. “Dee Dee!” Roger called from the living room. “I have presents for you!”

Nick tottered into the living room, used to being called by that new name. “Presents?” He asked. “What presents?”

“*Lady* presents,” Roger replied, cryptically. “I bought some items to help you out a little.”

Nick saw the assortment of boxes that had been delivered, all in plain brown wrappers. He waited as Roger was obviously ready to explain what he meant.

“Working at the hospital gives me access to a lot of things that could really help you with your impersonation.” He unwrapped a box and held up its contents. “This is a small pill we use in patients who are having throat surgery. It

causes the glottis in the throat to stay partially open, forcing the patient to speak in a breathier voice. It will also put the cricothyroid muscle in a state of hyperactivity, which tenses the vocal cords. The side effect is that this tends to raise the voice a little. In fact, many male patients complain that they sound like girls when we use it.”

He handed a bottle of pills to Nick. “Pills can do that?”

“Well, it’s actually a lozenge.”

“I don’t believe that this can actually do that.”

“It does. Honest. Try it.”

Nick popped one in his mouth. “You’re lying.”

“We’ll know in half an hour.”

“What else you got?” Nick said, sucking on the lozenge.

“Latistil,” Roger said, holding up another pill bottle. “Grows eyelashes.”

“They make a prescription drug to grow eyelashes?”

“Brand new.”

Nick took the bottle. “Anything helps. More?”

“This stuff,” Roger had a smaller bottle of pills. “Melatox.”

“What the hell is that supposed to be?”

Roger rattled the bottle to see how full it was. “Amazing stuff. The Australians were trying to make a drug that would induce a tan. Increase melanin production to prevent skin cancer. Those Australians are very pale and love the sun.”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

“Anyway, not only did they succeed, creating a drug that tans your skin evenly and naturally, but the side effects...?” He let Nick guess.

“Elephantism. Lepracy?”

“This is the funny part. The side effects are decreased appetite causing weight loss, increased sex drive and helps you sleep.”

“Gimme that,” Nick said, urgently grabbing the bottle. “Why the hell isn’t someone selling this for billions of dollars?”

“Three companies are suing the crap outta each other to make it. It’s been held up in court for over twenty years.”

“Okay, and what’s in that box?”

“It’s called the Merkin Device. It’s designed to, in complete comfort, keep your junk from showing.”

Nick thought about that phrase for well over twenty seconds before he realized what that meant.

“You have something like that in a hospital?”

Roger cleared his throat. “We do a lot of things at the hospital.” He held it up. “This is how it works, first you take your flaccid penis...”

“I do *not* want to know how it works,” Nick said, abruptly. He left in a flash for the kitchen. “I think the chili’s burning.”



“Oh, Dee Dee. You’re looking wonderful. It’s so nice to have some new faces at our annual retreat.” Hayley was all smiles and hugs when Roger and Nick arrived. She and Dick ushered them inside and handed them over to the staff. The retreat was at a monastery in the hills far outside the city. It took two hours to drive there, along winding hillside roads. The place was absolutely stunning. Just looking at it was breathtaking. Being on the premises felt like being on hallowed ground.

A monk — real, live, honest-to-goodness monk — led them to their room. As Roger tried unsuccessfully to tip the monk, Nick’s attention was to the room. It was sparse, as you would figure a room in a monastery would be. That was good. Nick was hoping it wasn’t going to be overly romantic. He feared candles and the like, so the discount motel look suited him. What he did not like was the sleeping accommodations. A single bed.

Even as the monk was still in the room, Nick examined the mattresses to see if they were two beds pressed together, and could be moved apart. They weren’t.

As soon as they were alone, Roger turned to Nick. “Well?” he asked. “Is it one bed or two?”

“One,” Nick replied, starting to unpack his luggage. “You better not get frisky on me.”

“Don’t worry about it.” He plopped his suitcase on the bed and then himself. “I’ve never been so nervous. I must be crazy for bringing a man to impersonate a girlfriend. I could lose my job, and destroy my reputation. This is insane.”

Nick laughed. “Well, since I’m on the payroll, I haven’t commented. But yes, this is a *little* crazy.”

“It might be a good idea for you to lay low. We’ll probably need to be seen for dinner, and the brunch on Sunday, but the rest of time you can hang out here in the room, if you want.”

Nick looked around and saw no TV set. “I guess. I don’t know what I’ll do with myself for two days, but I’ll definitely try to keep myself busy in here. I certainly don’t want to be hanging out with ‘the wives’ all weekend.”

“I can’t possibly ask any more of you,” Roger said.

“Until you think of it.”

“Of course. Until I think of it.”

No sooner than had he said it, but the front door swung open slightly. It wasn't shut. “Knock knock!”

Nick immediately recognized the voice of Margot. He straightened himself and advanced on the door with a smile. “Margot! I haven't seen you in ages!” Taking the initiative, he hugged and kissed Margot in the ladylike fashion he had grown accustomed to. Noticing something different, Nick said, “I love what you've done with your hair!”

“Oh, Dee Dee, thank you. I just had it done. I swear, Gene hasn't even noticed yet. A woman could shave her head and their husbands would never even notice.”

“Well, they should notice, they're the ones paying for it!” Nick joked, slyly glancing at Roger. Roger smirked back.

“Make sure of that!” Margot kidded in Roger's direction. “Come with me, Dee Dee, we're all in the garden, having drinks. Gwen and Hayley are here and we've got a lot of things to do this weekend, and so little time!”

Margot had already claimed Nick's arm, but Nick was trying to gently keep his ground. “It's been a long drive, Margot, and...”

Roger interrupted. “She's not feeling that well, and she needs some rest.”

Margot's bright expression suddenly turned to bleak disappointment, like someone had just taken a chew toy from a dog. Immediately, Nick saw the worried expression on Roger's face. He was obviously concerned that this was making a bad impression.

“Oh no, I'm sure I'll be fine, honey,” Nick said, against his better judgement. “The girls won't be doing much more than sitting and talking.”

“No, of course not!” Margot chirped, her face lighting up with a smile. “We promise to return her to you in better shape than she left.”

With that, Margot tugged on Nick's arm and he followed. He immediately hated himself. It looked like he was going to have to really earn his money for the weekend.



Some hours later, when Nick arrived back at the room, he found it empty. A note on the dresser read, “Dee Dee — Have gone with the fellas to talk. Might be back late. Don't wait up. Love, Roger.”

At least this meant that Nick could undress in private, and pick the side of the bed he wanted to sleep on. Looking at the bed, Nick had hoped for something

wider. He knew for a while that he and Roger were going to have to share a bed for the trip, but he was still think that something wider, say fifty or a hundred feet wide, would make him feel better about it.

Nick slipped out of the off-the-shoulder dress he had worn for the first day. He gratefully kicked off his heels and set them aside. He switched out his wig for a second wig he had prepared for the occasion. It was the same color, length and style, but Nick had pinned it up so he could sleep in it. That way, should there be a fire or something, Nick would still look properly female if something happened.

Nick's head was still spinning, as the hours of chatter with the girls had bent his mind. After a few minutes of letting the girls just talk amongst themselves, they started to egg Nick on to join in. They wanted dirt, they wanted gossip. So "Dee Dee" told a tawdry story of her cousin "Rick" who had gotten tossed out of his own apartment when his girlfriend learned he was dressing in women's clothing. Now "Rick" was being blackmailed by "Bret," and can't get in contact with his girlfriend. They loved the story, at least. The group had gone on like that for hours, and by the end of the night, Nick had reached a sort of camaraderie with the women.

He undid his bra, and slid his panties off. That was when he was reminded he had capitulated and worn Roger's godawful Merkin device. He had forgotten about it, and had to admit it was far more comfortable than he could have imagined. Normally, something that jams your penis away and, compresses your testicles and cinches your waist would not be thought of as comfortable. But he had forgotten all about it. Which was good, because he was going to have to keep it on all night, for the same reasons he was using the second wig.

What was going to come off was the makeup. That was unavoidable. It was that or wake up in a pool of mascara in the morning. Using some cold cream, Nick gently wiped off the cosmetics as he stood at the mirror in the bathroom. He then slipped into the new nightie he had just purchased yesterday — made of silk, of course. His new favorite material.

He slipped into bed, choosing the left side, and waited for Roger.

It was at least one in the morning when Roger entered the room. Nick was well asleep by that point, but the sharp noises and stumbling woke him half-way. Nick figured that Roger had wound up drinking, and by the sound of it, was quite thoroughly sloshed.

Nick decided to just let himself fall back to sleep, when Roger's near-naked body crashed onto his side of the bed. He was practically unconscious. Even as Nick talked to him, he didn't respond. That wasn't so bad, but a few minutes later, when Roger's giant, limp, hairy arm came crashing down on Nick's body, it woke Nick up all the way. He tried to toss the arm off of him, but Roger's drunken state just caused Roger to put it right back again.

When light broke in the morning, it was still there. Fortunately, Nick had managed to fall asleep, even with it invading his space. Since he was awake before Roger, Nick decided to just slip out from under him and not mention it. Man-on-man intimacy. He really didn't want to talk about that sort of thing. Ever.

Without really thinking about it, he had put on an outfit and makeup, and was out the door. He wanted to be the heck out of there when Roger awoke. That also meant he had little choice but to go but downstairs for breakfast, and right into the clutches of Hayley, Margot and Gwen.

"Good morning, sunshine!" Gwen said, holding up her orange juice and vodka to welcome Nick. "Join the party!"

"Gwen's getting started early today," Hayley said, rolling her eyes. "The poor dear went a whole ten minutes after waking up without booze. I don't know how you survived."

"The pain was indescribable," Gwen smiled, "I think I need a drink to blot out the memory." She took another sip.

"One of the traditions of the retreat," Margot explained, "is to see how many orange juice and vodkas Gwen can drink before we leave."

"Twenty-one," Hayley added. "Or so I'm told."

"Where are the husbands?" Nick asked, as he found a seat.

"They came back as drunk as skunks last night, they won't be up for a while," Margot said. "Dee Dee, what in the world are you sucking on?"

Nick shrugged. "Lozenge. For my throat."

"Oh you have a bad throat?" Gwen asked, "Or did Roger demand a little... Oral... Attention from you last night?"

Nick nearly swallowed his lozenge whole.

"She's blushing," Hayley said, "and she comes off as so virginal."

"I just have a cold I'm getting over," Nick said, after coughing to regain his voice.

"Of course you do, dear." Gwen nodded, mockingly. "Say, do you girls know that our Dee Dee and Roger are to be wed on June 23rd?"

"You have a date!" How wonderful!" Hayley stood on her feet, and Nick had to do the same, because it was a hug. Margot hugged him as well.

"Tell me all about what you're doing!" Margot asked. "I love weddings! Such good memories."

"Yes! Tell us! Where's it going to be?" Hayley added.

Nick was prepared this time. "It's going to be at the Holy First Church of Christ on seventh street."

Gwen gave another mini-toast. "I married my second husband there. It's lovely. Lovely arches. Did you call my planner?"

"Yes, I did. She's taking care of all the arrangements." Nick had called, but hadn't committed to anything but the reservation of the church. It seemed useless to do any more, as this ruse wasn't going to last much longer.

"Invitations in the mail?" Margot said.

"Very soon," Nick replied.

"Well, on behalf of the girls, I'd like to welcome you to the club," Hayley said. "You're going to be one of us soon. One of the wives of St. McGivens."

Nick laughed. "Well, Roger hasn't even gotten the job yet..."

"Yes," Margot spoke. "But with us on your side, our husbands wouldn't dare not promote him."

"They'd never hear the end of it!" Hayley said.

Gwen put her drink down for a moment. "Face it, Dee Dee. You're part of this group, and we like it that way." She then picked up her drink again. Just before sipping, she said, "and we always get what we want."



The day went slowly for Nick, as the "husbands" had left before lunch for a round (or two or three) of golf. That left him alone with the "wives." After a very light lunch, it was suggested that they go on a drive for the afternoon. Hayley invited everyone into her convertible Bentley, and they spent the afternoon and early evening cruising along the roads that wound endlessly in the hills around the monastery.

The views were stunning. Deep, lush valleys that plunged deep into the earth, and rolling hills that spilled on forever. As the sun started to set, the golden light lit the hills up in beautiful oranges and amber hues.

After hours of drinking in gorgeous scenery that was so powerful, it made your heart thump with excitement. The hills practically radiated beauty, enveloping even the cold, broken heart of a man in a dress. All Nick wanted to think about was the warm, enveloping romance of nature. They returned home to the husbands, who had already started in on cocktails.

"Hey, the hens have flown back to the nest," Gene said. "We've been waiting for hours so we can sit for dinner."

Dick stopped puffing on his cigar for a moment. "Where'd you broads go? You get lost?" He chuckled.

Arnie, Gwen's husband, was just as condescending. "My dad always said to never let a woman drive. They won't stop until they find a sale."

They all laughed at the poor attempt of humor — even Roger.

Nick actually felt angry as the men sucked every bit of joy and appreciation of beauty out of his heart. Didn't they understand how amazing the countryside is?

Hayley, Gwen and Margot were also just as disappointed. Gwen folded her arms and gave the men a scowl only she could give them. Margot put her hand on her hip and grabbed Nick by the arm. "Obviously they're doing fine by themselves, so they can get along without us." They then started to leave huffily.

Hayley tossed her hair and turned away. "If you think you had to wait now, wait until tonight in bed," she said.

Dick was up like a shot, immediately apologizing to his wife, and kissing her on the cheek. "Don't be that way, schnookie-lumps," he begged.

Arnie called out after his wife. "Aw, Gwen, you know I'm just yankin' your chain, right?"

"Well, you'll have to yank you own chain, tonight, darling," Gwen quipped in reply.

Quickly, Arnie walked over to her and started to rub her shoulders. Just beside those two, Margot was similarly being consoled by Gene.

Still ticked off, Nick didn't even realize he had just unintentionally baited Roger into doing the same thing the other men were doing. Timidly, Roger approached Nick, put his hands on his shoulders and with a grimace of uncertainty on his face, he tried to console him by holding him closer.

Nick instinctively fought it off, breaking free. Then, only too late, he saw the other men and their wives kiss and make up. He then looked back at Roger's worried expression, as Roger took a microscopic step forward. "Oh, no," Nick said, backing away. "No. No." Nick then saw the eyes of the other six men and women upon him, now having made up, wondering if they were about to witness a scene or a spat.

Quickly, Nick calculated the terrifying equation. Apology not accepted equalled spat. Spat equalled unhappy couple. Unhappy couple meant doubt for Roger's relationship. That was equal to no promotion. Nick sighed heavily, slumped his shoulders and rolled his eyes, conceding to the fact that he had just trapped himself into a kiss.

Roger correctly interpreted the sigh as the non-verbal message: "Go ahead, I'm screwed."

Nick steeled himself rigid to take it. Roger quickly pecked him on the cheek.

"Well, that's settled." Margot declared. "I'm starved, let's eat."

Nick had little appetite.



The remaining time was largely uneventful. The most eventful thing that happened was that Nick demanded Roger sleep on the floor for the second night. He did, but miraculously, Nick found Roger snoozing away on the mattress next to him when he awoke in the morning.

Nick rose early to get himself ready. There would be just a Sunday church service and then brunch before they set out for home. They'd be done with this charade by four.

Nick carefully selected his final outfit. He had packed heavily, just in case, and had quite a few things to choose from. Being Sunday at a monastery, he decided to keep it respectful. It was a little chilly, so he opted for white opaque tights, a sleeveless baby blue sun dress over a white t-shirt, and a pair of wedge sandals with a four inch heel. Well, he had been practicing on four inch heels, and this was his last day to show off his skill. No sense wasting all that practice time.

But what he really enjoyed was new thrill of feeling his tights zipping along under his skirt. He had never tried it before. What an incredible sensation. Nick was driven almost to complete distraction. He decided on a short walk around the building, which he told himself was for exercise, but it was really just to keep feeling the tights.

Realizing he was spending far too much time on swishing his legs around with his skirt, he wanted to take everything off and wear something else. But it was too late. Back at the room, Roger was awake, in the shower, and in moments, he'd be dressed and ready to go. Church would start in minutes.

Even as he said pleasant "hello's" to everyone, Nick was still thinking about his tights. Halfway through the services, he was thinking about the tights. He crossed and uncrossed his legs twice a minute. "Why the fuckin' hell can't I stop doing this?" He mumbled to himself. Then, remembering where he was, a quick 'Hail Mary.'

When they sat down for brunch, Nick had to be kept on point to stay in the conversation. Roger was actually physically prodding him, as Nick's attention would quickly wander to his clothing. He absently smiled, and his eyes would stare into the sky. While he was just thinking about his clothes, to the rest of the world he looked like...

"I remember when I was a newlywed. I must have looked like you do every day for months," Margot said to Nick.

"Wha?" Nick replied, coming back down to Earth.

“You two must do it like rabbits,” Gwen whispered from too far away. Gene overheard the comment, and grinned at Roger.

“You took the old lady out for a spin last night, Roger?” Gene said. “Shouldn’t you wait for your wedding night? You’re in a church, you know.”

“You old dog,” Dick added, elbowing Roger in the arm.

Roger, who had been eating and was oblivious to everything being discussed, swallowed and decided to do the safe thing and agree with the boss. “Yes sir.”

“I thought as much,” Dick replied, lighting up his cigar for the morning. “You two make a great couple. If I wasn’t so goddamned old and ugly, I might have a go at her myself.”

“Richard!” Hayley objected, half in jest. “Behave!”

Nick just looked in Roger’s eyes, not believing that everyone at the table was taking about him having sex. “We didn’t...” Nick tried to say.

Now in on it, Roger cut Nick off. “Mind your own business everyone. What me and the little lady do in the privacy of our own bedroom, stays there.”

“Not after I develop the film!” Arnie joked.

“Between, Me, Dee Dee and Arnie, then,” Roger said.

Everyone, except for a thoroughly ill Nick, laughed.



“Goodbye, girls,” Nick said. Waving goodbye to his female companions, Nick was finally done with it. He had hugged and politely kissed each one on the cheek, as Roger shook hands with the men. It was all good vibes. The guys had gotten along with Roger, and Roger had definitely left a positive impression. The smile on Roger’s face proved he had felt it, too.

As they got into the car and eased out of the driveway, Nick told him that the wives had pretty much backed him as well.

“Really?” He replied. “You did a great job. They took you right into their little group. I would never had expected for you to make friends like you did.”

“Yeah, well, I think friends is going a bit far, but they all sure sounded like they liked you, and that means you’ve got that job.” Nick said.

“See? This was worth every cent I’ve invested in you.”

“Well, I’m glad it’s worked out for you, Roger. But as for me, I can’t wait to get in the shower, get these breasts off, cut my hair and get out of this stupid underwear. Then, I’m going to the nearest steak house and order me up a thick, juicy...”

Nick’s cell phone went off. He didn’t recognize the caller number.

“Probably Chet wanting more money,” He said. Nick flipped open the phone. “Hello?”

Nick immediately started to rub his temple. Roger was puzzled.

“I’m out on Tuesday,” Nick said, using his feminine voice. “Wednesday, I’m busy. The whole week, really.”

Nick crossed his fingers. Then his face sank. “The week after that? I’m always doing something... No! I’m not trying to avoid... No! No no no no! I’ll be happy to make the time. How about Thursday? I’ll see you on Thursday then, Gwen.” Nick clacked the phone off.

“That was Gwen?” Roger asked.

Nick nodded his head, regretfully. “She wants to have me go with her to pick out a bridal gown. How could I say no?”

“Well, I’m glad you didn’t. I’ll be happy to pay...”

The phone rang again.

“Hello?” Nick answered. “Hi, Hayley.” He kept his voice feminine and chipper, but otherwise he was pretending to ram his head into the dashboard. “Fundraiser for blind children? Friday? Of course I can be there...” Nick fired an imaginary bullet into his head from his cocked fingers.

“Well, we’ve got to break up by Thursday,” Nick said, as he dropped the phone onto the floor.

Roger looked over at Nick. Nick looked back. Roger looked again. “You’re kidding, right?”

“If you think I’m going to keep living this lie, you’re crazy. I don’t care how much money is on the table. At some point you have to return to sanity. And I’ve got to get back to living a real life again.”

“I understand,” Roger said, looking dead ahead on the road. “I understand.” Then his mood changed. “Hey, what if I make a deal with you?”

“No deals, Roger. You keep talking me into this,” Nick replied.

“Wait, hear me out.” Roger said. “What if I can get Chet off your back, out of your apartment and get you back in touch with Sasha? How about that?”

“And what do you want? How would you do that?”

“Never mind that. I’ll get it done. Just give me two, maybe three weeks of Dee Dee. I have to keep up appearances until the promotion comes through.”

“Hell, if you can get me in touch with Sasha, I’ll bear your children.”

CHAPTER 4

“You can go in and see the doctor now, Sir. Miss. Sir.” The receptionist said. She turned away to save face.

Nick sighed, and slung his purse on his shoulder. The door opened, and Dr. Pfelter greeted Nick. “Good afternoon, good to see you. Come right in.” The doctor was a bald man with a nearly perfectly round head. A pair of English rim glasses on his face were the only noticeable feature.

“Hello, doctor,” he said, through a filled cheek. “Sorry about the lozenge. I need to do this for my voice,” Nick apologized, as the door closed behind him.

“You’re confusing my poor assistant at the desk,” the doctor joked.

“No more confused than I am.” Nick chose a plush leather chair and took a seat. He crossed his legs for modesty. “As you can see, I’m still doing this.”

“Refresh my memory,” the doctor said, pouring some water for his patient, “you were supposed to be finished with your commitment to Roger by now?”

“I was supposed to be done a week ago. But I was so successful at my impersonation, that now...” He took a breath. “Now, I’m booked every day of the week with some social obligation. I have parties, charity fundraisers, dinners, sports events... My calendar is jammed for three weeks full of appearances as Dee Dee!”

“So you’re worried that...”

“I think I’ve trapped myself in the lie. I have to tell Roger that I’m done. I have to set a date. I’m dressing up in women’s clothing! I’m pretending to be someone I’m not! It’s a disaster waiting to happen!”

The doctor sat back for a moment of contemplation. “But in the meantime, would you agree that you’re doing some good?”

“Good? How in the hell...”

“Well, aside from the fact that you’re helping Roger out, bettering his life — you are being paid for this. You’re making quite a bit of money.”

“Yes, there’s money. But...”

“You have a roof over your head, you don’t have a job you have to work at. Those are benefits of your situation you should consider.”

Nick shook his head. “Are you working for Roger? I think you’re trying to make this insane situation seem rational.”

“I’m on your side, Nick. I’m always on your side. I would be doing a disservice to you, as your analyst, not to help you see the entire picture. In that vein, are you ready to live on your own, find a place, get a job, and leave Roger to his fate?”

“I like Roger, I want him to do well. But I have to walk away at some point.”

“Granted. But why? What are the reasons you should walk away?”

“I need to leave, because sooner or later someone is going to find out that a man is pretending to be his wife.”

“So if it weren’t for being discovered, you wouldn’t be so eager to leave? What say you actually were a woman.”

“Come again?”

“Imagine that you are a woman. You’re being paid to be seen with Roger, and all your expenses and care are being taken care of. Would you leave?”

“I mean, it’s still a lie, pretending to be his wife, but if I were a woman, I guess I might be tempted to stay.”

“So, given that the principal point of your objection is that you’re worried about discovery, would it put your mind at ease if you were less discoverable?”

Nick gently tossed his head back and forth, fighting the answer. “I suppose,” he said tossing his hands in the air.

“Then if you embraced a more complete disguise — in fact let’s not call it a disguise. If you were more woman than man, would this be a problem?”

“I guess not.” Nick took a sip of the water. He was sure he had lost control of the conversation somewhere, but the logic wasn’t hard to understand.

“So, then it follows that if you were more feminine, and more like a woman, the less stress you’d feel. The less you’d worry, and the more you could relax, and enjoy the life of leisure you’ve been lucky enough to find.”

“I guess that makes some kind of sense,” Nick said, scratching his bare chin.

“I have some slides I’d like you to take a look at, Nick.” Just as before, the room went dark, a screen appeared from the ceiling, and inkblots appeared on the screen. Inside three minutes, Nick was in a trance.

“Brilliant stuff, Mark. You almost had me convinced,” Roger said, entering the room. “The suggestion was certainly implanted in his mind.”

“I’ll leave you alone. I’ll be in the back room when you’re ready to bring him out.” The doctor left through a side door.

Roger drew a chair close to Nick so he could talk slowly into his ear. “Can you hear me, Nick? Good. Very good.” He paused. “So, have you been enjoying the silk and leggings like I asked you to?”

“Oh... Yes, I have,” Nick replied, dreamily.

“Fantastic. Now I want you to think about what the doctor said. Wouldn’t it be easier to be more like a woman? Wouldn’t that help your good friend Roger? You do want to help Roger, don’t you?”

Nick nodded.

“Then let’s start with some simple things that will help. Like the way you look, the way you dress, the way you walk and such. That would help you stop worrying so much, wouldn’t it?”

Nick nodded again.

“Very good. But let’s start with simple things. Such as names...”



That evening, Nick was preparing a dinner of pasta and salad for him and Roger. He came out of the kitchen with an apron over his dress. “What a day! I swear, if I have to work one more charity soup kitchen... I’m going to go mental. Sweetie, what drink would you like with dinner?”

“Let’s have wine. After my promotion, I’ll be able to afford things like that,” Roger replied.

“I think you can afford it now. You’re just used to beer and pizza.” Nick sat down to join Roger at the table, waiting for the water to boil. “You know I’ve been thinking.” Nick unconsciously touched Roger on the hands for a moment, then raised his hand back up to his chest, where it lay limp. “I think it would be better for me, and for you certainly, if I just paid a little more attention to the way I present myself as a woman.” Nick’s hand then started to play with an earring clamped onto his earlobe.

“You do a great job already. I don’t know what more you could do.” Roger said.

“Well, for starters I think I should definitely see a doctor. A medical doctor about how I can improve my appearance. You know, someone who has some expertise in this sort of thing. Someone who’s used to dealing with people in my situation.”

“Sure, I suppose. I mean, we have a couple of guys who do some work in gender specialties.”

“I think I should see one of them and work out things I can do, vitamins for thicker hair, softening my skin, that sort of thing,” Nick said, using his hands to make his points. “Also, I’ve decided to just let myself fall into this role. That’s why I’m making dinner for us tonight. Did you notice I called you ‘sweetie?’ Little things like that really help me adjust.”

“I did notice, I just thought you were being sarcastic.”

“I’m just eating myself up over this whole dressing up business. As long as I’ve got to be doing this, I’m just going to settle in, because every time I think it’s over, it’s not.”

Roger felt the need to apologize. “It’s just that...”

“Don’t worry about it.” Nick stopped him from going on. He absently touched Roger on the hand again. “I know you’re doing your best. I promised to help you get the promotion, and if I have to do this for two, three, four or more weeks, I’m not going to let it bother me.”

“I’ve got to say, this new attitude surprises me. It’s very welcome, but it surprises me.”

“I’m still Nick under all this, but as long as I’ve made this commitment to you, and the commitments you’re making for me, I’m going to do this the best I can.” Nick said with a half-smile. “By the way, have you talked to Chet about my apartment?”

“Well, I think as I’ve mentioned, that is to say... Chet’s not... I think I hear the water boiling over.”

“Oh!” Nick said, getting to his feet with a none-too-masculine yelp. “My water!” He quickly skittered off into the kitchen in his high heels and tight skirt.



“It’s you,” Chet said. “Do you have...”

“Your drugs?” Roger replied. “Yes. But I need to talk to you before you check out for the night.”

“Make it quick,” Chet spat. “I really fuckin’ need the stuff.” He massaged a hungry arm as he paced.

“I need you to move out. I also need Sasha’s phone number.”

“*What?* Are you goin’ back on our deal? You said...”

“I know what I said, Chet!” Roger barked. “I made a deal that I would get you out of this place, and I’d get him in contact with Sasha. Don’t worry about it. I’ll put you up in nicer place than this.”

Chet was suspicious of this change in plans. “I don’t want to move out.”

“Don’t fight me on this, Chet. You’ve trashed this place completely anyway. I can put you up in a place near where I live. I’ll get you maid service to clean it up, and no nosy neighbors to ask what you’re doing.”

His impatience got the best of Chet. His pale blue eyes were dilated in anticipation of another hit. “Fine. Yeah. Fine.”

“Good. You don’t have much to move, do you?”

“No. Clothes. I got some records. A six-pack in the fridge.”

“I’ll have someone here, day after tomorrow, to clean this up. I’ll drive you over to the new place then.”

Chet’s voice was becoming even more anxious. “I need the...”

“I also need Sasha’s phone number,” Roger said.

“Hey, I already did what you told me. I don’t think she’s going to want to talk to...”

“Let me worry about that. The number, please.”

Chet hesitated. The number was one thing he had as insurance that Roger would still keep him paid and hooked up.

“The number for the syringe,” Roger offered.

Chet quickly tore a page out of an expensive photography book and scribbled the number out on it. Roger handed over the syringe.

In three seconds flat, Chet wrapped a shoelace around his upper arm and injected the drug into his vein.

“I’ll show myself out,” Roger said to the enraptured body of Chet.



Some weeks later, Nick was meeting Gwen for lunch and some shopping. Gwen was also trying to invite Margot, but didn’t know if she was too busy or not. It was yet another visit to a bridal shop. Nick had been to two so far, and had evaded any attempt to do a dress fitting by pretending to be picky.

But today was the day. He was prepared for a fitting today. It became clear to him that Gwen would keep harping on the subject until Nick picked something, so he had to be ready to try one on and put down a deposit.

He had waited this long, because he simply wasn’t ready, physically. However, thanks to the work of Doctor Kinkowski at the Hospital, he was feeling confident. Roger had recommended Dr. Kinkowski, who in addition to doing “gender specialty” and “gender transitional” work, also dealt with older women and menopause patients. The same general course of treatments, the doctor explained, could be used to help refine Nick’s appearance.

Thanks to “high-intensity light” and a bath in an organic hair inhibiting liquid, Nick’s body and face were as smooth as it had been since he was a ten-year-old. The doctor said that the treatment was only effective “over a course regular application,” and was therefore safe to use as a temporary but long-lasting depilatory.

With no hair or stubble on his body, Nick’s skin felt softer than ever. But the doctor had Nick start to use vitamins, skin moisturizer and a regimen of other lotions that had made his skin feel incredible. Not only did it feel great, but it was also much better looking. Nick was pleased to see his complexion clear up, and his sometimes acne-prone skin become even-toned and blemish-free. With

the tanning effect from the Melatox he had been taking already, he was always receiving compliments from women on his skin.

His weight had also dropped enough that Nick would feel comfortable enough to be seen without clothes. Well, he was comfortable enough before he was impersonating a woman, but now he was slim enough to be seen as a woman. Also thanks to the Melatox, he was tipping the scales at about a hundred and thirty five pounds.

An unfortunate by-product of all the weight loss was that Nick now felt as weak as a kitten, and his rapidly shrinking muscles were a hit to his male pride. Gathering fat on his rear end and hips also reminded him he wasn't getting much exercise. When this was over, he was going to have to buy a home gym just so he could build himself up enough to be seen at a real gym.

There was still the problem of not having any female parts, and the dressmaker fitting his gown was sure to note the addition of parts that women traditionally don't have. To work around the problem, Nick had found a body-shaper garment that covered him from the armpit to the thigh. Not only was he able to pad himself under the body-shaper, but he could tuck himself in tightly without the "Merkin device" being seen. Also, since it was a body-shaper, it nipped in his waist to twenty six inches. He was projecting a distinctively female figure, and Nick was sure the dressmaker would have little problem with him keeping the body-shaper on.

As Nick dressed for the day, he was still enjoying the process. He figured that after several weeks — was it months now? — he'd have gotten used to putting on women's clothing. But even now, he was still feeling the thrill of the light and smooth fabrics against his now even more sensitive soft skin. He had taken to wearing stockings as often as possible, even if it was against the fashion of the day. He was not about to admit to himself that he was addicted, but he was even wearing pantyhose under his ladies' slacks.

Silk, satin and rayon were starting to take over his ever-expanding wardrobe. He was also starting to choose clothes based on the need for a silky slip underneath. He was looking for any excuse to wear soft, slippery clothes.

Today, he had chosen something that would be easy enough to remove when necessary, but still stylish enough to be seen with high-class women like Gwen and Margot. He had recently gotten a rayon collared halter top in black with a huge red flower print. He had seen Margot wear one very much like it the other day at a fundraiser. Also inspired by something Hayley had worn, Nick had purchased a silver satin skirt with a knee-length hem. A pair of black "Robin Hood" boots with a fringe was what he chose for shoes. Sadly, he had passed on any leggings for the sake of changing quickly.

Nick examined his closet, and decided he should pick up a few more things if he had the time today. He had a lot of clothes, but he had lost enough weight

that some of his older things didn't fit anymore. With another week full of appointments, he was going to need at least three more day outfits and at least two evening gowns. Fortunately, Roger's credit card hadn't broken yet.

Before he stepped into his outfit, Nick appraised himself in the mirror. He was worried that the weight loss might be accelerating. He was wasting away. Margot had offered to put him on her guest list at her club. She had repeatedly asked if Nick wanted to join her for tennis or aerobics. Maybe, he thought, he should take her up on the offer, just to stay in shape.

He also thought he wasn't that far away from looking almost exactly like a woman. His chest even stuck out a little bit, without padding. Did it always do that? Maybe it was wearing the bras that pinched his flesh so much.

Roger was spending the day working at home, and raised his eyebrows when Nick came downstairs. "I have one sexy girlfriend," he joked.

"I guess I should be flattered," Nick replied.

"Take it for what it's worth. But whatever you're doing, it works."

"Thanks. I'm going to be spending the day with Gwen looking at bridal gowns. I'll probably have to pick out bridesmaid dresses, too. You okay with putting down a deposit?"

"It's what we need to do."

"Thanks, honey. I'll try to keep it from being too much."

"I really can't get used to you calling me honey," Roger said. "Don't worry about it. Pick what you like. The more it looks like you're really picking a gown, the better."

Nick emptied the contents of yesterday's purse into today's purse. "I don't really want one. I don't know what to pick."

"Just imagine what you'd want to see if you were getting married to a sexy girl. If that fails, just get what Gwen wants you to get."

"Gwen has no taste. She dresses like Joan Collins on hallucinogenic drugs. Like Elton John threw up on Ziggy Stardust. Like..."

"I get the picture. Just get something nice, and don't worry about price. I'll see you back here for dinner at six."

"Yes, dear," Nick replied, clamping his earrings on. When had he become such a pushover? 'Yes dear?' Nick resolved to show some backbone to Roger next time they talked. He wasn't going to make a habit of being told what to do.

A few minutes later, Gwen came by and picked up Nick for shopping. They also went by Margot's house, who decided she would tag along. They laughed and told stories about their "husbands" all the way to downtown. Nick wasn't sure exactly when he had become so adjusted to being Dee Dee and spending time with the wives. Maybe it was gradual. But he rarely even worried about

being unmasked anymore. They felt more like his friends, and more and more they felt like his peer group. There really weren't any other people in his life. Just like he had become a part of the group when he was performing at the theater, he was now performing for a new audience.

"Have you lost weight, Dee Dee?" Margot asked.

"Every time I see her, I think she's lost more weight," Gwen said to Margot.

"You have *got* to tell me the diet you're on," Margot asked Nick.

Nick waved the question off with a limp hand. "I'm not losing that much. I just don't eat as much as I used to."

"Willpower. Who has the patience for that?" Gwen joked.

Margot giggled. "Besides, she's getting married. I remember I dropped twenty pounds just before I got married."

"Me too," Gwen said, "I just had to fit in that dress. Then I gained it back on the honeymoon."

"You're both thin enough."

Gwen gave a sharp, single laugh. "I'm a cow."

"Come on, Gwen, you've got to be..." Nick very nearly spoke what he was thinking, saying that she appeared to be about 110 or so. "...kidding me. You look fantastic." He knew enough to not name a number when it came to a woman's weight or age.

"I've been trying to drop ten pounds for the last five years," she protested.

"Well, I think you worry too much." Nick said. "Did you see some of the girls at the head table yesterday at the Conklin Club? They were so big, they should have been eating from a troff."

"Oh, you're wicked, Dee Dee." Margot said, gasping and then giggling.

"We're here," Gwen said, pulling her car into a parking spot. Nick swung his legs out and stood up, for the first time realizing where he was. "Rodeo Drive?" He said. "Gwen, you know Roger can't afford..."

"Roger has plenty. Plus, he will be able to afford more once he gets the promotion," Gwen replied.

"And he *will* get the promotion, sweetie," Margot added.

Nick did what he could to hide his awe at walking along the sidewalk, in front of the most expensive shops in the world. He felt somewhat out of place, in a halter top and heels looking at windows displaying ten thousand dollar dresses. Despite himself, his eye and eventually his entire head started to stare and gawk at the sights around him.

"Don't get hypnotized by these stores, dearie," Gwen said, gently steering Nick away with her hand on his arm. "These are for the tourists."

“I don’t know why *anyone* would shop here,” Margot said, looking at the lavish storefronts.

They took a turn down an alley, which led to a small courtyard, and a modest little house. There was no sign, just a front door and a small number pad. Margot walked up to it, punched in a six-digit number, and the door popped open. They were greeted by a woman close to Gwen’s age, decked out in clothes that seemed to be out of time with the rest of the world. Not that she was out of fashion, but there’s a certain look to the clothes worn by the rich that resists trends, so it seems to always be the same.

Once inside, the house wasn’t a house at all, but a glitzy clothing store. The woman hugged and cheek-kissed the two women who she was obviously familiar with. “Gwen, don’t tell me you’re here for another wedding gown! I need more customers like you.”

“No, no. Bonnie. I’m here with our new friend, Dee Dee.” Gwen brought Nick front and center, for display. “She’s getting married to one of my husband’s fellow executives, and we need a gown that will welcome her into high society.”

Margot agreed. “Something that will look spectacular. Really make an impression.”

“Oh, yes!” Bonnie gushed. “You’ve come to the right store!”

After viewing some thirty gowns, Nick had tried on two or three “potentials” — with not even a thought about undressing in front of women — before he actually found something that everyone liked. Nick had been leaning towards some simpler designs, but Gwen and Margot were pressing for something a little more elegant. When they saw one particular gown, Gwen and Margot were so adamant that Nick get it, Nick had to think hard about it.

After all, he wasn’t a woman. Maybe the true female perspective of Gwen and Margot could see what he couldn’t. Because if you asked him, Nick was of the opinion that the gown was tacky and over-the-top. So, Nick tried to concentrate. He tried to think like a woman. He tried to see the gown with a woman’s eyes. As he thought about it, he could see some admirable qualities. As he thought even more about it, he had to adjust his original opinion. He concentrated harder on thinking like a woman. Five minutes later, Nick was enthralled with the dress. He had to have it.

Before he could talk himself out of it, he had handed over Roger’s credit card.

“That was a kick,” Margot said, as they left. “The only thing I love more than planning a wedding is... There is nothing I love more than planning a wedding!”

“How is my girl doing for you? Have you mailed the invitations?” Gwen asked.

Nick figured she meant the wedding planner she had suggested. Truth was, Nick hadn't called Gwen's wedding planner for over a month. He hadn't returned her calls. It seemed like a waste of time. "I've been busy, Gwen. I do owe her a call."

"Well, don't leave it hanging. You won't want to miss out on all the fun of planning a wedding."

"Is there anything else we need to do while we're here?" Margot asked.

"I do need to get some things for the week ahead," Nick said.

"Like?"

"Blouses, skirts..." Nick went through his mental checklist, "dresses, gowns... Shoes..."

Gwen and Margot looked at each other.

"I swear, Dee Dee, sometimes shopping with you... It seems like you're always buying a whole new wardrobe," Margot said.

"But we know just where to take you." Gwen said with a smile.

They walked one block down to an unmarked door that looked like it led to apartments above a small café. But instead, Nick found himself in another disguised store. Just as before, the salesladies knew Gwen and Margot. As they made introductions, Nick looked around at what they sold. It was a store full of the sort of outrageous, larger-than-life things you see Beverly Hills women wear, but had never seen for sale. Leopard-print dresses, gold lamé pants, silver cowboy boots, glittery rhinestone jackets, bejeweled belts, diamond-encrusted cats-eye sunglasses, and solid gold pet collars.

It was, Nick thought, exactly the sort of place Gwen, Margot and even Hayley would shop in.

"And this is?" The saleslady asked, looking at Nick.

"This is Dee Dee Summers. She's getting married into the company," Margot explained.

"We just had to show her your store!" Gwen said, merrily.

The saleslady was practically exploding with enthusiasm. "Well, if you're a friend of Gwen and Margot's, we'll have you set up with a store credit account before you leave. Meanwhile, what can we help you with today, ladies?"

All of the sudden, a fear gripped Nick. It wasn't the first time he had been out shopping with one of the wives, but until now, it had always been a "quickie" trip. A red blouse top, or a black knee-length skirt, and then done. But he had no idea of what he wanted today. He was just looking for something 'nice.' Now, here he was, with two of the people who could ruin everything he and Roger had worked for — and he had no clue what to ask for.

"I guess I'm just looking... Looking."



The open-ended opportunity to sell lit up the eyes of the saleslady. “I don’t think I’ve introduced myself. My name is Barbara. Let’s get you started. What size are you?”

Another question he couldn’t answer. “I’ve been dieting. I don’t know.”

Barbara didn’t stop asking questions. “Well, what were you before?” Nick shrugged with a sheepish smile. “What’s your bust-line?” Another shrug. “What size bra do you wear?”

“I’ll have to check the tag,” Nick said.

“What about your hips? Your waist?”

“Oh!” Nick exclaimed, eager to provide some sort of answer. “I wear a 30 waist and a 29 leg.”

There was an awkward silence. Then, Gwen spoke. “Dear, we’re in a women’s high fashion boutique. Not the men’s department at Sears.”

“I... I guess I need to get measured then.”

After that faux pas, Nick got conservative with his language. He did what the girls told him to do. No more mistakes. Fortunately, when they drove home, Gwen and Margot just ribbed Nick as being a bit of a “tomboy.” They didn’t seem to take much notice of the fact that Nick was absolutely clueless about sizing, fashion and style.

Five minutes before six, Nick came bursting in through the front door of Roger's house, and dropped his purchases on the floor. He let out a loud, dramatic sigh of relief.

"That was too close." He said to Roger, who had been seated nearby, reading a book. "I nearly blew the whole thing."

Alarmed, Roger dropped the book onto the floor. "You did *what?*"

"It's okay, it's okay. Nothing happened. But I just don't know anything about fashion or picking clothes."

"What happened? Tell me what happened."

"It's not important. I'll just have to work harder at this than I thought," Nick said regaining his composure. "Now, what do you want for dinner?"

"We'll order out. Are you you sure everything is okay?"

"It'll be fine." Nick reached into one of the shopping bags and pulled out a thick bridal magazine. "I just need a chance to relax and read a bit."

"All right then." Roger went back to his book. "By the way, the credit card company called and said someone had used it for a five thousand dollar purchase at a bridal shop, and then another two thousand at a boutique."

"You said not to worry about price," Nick reminded him.

Roger cocked his head to the side. "That I did."

Nick opened his magazine and started to look at it, waiting for an objection to come from Roger. It never came.

CHAPTER 5

Nick put down his bridal magazine onto the pile, and picked up another. Only a few days had passed since his trip with Gwen and Margot, but in that time, Nick had accumulated at least a dozen two-inch-thick bridal magazines. Makeshift bookmarks poked out of the pages, where Nick wanted to show something to his wedding planner. A type of napkin he wanted at the dinner or an arrangement of flowers for the reception.

He figured that he'd spend his idle time planning "the ultimate wedding" and just kind of making a game out of it. It was kind of a "fantasy football" except it involved cakes and tablecloths instead of running backs and linemen, or so he had hoped. Predictably, it wasn't quite the same.

"Oh God, I'm so bored!" Nick yelled out loud into the empty house. He had become so bored, in fact, that he was laid out on the couch, waiting in a black lace dress. Nick was unaware of the image he was projecting at that moment, lounging sexily on the couch, in an elegant dress, jewelry and stocking feet. He was ready to go out for dinner with Roger. He was coming home from work, and they were to go to a nice restaurant for 7:00 reservations.

That's how bored Nick was. He had decided to curtail his schedule of appearances as he figured that any day now, that promotion would be settled, and he'd be done with this business. But without places to go, Nick had gotten restless. So restless that when Roger had proposed a night out "for practice" as Roger and Dee Dee, Nick hadn't even bothered to object to going out in a dress.

"You look nice tonight, Dee Dee," Roger said, when he came to pick Nick up. "We're going to be late," Nick replied, checking the thin silver watch on his wrist. He stepped into his black pumps and walked behind Roger as he led Nick to the car. Roger opened the door and Nick slid himself inside, keeping his knees together.

Roger drove him to a nice restaurant Nick had never been to; the sort of place that had a pianist providing music, some dancing in the center of the room, and candle-lit tables. Roger played the part of the man-trying-to-impress-his-date to the hilt, leading Nick through the dining room with his hand at the small of Nick's back, holding the chair out for him, and moving it in. Roger even ordered dinner for the both of them. Nick was amused to be the focus of attention like he was, even slightly embarrassed. He looked around and could not see any woman being treated as nicely as he was tonight.

"Exactly who are you trying to impress, Roger?" Nick said, winding his finger around the rim of his wine glass.

Roger smirked. "I guess I'm just used to being the gentleman when I'm out with a woman."

"But I'm not..."

"Or at least someone who looks like one. Close enough."

Nick sensed it was a good time to ask a question he was afraid to ask. "Roger, I have to ask you. You said that if I continued in this masquerade, that you would put me back in touch with Sasha and get my apartment back. Remember?"

"Of course I do. And I have very good news for you." The piano music started up, after having been silent for a few minutes. "Would you like to dance?"

"Roger, please." Nick wanted an answer.

"Dance with me, and I'll tell you."

Nick nervously looked out on the dance floor. "I really don't dance, Roger and..."

"You'll be fine," Roger said, reassuringly. Somehow, Nick believed him. There was something about the way he said it, the calm look in his eyes and the honest smile that made Nick feel better. He could trust Roger.

"Just one dance," Nick said. As soon as he stood, Nick was wondering exactly what had possessed him to willingly dance with a man in public. He felt a knot in his stomach the moment his heels hit the wood of the dance floor. He wobbled at the knees and ankles, when he saw that there were dozens of pair of eyes on him. He hadn't danced since his senior prom. He had never danced in the woman's part, and certainly not in high heels. The fright of the moment flashed through his system, as his heart started to beat like a sledgehammer. That dance at the Anniversary Ball was just a clumsy bit of swaying, not a real dance.

Then as his legs started to give way, Roger gripped him by the hand and wrapped his big arm around Nick's slim waist. Nick's waning consciousness was suddenly snapped back to reality, as his eyes fixed upon Roger's steely gaze. He was under a man's control now. A man who knew what he was doing, and was going to take command.

Without even thinking about it, Nick let Roger lead. Roger gently pushed and swayed his partner where he needed to go. Nick's steps merely had to follow Roger's, giving way to wherever Roger wanted to go with his feet. All Nick needed to do was look like he knew what he was doing.

Submitting to Roger's direction, passively letting the aggressiveness of the lead take him where he wanted to go, Nick was definitely getting into the flow. He was finding his place in the rhythm. He started to even get a little showy, smiling broadly to show how effortless dancing was, and twisting his head so his long hair would dramatically fly into the air as they whisked along. Nick embraced Roger just as firmly as Roger was holding him.

When the music died down, Nick was released from Roger's grip, and they walked off the floor to applause. Nick was sure he could feel his face go beet red with embarrassment. He had gotten carried away. Literally. He sped up his pace to get back to the safety of the table.

Roger didn't say a word, instead taking a long sip of wine, and idly checking his phone. Nick also wasn't eager to talk, and decided to check his makeup in his compact mirror. He freshened his lipstick and removed his bangs from his eyes.

"So," Roger said, eventually, "you wanted to know about the apartment and Sasha."

"What?" Nick replied. "Oh, yes." He got himself on track. "You said that..."

"Chet has already moved out of the apartment, and he's given me the keys. I wanted to surprise you with them." Roger fished a set of keys from his pocket and placed them on the table.

The look on Nick's face was that of profound shock. It took him a moment to find his voice. "I... I... Thank you. I didn't think you could get Chet out of there with a crowbar."

"He's a greedy man, and that's his weakness." Roger then went to his breast pocket and pulled out a business card. An address was written on the back. "I tried to get a phone number, but the number Chet gave me was the same one you already had. This is Sasha's address in Paris, where her show is now playing. I'd write her a letter. She's probably most likely to listen through writing."

"That's not a bad idea. I think she blocked my number anyway." Nick took the card and keys and dropped them in his purse. He finally had what he wanted. He had doubted Roger. He had even doubted Roger's true motives. But he had come through for him. Impulsively, Nick grabbed Roger's hand. "Thank you, Roger. Really. You're wonderful for doing this."

"I'm glad it makes you happy," Roger said, grasping Nick's hand in return.



"Just give me a call when you need me," Nick said, as he slung a bag over his shoulder. "I'll always have my cell phone on me." He was dressed in his favorite pair of blue jeans, a t-shirt and a hoodie sweatshirt. He looked oddly uncomfortable in his regular clothes, probably because he had dropped so many pounds since he last wore them.

"If the wives call..." Roger started to say.

"Just tell them that Dee Dee is out and, she'll call back. Let me know, and I'll call them." Nick headed for the front door, and looked through a glass panel. "That's my taxi."

“I can drive you, it’s not a problem,” Roger offered for the fifth time in the last hour.

Nick shook his head. “I just want to be in control again, Roger. I want to get out of here paying my way, go home to my apartment, kick up my feet, not shower for a day or two, have some beer and order a pizza.”

Roger slapped Nick on the shoulder. “Well, I have to thank you for all you’ve done, Nick.”

“I’ll see you whenever we need to get together, I suppose. I think we have a dinner scheduled for next Tuesday. The Chilton ball in...”

Wham wham wham!

A noise came front he door. Someone was pounding on the door. “Taxi driver must have another fare lined up,” Roger remarked.

“I guess so.” Nick went to the door and opened it up, just as the pounding resumed. Spilling through the doorway was Chet, looking like death was chasing him. His clothes were torn and soiled, his hair was frazzled and his eyes were wild like an animal’s. He sprang up on his feet, and threw himself at Roger. “You gotta help me!” He screamed. Chet grabbed Roger’s shirt, clinging to it like a life preserver. “They’re gonna get me!”

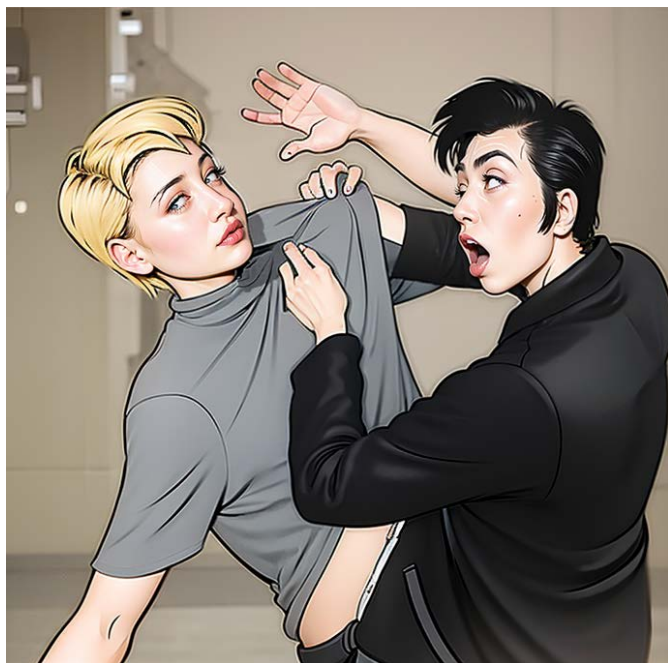
Roger tossed Chet off of him, easily. “What the hell?” He yelled. “Chet, what do you think you’re *doing?*”

Chet’s attention then fixed on Nick, and he ran to Nick and grabbed him by the sweatshirt. “I’m not fucking around, man! They’re gonna kill me! They’re serious! Really serious!”

Nick found it harder to shed Chet, and Roger came to grab him away.

“You gotta keep me hidden! They’re fucking serious motherfuckers!” Chet insisted.

Roger grappled Chet by the shoulders, trying to get



him to calm down. “Are you high, Chet? You look like you’ve been using...”

Suddenly, popping noises flooded the room, and shards of wood came exploding from the door and wall. Nick and Roger instinctively dropped to the floor, while Chet scrambled his way behind a sofa. It had happened so fast, no one could really tell what was happening. Then, it became clear. They were being fired on.

A long, tense minute passed. Unable to process what was going on, Nick just looked at Roger blankly, who looked back with the same blank stare. As they waited, and nothing more happened, Nick stood to look through a window. “Get down!” Roger shouted at him. Nick did just that. “They may still be out there!”

“They’re gonna kill me!” Chet shouted. “They’re trying to kill me!” Roger pulled out a cell phone and started to dial. Chet flew from his hiding spot, charging Roger. “No cops!” He shouted. Roger continued to dial. Chet then tackled Roger, biting him in the hand he was using to dial.

Reflexively, Roger grabbed him by the face and shoved him back onto the floor. Chet landed like a cat, and then sprang back at Roger, his fingers out to use them like claws, as he swiped for Roger’s eyes.

Roger inelegantly ducked the swipe, but as Chet then lunged for him once more, he left his midsection exposed and Roger kicked him squarely in the ribs. The kick was powerful enough to send Chet sailing ten feet across the floor, where his head squarely hit against a table leg. After that, he didn’t move.

Nick, still rooted to the spot, couldn’t believe what he had just seen. In mere moments, he gone from waiting for a taxi, to having been shot at and now his nemesis lay limp on the floor. As nothing happened for one whole minute, then another, Nick followed his instinct and grabbed his cell phone.

Roger saw what he was doing. “No, don’t.” He said.

“I’ve got to call 911.” Nick said, his reply on autopilot.

“No.” Roger darted over to Nick, and took the phone. “I have to think about this.”

“What’s there to *think* about?” Nick cried.

“Whoever fired the shots — they’re professionals. They’re not going to let the cops stop them.” Roger looked at Chet’s lifeless body. “And I may have just killed a man.”



There was barely more than a flicker of light in the dark room where Chet awoke. It was deathly quiet. He lay there, unsure if he was conscious. He could

hear his breathing, so it seemed like he was awake. It also seemed to him that he was alive. He tried to move, but a sharp pain in his ribs interrupted that effort.

“Welcome back to the land of the living, Chet.” said a voice from the dark.

Chet could hear a wooden chair scrape along a floor, and then a face became dimly visible in the weak light. It was Roger Van der Slyke. He peered at Chet, the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes scrunching.

“Where am I?” Chet said. He immediately tried to get out of the bed he seemed to be in.

“You’re in my basement. And you’re restrained.”

“What the f...?” Chet tried to say, but the pain from his ribs stopped him from saying anything more.

“You’re hurt, Chet. But just bruised ribs. Nothing broken.” Roger stood up. “Now I want to you to tell me why I can’t call the police.”

“They’re trying to kill me,” Chet said.

“That much is clear. Who are ‘they’ and why are ‘they’ trying to kill you?”

“They’re bad. They’re dangerous people. They want to kill me.”

Roger was frustrated. “If you don’t tell me what the hell is going on, I’ll kill you myself!”

“I can’t tell you! You’ll turn me in! They can get to me anywhere, even in jail! There’s no way...” Suddenly, Chet’s entire body clenched up in pain. It lasted for a second, and then just as suddenly it was over. “What... what the fuck... What was that?”

“That was a few volts of electricity going through the bed frame, Chet. I don’t want to do that again. Now, you’ll tell me why people are shooting up my house. What did you do?”

“I didn’t pay on some debts.”

“I gave you thousands, Chet. You got even more out of Nick, and you probably took your sister for a few bucks as well. You had plenty of money.”

“I have needs!” Chet yelled.

“You have an addiction to heroin, that’s what you have. And I gave you a free supply.”

“That wasn’t enough! Whatever you gave me wasn’t even any good! I need more!”

“So you cheated a drug dealer. Idiot. So they came after you? A dead client can’t pay. There’s more that you’re not telling me. Why are they trying to kill you?”

“I don’t know! They’re crazy! I just tried to sell some of the stuff you game me to some friends...”

“You encroached on their turf while you owed them money. You stupid fool. But predictable, I guess.” Roger sat back down in his chair. “Now, who exactly are these people? Just corner drug dealers?”

Chet shook his head nervously. “I don’t know their names!”

“I don’t suppose it matters, really. They’re either stupid enough to come to a good neighborhood and open fire in broad daylight, or they think they’re connected enough to get away with it. Either way, now that you’ve led them here, they’ll know where to look to find you.”

“You’re going to turn me in, aren’t you?”

“I can hardly do that,” Roger replied. “I have a junkie living in my house, and turning you over to the police would be disastrous to my public image. Especially if you got killed. The gunmen probably have someone waiting down the street to follow us and get you if you try and leave.”

“I can stay here, right? You’ll protect me! You have to!”

Roger’s voice turned low and deliberate. “Yes, I will protect you, Chet. But I can’t have you live down here for the rest of your life.”

“What about that faggot’s apartment? I can go back there.”

“I just told you that you can’t leave. You’ll be dead before you get out of the driveway.”

“I’d rather get my head blown off than have to live with that faggot Nick. He’s probably up there pissing in his panties he’s so scared.”

“Actually, he was about to leave when you showed up. Now, he wants to kick your ass halfway to hell.”

“Like he could.”

“I wouldn’t try it. He’s mad as I’ve ever seen him. He was about to go home and get out of women’s clothing for a change. Now, you’ve forced him to back into dresses and heels.”

“How the fuck did I do that?”

“With the house under surveillance, we’ve got to keep going with the deception. Nick can’t go home — they’ll go after him. He’s only safe as a woman.”

“That’s bullshit. That’s not my fault!”

Roger grunted in disagreement. “You’re not worth arguing with. You’re stuck in this house, and you can’t leave. You’re stuck in this basement as long as...”

“You’re not keeping me locked in the basement!” Chet demanded.

Roger's tone of voice became loud and commanding. "You're in this basement until I say so! Unless you want to kill yourself and kill me and Nick in the process!"

Chet's usual false bravado failed him. He didn't object in the face of Roger's authority.

"As long as you're stuck with us, you're not in a position to object to anything. And if you want to get out of this basement, and see sunlight again, you're not going to be able to be Chet anymore."

Then, Chet's eyes lit up with shock. He knew exactly what Roger was about to say.

Roger stared through Chet's eyes, through to his primal fear. "You're going to need a disguise... And I need someone to be my daughter."



"He's going to be okay," Roger told Nick when he came up from the basement. "He'll need to be in bed for a couple of days, but he's just got some bruised ribs and a concussion."

Nick was seated at the kitchen table, his legs crossed to keep modesty in his short skirt. His black-lined eyes were wide with anxiety. "Do you think they're still outside?"

Roger nodded. "At this moment? They're probably parked somewhere along the street, yes."

"Dammit!" Nick cursed, ramming his fist onto the table. "Why did that moron have to *fuck* everything up? I can't believe I'm right back where I started."

"You agree, though, that you're safer as Dee Dee than as Nick, right?"

"Of course I agree. There's no question! I just really wanted this to come to some sort of end, that's all."

Roger took a seat next to Nick and patted him on the bare knee. "I know you're upset, and you have every reason to be. This can't last long. If they want money, I can give them money. If they want Chet dead, then I'll just go to some people I know in the D.A.'s office. We'll work this out, and it won't be too long. Until then, we're just a happy family going through our regular routine. There's nothing suspicious about that."

"How long?"

"I don't know. I just can't say for sure," Roger smiled, which took Nick completely off guard. "But I do have a present for you."

Nick wasn't sure at all of what to make of Roger's smile, and replied hesitantly. "Um... Okay. What do you mean?"

“Nick can’t stay down in the basement forever. He’s going to have have some way of getting past the thugs out there. He needs a disguise.”

Against his conscious will, Nick smirked. He wasn’t even sure why. But he had a vague sense of Roger was hinting at. “You don’t mean...”

“I made the mistake long ago of claiming that my fiancée had a daughter. Sooner or later, I’m going to have to prove it.”

“He’ll never go for it. He wouldn’t. He couldn’t. I don’t care how much you’d bribe him. He’s never going to allow himself to be dressed up like a girl.”

“Not willingly, no,” Roger said. “But he gave up his rights to make his own decisions when he got us involved.”

Nick leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling, deep in thought. He looked out a window, then back at a salt shaker on the table in front of him. “How do we force him?”

“I haven’t told you how I got him out of your place.” Roger rubbed his chin. “Well, I got him the drugs he’s hooked on.”

“He’s hooked on drugs?”

“Heroin. That’s why he needed the blackmail money from you. He’s got a bad habit. Real bad. Anyway, I gave him something he thought was heroin, and he’s been on that for the past two months.”

“He’s an addict?”

“And, as I’ve learned, he’ll do anything for a hit. Absolutely anything.”

“Even pretend to be a girl?”

“Even that,” Roger folded his hands on the table. “So I thought, who better to help him with his transformation into a pretty young girl than you.”

Nick considered the idea, putting a freshly polished fingernail to his red painted lips. “He’d be totally humiliated, wouldn’t he?”

“Yes, he would.”

“As I forced him to put panties on and short little dresses.”

“I’d imagine that he’d be quite ashamed of himself.”

“Then maybe we take him outside and show him off in public?”

“Oh, he’d probably want to kill himself.”

Nick primped his hair for a moment. “Do I need to wait, or can I get started right now?”



That night, as Roger tested the locks on the basement door, he walked over to where the walls of his house had been pock-marked. He was going to have to get a carpenter in here. Sticking his finger in one of the holes, he was alarmed at how deep it was.

“Those were some powerful explosives,” he said to himself. He had them put in the wall while they were out for dinner the other night. He had to get Nick out of the house so the crew of movie effects people could rig the house with tiny little explosives — squibs, they called them — to go off when Roger wanted them to.

It was simple enough to have some guys chase Chet around town. Roger knew that Chet eventually would wind up at his house, afraid for his life. The timing made him sweat, as Nick was just about to leave when Chet finally showed up. Another minute and it wouldn't have worked.

The beautiful part was that he had Chet scared stupid, forcing him to do exactly what Roger wanted him to do. At the very same time, he had scared Nick into staying in his guise as Dee Dee. It was a great plan.

However, Roger knew that he had to move quickly to take advantage of the situation.



A week later, Nick was walking through a nearby mall, a heavy load of shopping bags in his hands. On a whim, he turned to enter a jewelers' shop.

He walked up to the nearest salesperson, and with a cheery smile, asked, “Do you pierce ears?”

“Yes miss, we do. With purchase, free,” a young lady at the counter replied.

“Perfect,” Nick said. He looked along the case for a quick moment, and pointed to a pair of earrings. “Those.”

“These?” The lady responded, as she dug under the counter to retrieve the pair. “These will make a thoughtful gift.”

“Oh, a very nice gift, yes,” Nick said. He pointed to another pair of earrings, studded with diamonds. “I'd like those for myself.”

“Those are exquisite,” the lady said, retrieving them as well.

Nick was humming to himself merrily as he returned to Roger's house, stopping to note that the minivan with the tinted windows that had been parked outside the driveway was still there. He had no idea who was watching them. It could have been the men who shot at them or the security men Roger had hired. He concentrated on looking unconcerned and unaware of its' presence.

He unloaded the dozen or so bags he had, full of purchases from the mall. He left them by the door to the basement, selecting two to take with him. He carefully negotiated the steps in his four-inch heeled sandals, humming to himself again. "Hello, bright eyes!" He sang out as he reached the bottom. "I've brought you presents, sweetie!"

Welcoming him was a thoroughly dejected and morose young man, dressed in a pink nightie, near transparent, and only short enough to reach his pink-pantied butt, trimmed with a ridiculous amount of frills and bows, Chet's expression was priceless. He looked as miserable as a person ever could.

Chet was no longer bound with restraints, but he was as much a prisoner as an inmate at Alcatraz, he had no place to go — faced with death if he left the house dressed as Chet, and utter humiliation dressed as he was. He was now subject to the whims and whimsy of his captors, who delighted in torturing him every minute of every day. He knew that was exactly what Nick had in mind.

"I saw this dress in the window at the mall, and I knew I just had to see you in it. It's perfect for a girl your age." Nick said, hoisting a child's pink party dress in the air for Nick to see.

"I'm never going to wear that fucking thing, faggot." Chet spat.

"That's what you said about the nightie, dear." Nick was laying it on thick. He wanted the man who had ruined his life to feel pain. Pain down to the grey depths of his dead soul. If that meant camping it up a little to make it happen, Nick was very willing to do it. "I'll put it right by your bed so you can change into it later."

Nick spread the dress out carefully on a chair, and Chet made it very clear he was ignoring it. "What the fuck do you want from me? You guys getting some kinda jollies watching me?"

"My, my. You certainly to have a potty mouth, young lady," Nick scolded.

Chet turned his back to Nick. Looking closely, Nick could see that Chet was shaking, he was so angry. "If you must know," Nick said, in his most haughty of feminine voices, "Roger and I have to show a daughter to the board members of his company at some point. That's going to be you."

Chet shuddered, then turned around to confront Nick. "What kinda fuckin' pervs *are* you guys?"

"We don't have much of a choice, thanks to you. You're the one who lead drug dealers right to our doorstep. You're the one who created this situation. If you don't like it, we can just open the door and throw you out."

"You don't have to make me dress like a fuckin' little girl!"

"You lost your right to object when you tried to hide out here!"

"What the fuck do *you* care? You know that that sicko upstairs has paid for everything! He paid me to take over..."

“Dee Dee, if I could have a word with our daughter,” Roger said, his voice booming from atop the stairs.

“I need to get dinner started anyway,” Nick said, cheerfully. Once he had left, Roger slowly trudged down the stairs, his heavy footsteps generating menacing creaks from the old wood.

Once the door was shut, Roger bent to loom over Chet. “I told you that if you mention one word of our former agreement to him, I’d never get you another hit again. I’ll let you rot down here.”

Nick’s anger was boiling over. “You’re a sick freak who gets off seeing men in women’s clothing!”

“You’re going to put that dress on, right now,” Roger said, pointing the dress laid on the chair.

“Like *fuck* I will.”

Roger emotionlessly took a syringe from his pocket and held it up for Chet to see. “This is your dose for the day,” Roger started to slowly squeeze it, causing the drug to dribble down the tip, onto the floor. “When you agree, I’ll stop.”

Not waiting very long at all, Chet immediately yelled out, “that’s enough! I’ll do it!” He quickly pulled off the nightie he was wearing and grabbed the dress.

Roger put the syringe away, back in his pocket. “Good. I’ll give this to you when Dee Dee is finished with you.”

Chet glanced up at the name Dee Dee. He wanted to tell Roger how sick he was for even calling a man by that name, but he stopped himself.

“Looks like you’re sprouting a fine pair of breasts there,” Roger remarked.

Looking down in humiliation, Chet spoke through a clenched jaw. “That’s been happening for two months. You’re putting girl drugs in with the heroin, aren’t you? That’s why I’m growing breasts!” Chet said.

Roger didn’t address the issue. “You finish getting dressed and your mother will be down to check on your progress,” Rogers said, and he left.

By the time Chet had put the dress on, Nick was indeed coming down the stairs. “I see your father has been his usual persuasive self.”

Chet sat on his bed, containing his violent temper. His face went flush, inadvertently making it look like he was blushing.

“You and I need to understand something, sweetheart,” Nick said, taking a seat on the chair. “We’re both stuck in this situation, and there’s no way out for now.” Nick watched with pleasure as Chet held his tongue. “For the time being, you’re going to be a daughter to Roger and me. There’s no way out of that. The more you fight, the more Roger will do to break you.”

“I’m a twenty-three year old man being held prisoner in a basement by two sick freaks.”

“You’re the daughter of Roger Van der Slyke, in the care of his fiancée, Dee Dee Summers, and you’re looking forward to being a bridesmaid at your future mother’s wedding.”

Chet squinted back at Nick, trying to say with his eyes what he wasn’t allowed to say with his voice.

“You’re adorable when you’re angry,” Nick said, knowing he was pushing him.

“I’m not anything like a girl, and you can make me dress any way you want to, but you’re still sick.”

“You’re so much like a little girl. You pout, you throw tantrums, and you think you know everything when you don’t.” Nick examined Chet. “What are you, five seven?”

“Five foot ten.”

“I don’t think so. Maybe five eight, but I’d put you at five seven. And that drug habit of yours has given you the body of a junkie. You probably barely even weigh a hundred pounds.”

Chet didn’t answer. He hadn’t been in the habit of weighing himself lately.

“I think you have the makings of a fine young woman. Some might even be jealous of your trim figure.”

“I’m not going to be a girl or a woman or whatever you want. I’ll *kill* you first,” Chet growled.

Nick laughed. “I don’t think so. You’re as much able to kill me as you are to win a Nobel prize.”

“I mean it.”

Nick quickly grabbed Chet’s wrist and bent it back behind his back. Struggling, Chet tried to get his arm back, but he didn’t have any energy at all.

“See?” Nick said, with a smile. “You’ve got no strength. You’ve got muscle relaxants making you as weak as a newborn fawn.”

“Let me go!” Chet demanded. He continued to struggle, but was obviously just as weak as Nick claimed. He could barely even find the energy to fight.

Nick released Chet, who fell onto the bed, breathing heavily. “Fuckin’ cock-suckin’ pervert!” He said, in between breaths.

“Sit up straight, young lady. No one likes a sloucher.” Nick said, almost laughing too hard to complete his sentence.

Nick did nothing. He continued to lie there on the bed.

“You will learn to do what I tell you to do, dear. Sooner or later.” Nick removed two smaller bags from the one bag he hadn’t yet touched. He removed a pair of red heart-shaped plastic earrings, the ones he had just purchased,

opened the box and placed them on the bed for Chet to see. "This is my other gift."

"I can't wear fuckin' earrings!" Chet said.

"If they're good enough for me, they're good enough for you." Nick revealed his freshly-pierced ears. He didn't want to be accused of having double standards. Nick then removed five items from the other bag. A potato, a cup full of ice, medical alcohol, cotton balls, and an ice pick. He grinned from ear to ear, and couldn't stop smiling. "You'll be able to wear them in just a minute, dear."

Chet's eyes were alight with fear. "No. No way!"

"I think you will. If you want your precious heroin, you'll do this. One word from me, and Roger won't give you anything for a week."

"I'm not going to let you..."

"Two weeks."

The fury of Chet's emotions were checked by the only thing that could contain him — his addiction. He stared at the ice pick and shivered.

"You've put needles into you every eight hours for months, Chet. It's no different..."

"Do it." Chet shut his eyes tight and squared his jaw.



As Nick returned upstairs to the kitchen, a bemused Roger was patiently waiting as he sipped a steaming cup of coffee.

"I heard some screaming," Roger remarked.

"Chet has his first pair of earrings." Nick balled up some blood-stained paper towels and threw them into the trash. "He refused any deadening or painkillers. He was trying to take the piercing like a man, I guess."

"I see you got pierced as well."

Nick thought about showing off his ears so he could proudly display them, but stopped himself. "Well, I was in a jewelry store, after all. I'm not a hypocrite, so if I'm going to make him do it..."

"They look nice on you."

"Don't start."

Roger smiled to himself. He put down his mug and stood. "I suppose I should follow up with the little darling." He headed downstairs, making sure the door was locked behind him.

"You're trying to make me into a woman. Isn't one freak enough for you?" Chet said as Roger walked down the creaky steps.

“I certainly don’t want for you to think of yourself as a freak,” Roger replied, in his usual calm way, “and I certainly don’t want you thinking of yourself as a woman.”

“The fuck are you talking about?”

“I never said you were going to be a woman. I said you were going to be my daughter. My *teenage* daughter.”

Chet started to laugh. It was a sick laugh, with no joy. “You’re really out of your fucking mind. No one would ever believe I was a teen girl.”

Roger stroked his chin with his fingers, evaluating his prisoner. “Well, let’s see, you’re what, about five foot seven?”

“Five ten.”

“Wishful thinking. Very wishful. You forget I’m in medicine. No, you’re five foot seven, which would make you tall for your teens, but certainly not too tall to be a girl. You’re about one hundred-ish, thanks to that habit of yours.”

Chet involuntarily looked at his body, and wanted to swear at himself for being so thin. He kept silent.

Roger bent down to take a closer look at Chet’s head and face. “Puberty hasn’t hit you very hard. You’re probably not even shaving more than once or twice a week. And your bone structure is really quite delicate when you look at it closely. No, you’re going to be quite convincing as a young girl.”

“No matter what you and that fag upstairs do to me, I’ll never be your daughter.”

“You’ll *beg* to be my daughter,” Roger said, with determination. “Get up on your feet.” He pointed to the party dress laying on the bed. “Put it on.”

From where he was sitting, Chet uneasily stood on his weak legs. He picked up the dress, glancing at Roger in the process, and noting his hard, unflinching stare. Chet had to fuss with the dress for a while, to figure out exactly how to put it on, but he eventually got it right. By the time he was done, Roger then produced a pair of white Mary-Jane style shoes and anklet socks. Chet put those on, without asking. Finally, Roger opened a large box in the corner and brought out a wig, resting atop a styrofoam head. “You’ll want to comb your hair back so the wig fits properly,” Roger instructed.

Silently, Chet did as he was told, combing his longish hair back and then putting the wig over it. It was long, flaxen blond hair with ringlet curls at the end. Once he had it on, he stood still, his anger and humiliation battling to a stalemate.

Roger adjusted the wig to his satisfaction, not guarding himself in the slightest from a sudden attack from Chet. He simply didn’t seem to take him as a threat. “Now take a look at the man who could never be a girl.” Roger pointed to a full-length mirror in the corner.

Chet took short steps, knowing he didn't want to make any false moves around the man who was twice his size and a head taller. He tried to look tough, but that wasn't possible in his situation.

He looked at himself, intending to be disgusted and show defiance. But the image that came back from the mirror shook him inside, violently. Roger, who stood behind him to see Chet's expression looked like the adult in the room, so tall and large next to the smaller figure in front, who was unmistakably the child of the two.

The child was small and delicate, dressed in a frilly, sparkly party dress fit for a pre-teen princess. All that was missing was a tiara nestled in those golden curls on her head. Her expression was confused and dumbstruck, but on a feminine face, framed by twin tails of blond hair, it was childishly darling and adorable. Her legs were clumsy in her little shoes, and her legs were knock-kneed. Her thin arms fought with the fluffy frills of her dress, and her slumped shoulders made her look even tinier and more frail. Finally, her face was brightened and highlighted by the two plastic earrings than hung on either side of her face.

"I'm a man," Chet said, angrily. He said it in vain.

"You may have thought of yourself as a man, Chet. But I know what men are, who they are." He pointed tot he reflection in the mirror. "You are not a man."

Chet did not reply. He had no response. He failed to find an argument. He was at a loss to prove his words.

"Until further notice, your name is Tiara Antoinette Van der Slyke." He started for the stairs. "Your future step-mother is Dee Dee Summers, and I expect you to call her 'mother.' She will be in charge of training you, and you will do what your mother tells you. You know the consequences."

All Chet could do is walk over to the bed and seat himself. He had the sick feeling he had been beaten. Worse, he didn't know what he could do to fight back anymore.



Over the course of the next two weeks, Nick took delight at training his new 'daughter.' Chet, for his part, really never believed that Nick and Roger really were going to do the things they told him they were going to do. After all, it seemed not just impossible, but insane. After every day of this so-called training, he was convinced it would be the last. But then the next day would come, and the nightmare continued. Nick never seemed to tire of finding new ways to humiliate him and force him to dress and behave in the most childish and girlish ways.

He was drilled in dressing, often changing his clothes five or six times a day, always with another frilly adolescent outfit ready for him. He applied makeup to his face, in moderation for a young child, as appropriate. He was also shaving himself not only to hide the traces of his light beard, but also for his underarms and his legs. He was punished unless he was found to be perfectly smooth at all times. He also was taught how to do his hair in many styles. He wore it in a bouncy pony-tail, twin pigtails, a french braid, a messy bun and dozens of variations. Sometimes Chet would use the wig, but since his hair was almost to his chin, some styles he was forced to do on his own hair. There also was no shortage of clips, ribbons and bows for Chet to be instructed to use, either.

Of course, an odd by-product of this was that Nick didn't seem to object at all to dressing as Dee Dee to do the training. In fact, he seemed to enjoy making himself as feminine as possible, just to flaunt it in front of Chet, as he tried to set a standard to hold Chet up to. He also found an odd thrill at instructing someone else to do all the things he had been forced to do himself. With every step he pushed Chet to become more feminine, Nick seemed to take a small step himself.

Like any typical day, Chet would rise as a stern knock came from the door up the stairs. "Wakey wakey, sleepy eyes!" Nick would call down. As soon as Chet heard Nick's heels click and clack on the steps, he would whisk the covers off and get out of bed. He slipped his feet into the fluffy rabbit slippers he was forced to use, and straighten out the silk nightie he wore to bed every night. By the time Nick arrived at the bottom of the stairs, Chet was making his bed, smoothing out the pink sheets and frilly "my little pony" bedcovers.

He knew that he had to be perfect in the morning, because that was his first chance to get the fix he so desperately craved.

"Good morning, Tiara darling," Nick sang in his feminine voice. With every day that passed it almost seemed to Chet that he sounded more and more authentically maternal. "How did you sleep? Did you dream of fairies and unicorns last night?"

"Yes, mother, I had wonderful dreams last night," Nick was required to say. The truth was, he wasn't someone who remembered his dreams, usually. That was, until three nights ago, when he actually had dreamed of fairies and unicorns, and it had scared him to death. He was going to have to fight harder.

"Here's your lozenges," Nick said with sugar. He handed Chet two of the pills Nick had been using for his voice. The double dosage made Chet's voice even higher than Nick's, which is what you would expect from a young girl of the age Chet was dressed as.

Nick put the lozenges in his mouth with as much of a smile as he could. "Is breakfast ready?"

“Yes, but let me take a look at you,” Nick replied. He examined Chet’s increasingly soft face and ran the back of his hand against Chet’s cheek. “Nice and smooth.” He flipped the hem of Chet’s nightie and felt his legs. “Smooth there, too. Yes, here’s your breakfast, Tiara.” Nick laid out a syringe on the white vanity table against the wall, and walked away, his back turned. “Quickly, now.”

Chet leapt for the syringe, and quickly cleaned off a patch on his arm to feed it into his arteries. It didn’t give him the high he wanted anymore, and in truth, he didn’t feel any different after an injection. But from experience, he knew that his body still craved the drug, and if his ‘parents’ decided to punish him by not having it for him, he was in terrible pain until they gave him another hit.

He was also painfully aware that it not just contained his fix, but doses of other medications. He always felt a little flighty after taking a dose, and was much weaker. One day he just asked Nick point-blank. “Is there other stuff in here, mother?” He said.

Nick smugly replied, “I think you know by now, princess. You see how your skin is becoming so much smoother and softer? See how your complexion has cleared up? You’re even beginning to put on a little baby fat.”

Chet had noticed. It was getting harder to find veins in his arms, as a little layer of fat built up under his skin. His sinewy body now grew smoother and his muscles were disappearing. He knew for sure that the syringe contained drugs that were robbing him of his masculinity.

But he had to have his fix.

“Let’s get you dressed,” Nick instructed, after waiting a minute or two for Chet to finish and then return the needle to the vanity. Nick picked up he needle and noted the cute little Dora the Explorer band-aid Chet had on his arm to cover the mark. Chet then walked over to his bed and removed his nightie, placing it on the bed and then folding it neatly and setting it aside to be washed. He then did the same with the cotton panties he had worn overnight.

Nick then made a show picking out the “cutest” and “most darling” panties along with a matching bra. Chet had no need for a bra, but Nick had provided four triple-A cupped bras for Chet to wear, each just as lacy and silky as his matching panties. Chet then emotionlessly slipped on the panties, adjusted them himself, and then let his ‘mother’ wrap the bra around and fasten it in back.

“Now let me help you with your dress, Tiara,” Nick would say, as he picked from an unnervingly large assortment of little girl dresses hung in a closet. The dresses themselves weren’t that little, though. They were just his size. Where would you find such things? Well, Chet had been to a few back-alley places downtown that carried dresses like these. But he didn’t like that sort of crowd.

This one dress Nick was particularly fond of dressing him in was pale pink satin, with white trimming. It was a dress that seemed to be made of nothing but ruffles. It had a high lace collar that was trimmed with a pink ruffles, and a shimmery pink bodice. The arms were big pouffy shoulders made up of shiny silky material that gathered in ruffles. These shoulders popped out of an explosion of such ruffled material, adding to the fanciful nature of the outfit. That same material made up the skirt, four rows of it. Under the skirt were several layers of petticoats, causing the skirt to spring out at an angle, which also bounced around in the air with even the smallest step.

To cap it all off, a wide pink satin sash was tied around the waist, ending in an oversized bow, tied so the ends would reach down lower than the short hem of the skirt.



“Now let mommy help you with your shoes,” Nick said sweetly.

Chet grudgingly swished to his bed, which, as he had noticed some time ago, had been jacked up several inches higher than a normal bed. In fact, the same held for the chairs in the room. Nick and Roger sat down in them comfortably, but they were an inch or two too high for Chet, as his feet didn't touch the ground. So when he sat on the edge of his bed, he tended to look rather childish when he absently swung his legs without the restraint of the floor.

Crouching down, Nick took one of Chet's feet and fed it into a pair of white tights, and then the other foot. He then fed little lavender ballet slippers onto each foot and tied them up with ribbons that wrapped around Chet's lower leg.

A few moments were spent in front of the vanity so Chet could put on some pink lip gloss for that youthful look. He had been using a small bit of mascara to make his eyelashes thicker, but mysteriously to him, they had started to grow in thicker by themselves. Only Nick and Roger knew it was because of the drugs. With the wig

on Chet's head, styled in twin pony tails each just above each ear, Chet was told to check himself in the mirror. He hated seeing his reflection in the mirror. He was all smiles for appearances, just as he had been told to do, but inside he was killing himself.

Not because he looked so adorably girlish and childish, but because he had grown so used to it that he wasn't quite sure what he was supposed to look like. So many days of doing his makeup and hair, wearing dress after dress and concentrating so



hard on making sure he looked just like the little girl he was supposed to be had left him wondering exactly what he really was. He was so convincingly girlish, he had to wonder if that's what he had always looked like to other people. Did they see the same feminine features he saw in front of him? All these years, did others think that he was short enough to be a kid? Did they talk behind his back about how young and delicate he appeared? Had everyone he had ever met seen through his mature, sexy, ratty hair and slept-in clothes to see a little girl behind it all?

“What do you say for me helping you get dressed?” Nick prompted.

“Th... Thank you... Mommy,” Chet forced out of his mouth.

“That's a good girl,” Nick made a show of ‘assisting’ Chet off the bed and onto the floor, by lifting him by the armpits. Nick wasn't sure how much he weighed anymore, but he knew it couldn't have been much. “Mommy is going upstairs to finish cleaning the dishes. Would you like to be mommy's little helper and dry them?”

Chet was actually a little excited. He didn't get the chance to go upstairs that often. He had to take baths every two or three days, but otherwise, he was restricted to the dank basement for his days at the Van der Slyke home. “Yes!” He said, urgently.

“Yes what?”

“Yes please,” Chet corrected himself, though clenched teeth.

They went upstairs where the basement steps connected right into the kitchen, where the smell of a freshly prepared breakfast still lingered in the air. The smell of bacon was wonderful, but it didn't make him hungry. He had almost no appetite these days, probably thanks to whatever was in those syringes. He only had a light lunch of a salad or a piece of fruit that he couldn't even finish. That's probably why he was still shedding weight, even though he felt like skin and bones.

Nick started to wash the dishes with soap and a washcloth, and handed them to Chet. Nick made sure to have a tiny stool ready for him, as Nick, in a pair of heels, was five or six inches taller than Chet. Chet stood on it to come to eye level with Nick. As Nick scrubbed away, he hummed a tune to himself, and it was driving Chet crazy. The tune was irritating enough, but he also couldn't stand the fact that Nick seemed to be rubbing this femininity thing in Chet's face. He half expected Nick to start twirling around the kitchen and a bird land on his finger to sing with.

Then, the phone rang in another room. “Keep drying. Mommy will be right back,” Nick instructed. His heels clacked on the hard floor and around the corner into the living room. “Hello? Oh hi, Hayley. Yes, I was planning on handling the arrangements...”

Chet dried one or two more dishes until it struck him that he was alone, without anyone between him and freedom. Who cared if those thugs were still outside waiting for him. He had to make an escape. It was a choice between going insane in this frilled prison or risking some gunfire and breaking out. Chet listened as he could hear Nick continuing to talk on the phone, and he quietly placed the dried dishes aside. He stepped down off his stool and made for the back door.

His heart leapt when he found the knob freely turnable, and unlocked. Ever so slowly, he pushed to door open, and then he was off like a shot.

Chet really didn't know exactly where to go for a minute, as he was unfamiliar with the back yard. He went one way, and then another, before seeing a break in the hedges and running around the house for the front.

He ran as fast as he could, but his newly rearranged body was clumsy and hard to use. He felt so much lighter than before, but his center of gravity was completely different. The awkwardness of the dress didn't help either, with the mess of frills getting in his way. He could barely do much more than manage a fast walk. As he headed down the winding driveway, he didn't see a car or a single person in sight.

Chet hesitated, and froze. He quickly then headed for the street.

With heart-thumping fear, Chet tried to get his legs moving, but his clumsy, frilly dress only further frustrated his attempts to run. He could hear only his hard breathing as he ran. He had nothing in his way to stop him, and even as he stumbled his way to the gate, all he could think of was escape.

And his fix. He still needed his fix. As he stepped onto the sidewalk, finally free of the property, he took one look back. He would regret it.

Standing at the doorway of the house was Nick, leaning to the side, his legs crossed, with a look of impatience on his face. In his right hand, he twirled a syringe, flipping it in his fingers, so that Chet could see it plainly.

Involuntarily, Chet rubbed his arm where he shot himself up. He could already feel the burn that would become overpowering in just a few hours. He could already feel the convulsions and the muscle aches he would suffer. He could feel the throbbing in his head and the sweat dripping from every pore.

With the frilly pink party dress pulled up around his waist, Chet was bent over Nick's knee, back in Roger's living room. "Smack!" Nick's hand spanked Chet's exposed bottom. "Smack!" Chet knew he couldn't leave. He had to have his drugs. He needed the next syringe. There was no place for him to go, really. He was stuck.

"Smack!" Nick's punishment was turning Chet's behind nearly blood red. "Smack!" His hand went again. "Bad girl! Bad girl!" He chastised. "You aren't allowed outside without adult supervision!" If only Chet could have seen the

satisfied expression on Nick's face as he got to take months of anger out on him.



Nick returned from the shower and was still towel drying his hair furiously. The longer it got, it seemed, the longer it took to dry. He used to just whip out of the shower and throw on some jeans and he was good. Now he had at least an hour until his hair was dry enough to go do anything. He considered getting a hairdryer that might speed up the process, but it seemed like such a huge concession to the whole living-as-a-woman thing.

Instead, Nick tugged on the “Merkin Device,” pulled on his panties, pulled on his boned body shaper and sat down on the edge of his bed. He balled up a pair of dark stockings and pulled them up.

Nick thought to himself that maybe getting a hairdryer wasn't the biggest concession he might have to make these days.

As the cool light fabric slid up his smooth legs, Nick was unable to keep himself from letting out the quietest little moan. He just loved putting on stockings. It was a wonderful sensation. It was a cool tickle as it came up his feet and warm hug when he pulled them tight. Once they were on, he ran his fingers up and down, enjoying every moment. He skiffed his feet on the carpet back and forth, liking the feeling of the bristles through the material of the hose. Then, he attached the stockings to the garter clips on his body shaper, and shimmied into a silk camisole. He shook his hips to feel the lacy hem dance across his thighs.

When had he fallen so in love with these clothes? Nick wasn't sure. But the one part of his day he always looked forward to was dressing. He wasn't even sure that anyone but Chet and Roger would see him today — but he dressed every morning like he was going out on the town.

By the time Nick was putting the last brush of powder on his cheeks, Roger stopped in. “Knock knock,” he said as he opened the door to the cottage.

“Roger!” Nick replied with shock. “I might have been naked!”

“I'm sorry. My fault. I'm not used to living with anyone else,” Roger said, apologizing. “But I do think my *future wife* would be comfortable with...”

“Oh God. Don't even joke about that. Let's hope we can get this over with before actually having to do a ceremony or something. I could never deal with that.”

“I was just kidding,” Roger replied. “The reason I came in was that I have to have a meeting here tomorrow night. Most of my executive team will be here after work, to get ready for our quarterly review.”

“Here? I can’t do that!” Nick said. “All those people?”

“You’ll be fine. These people have probably already seen you.”

“No, I’m not worried about that. I just don’t know if I can play hostess. The house needs cleaning, and... Can’t you do it elsewhere?”

“We always do it at one of our VP’s houses. I drew the short straw this time.”

Nick threw up his arms. “I guess I don’t have a choice, do I?”

“Sorry.”

“Look, darling, what about Tiara? What... I mean... Chet. What about Chet? He’s still down there in the basement and...”

“I hadn’t thought of that. Maybe we can hide him out here in the guest cottage.”

“Oh no. It’s *my* place.” Nick shook his head in frustration. “Well, I’ll figure out something.” He dusted the tip of his nose with the brush he was still holding, before placing it aside. “You know, as much fun as it is, we can’t keep him down in the basement forever.”

Roger rose an eyebrow as he pondered. “But I’m not letting him go back on the street. Whoever he crossed is going to want money, and Chet will lead them right back to us.”

“Well, back to *you*, at least. He knows he’s bled me dry,” Nick said. He got to his feet, buttoned up the silk blouse he wore and slipped into a pair of three-inch pumps.

“He might go after Sasha’s money, too,” Roger pointed out.

“He might. What am I saying? Of course he would.” Nick picked out a pearl necklace and clasped it around his neck, as he examined himself in a full-length mirror. “But keeping that bastard down there is going to cause just as many problems as letting him go would.”

“I can take care of that,” Roger said, standing behind Nick. He looked at himself standing next to the image of a beautiful, sophisticated wife and smiled. “I was thinking I’d send him to a private clinic. Somewhere that knows how to deal with tough cases like Chet.”

“I’d settle just for a place that won’t wonder why he’s got female hormones coursing through his veins,” Nick said, noting that even in pumps, Roger was still taller than him.

“I know a few places where they’ll actually keep *giving* him the hormones,” Roger said, with a smirk.

“Really?” Nick replied, turning to face Roger. “What kind of clinic would...”

“One that doesn’t ask questions as long as you have the money,” Roger answered. “Give me a few days to make some calls. We can probably ship him out by next week.”

Nick fed some pearl earrings into his pierced ears. “Just a week? What will I do with all the spare time once he’s gone?” He said, sarcastically.

“I’ll think of something,” Roger said, as he left the room. Nick wondered what that was supposed to mean.

Later that afternoon, Nick was down in the basement watching Chet brush his hair. “One hundred strokes,” Nick reminded him. “If you lose count, you need to start over, Tiara darling.” Chet’s hair was long enough to reach below his chin now, and although they still used his wig most of the time, it was no fun for Nick to watch Chet brush a wig.

“Yes, mommy,” Chet replied, with a dead voice.

“I suppose I’m not actually your mother. Roger and I aren’t married.”

Chet looked through squinted, suspicious eyes at Nick, as this was his unenthusiastic response to that comment.

“But I still think ‘mommy’ is appropriate.

“Tomorrow night, your father is hosting some people from work,” Nick said. “I’m going to introduce you to all of them as Tiara Van der Slyke. Won’t that be nice?”

“No!” Chet replied with panic. “Please, no!”

“Well, either that, or you’ll do what I tell you and keep quiet all night without any fuss,” said Nick.

Chet looked down at the floor. “Yes.”

“Yes what?”

“Yes, Mommy. Thank you, Mommy.” Chet replied. He went back to brushing his hair.

When Roger got home from work, Nick was in the kitchen, thumbing through a bridal magazine. “Hey, snookums,” Nick said.

Roger visibly winced at the term ‘snookums.’ “How was your day?”

“Chet’s down in his room getting dressed for dinner,” Nick replied. “Can you look after him for the rest of the night? I need to go get some things.”

“Things?”

“If I’m going to entertain tomorrow night, I need so get something nice to wear and a lot of groceries. How many people are coming?”

“About eleven. You don’t need to go shopping for groceries. I’ll just hire my caterers to come in.”

“Caterers? You have *caterers*?”

“This isn’t the first time I’ve had people over here, you know. And I can’t boil water without setting off the fire alarms. So I use a local caterer to come in and do the food. I’ll give them a call.”

“I can make food you know. I’m a good cook.”

“Don’t worry about it. Besides, I don’t think anyone really expects my wife to be in the kitchen. They probably assume we’ve got a chef or someone to do it.”

Nick put his magazine aside. “I suppose that’s right. I don’t mind just letting someone else do the cooking.”

“Good. But if you want to go out and get something nice to wear, I’ll make sure Chet doesn’t get out of hand. Does he know about tomorrow night?”

“Yeah. I think he’ll play ball. I told him we’d parade him around as a little girl unless he behaved.”

“That’ll work for me. Take the Porsche and don’t forget your purse.”

A quick drive towards downtown found Nick examining himself in the rear view mirror to check his hair and makeup. It suddenly occurred to him that he barely even thought twice about leaving the house. He didn’t make sure he was “passing” or meticulously go over every aspect of his appearance. He just grabbed his purse and left. Come to think of it, since when had he started to keep a purse? He hadn’t even really noticed that detail. Yet that’s exactly what he had been doing. He had used one for an outing here and there for appearances, and gradually had been adding to it. It had his cell phone, some tubes of lipstick and mascara, a compact of powder and blusher. It had a travel pack of tissues, a couple of pens, a slender white leather wallet, hand lotion, a bottle of Prell, a comb, a brush, a small bottle of his favorite perfume and some mints.

He had transferred it all from purse to purse as he added to it, so he’d become somewhat oblivious to its ever-growing importance in his life. Now, he wouldn’t consider going anywhere without it.

Nick pulled into a private parking spot and walked down the street and down a secluded walkway, and punched in his private PIN number in the keypad next to the door. It quickly popped open. “Miss Summers!” said the saleslady, greeting him.

Nick smiled and leaned forward to hug her. “Hello, Barbara! I hope it’s not too close to closing time?”

“No, of course not,” Barbara replied with a warm smile. “What can we do for you today?”

“My fiancée has roped me into hosting a dinner party tomorrow night and I simply don’t have a thing to wear,” Nick said, walking into the small store.

“Formal, casual or formal-casual?”

“Formal-casual, I’d think,” Nick replied, understanding the question completely. “Something homey but still sophisticated. Something that says perfect wife, but still sexy. Not too dressy, though.”

“I know just what you mean. Let me put a few things together and I’ll have you try them on. Meanwhile, have a seat on the couch, and would you like some tea or a cocktail?”

“I’d love a screwdriver, Barbara.”

“I’ll have one for you immediately.” Barbara turned to an assistant who was waiting nearby. “Simone? A screwdriver for Miss Summers.” The assistant sped off and Barbara returned her attention to Nick. “I was going to get some size twelves for you, madam, but have you lost some weight?”

“You’re precious to say so, Barbara,” Nick replied with a glowing smile. “Yes, I’m a size ten now.”

“How wonderful! There’s so much more fashion at ten. I’ll just be a few moments.”



The bell rang and Nick rushed downstairs to greet the first people arriving for the evening. He had spent the better part of two hours getting ready for this informal meeting he wasn’t even invited to. At best, he would be in the same room with these people just a few times, as it was what Roger called a “confidential” meeting that required privacy. Even so, Nick was nervous. For whatever reason, he wanted to make a great impression. He wanted the house to be immaculate — and had spent most of the day cleaning it — and wanted to look the part of a beautiful and cultured woman. Nick tried to explain it to himself, saying that he just believed that it would advance Roger’s chance of getting promoted. The truth, however, may have been that he felt some sort of ownership now. He regarded Roger’s house as his house, and it was his duty to keep it nice. Nick may have even believed that it was his responsibility to make sure Roger was seen as a family man, as a man who had great taste in a future wife, and therefore Nick had to prepare to be that kind of woman.

But whatever the reason, Nick had simply outdone himself tonight.

He descended the staircase in the ensemble he had purchased at Barbara’s. He wore a cropped length knit cardigan in a blend of cashmere and silk. He wore it over an Akris cashmere/silk knit with short sleeves and a round neck with a center front slit. Both were in a water-blue color. Nick had matched those two items with a fitted just-above-the-knee pencil skirt in white Italian silk and cotton. He had also bought a pair of plum Christian Louboutin point-toe pumps with a five-inch heel that he wore with expert agility. He had spent two hours on his hair, making it a shiny and perfect as one could.

The entire outfit had cost \$4,284. Roger didn't even hesitate when Nick had told him the price. Honestly, he had lost track of the cost as Barbara talked him into it, and didn't even think to look at the receipt until the next day. How clothes could cost so much blew his mind. But if Roger didn't have a problem with it, then he didn't have a problem with it.

"You look absolutely incredible, Dee Dee," Roger said, looking humbled and

somewhat shocked by Nick's appearance. He gazed down that slit in Nick's top and seemed transfixed by the appearance of cleavage there.

Nick slid on a diamond tennis bracelet as he strode across the tile floor to the front door. "Don't keep our guests waiting, honey," he replied, exasperated at Roger's behavior.

He opened up the door and greeted the arrivals warmly. Roger introduced them by name, and Nick quickly memorized them. Once everyone had arrived, Nick produced tray after tray of hors d'oeuvres: quiche in prosciutto cups, coconut shrimp, pancetta-wrapped dates stuffed with manchego cheese and mint, caramelized cashews with cayenne, and all sorts of fancy items Nick had never bothered to think could possibly be classified as food.



Before too long, Roger rounded his group up and set up a projector for slide presentations. Nick dismissed himself to the kitchen, but lingered for a brief moment, just to hear some commentary.

“She’s gorgeous, Roger,” said one person. “Too good for you, boss,” was another. “Why do you bother even coming in to work?” was one that made Nick blush.

“How’s dinner coming, Frederik?” Nick asked the cook.

“Everything is on schedule,” the cook replied. “Seven o’clock, still?”

“At the earliest,” Nick replied. “You know how meetings can go long.”

“Whenever they’re ready, my dinner will be ready, Madam.”

“Excellent, Frederik,” Nick replied. He left to go upstairs.



“...and this market research has led us to believe there’s a market beyond traditional health care, and something a bit beyond rehabilitative care.” Roger said, clicking through a slide. The assembled executives were paying close attention, as it had become clear to all of them that this wasn’t just another “get-together,” but Roger was unveiling something new and truly important tonight.

Clicking to another slide, Roger continued. “What people seem to want is something in between health care and rehab. They have physical and mental health care needs that don’t fit into conventional medicine.” Another slide. “Also, they want to take advantage of all the things modern medical care can do for them in a one-stop environment. It’s not unlike a spa getaway, where multiple therapies and treatments are given to the patients. But there’s one crucial difference.”

Another slide. “People want to have the sort of therapies and treatments that will not simply fix issues they have with their bodies or mind, they want to improve themselves dramatically.” Another slide. “They want what they believe celebrities have. Some magical method to make them look like movie stars and find some sort of inner happiness.”

Roger turned to face his employees as he clicked to another slide. “This is what we’re going to call ‘Malibu Spas.’” He said, with emphasis. “What Malibu Spas will provide, at least from a marketing perspective is a holistic approach to total well-being and improvement. A one-stop shop for cosmetic surgery, beauty treatment, body building and toning, medically enhanced mental health and intensive life-coaching.”

Then another slide. “That’s from the outside view. In reality, what we’ll be doing is providing patients with an entirely new start on life. Think of it as an

extreme make-over for every patient. No medical procedure to be spared in the pursuit of health and beauty. We'll literally make new people out of them."

"Wow," was a comment from the executives.

"A question," said one of the others. "Are you saying that we'll be forcing the patients to undergo medical procedures?"

"No, no," Roger said with a chuckle. He clicked to the next slide. "By providing mental health services, which will give patients a positive self-image, they will embrace cosmetic procedures and beauty treatments."

"At what cost?" was the question.

"No extra cost. Everything is covered under a single fee."

"That's going to be murder on profit margin," an executive said.

Roger quickly answered that question. "Not at all. In fact, the profit margin here is *higher* than any of our other facilities. The cost of using an operating room is about the same as not using it. Equipment that's idle is a lost investment." He clicked to another slide. "By guaranteeing that we use our facilities and our professionals at 100 percent of availability, we'll have a very healthy profit margin. *Very* healthy."

"Um, Mr. Van der Slyke..." Said a voice from the back of the group.

"Yes?"

A young woman rose, the most junior of the team, looking slightly unsure of herself. "I'm interpreting this to mean that we will promise patients a complete make-over both physically and mentally. Doesn't that open us up to multiple liabilities? Isn't it unethical to persuade people to have surgery? And once all this is over, won't they..."

Roger shook his head. "All they will remember is that they had a great, relaxing time at Malibu Spas. We're going to ensure that once they have entered our facility, we will be in complete control of their perceptions of the experience."

"They won't know they've had cosmetic surgery?" Another executive asked.

"They will know exactly what we *want* them to know," Roger answered. "They will remember only what they need to remember. That way, they'll always have positive reports about the experience and recommend it to friends and family."

"That seems unethical," the young woman said.

Roger considered that statement. "It's a case where the professionals know best. Customers will be paying us to become better people. Once they leave a Malibu Spa, they'll be happier, healthier and more attractive than ever. They'll be the best possible people they can be, and all the better for it. What happens in between isn't important to them. They want results and we will deliver results."

A different executive spoke up. “We’re certainly not going to trick them, are we?”

“No. Not as such.” Roger took a few steps to think out his answer. “We’ll be asking them to sign a single contract that will essentially give us the rights to perform whatever procedures we deem necessary, rather than signing off on multiple procedures one by one. They will come to us because we’re the experts, and we’ll be able to do what they want to have done. Just as long as they leave it up to us.”

“Roger,” said a grey-haired man who was the oldest of the executives present, “Why would we do this? We can make more money selling it as individual procedures, and do it completely above board. More to the point, why would we have any interest in the well-being of our patients beyond what they pay us for? We certainly provide a full range of care services already, as people can afford them. What gain is it to us to essentially discount our services and push people into procedures they’d never pay us full price for anyway?”

Roger used his finger to point at the older man. “The experience. It’s all about the customer experience. They will have the best possible memories of our services and be overwhelmed by what we’ve done for them. Then, they will want to come back. Think about it. They’ll need to go through regular upkeep every few years. A nip there, a tuck there. Plus, the mental health benefits will inevitably decline over time. They’ll never feel as good as when they leave a Malibu Spa, and they’ll pay willingly to experience it again. We will have them every few years like clockwork. Before, it was one procedure and we’d be lucky to see them again. Now, we’ll have a steady, loyal stream of customers.”

“Like a car mechanic?” Someone asked.

“Not unlike that. Plus, like a car, every year they upgrade the product and make a new model. That’s what we’ll do. As we upgrade our services at Malibu Spas, we can advertise a new benefit or a new technique. People will come back to be made even better than they were last time they went to Malibu Spas. They’ll be paying us thousands every few years, like a subscription.” Roger scratched his chin for a moment. “You and I both know that we essentially provide this same sort of product for celebrities and the super-rich. They pay us money to do whatever we need to do to make them better people, and they don’t want to be bothered with details. They are our best clients. Once they have one procedure, they want more. Year after year they come back. That’s exactly what we’re doing here. Only we’re bringing it to the masses.”

From the kitchen, Dee Dee entered the room with a fresh bowl of salsa. “Let me know when you need anything else!” She said with a smile. She then headed back. “Sorry to interrupt!”

After the door had closed, they continued. “So, we’re going to test this.” The junior executive asked.

“We already have two facilities operating right now. One here in the suburbs and the other in Florida,” Roger said.

A slight gasp could be heard coming from the executives.

“So I’m not asking for approval here. I already have a staff of top people working at these clinics and we’re working with private clients. This project is in full swing, and it will continue to go according to plan. In three years, we’ll have 70 clinics operating around the country. So either you are on board and fully supportive of this initiative, or you should leave.” Roger folded his arms and scanned the room. “Right now.” He waited a moment. “If you have a problem with this, this is the moment of no return.”

Everyone remained seated.

“Good.” Roger then went into details about his ambitious new plan.



“When it comes to marketing, our best message is to appeal to...” Roger interrupted himself when he saw Nick enter the room. He had been on a roll for the last hour, and hated to stop. “Dear...?”

“And how is everyone doing?” Nick asked with a bright smile. “Does anyone need another drink?”

There was little reaction. Everyone seemed too uncomfortable to answer. They knew that this was a private meeting for a reason. “We’ll be done in just a few minutes, honey,” Roger said, trying to politely dismiss Nick.

“Wonderful!” Nick replied. “Dinner’s ready whenever you are. Oh! Roger? I have question about the seating arrangements.”

Roger followed Nick over to the stairway. When he was sure he couldn’t be overheard, Nick grabbed Roger by the arm. “I can’t find Chet.”

“What?” Roger answered.

“I can’t find Chet. He was supposed to be upstairs, in the guest room, watching his Disney DVDs. But now he’s gone. I searched all up there and he’s missing.”

“I knew we shouldn’t have let him out of the basement,” Roger said.

“What are we going to *do*?” Nick asked.

“Just keep calm and let me handle this.”

“This could ruin everything for both of us! Everything!” Nick said, his voice starting to warble from panic. “I don’t know what...”

Roger held Nick’s hand with his. “Darling, I know what to do. You entertain my employees and I’ll go look for Chet. Everything will be okay.”

“But Roger! I already looked everywhere!”

Roger looked directly into Nick’s thickly lined eyes and broke through his swirling emotions. “Trust me, sweetie. Do you trust me?”

“Of course I do, darling,” Nick replied.

“Now go and talk to the gang and I’ll be back before you know it,” Roger tapped Nick on his backside and headed up the stairs. “Atta girl,” he added.

Nick growled to himself. How the hell was he supposed to entertain executives? What the hell did he know about hosting a dinner party? Did Roger just slap him on the butt? What he needed to do now was dig deep and bring out some sort of “inner hostess” in him. Then it occurred to him that he had been in the company of three experts in the field: Hayley, Margot and Gwen. All he had to do was mimic what he had seen them do.

“Well, Roger tells me you’ve all been working very hard lately,” Nick said moving from executive to executive and adjusting the coasters. “I hope not too hard.” There was no response. With the reflexes of a stand-up comedian in front of a dead audience, Nick didn’t let the silence linger. “Roger has been putting this together for weeks now. He hardly sleeps a wink. I have no idea what it is, but I know it’s very important to him.” Okay, maybe he shouldn’t have ventured into work talk. Time to bail. “Our chef is cooking up a storm in the kitchen. Is everyone hungry?”

A murmur of agreement rose from the executives. That was it. Free food would get a response out of them. “Well, we have a Crostini with white truffle oil and olive paste for starters, followed by oysters casino...”

“Oysters!” said one of the businessmen. “Hot damn, I love oysters!”

“They’re fresh shucked oysters with a little red pepper and bacon. I had one in the kitchen. They’re delightful! We have plenty for everyone. Then it’s a nice mixed green and lemon vinaigrette followed by asparagus with poached eggs and parmesan, baked lobster tails and...”

“You’re kidding, baked lobster tails?” another of the executives asked.

“Nothing but the best.” Nick smiled to himself. He had their full attention now. “Wait until you see what we have for dessert!”

They all replied with an expectant “ooo!”



Roger looked in each room upstairs and saw them empty. They had put Chet in the guest room, with enough to keep him diverted for a few hours. Roger should have guessed that that little runt would have tried something. Still, he knew he was here somewhere. The only way down was that stairway, and he

hadn't seen anything since he started the presentation. Jumping from the windows wasn't going to happen as it was a little too high and Chet was a little too weak.

Thinking about it, he realized that Chet wasn't likely to leave at all, if he was still hooked on the injections they were giving him. In fact, they had proven he wouldn't escape without getting his fix. That made him think about what Chet would do. He'd certainly want to get some of that stuff if he were to escape. Roger walked into the master bedroom, following his hunch. Chet needed his drugs, and he probably believed that they were stashed here in the bedroom. They weren't, but that's probably what Chet believed. He'd scour this room in search of them. Roger went to his half-full walk-in closet and flicked on the lights. No one was hiding in there.

The only other place he could think of to hide was... Roger casually strolled over to the bed, and leapt high into the air, coming down sharply on his elbow, like a pro wrestler onto the mattress.

"Eurf!" yelled a voice from under the bed.

Roger quickly sprang off the bed to see Chet scamper out from beneath it, and he ran for the door. He sped off to get him, but Chet was surprisingly quick for someone who was so thin and on tranquilizers. They went down the stairs and Roger managed to grab Chet by the waist and hoist him up in the air, with Chet flailing away for freedom.

"Whoa there!" Said one of the executives. "Looks like you got quite a fighter on your hands there, Roger!"

Roger looked around and saw that he was right in plain view of his assembled team. Nick was there too, his eyes about to pop from the shock.

"Is this your daughter?" Asked the young woman.

Faced with a true moment of decision, Roger did what he had to do. He took his chances and put Chet back down on the ground.

To Nick's utter astonishment, Chet stood still and didn't fight Roger any further. On closer inspection, Nick noticed that Roger had a tight grip on Chet from the back. He was holding him still by the dress, and tightening it so much that Chet must have felt like he was going to be crushed. That's why he wasn't moving. Unfortunately, that was taking just about all of Roger's strength to hold him, and wasn't responding to the question.

"That's Roger's daughter, Tiara," Nick interjected. "She's quite a handful these days. She's..." *C'mon, Nick! Think!* He told himself. "...Recovering from a fight with the swine flu and... The medication has her prone to... Episodes."

"She's adorable!" said one of the executives. He must have been trying to score some serious brownie points, Nick decided. Chet looked disheveled and unkempt, but still, he did resemble a young girl in some ways. His wig was



slightly askew, but his face was fair and hairless, his lips red and his cheeks flush from fighting Roger. The little girl dress, tights and Mary-Jane shoes certainly wasn't giving the truth away.

"Roger, would you take her upstairs and try and put her to bed? She'll be exhausted from all this activity," Nick suggested.

Roger nodded without speaking, as his teeth were clenched hard and all he would have been able to manage would have been a grunt. He hoisted Chet over his shoulder and carried him back up the stairs. Chet fought with weak fists glancing off of Roger's chest. To the members of his team, it probably looked like good-natured dad and daughter interplay.

"How old is she?" the older executive asked.

"She's..." Nick hadn't yet pinned a real 'age' for Chet. He treated him like a six-year old, but what would average people think he looked like? He had wondered that. Now was a good time to find out. "Well, how old do you think she is?"

"Eleven," said one man.

"No, she's far too tall for that," said another, treating this like a game. "She's at least fifteen."

"I say fourteen."

"Fourteen sounds about right."

"Thirteen or fourteen."

"A young but tall thirteen."

"Fourteen, but *just*."

Nick smiled. He had an answer. "Fourteen is right!" He affirmed with a little grin on his lips. Chet was now a fourteen year old girl.



As Nick and Roger stood side by side at the door, waving good-bye to the last of the St. McGivens Hospitals executives, Nick casually tossed off Roger's arm, from where it had been resting — around Nick's shoulders. He turned back inside and immediately stepped out of his shoes. "These things are killers. Why the hell did I get these?"

"Because you look dynamite in them," Roger said, shutting the door behind them. "I had to keep telling myself all night long not to just walk up to and ravage my fiancée."

"I look that good?" Nick asked.

Roger dramatically swept Nick into his arms. “You make me feel like the luckiest man on Earth.” It took only a split-second for this to become extremely awkward, and then Roger gracefully spun Nick away from his embrace.

“Uh... So, what about Chet?” Nick asked, wanting to talk about something else. *Anything* else.

Roger nodded. “Well, we can’t keep him around here. Fortunately, I know just the place to send him. A good test case.”

“When can we get rid of him?” Nick asked, picking up his heels from the floor.

“Tomorrow. We’ll sedate him in the morning and I’ll have an ambulance pick him up.”

“It’s probably for the best,” Nick said, slumping his shoulders in relief. “I’ve had enough fun with him. So is this Malibu Spas thing your big secret project?”

“You heard that, huh? Well, I can’t really say much about it. We haven’t launched it yet.”

Nick put a few of these facts together. “This is what you’re going to hang your promotion on, isn’t it? Malibu Spas is going to be your big project to vault you up to the top.”

“That and having a beautiful bride to be,” Roger returned, with a wicked sneer. He walked right up to Nick, grabbed him by the shoulders and landed one quick, wet kiss on his lips. He then let Nick go and headed for the stairs.

“What the *fuck* was that?” Nick yelled at the top of his lungs. “What the hell, dude?” But Roger didn’t turn around and didn’t stop heading up. Nick took a few steps to run after him, to demand an answer, but he stopped himself. “What the *fuck*?” he yelled again. He was too exhausted to fight, and besides, he figured Roger was just trying to mess with him.

Done for the day, Nick locked up the doors. He turned off the lights, checked the kitchen to see if the pots and pans were clean, and resolved to do the dishes tomorrow. He unlatched the lock on the rear patio door, and headed for his cottage out back. As he did, he couldn’t help his curiosity, and made the tiniest little run of his tongue along his lips to know what Roger tasted like.

CHAPTER 6

By the time he reappeared in Roger's house the next day, it was well past noon. Roger would be at work, and if he knew what was good for him, he wouldn't be back until late tonight. Nick just didn't want to face Roger for a little while.

Nick was pleasantly surprised to find the dishes done and churning away in the dishwasher. Maybe Roger was trying to make it up to him. He went downstairs and found the basement empty with no sign of Chet. Nick figured he had already been shipped off for the clinic. He fixed himself a cup of coffee and checked his cell phone for messages. Margot had called yesterday, and he'd have to call her back. Another message was from Doctor Pfelter's office. Apparently, he had an appointment scheduled for this afternoon. Nick had no real memory of it, but he had a lot of things on his mind lately. He must have just forgotten.

A session with Dr. Pfelter did sound good to him right about now. A chat with a professional psychologist had a serious appeal to him. With Chet and that whole mess going on, with Roger and his weirdness, keeping up with the girls and all that, it was a lot to deal with. Plus, he was still dressing as a woman. He didn't want to forget that detail.

Changed out of his casual clothes and into a smart little blazer and skirt outfit, Nick drove into the city to keep his appointment. As he sat in the waiting room, sucking on his morning voice lozenge, the receptionist didn't seem to have the trouble she used to have with him. Nick well remembered his visit when she was totally flummoxed as he signed in as Nick O'Brien. Now, he just signed in as Dee Dee Summers. It made things so much easier.

"Hello, Doctor," Nick said, shaking his hand as he came into his office.

"Why, hello... Miss Summers?" The doctor replied, noting his receptionist was too close to say anything else. "Come in and have a seat."

"Thank you," Nick replied, and walked over to a comfortable leather chair. He sat and crossed his legs strategically, covering his modesty, and making a quick tug on his knee-length skirt to reduce the exposure of his tights. "I almost forgot I had an appointment with you today."

The doctor closed the door and went to a chair opposite Nick's. "I was worried when I hadn't heard from you in a while. But I see you're still soldiering on."

"It's almost over, though," Nick said.

"Oh?" the round-headed doctor asked.

"The last thing that was really keeping me tied into this crazy arrangement was taken care of this morning."

“And what was that?”

“I can’t really get into it.”

“Everything’s confidential here, Miss Summers.”

Nick didn’t seem to bristle at the name. “It’s just too complicated. Just suffice it to say that this little charade may be over very soon.”

The doctor realized he wasn’t going to get anywhere with that line of questions, so he moved on. “Well, how have things been going? Last time you were here, I think we had resolved that your best course of action was to become as real a wife as possible to Roger.”

“Well, yes. And no one is more surprised than I am that it really did seem to reduce the stress. It’s been much easier just to fall into the role and not worry.”

“Excellent,” The doctor said. “So, what I want to do is begin with my inkblots.” As soon as the blots were produced, Nick’s eyes closed and his head slumped to the side.

“He goes under faster every time,” Roger Van der Slyke said, emerging from the doorway.

“The inkblots are the trigger. He doesn’t even need the drug anymore.” The doctor rose from his seat and proceeded to leave. “I have my next appointment coming up in at the top of the hour.”

“I’ll have your office back to you well before that,” Roger replied. “Oh, and I unveiled the Malibu Spas project last night to my team. So we’re going ahead full steam.”

“I’m glad to be a part of it, Roger. I think it’ll really be a hit.”

“I do hope so. I’ve got a lot riding on it.” He moved a chair as close as possible to Nick so he could talk to him in a quiet, low voice. When the door shut and the two of them were alone, he leaned in closer.

“Can you hear me, Nick?” Roger said.

“Yefss...” Nick slurred.

“Good. Which name do you prefer, Nick? Nick or Dee Dee?”

“Nick.”

“Are you sure? What if someone calls you Nick when you’re at a charity function with Margot?”

“That would be bad.”

“It would be very bad. What if someone called you Nick when you were out with me at lunch?”

“I’d want to...”

“You’d want to run away and hide forever. I think Dee Dee is the name you should use from now on.”

“But what about...”

“All the time and every time. Even in your head, you should call yourself Dee Dee.”

“But...”

“Even in your head. You can’t be too careful. You need to make sure no one discovers your secret. You *must* call yourself Dee Dee.”

“Yes,” Nick said. “Yes, you’re right.”

“Do you like doing what I tell you?” Roger asked.

“I don’t like being bossed around. No one does.”

“You trust me and you know I’m just doing what’s best.”

“Of course I trust you, Roger.”

Roger smiled. “You trust me, but even when you don’t, it’s important to do what I say.”

“That doesn’t make sense, does it?” Nick asked.

“Yes it does. I know what’s best for us. I’ll make the decisions.”

“I don’t want to give up my...”

“You’re not giving up anything. Doing what I tell you to do makes you feel good.” Roger blew lightly into Nick’s ear.

Nick grinned at the sensation of cool air over his skin. “What did you think of the kiss last night, Dee Dee?”

“Disgusting.” Nick replied with a sour face.

“You told me you liked it.”

“I did not!”

“You told be you thought it was sweet.”

“I did not say that.”

“Yes you did, Dee Dee. You looked into my eyes and told me I was sweet.”

“No I didn’t.”

“Think about it, Dee Dee. You said ‘Oh, Roger, that was sweet of you.’”

“It was sweet of you to kiss me?”

“That’s what you said, Dee Dee.”

“I don’t think I did.”

“Yes you did. ‘Oh, Roger, that was sweet of you.’”

“I would have never said a kiss from you was sweet.”

“Oh, Roger, that was sweet of you,” Roger repeated.

Nick raised a hand and felt his lips with his fingers. “Never. A kiss from a man...”

“A kiss is a kiss, Dee Dee. It’s just a sign of affection. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yes, it’s a sign of affection, but from a man...”

“A man even more so. A man kisses because they want to show friendship and warmth. The care deeply about the person they kiss. Don’t you think so?”

“Yes, I know that. A kiss is very special.”

“Yes, Dee Dee. You understand. I was showing you how special you’ve been to me.”

“I’ve been special to you?” Nick said, his speech halting slightly.

“You’re incredible. You really are amazing. I feel as though I could spend every moment of my day with you. I want to be around you, Dee Dee.”

“Really? Do you mean that?”

“Of course I do, Dee Dee. That’s why you thought my kiss was sweet.”

“Your kiss?”

“Do you remember what you said to me?”

“I said that was sweet of you, Roger.”

“Yes, I remember that, too.”

“I’m so confused.”

Roger placed his hand tenderly on Nick’s exposed knee. “Don’t be confused, Dee Dee. I’m just showing you how much I like you. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“It still feels odd. I can’t help but think it’s strange.”

“That offends me, Dee Dee. It’s only strange if you let it be. Next time I kiss you, see if you don’t feel the warmth and tenderness behind it. Can you promise me that?”

“I suppose I do owe you that.”

“It’s all right, Dee Dee. You’re very fair and understanding.” Roger checked his watch for the time. “Oh, and before we go any farther. Don’t call me snookums again.”

“What?”

“Just don’t call me that. It’s old-fashioned.”

“All right.”

“Now I wanted to talk to you about something very important, Dee Dee.” He paused for dramatic effect. “Do you remember when you said that this arrangement was close to being over?”

“Yes.”

“Well, it’s not over yet. Even with Chet out of the picture, I still need you.”

“But my life...”

“You’re already living a life, Dee Dee. You have so many friends. You know so many people. Would you want to leave them all behind? They’d miss you. You’d miss them, too, wouldn’t you?”

“I suppose. In a way.”

“Margot and Gwen would call and no one would answer. Hayley would come and drop by, and you wouldn’t be there. I’d come home and find the house empty.”

“I guess I can... Keep going for a little while. Maybe...”

“Don’t think about the end. You can only think about tomorrow. About what comes next. And next, Dee Dee needs to get married to Roger.”

“Married?”

“It’s the next step.”

“That’s not until June...”

“Yes. There’s a big ceremony in June. But we may not be able to wait...” Roger checked the time again. He had another fifteen minutes to finish with Nick. That was probably just enough time to prepare his future bride.



Roger arrived home at about six that evening, to find Nick sitting on a couch with a woman.

“Darling, welcome home,” Nick said in a sing-songy voice. “This is Nora.”

He gestured to the woman on the couch with him. She was in her mid-thirties, Asian, immaculately dressed in a lavender women’s suit, and her dark hair pulled back tightly into a bun.

“Nora...?” Roger said, trying to have Nick fill in the details. He came over to shake the woman’s hand.

“Nora Greenway,” Nick added. “Our wedding planner.”

“Oh!” Roger said, the information registering with him. “Gwen recommended her, isn’t that right?”

“Yes,” Nick answered. “I’ve been a little tardy in getting the basics covered. The ceremony is only a few months away, after all.”

“Invitations do need to be mailed!” Nora said with a grin.

“We’ve just been selecting a few things for the invites,” Nick said. “The right paper, the perfect fonts, the right paper for the inner envelope, the right paper for the outer envelope, the right paper for the RSVP envelope, embossing, foil... There’s a lot to decide!”

“Yes. So I see.” Roger said, bemused at the whole thing.

Nora gathered the many loose-leaf binders she had lying around, all filled with samples and pictures. “Well, we’re about done anyway, Miss Summers. I think we can pick this up later.” She looked back at the two of them just before exiting. “You make such an attractive couple,” she said before he shut the door.

“What brought this on?” Roger asked Nick.

“It just kind of sprang to mind,” Nick said. “I know June is still a long way away, but people have been expecting invitations.”

“That’s a good idea. I don’t know what I’d do without you, beautiful.” Roger put his things aside and hung his coat up. “How was your day?”

“Same old, same old,” Nick replied. “Except for Nora, there wasn’t much going on today.”

“Weren’t you supposed to see Doctor Pffelter this afternoon?”

“Was that today?” Nick said, puzzled. “I suppose it was. Yes, I guess I did go see him. It’s always so relaxing, I never even remember what happens in those sessions. I just go in sad and come out happy. He’s a wonderful doctor.”

“He’s the best. He’s working with me closely on the new project. So you just wanted to mail out invitations all of the sudden?”

“I was driving home and all the sudden I told myself: Dee Dee, you need to mail the invitations at least three months in advance! No matter what happens in June, those invitations need to go out now!”

“I’m glad you’re doing it. I’m lost when it comes to these things.” Roger sat down and stretched out a little. “Anything else happen?”

“Well, Hayley and Dick invited us on a cruise for the week, but I didn’t think that we’d be interested.”

“They what?” Roger’s sleepy eyes popped open. “No, of course we’re interested!”

“The whole week, Roger? Seven days? You have work and I’m been so exhausted...”

Roger seemed quite emphatic about this. “Have you lost your mind?” He exclaimed. “Dee Dee, darling, this is a prime opportunity to socialize with them!”

“On a boat?”

“They have a yacht. A ten million dollar yacht. They’ll sail on up the coast or down into Mexico, and return. That’s all.”

“But seven days! I’m not prepared to be like this for seven days straight.”

“You’ve been like this for weeks now, Dee Dee. You’re more than ready for this. Now go call Hayley and tell her we’d be happy to go on the cruise.”

Nick looked at Roger, ready to come up with a thousand reasons why he didn’t want to do this, but when it came down to it, Nick knew Roger was right. It was a cruise on a luxury yacht, which sounded like it could be fun. Hayley was a good friend, and it would be a good chance for Roger to make points. Nick understood that Roger’s decision was correct, as usual. “Yes, of course, dear,” he said.



Nick examined himself closely. He was about to leave for his week-long trip with Hayley and Dick for Ensenada, Mexico. It would be warm, and that meant that sooner or later, he was probably going to have to wear a bathing suit. Nick had bought a simple, white, one-piece for the job. He intended to add a delightful Jean Paul Gaultier fishnet tunic he found, a floppy hat, flip-flops and big sunglasses. That was his plan, at least.

He had wriggled into the one-piece and was staring at himself in the mirror. It was certainly true that he had examined himself when dressed as Dee Dee many times, but his time it was different.

This time he had removed everything. He wasn’t wearing a body-shaper, or any other foundation garments. He had the Merkin Device on, but that was all. He presented a perfectly flat front, a slight feminine belly, a slender stomach and... Curves. There was no doubt about it, he had hips now. He had been thinking the hi-cut legs of the suit were going to be a problem, but it wasn’t that bad. He really hadn’t been paying close attention as his body changed, but he had hips. He also had a butt. It was toned, thanks to his daily exercise routine, but it was still plenty fleshy. Combined with his ever-shrinking waist, he had a very female shape to his body now.

His wig was removed as well. His natural hair had now grown about three-quarters the length of the wig, and reached well down his neck and all the way to his shoulder blades. All these months he had been twirling it around his head and pinning it up under the wig, and really hadn’t seen it at full length for a while. Roger had been encouraging him to not cut it, and he could see why. As nice as the wigs were, there was something unmistakably more attractive about natural hair. Especially this hair. It was thick, lustrous and wavy. He never had hair like this before. He had let it grow out from time to time, but it



never looked as healthy as it did now.

Then came the most disturbing thing about his appearance. He had not just removed the body shaper, but he had removed the gel forms on his chest. With nothing else, he looked like he had a pair of small — but still real — women's breasts on his chest. At first, when he felt them so many months ago, they were just little firm spots on his chest. They grew slowly, week after week, until now, where he could see he had a very definite shape. He'd push on them and they'd wobble and shake like jello. He could tickle them and they'd make him giggle. He'd pinch them and they hurt like crazy.

Why had he let it happen? He could have gone to Roger and told him, but he wasn't so sure what Roger's real interest was anymore. After all, he had been taking a few medications to deal with his voice and his nerves, all given to him by Roger. Then, the other night, when he caught Roger staring at his cleavage, it was telling. It was like he was examining his handiwork.

Still, Nick trusted Roger. He was such a good man and worked so hard to get all of these things. He was a wealthy single man, and could have had the attentions of any woman. Yet he took Nick in when he was down on his luck, and gave him a taste of living well. All he had to do was a little pretending. There was no harm in that, was there?

But where had these breasts come from? Maybe handling those syringes he gave Chet had somehow gotten into his system. His body was definitely becoming very female in appearance, and the only explanation was female hormones.

Even if it was true, even if Roger had been spiking his pills with hormones, what real danger was there? Roger did work at a hospital. He knew what he was doing. After all, Nick was a very convincing woman now, and rarely if ever worried about being "given away." Heck, he didn't even really need those voice lozenges anymore. There seemed little point in changing something that was working so well. Life as Dee Dee was interesting and fun most of the time. Nothing was permanent, anyway. A few days on his own, and his beard would be back, the breasts would shrink and he'd be back to his old self. That was something he could *definitely* count on.

Turning left and right to see his profile, the thin woman in the mirror seemed very pleased with her appearance. It was a flattering cut to the suit, and Nick thought his body was just thin enough to avoid being self-conscious. He weighed in at 125 these days, but wanted to get down to 122 or so. Why? Well, that's what he needed to do to fit into the size six bridal gown he had his eyes on.

With one last look in the mirror, Nick ignored using the forms and used some new gel inserts, tucking them into the cups of the suit. They took him to a C-cup size and were so much better feeling than the false breasts. At least that was one positive thing about growing real breasts of his own.

That and the way they felt when you stroked them.

He was downstairs with two suitcases only a little while later, in a navy blue Italian jacquard sailor dress with double-breasted buttons. It had the cutest little belt which looked like a multicolored, tied scarf around the waist. He saw it at Barbara's yesterday and had to have it, even if it was a miniskirt length hem. After putting it on, he decided he definitely had the legs for it — especially atop the suede navy Miu Miu platform pumps he had bought. Why he kept buying these ankle-breaker shoes he didn't know. It's just that his legs looked so amazing in them.

Roger was waiting at the door, clearly ready to leave. "Four suitcases for just a week?"

"I just have no idea what one brings on a yacht trip," Nick said. "So I have a little bit of everything."

"I was going to say, that may be pushing the female image a little too far," Roger said. He glanced upward at Nick's head. "You're not wearing your wig?"

Nick smiled and flicked the ends of his hair around. "It's my natural hair. It's long enough to not need the wig anymore."

As he continued to look, Nick saw a sparkle in Roger's eyes. "Yes. It makes quite a difference," Roger said. He then walked closer to Nick and continued to stare. He stood still for a moment, and Nick was worried he might try something funny, but then Roger backed off. "I think it might be better to use the wig, though," Roger said.

"I like my hair this way," Nick replied.

"The wig is better. Fewer questions."

Nick was about to object, ready to stand his ground, but there was something about a request from Roger that made Nick cave in immediately. He just wanted to do what Roger told him to do. "Perhaps you're right," he said.

"You know I am."

Nick sighed and headed back upstairs to change into his wig. He returned shortly, just in time to see Roger bend down and pick up the suitcases. Roger carried the suitcases out to the car as Nick followed closely behind, clacking along in his high heels.



Roger pulled the car up to the slip where Dick's yacht was parked, and Nick audibly gulped. "I thought you said it was only a ten million dollar yacht?" He asked Roger.

“I’ve never asked what it cost,” Roger explained. He got out and ran around to the passenger side door.

As he held Nick’s hand to support him as he got out of the car, Nick’s expression was somewhere between astonishment and terror. “There’s a helicopter on it, for God’s sake!” He said.

“Honestly, I didn’t know. I only saw some pictures of it,” Roger explained. “It looked smaller in the photos.” They both took a few tentative steps forward with their attentions fixed on the huge, impressive white miniature cruise liner in front of them. It may have technically been a yacht, but it appeared to be nothing less than pure opulence in a metal hull. There was indeed a helicopter on top, four stories of windows, a pool and what even appeared to be a miniature submarine hanging at the side of the boat.

“Mister Van der Slyke?” a man in a white sailing uniform said.

Both Roger and Nick flinched, as they were too distracted by the yacht to have noticed several men approach, until they were standing right next to them.

“Y... Yes.” Roger said, gathering himself. “I’m Roger Van der Slyke.”

“And guest?” The man asked in Nick’s direction.

“I’m Dee Dee Summers,” Nick said, “Roger’s fiancée.” He surprised himself by how easily he said those words — and how comforting it felt, knowing that simply saying that he was Roger’s was like having a ticket to all of the best things in life.

As Roger briskly headed up the gangplank, Nick lingered for a moment before he realized that he wasn’t going to have to carry the bags on board the ship. That’s what the uniformed staff was for. Nick carefully maneuvered his way along the plank, his gold lame purse swinging off his arm and the other hand holding his hat to his head in the stiff ocean breeze.

“Deets!” Hayley said, upon seeing Nick. Nick gingerly and carefully climbed the last few steps as he came aboard the ship. Hayley immediately hugged her friend as Nick did the same. “I’m so glad you changed your mind.”

Nick was apologetic. “I’m sorry, Hayley. I didn’t mean to sound...”

“Don’t think anything about it. Honestly, you’re saving my life. I told Dick I just had to have one of the girls with me on this trip or else I’d lose my mind!” Hayley took Nick by the hand. “Let’s get you a drink.”

Hayley led Nick to the back of the boat, where they found Dick and Roger talking it up, laughing and slapping each other on the back. Dick wore a navy blue jacket with captain’s decorations on it, as well as a captain’s hat and white slacks & shoes. As ever, he was puffing away on one of his cigars. He looked mildly ridiculous.

“There she is! The future wife of this old mangy cur!” He said, referring to Roger. “Now aren’t you glad Roger talked you into this?”

Nick knew what he had to do, as all those formal events and parties he had attended had trained him well. “Dick! How wonderful of you to invite us!” Without any visible hesitation, he strode confidently to Dick, reached out for a handshake and presented his cheek for a kiss. Dick didn’t wait and laid on a particularly foul smack which reeked of tobacco and whiskey. “So sorry for the miscommunication, Dick. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“Please, just as long as you’re here now.” Dick replied. “Just as long as you and the old lady there stay busy and let the men enjoy the weekend.”

Nick glanced at Roger who grimaced in discomfort. He’d have to wait until later to speak his mind about what a boor Dick was.

The ship set sail shortly thereafter, and after a little schmoozing, Nick and Roger were escorted to their stateroom. It was huge and lavishly upholstered, almost too nice for being confined to a boat. Their bags were already unpacked for them, and Nick found his dresses hung in the closet and his other clothes folded and tucked away in a dresser. There were windows on both sides of the room, which let in a smell of sea air into the room and a pleasant breeze.

“Where are you sleeping?” Nick asked Roger.

“Where do you think, hun buns?” Roger replied.

Nick covered his face with his hands. “Oh, lord.” It was immediately clear to him that he had not calculated this detail. “There’s got to be another room that...”

“We’re a couple, Dee Dee. We are expected to be sharing the same bed.”

Nick softly pounded alternate sides of his head with his palms. “What are we going to do?” Nick asked. “*What are we going to do?*”

“We’re both adults, Nick. We can share a bed and the world won’t end.” Roger said, dismissively. “We did at the monastery.”

“That was a mistake.” Nick shivered violently to show his displeasure with the situation.

“And that wasn’t the end of the world, was it?”

“No,” Nick replied. “But I sure wished it was at the time.”

“It’ll be fine. Meanwhile, do you have something to wear for the evening?” Roger said. “I’d recommend something with a flat heel.”

“I nearly toppled over the railing twice,” Nick said with a laugh. “I forgot that boats sway.” Nick undid the buttons on the front of his dress as he stepped over to the closet. He removed the dress carefully and slipped it onto a hangar.

“Dee Dee...” Roger said from the bed, where he was taking off his shoes. “Turn around.”

Nick turned front and center, clad only in a bra and panties. “What?” Nick asked.

“You’re not wearing the body-shaper.” Roger noted.

“I guess I’m all shaped up,” Nick said.

“And the...” Roger made the universal sign for breasts by cupping his hands at the chest.

“More me than padding,” Nick said. “But it’ll all go back to normal once we’re done, right?”

Roger squinted. “Oh. Yeah. Of course.”

Dinner was pleasant, and they dined inside to stay out of the wind. Afterwards, they went out on deck for after-dinner drinks. Hayley and Nick chatted about upcoming events they were going to attend, and Hayley was



doing her best to talk her friend Dee Dee into taking more of a leadership role in some charities they were involved in. Meanwhile, Dick and Roger paired off, guffawing at various jokes they kept to themselves. After a while, they all sat down, tired and slightly intoxicated.

“When was it you two were going to get hitched?” Dick asked.

“June 23rd,” Nick replied quickly. “Holy First Church of Christ on seventh street.”

Dick looked to Roger for confirmation. “What she said,” Roger replied. “She’s in charge.”

“That’s still over three months away,” Dick said. “It seems like an awfully long time for two lovebirds like yourselves to wait. Unless you’re *not* waiting and going at it like...”

“Dick!” Hayley barked, chastising the old man.

“I’m just saying...”

“That’s private!” Hayley scolded. “None of our business!”

“In a way it is. I mean, if they were married, then there’s nothing to stop them from pursuing a normal, healthy marriage in the eyes of the lord,” Dick said, puffing on his cigar a bit more.

“Dick, I can say categorically that we’re not violating scripture,” Roger stated.

“Ditto,” Nick added.

Dick took a drink. “You know the position of the church, Roger. I totally believe you, of course. But the board of trustees... Well, they can be pretty strict about these things. By the time you get to the church, it’ll have been several months of you two living together.”

“They have nothing to worry about,” Roger said again, his tone becoming more and more sober.

Dick drew in a deep breath from the cigar, puffed out the smoke, and then examined the cigar he held in his hands. “Cuban,” Dick clarified. “Private label for the Castro family. Only place I can smoke these is out here. The law’s different 12 miles out.” He took another draw. “Same goes for marriages. Boat captains can perform marriages this far out to sea. International waters and all that.”

Hayley swatted Dick on the knee playfully. “Richard, you’re not suggesting...”

“I’m just saying that if they wanted our captain to perform the ceremony and get married, then I wouldn’t have any problem backing Roger before the board,” Dick said. “My conscience would be clear.” He took another sip of whiskey. “What do you say, Rog?”

Roger nervously looked at Nick, trying to look as though he were silently pleading — without letting Hayley or Dick catch on. He paused, hoping that Nick would understand. “What do you think... Sweetie?”

“It’s not a legal marriage,” Hayley added. “That’s a myth.”

“But it would be a marriage in the eyes of the church,” Dick said. “But no. Not legal.”

A long pause of silence followed, and Nick realized he was on the spot. “What if people find out? Then June 23rd would mean nothing,” he said. He hoped that was a solid excuse.

Dick waved off that concern. “We’re not going to tell anyone. My crew isn’t going to tell anyone, or else they’ll find themselves on a dingy a hundred miles out at sea.”

“What do you think?” Roger said, nervously smiling.

There was nowhere to go. Maybe Nick could grab the keys to the helicopter and take off for Mexico, apply for amnesty and live in exile until he died, but that probably wasn’t terribly practical. “Well... Of course... Of course I’ll do it,” Nick said, forcing the words out syllable by syllable. “It’ll be romantic.” He was plastering his best smile on his face.



The next morning, with a ringing in his ears, Nick rose. He turned to see that Roger was indeed in the same bed as he was, but his back was turned and a fair distance away on the other side of the large bed. Although, not nearly far enough away for Nick’s comfort.

He stood on the soft carpet in his bare feet, the silky lace chemise he wore slipping back into form. He had barely even thought to pack it, and he was glad he had. If one of those stewards walked in, he’d have a lot of explaining to do in boxers and a t-shirt.

Nick massaged his temples with his fingers, wondering why he had a slight headache. The events of the previous night came back to him, and he realized he must have had a slight hangover. As he padded to the bathroom, he then remembered the most important part about last night.

“Shit,” he growled to himself. “I’m getting married today.” He saw himself in the mirror and sneered. “Nice going, Dee Dee.” He saw the nice, large tub nearby and decided he needed a soak to soothe his nerves. He filled it up with warm water and a generous amount of bubbles. Nick pinned his hair up to keep it from getting wet and slid slowly into the water.

“Aaahhh...” He said, in the lilting voice he spoke in. Once fully seated, he laid there in bliss for a moment before realizing that his body now had some buoy-

ancy issues he wasn't prepared for. He tried to push his breasts down, but they would just spring back up. That didn't stop from trying several times, though. Then he just held them in place for a while before giving up and letting them bob back to the top. That was frustrating — but then again, the combination of bubbles and surface tension were tickling his nipples and it felt wonderful. Nick allowed himself a few minutes of doing nothing. But then, some voice in his head told him not to linger, scared that he would fall asleep and become all prune.

He chose to shave his legs, grabbing a razor and foam, and lathering up. It was odd how his leg hair was barely even visible anymore. Even when it did grow a little, it was downy soft and nearly invisible. But nearly invisible wasn't good enough today. *I may not really be a woman*, he decided, *but I'm going to look like a million bucks for my wedding*.

Nick drew the razor over his legs slowly, almost as much to shave as to caress his slender and shapely flesh. He had to admit, he had very attractive legs. As a man, he thought they looked a little too feminine, and now they were just right for this role. Once done, he wriggled his toenails at the other end of the bath. "I should paint my toenails today," he said to himself. He had done his fingernails for a long time now. It just seemed to be practical to do his toes as well. Besides, he had these adorable espadrilles he wanted to wear that would show his feet.

He got out of the tub, patting himself dry with a towel, before wrapping it around his body, chest-high, and tending to his toenails.

"How is my blushing bride this morning?" Roger asked, walking into the bathroom with a slight stumble.

"Don't test me," Nick replied, as he finished up the last toe. "This is way beyond the call of duty."

"I know it is, Dee Dee," Roger said with all sincerity. "I want you to know I truly do appreciate it, and I'll make it up to you."

"How?" Nick asked.

"I'll think of something," was Roger's answer.

Nick left the bathroom for Roger's use and dressed for the day. He easily slipped himself into the Merkin Device, pulling everything tight. A natural bra & panty set was next, and even though he loved stockings, this was not the weather for it. He selected the only white dress he had brought with him, a Michael Kors crinkled matelass e v-neck dress with a knee-length hem. He tied up the wide canvas straps on his espadrilles around his ankles and added a modest selection of jewelry. Nick took special care with his wig hair, wearing it up, but curling two tendrils at the sides of his face. His makeup was clean and fresh.

"Wow," Roger said when he saw Nick. "If only..." He didn't finish the thought.

Hayley was girlishly enthusiastic about the wedding, and jumped and squealed like a teenager when she saw her friend that morning. Her energy was infectious, and it wasn't long before Nick was following suit, all giddy and excited.

"You can back out, sport," Dick reminded Roger. He was dressed in a neatly-pressed pair of khakis and a white polo shirt, which was as fancy as he had been able to manage. He was still quite strikingly handsome.

"I'll be fine," Roger said. "Though, if I dive overboard before we tie the knot, don't send anyone after me."

"Understood."

"Promise me you'll keep this a secret, Hales," Nick asked Hayley.

"Can't bear being labeled as a married woman?" Haley said.

"No," Nick answered, "Gwen will kill me if she finds out she wasn't here for the ceremony."

"My lips are sealed," Hayley replied.

The ship's captain was an unremarkable man, but he clearly was going to enjoy this particular task. He gathered the two couples and the available stewards together and read from a small book. "As we stand over the ocean," he began, "may your love always be as constant and unchanging as these never-ending waves..."

The captain's voice fell into the background for Nick. As he stood facing Roger, he looked up into his eyes, and found the oddest sense of calm and certainty there. If, he hypothesized, if he were really a woman, that woman could do a lot worse than Roger. Besides the money and everything, he was a commanding man who always seemed to be in charge. His presence was reassuring and comforting. Plus, even as he was going into his mid forties soon, he looked great. He was sophisticated and debonair when he wanted to be, and the flecks of grey at his temples distinguished him

"Dee Dee?" Roger said, bringing Nick back into the events at hand.

The captain cleared his throat and read the passage again. "Dee Dee, will you take Roger as your husband, in happiness and with patience and understanding, through conflict and tranquillity?"

"Yes," Nick said, almost blurting the word out. He had been so worried about his reaction, that he had told himself to just say yes and get through this. It wasn't real, after all. "I do." He added.

"Roger, will you take Dee Dee as your wife," the captain said, "in happiness and with patience and understanding, through conflict and tranquillity?"

"I do," Roger answered in a deep, solemn and reverent voice.

"I now pronounce you husband and wife," The captain said, and closed his little book.

Roger and Nick turned to Hayley and Dick, in an awkward silence.

“You’re supposed to kiss,” Dick pointed out.

The color drained from Nick’s face like a broken thermometer. This little tradition had slipped his mind. Before he really could do much of anything, Roger had turned Nick toward his face, and was coming in fast. Roger placed his fingers under Nick’s slender chin and he kissed Nick full on the lips, not bothering to apologize verbally or silently. His lips gently worked their way along Nick’s mouth and made noise as the moisture from both mouths met.

Nick remembered something, that was at the back of his mind. He remembered that when he was next kissed, he wanted to feel the affection, tenderness and warmth. Men kissed when it was special, he told himself. This was his chance to see if it was true. He searched for the warmth and affection in Roger’s lips and sure enough, he found it. The kiss was indeed special, and the affection flowed through him like a warm tropical waterfall. It was very moving and touching the way Roger demonstrated his affection and appreciation of Nick. Soon, Roger pulled away, and Nick fell into his arms. Nick had let his balance go unnoticed during the kiss, unconsciously allowing a leg kick back in the air. He quickly righted himself.

“I give you Mr. and Mrs. Roger Van der Slyke,” Dick said to those present.

Hayley bounced up and down in glee as the assembled staff applauded.

“I’ve married another man,” Nick said to himself, drowned out by the clapping.



The yacht pulled into harbor at Ensenada that afternoon, and Nick and Hayley spent the remainder of the day shopping. Haley mercilessly teased her girlfriend about being married and locked into a relationship for life. Back on the ship, Dick had his copter pilot take him and Roger on an aerial tour of the coast, and into the hills. By the time the sun was setting, the couples reunited on the yacht, ready for dinner.

As Nick changed out of his white dress for a dinner outfit, he was surprised to find Roger standing behind him. He was only clad in his underthings, and feeling more than a little vulnerable. Roger placed his hands on Nick’s pale, soft shoulders. “It’s been killing me all day, Dee Dee,” Roger said. “This is way beyond what you signed up for.”

“I’ll live, Roger,” Nick replied.

“Still, I wanted to give you a gift to make it good. I want to give you this,” He said, handing over a medium-small flat box.

Nick took it in his hands, and looked up to Roger for further information.

“Go ahead, open it,” Roger said.

Nick tentatively popped open the box. “Oh my God,” he said. “It can’t be real.”

“It is.”

“But how?”

“I snuck away while Dick took a nap. There’s a place just by the pier.”

Nick placed the box aside as he used both hands to pick up its’ contents. “Are they real diamonds?”

“Of course,” Roger replied. He grasped the sides of the stunning diamond necklace. “Let me see it on you.”

Nick obediently turned around with his back to Roger, and he pulled the necklace around Nick’s neck. Nick lifted his hair in the back to let Roger fasten it.

He walked to the mirror to see it, and was speechless. It was a riot of sparkling diamonds, arranged triangularly. There were so many stones that Nick couldn’t even count them all. They glistened in the light, dazzling to the eyes.

“It must have cost a fortune!” Nick said, transfixed by the reflection. “I’ve never seen anything like it!”

“I hoped you’d like it.”

“Like it?” Nick said, turning to Roger. “I love it!” he said, giving Roger a peck on the lips. After all, Roger wasn’t the only one who could show affection with a kiss. “I can’t wait to show Hayley! She might even be jealous of *me* for once!”

She turned back to the reflection in the mirror, transfixed by the dazzling necklace that would have made any woman the centerpiece of attention. It was hard not to think that this was the most precious gift he’d ever received.

Roger prepared for dinner, and Nick selected an off-the shoulder dress with a scoop neck, so he could show off his latest possession.

“Deets! That necklace is incredible!” Hayley said when she saw him that night. “Roger is going to spoil you!”

“I don’t mind,” Nick said with a smile.

Hayley held the diamonds in her hands, fingering them even as they remained attached to Nick’s neck. “So wonderful!”

“Now I’m going to have to buy her something,” Dick said with a grumble.

Dinner was amazing, as one would expect from any dinner on a yacht, but Nick was clearly the center of attention for the night. He beamed with pride as Hayley couldn’t stop talking or touching the necklace and Roger and Dick traded barbs about putting each other into the poor house while their wives lived the high life.

“I wouldn’t have it any other way,” Roger concluded.

They ended the evening without overdoing the cocktails, and once back at the stateroom, Roger was grateful to drop his clothes on the floor and fall into bed. “Long day,” he said.

Nick had no such freedom, as he needed a few minutes to disrobe, wash his face, prepare his hair for bed and slip into his chemise.

“Leave the necklace on,” Roger suggested, as Nick started to remove it.

“In bed?” Nick asked, not sure he understood the statement.

“Sure. Leave it on all night.”

Nick smiled and did exactly that, as he stopped trying to undo the clasps of the necklace and tucked himself into bed. He lay there as Roger stared at him.

“You look incredibly sexy,” Roger said.

Nick then went for the clasps again and removed the necklace. “I think I’d better not risk damaging it,” he explained.

“Suit yourself,” Roger replied. He then kissed Nick on the lips. “Good night, Dee Dee.”

Nick smiled back as he flicked off the bedside lamp. “Good night, sweetie.”



CHAPTER 7

“Do you want me to carry you over the threshold?” Roger asked Nick when they returned to Roger’s house.

“Knock it off,” Nick said, giving Roger a dead-eye stare. Roger grinned and proceeded to lug in the bags. Nick followed, placing his purse aside, as he made a bee-line for the little pink cell phone left behind for the weekend. It wouldn’t have worked on the high seas, anyway. “Tsk. Look at all these messages.” He found a spot on the couch, kicked off his shoes and curled up with the phone. As he waited for it to dial, he looked over at Roger, heaving the luggage in. Maybe he should have helped him...

“Hello, Gwen!” Nick said as Gwen picked up on the other end of the line. “We just got back. Yes! It was lovely. Have you been? Oh, you *must!*”

By the time Nick had run through his list of messages, dinner was already half-eaten by Roger. Nick joined him without any real acknowledgement that he had been talking for two hours straight. He took several bites of the salmon on his plate before it occurred to him he had little idea of where it had come from.

“I hired the chef on,” Roger explained.

“The chef?” Nick asked.

“The chef we had do the dinner party meeting. Frederik. He had an opening, and so I hired him for dinner five nights a week.”

“You hired someone to cook?”

“He’ll be here Sunday through Thursday night.”

“Why? Didn’t you like my cooking?” Nick said, feeling vaguely insulted.

“I love your cooking. But you’re so involved in your charity work these days, I figured it would make things easier on you.”

Nick took another bite of the fish. “I have to admit, he’s very good.” Nick had a few more bites, followed by a delicate dab of the napkin on his lips. “I’m sure I’ll be able to adjust,” he said sarcastically. “I just need him limited to the kitchen. If he’s wandering around the house, who knows what he’ll find.”

“I’ll make sure that’s clear to him,” Roger agreed. They finished dinner and Roger settled in to read through his email while Nick picked up one of his bridal magazines and started to leaf through it. He had another appointment with Nora tomorrow which was going to focus on decor, and wanted to be prepared. He was still divided on if he wanted a ceiling canopy for the reception, or possibly just an ornate staging area would be enough. Plus, he needed to select a color scheme.

“Do you like the color blue?” Nick asked Roger.

Roger blinked and shook his head, looking up from his computer screen in bewilderment. “What?”

“Blue. What do you think?”

“I... I really don't... I'm busy.”

“Never mind,” Nick said with a sigh. “I'll manage.” Fortunately Nick knew this was just all fantasy. Nothing but a funny little way to kill some time, planning a wedding that would never happen. After about an hour, Nick was feeling tired and decided to call it a night. He made a show of yawing and stood. “I'm going to bed. I'll probably see you tomorrow after work.”

“I'll be late. I have a bit to catch up on.” Roger said.

“As usual,” Nick said, as we walked to the patio door. He returned a minute later. “Roger... What happened to the back yard?”

Roger broke out with a goofy smile and played stupid. “I don't know what you mean,” he said.

“There's a pool there,” Nick said. “Or at least it looks like...”

“A pool? That hardly seems likely,” Roger replied. His face was contorting as he tried to hold back his laughter.

“Roger!” Nick said, stamping his foot.

“All right, all right,” Roger relented. He stood and walked to the back yard with Nick. “While we were out, I had some contractors come in and put in the pool.” He flicked some lights on and the back yard was lit up, revealing a spectacular new yard. A huge stone-slab patio with a large, square pool now dominated the back of the house. The pool was lit up in blue, and the water surface was level with the patio, creating a dramatic illusion. Two beach chairs and an umbrella rested in the water, as one end of the pool was just an inch deep, meant for lounging. The other end featured a jacuzzi which bubbled away in the night.

“In just a week? They built this in just a *week*?” Nick said.

His disbelief was delicious to Roger, who was still playing it cool. “There's still some more work to do on the landscaping,” he added.

“My God!” Nick said. “Where's the cottage?”

“We had to raze that for the pool.”

“Where... Where do I sleep? Where's my stuff?”

Roger patted Nick on the shoulder. “Don't worry. I had your older stuff stored in the garage. For the time being, the guest room yours. It's better than the cottage, and you won't have to walk so far to eat.”

“I'll sleep in the house?”

“Of course. Is there anything wrong with that?”

Living in the house had initially been a sticking point. Nick had strenuously objected to it when he had first entered in to this agreement, and that impulse fueled his reaction now. But as he thought about it, he really couldn't think of why he had been so hesitant to live inside the house. His previous refusal to do it almost seemed silly now. "Fine," he said. "I'm sure you're right." Shoes in hand, he walked upstairs to his new room.



Once he was sure Nick was asleep, Roger grabbed his laptop and logged into the Malibu Spas internal website. He brought up the security cam footage for the Miami facility, and then selected room 233. The footage was green-lit, meaning it was in night cam mode, and showed a grainy picture of a blurry figure sleeping.

Fortunately, one of the features of the security software was that he could watch up to 30 days of recorded footage. He selected 9:00 AM today as the time, and played it at 4x speed. Figures walked around at a ridiculous speed, and Roger let the footage play until he could figure out what was going on. He slowed it down to regular speed to watch.

A slender figure in a hospital gown sat in a chair, surrounded by two people, sternly standing by with crossed arms.

"My name is Tiara Antoinette Van der Slyke," the slender figure said, "I am fourteen years old. I love my daddy. I love God. I love being rich and I love looking beautiful."

Roger had logged into the security camera looking in on Chet's room. From his little black laptop, Roger could watch the work being done on his prized guinea pig. Of course, Roger was very satisfied with the retribution he was exacting on Chet. More importantly to Roger, he was about to push the whole Malibu Spas concept to the limit, and see just what his new project could do.

"Higher," said one of the two people standing over Chet.

"My name is Tiara Antoinette V..."

"Higher!"

Chet took a deep breath. "My name is Tiara Antoinette Van der Slyke," he said in a voice that was as high-pitched and bubbly as any teen girl. "I am fourteen years old. I love my daddy. I love God. I love being rich and I love looking beautiful."

"And again," said the other person in the room.

"My name is Tiara Antoinette Van der Slyke. I am fourteen years old. I love my daddy. I love God. I love being rich and I love looking beautiful."

“Again.”

“My name is Tiara Antoinette Van der Slyke. I am fourteen years old. I love my daddy. I love God. I love being rich and I love looking beautiful.”

“Agai..zzzrp!” Roger pressed the fast forward button and skipped thirty minutes ahead.

“...Ove God. I love being rich and I love looking bea...zzzrp!”

Roger skipped another thirty minutes.

“...Fourteen years old.” Chet said in that same childish voice, although raspier. “I love my daddy. I love...zzzrp!”

Finally, Roger skipped ahead two hours, and saw the two medical assistants leave the room. Roger then watched Chet sit on his bed, and grudgingly play with a Barbie doll. The small but well-furnished room was painted pink with fuchsia. The bed and windows were covered in white lace, and the room had a television, a computer and even a phone. None of it worked at this point, but when Chet was ready, they would.

A tinkling bell rang and Chet rose from the bed and walked over to a desk. He popped a pill into his mouth and drank a small cup of water to chase it down. Roger knew that at this point, Chet had been drilled to take his pills whenever he heard that bell. He must have resisted at first, like Chet always did, but it was now more than a week into his treatment, and taking his medication didn't seem to bother him in the least. He went back to playing with his Barbie.

Forwarding on, Roger saw another medical assistant come in to the room, and provide Chet with a selection of thin little children's books. Chet selected one, and read it out loud, showing each picture to the assistant. He must have read through a dozen of those children's books before the assistant left.

The two assistants who had been drilling Chet on his voice returned, and set up again for the same exercise. Roger zipped through the recording to just a few hours ago, when he was sent to bed — at 8:30 pm east coast time. That seemed about right for a fourteen year old.

Roger then flicked over to a different camera. This one was a view of the operating room. It would be another few hours before Chet was wheeled in for the first of his procedures, but Roger wanted to see it all.



“With appreciation. –Roger,” read the note.

Nick had showered and dressed, and came downstairs to find this note affixed to an envelope. Nick shook the envelope's contents out onto the table. One piece of paper fluttered about while the other item made a loud “clunk” as it

hit the wood. The paper was a temporary driver's license made out to "Daphne Deborah Summers," which had a bad pixelated computer print-out of Dee Dee's head, a photo he remembered being taken while on Dick & Haley's yacht. It was also the first time Nick had seen a full version of Dee Dee's name. It actually made him feel a lot better, knowing Dee Dee had a proper name. Who names their daughter "Dee Dee?"

The item that went "clunk" was a black AmEx card. He had heard about them before, but never actually seen one. He picked up the surprisingly heavy, metal card and saw it was made out to "Daphne D Summers." Nick ran his fingers over the raised letters and whistled in awe. He couldn't believe he now had in his hands probably the most potent instrument of buying power on the face of the Earth. Nick tumbled it around in his hand. There didn't seem to be any point in *not* using it, he thought to himself. "Let's test you out," Nick said to the card. He grabbed the keys to the BMW and his purse and headed for the door.

It was tempting to head for a mall or to Barbara's or to a restaurant, but Nick had an idea at the back of his mind that had been teasing him for days and this was the perfect excuse for it. Hayley had been a great person to hang out with for the week, and Nick had picked up a lot of little feminine tricks, including the biggest secret of all: beauty salons.

Here he had been, knocking himself out every day to look good, and there were people who would do it for you. All you had to do was sit. Using a wig, it wasn't an option to have somebody work on it for him, he had to do it himself. Going to a salon sure beat fussing with himself in front of a mirror for two hours. Nick had been wasting hour upon hour scouring the internet, gathering even the smallest most insignificant tidbits on doing his eyes, his lips, his cheeks, softening his skin, and now styling his hair. Now that he was paying attention to women and what they did to look good, he saw women with streaked hair, dyed hair, curled hair, straightened hair and hair extensions. In fact, almost all women had one or more of these things going on. How in the heck was he supposed to do any of that by himself? He felt like a chump for having to do it all on his own with his wig. Well, no more!

At a stoplight, Nick pulled off his wig, and tossed it into the back seat. He was sick of the wigs, and wanted to use his own hair. He brushed his shoulder-length blond hair out and shook it to life. No more waiting for his identity to be exposed because of a dumb wig.

Hayley was happy to give Nick the name of her "stylist," as she called him. He worked out of Beverly Hills, up above a furniture store. Nick literally had to know a secret knock to get inside, and once there, he had to wait an hour just to be seen. The stylist's name was Velosh, and he dressed like a romance novel cover model. He burst into the waiting area, and without explaining himself, he took several photos of Nick's head with a digital camera and quickly disap-

peared again. Another thirty minutes later, Velosh returned, speaking in hushed tones to only to his receptionist.

“Velosh has aesthetically approved you,” the receptionist announced. “We require a deposit of five thousand dollars to establish you as a client. How will you be paying?”

Nick’s wasn’t just intimidated by this bizarre process, but he was thinking he had just made an enormous mistake. Hadn’t they understood Hayley Porter had been his reference? Wife of billionaire Dick Porter? They treated him like he was just off the street. Not to mention they should have had the decency to tell him that they were going to take photos. Also, the least they could have done was tell him how long he was going to have to wait.

Nick took the black card out of his purse and handed it to the receptionist, who’s eyes lit up like Christmas lights. “Yes, Ma’am,” she said, her tone suddenly changing from dismissive and superior to respectful. “Can I get you some tea while Velosh prepares for you?”

That was more like it, Nick thought to himself. “That would be lovely,” he said.

When she returned with the tea, the receptionist sat down next to Nick. “Some things need to be made clear. Velosh does not ask your opinion. He knows what he wants to do with your hair and makeup and will do it. Don’t try to make small talk with Velosh. If he wants to talk, he will. Otherwise, he is concentrating and hates to be interrupted.” The attractive young woman returned to her desk. “Oh, and be sure to use the little girls’ room before your appointment.”

Nick was then taken through the door into the salon proper. It was ultra-modern, all aluminum and glass, and furnished in a very spartan fashion. What little Nick knew about salons usually suggested that there should have been an ample selection of bottles and brushes nearby, but there wasn’t much more than a few well-organized items on a nearby desk. After a slick cape was draped over Nick’s body and tied tight at the neck, he was left alone. Soon, he was joined by Velosh, who said virtually nothing. He started to work on Nick’s hair by shampooing it.

Nick also noticed the absence of a mirror in the room, so he had little choice but to sit and wait for the result.

“You have very masculine hairline,” Velosh said, suddenly. He had a very thick eastern European accent.

It startled Nick, as he had gotten used to the monotonous sounds of the scissors. “Uh...” He said, unsure of where to go.

“Yes, yes. Is almost like cutting the hair of man,” Velosh continued.

Nick couldn't believe he had gotten this far and it was some goofball in a salon who was going to give the game away. "Everyone always says that!" Nick said with a good-natured smile. He was desperate for any explanation. Truth was, he had no idea what a masculine hairline was.

"Yes. Not very attractive." Velosh said, coldly. "Here and here," Velosh said, touching Nick's temples, so he would know what he was talking about. "Women have hair there." The man paused, and Nick started to rub his hands together nervously. "But Velosh like challenge."

Over the course of the next fifteen minutes, Nick relaxed gradually as it became clear that Velosh wasn't going to make any further comment on his masculinity. Nick eventually returned his attention to the magazine in his lap.

After a little while, Nick noticed that his hair was being sandwiched into small bits of foil. He estimated Velosh must have done it a hundred times up there, but couldn't see much. Velosh left silently at one point, and a woman Nick hadn't yet met came in. She kept her eyes down, and rolled in a small stool and desk at Nick's side.

She held out her hand, expectantly. Nick, confused, started to give her the magazine.

"No, your hand!" she said, impatiently. Nick then gave over control of his nearby hand, which the woman grabbed and started to work on. Apparently, he was getting a manicure. Before it was over, he had gotten both hands done, as well as his toes. They were painted in a surprisingly bright pink, and his fingernails were now an inch long, thanks to acrylics.

Once the nails were done, Velosh came in, munching on a hot pocket, and examined Nick's hair. Without comment, he left again. In the meantime, another girl came in and washed Nick's face clean. She then began to do Nick's makeup, using paint brushes, sponges and other things that Nick hadn't even considered using before.

Eventually, Velosh returned and rinsed out Nick's hair. He then spent another half hour doing what smelled like burning his hair. "Extensions," Velosh said simply when he saw Nick's worried expression. He finished up his work with combing, blow-drying and touch-up clipping. By this time, Nick was fighting sleep, and was letting his eyelids fall shut. It was when he was just about to nod off when he was handed a mirror... And everything changed.

"Oh!" He exclaimed, upon seeing the reflection. "Wow." What was seen in the mirror, was the face of a young wealthy woman, the very picture of a Beverly Hills socialite. Her face was smooth and soft, with striking eyes and lush lips. The hair was big. It was parted on the left, with the top flaring up a few inches before cascading off to the right and ending in a flurry of waves. It shone like it was made of glass. It got lighter the longer the hair went, starting from light brown roots and fading smoothly out to a copper blond.

Looking into the eyes, there was little to recognize, with dark, thick lashes fluttering as they blinked repeatedly in shock. The shiny, wet lips parted as the mouth opened in amazement. The slender eyebrows bent crooked, questioning the reality of what was being seen.

It wasn't just that it was an alarmingly beautiful woman in the mirror, it was one that seemed familiar. He knew this person. It's what he had pictured in his mind when he thought of Dee Dee. "That's what I always thought Dee Dee would look like," Nick said.

"Velosh will see you again next week," the hairdresser proclaimed. "Appointment is over." He strode out of the room without looking back.

Nick walked back into the reception area, where he signed the credit card slip in the name of Dee Dee Summers. As he did, he saw Dee Dee's utterly feminine reflection in the shiny marble of the desk. He had to hold the pen differently with the long nails, and he noted how he had seen women with nails write — and he was doing it just like them. As he headed for the door, there was a tall mirror by the exit, there so the patrons could see the work that had been done on them just before they left.

"Hi, Dee Dee," Nick said softly to himself. He had identification as Dee Dee, a history as Dee Dee, clothes, friends, appointments... A whole life as Dee Dee Summers. Nick O'Brien was largely just in his own head now. The psychologist was right — there wasn't much point in being anyone else but a woman for the duration. There didn't seem to be any gain in continuing to remind himself about Nick. The reflection didn't lie.

Straightening up, sticking his chest out and putting a smile on, it was then that Nick was put aside for now. Nick O'Brien had entered this salon. Daphne Deborah Summers, known to friends as Dee Dee, was leaving.



"Pause music," Roger said aloud to his car. He was driving along, a few minutes from leaving the hospital, on the way home for the night.

"Music paused," the disembodied robot voice



responded.

It was still about a half hour until he got home, but it was six o'clock, which meant that it was nine in Florida, and it was time to check in on his project.

"Dial Malibu Spas Miami," Roger told the car.

"Dialing Malibu Spas Miami," the voice confirmed.

After a short exchange with the receptionist, Roger got his man on the line.

"Dr. Stanz. I'm calling to check up on my special patient," Roger said. "How did the surgery go?"

"No complications. There was a little excess bleeding, but it drained well," the doctor replied. "We have him back in his room, in an induced coma."

"Fantastic. Now comes the complicated part."

"The neural work was already underway some days ago. It's posed no problems and is a little bit ahead of schedule."

They were using hormones and chemicals to treat Chet's mind, a technique he had been very interested in lately. "Ahead of schedule is always good," Roger said.

"What we've done is inundated Chet's mind with the same mix of brain chemistry found in your average young teen."

"So he'll have the same emotions and impulses as a fourteen year old?"

"Yes, but it's much more than that. The mind typically stops developing a personality around the age of seventeen or eighteen. At that point, a person's personality and sense of self are set for life. With Chet, he now has those neural pathways back open. In essence, his mind is ready to become re-set with a new sense of self and personality."

"How long until he heals up, physically?"

"It'll be about three weeks. Once he's ready, we'll wake him from the coma. All he'll essentially remember going to sleep as he used to look, and waking up with a new face, voice and body."

"If that doesn't imprint his mind, nothing will."

"That *is* the plan," the doctor said.

"This is the central part of the Malibu Spas method. It's vital to the project. Keep me updated in the weekly reports, and we'll conference when we're ready to wake him."

"Will do."

"I'll talk to you later," Roger said, before pressing a button on his steering wheel to hang up. The music softly faded back to full volume.



Dee Dee was on the phone when he heard Roger at the front door “I have to go now, Gwen. Roger’s home,” he said. He put the phone down and quickly checked his appearance in a small hand mirror he had been carrying around for the last half hour. He had to keep looking at himself to believe what he saw.

Roger was putting his case aside when he froze. He had casually glimpsed at Dee Dee at first, and then did a double-take. He then turned to face Dee Dee and took a moment to make sure he was breathing properly. “What happened to you?” He asked.

The cool and calm expression from Dee Dee’s dark eyes threw Roger. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Dee Dee said, dismissively. His face broke from holding back, and he let go with a big laugh. “You should see your face!” he said to Roger.

“Well...” Roger relaxed and took his coat off. “That’s what I was going to say to you.”

“I went to go see Hayley’s stylist. I think he may have overdone it.” Dee Dee turned around and headed back to the kitchen. “Frederik?” He called into the kitchen, “Roger’s home. We’ll have dinner in the dining room.”

Roger undid his tie. “Well, if I didn’t know better, I’d say I was just about to have dinner with the most gorgeous woman I’ve ever met.”

“Please,” Dee Dee said. “Puh-lease!”

Roger noticed the hand mirror Dee Dee had left on the couch. It was a bit of a giveaway. “You mean to say you don’t think you look incredible? You don’t think you look like a movie star?”

Dee Dee smiled involuntarily. “Of course not.” He started to set the table with his head turned away rather obviously.

Roger was having too much fun teasing Dee Dee, so he started to help out with the table, grabbing some random flatware from a cabinet. “Did you use the card I gave you?”

“Yes. Do I even want to know how you got me a legal driver’s license?” Dee Dee asked.

“I wouldn’t worry your pretty head about it,” Roger said. “There’s a paper trail for Daphne Summers now. It’s been put together so that if anyone should start to dig and uncover anything, we can blame bureaucratic snafus and lost paperwork for any abnormalities.”

“So you didn’t break any laws?”

“It may turn out that I made some mistakes that are *perfectly* innocent,” Roger said with a smirk, “but no one knowingly broke any laws.”

Dee Dee didn't feel much like debating the topic, especially if it meant that he had to give up his new black card. "Dinner smells amazing," he said.

"It does," Roger sniffed the air. Then he sniffed it again. "Are you wearing perfume?"

"The salon did it," Dee Dee replied. He didn't bother to add that he liked the scent so much he had bought a bottle of it on the way home. That did bring up another subject. "How much is my budget for the card?"

"The whole reason I got you the card, sweetie, was so you didn't worry about spending."

"But..."

"If you're going overboard, I'll let you know."

"Today, I spent..."

"I know what you spent. I can check on their website."

Dee Dee blushed when he realized Roger already knew about the \$5000 deposit he made at Velosh's salon. All day, he had been trying to figure out how he was going to hide that from him. "No problems, then?"

Roger, ever so subtly shook his head, appearing almost insulted that he had to answer. "I think I hear dinner coming."



Dee Dee still wasn't quite used to waking up inside the house, and it took a little while to orient himself in the groggy first moments of the morning. He walked over to the shower, and started the water, and then looked at himself in the mirror for the first time that day. He then realized it was a Wednesday, and walked back over to the shower to turn it off. Wednesday was a workout day. He didn't want to get sweaty after he had taken a shower and then need another one. His skin was getting dry enough as it was.

Roger was gone for the day, as he had heard him walk down the hall an hour or so ago and head downstairs. The house was empty again, and Dee Dee dreaded having to fill yet another day by himself. He should phone Haley and see if she was up for some shopping or lunch. Or Both.

He slipped off the chemise he had worn to bed, and started to rummage through his undie drawer. He had grown to like sleeping in his silk chemise, and Dee Dee didn't feel an ounce of anxiety over wearing it. He had invested in six or seven new ones over the past few days, as it happens.

The Merkin Device was still on his body, as he had just become accustomed to wearing it to bed every night. It seemed to resist getting dirty, and washed

clean in the shower. The only reason he removed it recently was because he just felt it was a good idea to do that from time to time.

Dee Dee picked out a pair of stretchy workout briefs. He put on a slim blue athletic shirt with a built-in shelf bra. It was a little tight, but that's why it was something he wore for workouts. A cutoff Oxford grey hoodie covered it up. He then pulled on a pair of dark grey leggings, low-rise and cut at the knee. A pair of black trainers were on his feet and a scrunchie to keep the hair out of his eyes.

Descending the stairs, he was wondering how long he wanted to go today. Really, he didn't need to lose much more weight, and these little workouts were becoming a bit of pain in the ass every few mornings. Just a little maintenance exercise would suffice, surely. This whole process was just so monotonous and dull.

"Miss Summers," said a voice startlingly nearby. "Good morning."

Dee Dee nearly lost his balance and stumbled backwards. Grasping on to the hand rail, he kept himself from falling. "Who are you?" He asked.

The man standing at the bottom of the stairs was smiling, showing off a set a gleaming white teeth on his chiseled face. He could have easily been a male model. "I'm a surprise," he said, still smiling.

"What's going on? How did you get in?" Dee Dee asked, trying not to panic.

"I broke in and I'm stealing all your valuables," he said. As soon as Dee Dee had digested that fact, and started to back himself up the stairs, the man laughed. "Kidding. Your fiancée let me in. He's hired me to be your new personal trainer."

"What?" Dee Dee said, confused and nervous. Looking closer, it was clear that this man was dressed in workout clothes — tight-fitting lycra shorts and a muscle t-shirt. Plus, his physique made him quite a specimen. Every muscle on his body was defined, and his arms were bigger than Dee Dee's thighs. "Personal trainer?"

The man reached up and handed over a card to Dee Dee. "I thought it might make your workouts more fun," said the hand-written note, "or at least keep you from getting bored during the day. —Roger."

It was positively eerie, Dee Dee thought to himself, how Roger could read his mind at times.

"Everything okay?" The man asked.

Still reserving a little bit of doubt, Dee Dee reached the bottom of the stairs and placed the card on a table. "I think so. But maybe I should call Roger to make sure."

"Of course," said the man, still smiling. "Sorry to have startled you. My name is Jacob, by the way."

Dee Dee then noticed the workout mat that was rolled up leaning against a table, and a boom box near by. With that evidence as plain as day, Dee Dee decided that it everything was all right. "I'll call him later."

"Okay, then!" Jacob said eagerly, "let's get started!" He clapped his hands and bounded towards the mat, swiping up his tools and leading Dee Dee to the exercise room. His energy level was way too much for Dee Dee this early in the morning. He had already set things up by the time Dee Dee arrived, and quickly turned around, his hands on his hips. "Let me get a good look at you," he said. All of the sudden, Dee Dee found himself under detailed and close-up examination.

Jacob's critical eyes were running along Dee Dee's body, up and down, left and right. It was something Dee Dee could practically feel. He pushed his shoulders together in an unconscious reaction to try and make himself smaller, small enough to possibly disappear, but it did not seem to help.

"Lift your arms up, here," Jacob said, gently touching Dee Dee at the elbows, with the slightest pressure to make him do what he asked. Dee Dee cautiously raised his arms, which had the oddest effect of making him ever so aware of the jiggly breasts on his chest. Jacob bent down on one knee, getting a look at the lower body. "Mmm," he intoned. He appeared to be fixated on the hips for a minute, and then his attention was drawn to Dee Dee's legs, and then his eyes crawled up, up and up until he was looking at Dee Dee's groin with squinted eyes.

"So, been doing this long?" Dee Dee said, hoping that his stress levels wouldn't cause him to explode. It was one thing to be able to fool people in a dress, but this was something else entirely. This man was looking at his body as if he was an art historian examining a marble statue to the finest degree of detection. His knees bent and crossed, a reflex to wanting to protect himself.

"Stand up straight," Jacob requested, and placed his open palm in between Dee Dee's legs to keep them from closing.

"Oh!" Dee Dee replied, in a sound that probably sounded a lot more like a sexual response to being touched by a man than a simple exclamation of shock. He glanced down and Jacob glanced up at the same moment, making things extremely uncomfortable and awkward.

"I've been doing this for about ten years now," Jacob said with a handsome smirk. His eyes unlocked with Dee Dee's and returned to the examination. "It's fun to do what you love for a living." He then got back on two feet and looked closely at Dee Dee's waist. "Have you heard of W.H.R.?"

"Uh... No." Dee Dee replied.

"It's short for 'waist hip ratio'," Jacob explained. "Didn't you see that news story? Some scientists found that men's brains are attracted to women with a certain ratio of the measurement of waist to hips."

“I must have missed that story,” Dee Dee replied.

Jacob reached over to his bag where he swiped a tape measure and wrapped it around Dee Dee’s hips. “Interesting stuff. At least it makes targeting a body shape easier.” He then measured Dee Dee’s waist. Dee Dee was doing his level best to keep his breathing under control, as he was being sized up. Hyperventilation was just bubbling under the surface of his emotions.

“Can I put my arms down yet?” Dee Dee asked.

“One more minute,” Jacob replied. He punched in some numbers into a calculator built into the side of the tape measure. “You have a WHR of about 0.8,” Jacob declared.

“Is that good?”

“The most attractive women usually have a 0.7 or a 0.65. The smaller the number the better.”

“I’m a little thick in the waist, huh?” Dee Dee said, happy to engage in conversation. All this uncomfortable standing and staring was driving him nuts.

“No. You measure very well in the waist. It’s your slim hips. Some might call them... Boyish.”

Dee Dee’s breathing started to get labored. “What do you mean, *boyish*?” He asked, defensively.

“Nothing to get excited about. I have a ton of exercises to get those hips and butt looking like Beyonce’s.” Jacob said with assuredness. His gaze led further upwards, going past the torso, taking a slight detour at the breasts and then to the neck and shoulders. He held his chin in his hand for a moment of contemplation. He then glanced at Dee Dee again. “I think you’re going to like what I can do for you, Ms. Summers.”

Hearing him be referred to as “Miss” was reassuring for Dee Dee. His female identity was in tact. This kind of close examination was unexpected and dangerous, but maybe he had sailed through again. “Arms?” He asked.

“You can put them down,” Jacob replied. “I can tell you’ve been working out for a while on your own. I love that you’ve found the dedication to do this. From what Mr. Van der Slyke tells me, you’ve lost a lot of weight, too. That’s obvious.”

“Really?”

“You don’t have much fat on your body at all,” Jacob said. “Impressive. But unless you’re going to run a marathon or play Wimbledon, it’s got some bad sides.”

“You mean it’s bad for me?”

“It’s great for your health, but in terms of being attractive, it’s not ideal. Beautiful women need to find a balance between fat and muscle.” Jacob pointed to

Dee Dee's legs. "You have some great calves and thighs, which means you've worked really hard on your lower body."

"I have," Dee Dee confirmed, with pride.

"But look at the muscles. You can see some definition there of the gastrocnemus and tibialis."

Dee Dee figured he was naming muscles in his legs. "You shouldn't see them, then?"

"I mean, that's what a lot of my female clients want. They want to be in shape, and thin, but not to the point where they become sinewy or muscle-bound. For men, it's almost the opposite."

"Oh," Dee Dee said, coming to a bit of a realization. It was true that he had been working out hard, and he had seen the muscle definition in his legs and arms and was proud of it. It was an old male instinct, and now that he thought about it, that seemed to be a bit of a mistake. If he was to appear as female as he could, he'd have to take a different approach. "So you can help me look a bit more feminine? Get a better hip-waist ratio thing and all that?"

"I can guarantee it. You'll even be working out a little bit less and eating a little more."

"I like the sound of that!" Dee Dee said, enthusiastically. "But my dress size..."

"What would you say if I could get you in a size four by your wedding day?" Jacob asked.

Dee Dee thought about it. Any way to enhance his appearance as a woman was good, and working out less to accomplish it sounded great. "I say let's do it!" Dee Dee replied. *Plus*, he thought to himself, *Barbara's has so many more fashionable clothes to choose from for size-four girls...*

As the weeks passed, Jacob's training plan was transforming Dee Dee. Day by day, workout by workout, he was losing weight and definition, and his body was



becoming softer and rounder. Gone were the muscles bulging from his arms and legs, with smooth, supple and gentle curves left in their place.

It was been a relatively slow process, and Dee Dee had only noticed the reduction in weight and his waistline. Those around him, though, had noticed more dramatic changes, from a boyish, athletic figure to a blossoming thin and feminine shape that any woman would be jealous of. And they were.

CHAPTER 8

“Tiara, it’s time to wake up.”

Chet stirred in bed, his muscles aching like he had never felt before.

“Tiara, sweetie. It’s morning.”

Even with his eyes closed, the sudden light in the room stung. He wanted to shield his eyes, but his arms were as heavy as lead. The voice he was hearing wasn’t familiar to him, and he had little desire to do anything it told him to do. He did remember that he was being held in a small hospital room, and that he had been heavily drugged, although his mind did seem a little bit clearer now.

When he decided it wasn’t any more painful to open his eyes than it was to keep them closed, Chet peeked through his squinted lids. He saw a middle-aged woman, on the plump side, attending to a tray which had a plate of fruit and juice on it. She hadn’t yet noticed Chet was awake, which gave him the chance to evaluate his surroundings. The room may have been the very same one he last remembered being held in, but it was hard to tell. The walls were pink, with shelves decorated with knick-knacks, dolls and toys. The bed he was in wasn’t regulation hospital furniture. It was a four-poster canopy bed draped with gauzy white fabric. The bedsheets were pink and satiny.

It looked like the bedroom of a young girl, with the gaudy girlishness turned up to a hundred. That meant that whatever was going on here, he knew he was still under the control of Roger and his twisted mind. He still didn’t know why Roger was doing this to him, but one thing was sure — sooner or later he’d be out of here and he’d get his revenge.

“You’re awake!” the nurse said, with a friendly smile. “Now sit up and have some breakfast.”

Chet’s empty, growling stomach overrode his need to protest, and he struggled to sit up. His body just felt like it had been run over by a stampede and left in a bowling lane on a Wednesday night. Every joint was aching, every muscle was screaming in pain. But he eventually did sit himself up. That was when he looked across the room at a desk, and above it, the mirror on the wall, and saw the reflection.

He stared at it, his mouth open in a speechless shriek. Forgetting about his aching body, he whipped off the sheets and stumbled over to the mirror to get a closer look. There, he saw something that made his mind crack wide open in horror. A young girl, her blond hair falling on her slender shoulders in gentle waves was looking back at Chet. Her frightened eyes were adorably large and expressive, her apple cheeks were draining of blood, her fine chin was trembling and her cute little doll nose twitched.

“What...” Chet squeaked, in his newly adjusted little-girl voice, “what happened to...”

In the surveillance room, Roger zoomed in the camera to get a closer look at the satisfyingly devastated expression on Chet’s face. It was a delectable moment. He then watched as Chet’s attention soon turned to his body. His bone-thin body would have looked anemic as a twenty-three year old man, but now it was simply the fast-growing body of a fourteen year old girl. Chet ran his hands along the nightie he wore, trying to feel the shape of his body. He felt small volumes of fatty flesh on his chest, he felt his narrow ribcage, so much smaller than he remembered. Then he felt between his legs and found nothing but a slight mound where his little buddy used to be.

“Fucking Christ!” he cried at the top of his lungs. His eyes were wild as a caged animal as he tried to leap out of his own skin. He lurched forward, unable to work his spindly legs and keep himself stable at the same time. Crashing around the room and taking the shelves of trinkets with him, Chet was drunk with shock and could barely discern up from down. The only thing in the room he could comprehend was the nurse, who he was fixated on. He lunged forward, not yet able to think exactly what his intentions were, but they were full of black malice.

The electric tazer the nurse produced from under her gown put a quick end to his advances. He laid on floor twitching.



“Tiara, it’s time to wake up.”

Chet stirred in bed, his muscles aching like he had never felt before.

“Tiara, sweetie. It’s morning.”

Even with his eyes closed, the sudden light in the room stung. He wanted to shield his eyes, but his arms were heavy and slow to respond. He didn’t know the voice that was speaking to him, and therefore didn’t recognize any authority it had over him. He remained as he was. Chet recalled that he was being held in a small hospital room, and it felt like he had been heavily drugged ever since he had arrived. This was the clearest his mind had been in some time.

Deciding it wasn’t any more painful to open his eyes than it was to keep them closed, Chet peeked through his squinted lids. He saw a chubby middle-aged woman, with a tray of fruit and juice. She hadn’t quite seen that Chet was awake, and that let him take a look at his surroundings. This may have been the same room he had previously been held in, but it was hard to say. It did seem slightly familiar to him. The walls were painted pink and had many shelves holding an array of chotchkies, toys and dolls. The bed he was in was far from

standard issue hospital furniture. It was a canopy bed, covered in white fabric. The bedsheets he rested in were satin and colored pink.

There was little doubt that it was the bedroom of a young girl, as the girlishness practically bled from the ceiling. It also left little doubt he was still under the control of Roger and his strange plan. Why Roger was doing this to him, he didn't know. The only thing he was sure about was that he was going to have his revenge on this man.

"You're awake!" the nurse said, with a friendly smile. "Now sit up and have some breakfast."

He struggled to sit up, actually very eager to feed himself. His hunger was as great as he'd ever felt it. Even with every muscle and joint resisting movement and reward his attempts with pain, he did eventually sit himself up. That was when he looked across the room at a desk, where above it, he saw a poster on the wall, for "High School Musical 4." It was most definitely a room for a young girl.

"What..." Chet squeaked, in a voice that sounded a little more high-pitched than he was used to, "what happened to..."

"Shush. Eat your breakfast." The nurse plopped the bed tray down on in front of Chet. "It's fresh and delicious." Chet reached for the bowl, but was slapped on the hand. "Use your fork," the nurse said.

Chet really wanted to beat some sense into this hag, but he had the distinct impression he shouldn't. When he thought about it, something caused him to flinch in pain. He tried to make grabbing the fork look defiant, and then put a slice of papaya into his mouth. It exploded with flavor. The nurse was right. It was delicious.

"My name is Ms. Kinkade," the nurse said as Chet dug into the fruit. She then headed for the door. "I'll be back in a little while for the tray."

Chet barely even noticed her departure, as his appetite was into overdrive. In virtually no time, he had swallowed the contents of the fruit bowl and drank the juice. A small cup of yogurt was inhaled and a tiny strawberry pastry vanished as soon as he saw it. He brushed the crumbs off of his nightie with his hand, causing his small breasts to jiggle inside. The sensation was odd and distracting, but for some reason he chose to ignore it.

What did attract his attention was his hands. He hadn't looked very closely at them yet, as he had no reason to. But they were so very different than he remembered. The skin was smooth, the fingers were slender and the nails were a half inch long, and polished. Turning each slowly in front of his eyes, he knew beyond any doubt that they weren't the hands he remembered. Just by size alone, they seemed a fraction of what they once were. Testing each finger, they still responded like his old hands, and he still had that scar on his left thumb.

He was so transfixed by the sight of his hands that he barely even noticed that the television against the wall had turned on of its own volition. After a minute, the noise from the TV initially got his attention, and he saw that it had started playing an old “care bears” cartoon. Chet figured it was another likely attempt to have him play the role of a little girl.

His first instinct was to turn it off, and he looked for a remote. There was none. Then he wanted to get up, but as he started to move his legs, he became aware of a mass of bandages and dressing located in between his legs.

“You better have the nurse come in before he gets too curious,” Roger said to the doctor seated next to him. They were both in the darkened surveillance room, watching everything unfold on the monitors in front of them.

The doctor next to Roger pressed a button on the intercom. “Kinkade, you’re on,” he said.

“Ooop! Don’t get out of bed just yet,” Ms. Kinkade said to Chet as she returned to the room. “You’ve still got a day or two of recovery.”

Chet had peeled away the sheets on the bed, to reveal a bundle of bandages around his torso and groin. “What’s happened to me?” He said, his voice failing him slightly.

“The doctor has made it so you’ll have no trouble fitting in with other girls,” the nurse said with a merry tone. Chet immediately started to dig at the bandages, scared out of his mind as to what was — or wasn’t — there. The nurse stopped him, grabbing his wrists. “You’re still healing. Don’t play with your bandages unless you want permanent scarring.”

Chet struggled to get his hands back, but his body was so weak and feeble, he couldn’t do much more than helplessly tug with his arms. “What did you *do*?” he demanded to know.

“We tucked things away with a couple of stitches. Nothing to get excited about.” The nurse continued to hold his wrists. “Now promise me you’ll be good and not undo your bandages. Unless you wants scars and infections down there.”

Chet’s rapid breathing slowed, the tension in his body relaxing slightly. “As long as it’s all still there.”

“Of course it is,” the nurse said with her ever-present smile. “Don’t be a silly.” She then looked Chet in the eyes. “Do you promise to be good?”

“Yes,” Chet mumbled, the word dribbling out of his mouth.

“Promise me!” Mrs. Kinkade asked.

“I promise!” Chet said, frustrated. His wrists were then released. Chet pulled his arms in close to his body and turned away, massaging his tender skin. “Are you sure everything is...”

The nurse cut him off. “Does it feel like anything’s missing?”

Chet shifted in his seat. He fidgeted a little. Then, he bit his lip. “No.”

“Then just let everything heal.”

The most urgent thing in his life was to know what had happened under those bandages. Why wasn’t he just ripping them off and checking? Something was stopping him.

The nurse, at the other side of the room, started to open some dresser drawers and removed freshly laundered clothes. “Why don’t you get up and get yourself ready?”

Chet just looked at her, as if he didn’t even hear or recognize her words. His attention then drifted away, as he tried hard to build up some courage.

“I asked you to get out of bed, Tiara,” Mrs. Kinkade said, a little more sternly.

His head quickly turned towards her, his expression emotionless. He was trying to size her up. There was no reason to do what she said, and he knew that he could get past her and to into... Wherever he was. Maybe a hallway, maybe another room. He didn’t know and didn’t care.

“I’m not asking you one more time!” Mrs. Kinkade said. “Don’t make me cross!”

Chet squared his jaw as he took a deep breath, to fill his chest with air and determination.

“Don’t you get any ideas in your little head, Tiara,” Mrs. Kinkade said, standing tall. She reached into her gown and pulled out the large black tazer and placed in on the top of the dresser she stood next to. Chet’s eyes immediately shot to it, and fixated on the object. It rested there, just within a quick grasp of the nurse. His pupils dilated.

Chet pulled the sheets from him and hopped onto the cold floor. “How do I... Get ready?” He asked Mrs. Kinkade. He turned away from looking at the tazer, and missed the look of satisfaction Mrs. Kinkade gave the hidden camera in the corner.

“Well, normally, I’d say a dip in the tub. But with your bandages, we’ll start with a sponge bath.” She gestured toward the bathroom. As Chet moved slowly in that direction, hair dropped in front of his face. He had never had hair so long. How long it must have taken to grow, he couldn’t guess. But his estimate was in months, not days like he fist suspected. He had been in this place for a very long time.

“Out of your nightie, Tiara,” the nurse requested.

Chet removed it over his head, with the help of the nurse. Once it was off, he could see most of his body. Even with the two conical breasts hanging from his chest, and his formerly skin-and-bones physique slightly filled out, the first

thing that struck was his skin. “Did you people shave me?” He asked. It then occurred to him to feel his chin. “My face?”

“Young women do not have body hair or beards, Tiara.”

Chet felt his face even harder. “I don’t even feel any stubble,” he said, bewildered.

“And you never will, God willing,” Mrs. Kinkade replied. “Now, take a seat on the edge of the tub.”

There was a small yellow rubber seat affixed to the side of the tub, made for this. Chet sat on it, and it swung around so that he was positioned directly over the tub. Mrs. Kinkade used a large, soft, soapy sponge to scrub down Chet, starting at the shoulders. The drops of water running down his hairless body caused Chet to shiver slightly. He wondered what the nurse meant by never having a beard again. Did that mean he’d have no body hair either? Maybe this was just a threat or something to scare him. He felt his face again to see.

“Don’t touch your face so much. Finger oil causes acne,” the nurse said. As soon as Chet removed his hand, his face was washed by the sponge. “Why would you want hair, anyway. You have such beautiful skin. Not a blemish or a hair to be seen.”

Discreetly, Chet looked at the exposed skin on his arm. It was just as nice as Mrs. Kinkade had said. He didn’t remember ever seeing it this way, without hair or needle marks. It was almost like it was someone else’s body.

As Mrs. Kinkade started to run the sponge over his breasts, Chet’s attention was severely interrupted. The water on his chest shot strange feelings through his body, all the way down to his toes. These new breasts were sensitive, and they pulled his body forward from the weight. Still, as shocked and frightened by their presence on his body, he was strangely fascinated by them. When he was being held in Roger’s basement, he knew he was growing breasts. It was kind of expected that they would be getting larger. Maybe that’s why he wasn’t repulsed by them.

The nurse gave him a tiny slap on the backside. “Sit up straight, young lady. No one likes a slouch.”

Chet did just that, which caused his breasts to stick out and jiggle slightly. He winced at the sensation.

“You’ll need a bra,” Mrs. Kinkade observed. “Girls are wearing bras at such a young ages these days. Always in a hurry to grow up.”

She helped dry Chet off, demonstrating how to properly use a towel. Rubbing and wiping was too harsh on his skin, and he would need to dab it patiently, like he was trying to sop up a spilled drink on carpet. He was then led back into the main room, and handed a pair of cotton panties with pictures of Tinkerbell

printed on them. They looked far too small to really fit, but as he stepped into them, they fit snugly, even with the mass of bandages on his groin.

“How do I piss?” Chet asked.

“Language, please!” the nurse exclaimed. “When you need to go tinkle, little lady, let me know. There’s a bag and catheter in there right now. I’ll need to replace it.”

“A bag?” Chet examined his bandages again, wondering how big it was and where it was. He also wondered what a catheter was. Medicine was not his strong suit.

“Now I’ve chosen your clothes for today, so put them on,” Mrs. Kinkade then fastened a stretchy white bra around Chet’s breasts, which compressed them and made him look almost flat-chested. Then, Mrs. Kinkade handed Chet a neatly folded cottony item, in baby blue. When Chet let the garment unfold, he found it was a dress, with a tutu skirt and a picture of the Cookie Monster embroidered on it.

“How old am I supposed to be?” Chet asked.

“There’s no supposing about it, little missy. You are six years old.”

Chet wasn’t sure how to react to that. “You’re going to treat me like a six year old?”

“I’m going to treat you like you behave. If you behave like a child — and you have been acting like a little child since you got here — that’s how I’ll treat you. Now put on your dress.”

Chet held it up, and after one or two fruitless attempts to put it on like he would a pair of pants, Mrs. Kinkade took the dress from him and pulled it over his head.

Once she had pulled and tugged at the dress until she was satisfied it was fitting on properly she then handed him a pair of baby blue anklet socks and a pair of black flats. He walked back to the bed to sit down and slip them on. He had been wearing short dresses for a while now, and didn’t feel all that odd as the cool air drifted over his hairless legs. In fact, if anything, the cottony material was more comfortable than those stiff party dresses Nick had forced him to wear. He really hadn’t noticed the light, airy and chirpy voice he spoke in now, either. He didn’t need any lozenge to speak in the voice of a girl.

It also didn’t seem odd to him that he had to hop up onto the intentionally high bed, like a little kid. Chet had been taught well when he was under Roger and Nick’s control. It also had probably not occurred to Chet that Mrs. Kinkade herself was six feet eight inches, which is one reason why he felt intimidated and threatened by her. She looked to him like any adult did — if he were actually a little child. The entire room was built on a scale a bit larger than it should be. The chairs were too tall and the tables and countertops

chest-high. When he was given flatware and cups they were much larger than they should have been. He practically had to use two hands to hold the glass of juice he had just drank. It wasn't just the furniture, but the room itself had been built to these specifications. The doorknobs were four and a half feet up, and oversized. The windows were just as high. The ceiling was ten feet up. Everything appeared to be in proportion for Mrs. Kinkade, but Chet was sized as if he were the small little girl he was being treated like.

Mrs. Kinkade had Chet sit down on a tall stool as she did his hair. She gave him twin pony-tails, one just behind each ear, clipped with little blue butterflies. While he sat, he watched the Gummi Bears cartoon on the TV screen. Every commercial was for dolls or clothes, he noticed, as he idly kicked his legs back and forth.

"Pretty as a picture," Nurse Kinkade said when she was done. "Would you like to see yourself?"

"Not really," Chet answered.

She playfully patted Chet on the cheek. "Oh, you're precious. I have a mirror right over here." Mrs. Kinkade walked over to a piece of furniture with a bed sheet draped over it, and whipped the sheet away, revealing a full-length mirror. Of course, it was oversized just like everything else in the room, to make Chet feel small.

Chet didn't really move from his seat, so it was up to the large nurse to grasp him gently by the shoulders and pull him over to the mirror. Chet took short steps hoping to slow the process, but he then found himself stepping into view of the reflection.

He gasped.



"Jesus," he said in his lilting voice. Chet felt his body start to shake. "What the hell did you do to me?"

Before him, stood a young girl. Not a man who was dressed like a girl nor a boy who had been fashioned into some semblance of a girl. It was a real girl. Her eyes were big and dewy, her cheeks rosy with youth. Her body was lean and thin, her neck slender and delicate. Her hair was thick and lustrous and her skin was smooth and fresh.

“Tiara, now you need to stop talking like that.” Mrs Kinkade placed her big hand on Chet’s slender shoulder. “You’re a girl, and you should be thankful.”

“I’m not a girl!” Chet yelled, though he was unable to look the nurse in the eyes. He couldn’t stop looking at his reflection. “I’m... Not.” He repeated, with far less conviction.

“You are, as far as I’m concerned, and for all the world is concerned. Tell me that that person in the mirror could ever convince anyone otherwise.”

“I could! I’d tell them everything that’s happened...” He suddenly noticed how small his mouth was, and his naturally red, pouty lips. He touched them with his slim fingers. “I’d tell them...” He said.

“You *are* a girl, Tiara,” Mrs. Kinkade said with certainty. “You know it down inside, don’t you?”

The slightest crease of doubt formed on Chet’s brow. Mrs. Kinkade knew she needed to strike while he was questioning the truth.

“You know it’s true, Tiara. You are a beautiful young girl, you can’t deny that. Can’t your eyes see what’s in front of them?” She paused dramatically. “Can’t you hear what your mind is telling you?”

Transfixed in the mirror, Chet looked at his reflection and the doubt intensified. His mouth, agape, started to speak, but the softest whisper was coming out. Mrs. Kinkade could see the words his lips were forming — “My name is Tiara Antoinette Van der Slyke.” With the softest whisper, he continued. “I am fourteen years old. I love my daddy. I love God. I love being rich and I love looking beautiful.”

Mrs. Kinkade leaned down to speak into Chet’s ear. “You’re a very pretty girl, Tiara.”

Finally able to look away from the reflection, he looked at the nurse’s expression, to verify her sincerity. “Really?” He asked.

“Yes, Tiara.”

CHAPTER 9

Dee Dee took another sip of her iced tea and enjoyed the cool sensation. It was a warm day outside, and as he lounged on the deck chair that was in the one-inch end of the new pool, he wafted along in his state relaxation. Roger was gone on another one of his trips for a few days, and he had the house to himself. This morning, he had gone through another of his workouts with Jacob, his personal trainer, and was letting the burn work its way out of his system. The workouts weren't strenuous, as Jacob's emphasis was on 'toning' and 'flexibility.' There was plenty of bending and holding, some repetitive stuff, and worst of all, the flexing. Jacob told Dee Dee that he was "in desperate need of flexibility," and Dee Dee agreed with his professional judgement. Most of it was fairly easy, but lately it had progressed to being able to wrap his legs around his head, folding his arms behind his back, and the dreaded splits.

That's why today, he was taking it easy at the pool. He had finally done a completely flat split, and without it hurting — well, hurting too badly. So now, as a sort of reward, he had put on a one-piece bathing suit and was going to lounge. At least until later tonight when he needed to go to Gwen's fundraiser gala for the performing arts center. He had spent the better part of yesterday finding the perfect gown and had purchased a wonderful red Sue Wong silk beaded outfit he couldn't wait to wear. It only cost \$300, and he was hoping the other girls wouldn't know how cheap it was. That would be embarrassing.

Dee Dee took another sip of the iced tea as the ice chimed in the glass. He dipped his pink polished toe in the water and splashed it gently. He was loving being at the pool today. It was relaxing, warm and quiet. He could get used to this.



"Give Kinkade a bonus. That was masterful, what she did yesterday," Roger said to Dr. Pfelter, as they sat in the Miami offices of Malibu Spas. "And tell her I want to take her



to lunch.”

“She’ll be happy to hear that, I’m sure,” Dr. Pfelter replied. “She’s set us up very well for the next step: altering Chet’s self-identity.” He adjusted the glasses on his round head.

“Now,” Roger said, “I would have put a little more emphasis on establishing a new identity through hypnosis.”

“Hypnosis has limited application. It’s temporary and doesn’t make very deep changes in a person’s psyche. You have to force the brain to change through its own initiative.”

Roger nodded in agreement. “You’re the expert.”

“Nothing is more powerful or is more effective in treatment than when the mind forces itself to change,” the Doctor replied. “By introducing him to a group of girls his supposed age, the social contact will force his mind to adjust to a new reality. We can establish his new persona with simple peer pressure.”

“They’ll force him to behave like I want him to?”

“Well, *force* may be the wrong word to use. Individuals tend to pigeon-hole people they’ve just met into stereotypes. First impressions are the most important, after all. So if we feed the right expectations with the rest of the group, they will treat him like the person we’re trying to make him become. It all happens naturally.”

“How are you going to do that?”

“Well, first, all we have to do is tell the other girls that her name is Tiara Van der Slyke. They’ll hear that name and assume they’re dealing with someone who’s spoiled or entitled. No offense.”

“None taken. That was kind of the idea.”

“When Tiara first interacts with the group, he’ll be quite scared and unsure. We’ll help him out by giving him pre-scripted answers to questions the girls might ask, like ‘where are you from,’ ‘where do you go to school,’ ‘why are you at the clinic,’ and ‘what’s your family like.’ Of course, the answers we’ll provide him with will be sufficiently self-indulgent. He’ll tell the other girls he lives in a mansion, goes to an upper-class prep school and his father is rich and powerful. We’ll also infer that he’s here in the clinic to get plastic surgery. We’ll dress him in expensive clothes and do his hair perfectly every day. In little to no time, the other girls will expect him to behave like a spoiled rich girl. Because he’ll be so desperate to fit in and cover for his old persona, he will quickly live up to their expectations.”

“It’s that simple?”

“It’s that simple. The teenage brain chemistry we’ve given him makes him as unsure and socially anguished as any child of that age, and once his social circle

gives him a personality to latch on to, he'll grab for that life preserver and cling to it like a drowning man."

"So he'll be prepped for a little while, and then put into a social group? Who's in this group?"

"It'll be made up of fourteen year old girls here in the clinic. Two are here for some physical therapy from broken legs, one is recovering from a car crash where she lost her best friend."

"That's horrible."

"The friend was driving and was drunk. She's come to grips with the loss. She just needs some time to re-adjust."

"Sounds good."

"But we're getting ahead of ourselves. First Tiara needs to grow up."



Morning after morning, Chet looked into his vanity mirror and brushed his ever-longer hair carefully, as he had been instructed to. During that time, he'd see that reflection in the mirror that had been haunting him. It was the face of an adorable young girl who bore only a slight resemblance to the man he had always seen himself to be.



He wanted to drive it from his thoughts, and claim his life back. But unfortunately, Chet had kept seeing that face. Not only in the mirror, but when he closed his eyes. It was burnt into his brain. Now, he was having real trouble just picturing what he used to look like. In his dreams, he would sometimes see a blur where his face should be. More distressing, sometimes he'd see this girl's face.

His clothes had stopped being those for a toddler, and now he seemed to be growing up — in terms of his outfits. He no longer had cartoon characters on his shirts, dresses and underwear. He was now wearing a proper bra, and stylish denim skirts, shoes with modest heels and real shirts and hoodies. He looked like an ad for Gap Kids, but at least it wasn't party dresses.

He wasn't aware of it, but he had been moved to another room exactly like his old one, but with the furniture and architecture adjusted somewhat smaller than it had been before. Things were still intentionally a bit large, but not as big as they used to be. In his mind, Chet subconsciously believed that he was growing up. He felt more mature than he did just a few weeks ago, and began to understand the rewards he'd gain by doing what he was told.

When he stopped insisting that he wasn't named Tiara and he wasn't a "little lady," he stopped getting punished. When he chose an attractive outfit for the day, he'd get praise from Mrs. Kinkade. Chet was given more mature clothes and more responsibilities the less he fought with Mrs. Kinkade. He ate better food and wore better clothes as he was "aging." When he said "please" and "thank you," he would get a little extra dessert or stay up a little later. No longer would he duck his eyes and squirm when Mrs. Kinkade called him beautiful or adorable. He'd smile and thank her for the compliment. Something inside him that he hadn't felt since he was a teen made him desperate for accolades. He needed affirmation badly.

Yes, he told himself that it was all a game. He'd just play along and do what they told him to do, as long as he got out of it what he wanted. He knew that when this was all over, he'd just stop pretending to be Tiara and he'd be himself again. Maybe it wasn't as easy as he'd once thought that would be, but there was no doubt in his mind that he could shake all of this off when he wanted to.



"I hear Roger is working hard," Margot said as she finished sipping her cocktail. She wore a black silk and chiffon evening gown that was making Dee Dee viciously jealous. "A lot of late nights, long trips. Feeling lonely?"

"Oh, Margot," Dee Dee said with a tolerant grin. "Always trying to stir things up, aren't you?"

"I'm just a vicious gossip, you now that," Margot replied. "But you're not feeling a little cold on these long lonesome nights?"

They were at the Downtown Club's annual fundraiser for the women's shelter, and as the band played lightly in the background, the two friends had been talking to each other for some time already. "I can honestly say that there's no other man in my life, Margot," Dee Dee said, giggling to himself.

"What about that new trainer you hired? Awfully convenient timing. The husband is gone and you're all alone with a hard-muscled... Sweaty... Adonis in your house. No one would know."

"Where did you hear about Jacob?" Dee Dee was curious to now. "Yes, I have a trainer. But Roger himself hired him. It was kind of a surprise, actually."

"Well..." Margot said slyly, "do you think he wants you to have an affair, then? Maybe to get out of the marriage?"

"Don't be silly, Margot. The wedding is just a few weeks..." Dee Dee paused when he realized that the wedding was indeed scheduled for just six weeks from today. Where had the time gone? "...From now. He's worked so hard for it."

"Apparently working very hard. That's the rumor, at least," Margot said. She leaned in closer and lowered the volume of her voice. "Tell me, Dee Dee. What's his big secret project? No one knows what he's working on."

Dee Dee just played it cool. "I have no idea what you're talking about, Margot. I'm certainly not going to jeopardize the CEO job on blabbing."

"So he is working on something!" Margot said, excitedly.

"Maybe he is, maybe he isn't. I haven't said anything either way." Dee Dee decided it was a good time to get something at the hors d'oeuvres table. Margot quickly followed, much to Dee Dee's displeasure.

"Not so fast, Dee Dee, dear," she said. "You're going to tell me all about this secret project!"

"Margot, I am not sabotaging my future husband!" Good God, had he just said those words? "So stop mining for information!"

"Just give me *something*, darling!" Margot said, almost begging.

"Fine!" Dee Dee said, mocking exasperation. The truth was he was dying to tell someone. "It's a project he's going to present to the board. He's pinning the CEO job on it, and believes it's going to be the future of the business."

"That sounds big."

"He's thinking very big. But that's more than I should say."

"Is it a new hospital wing?"

“Bigger, Margot,” Dee Dee replied, satisfied that she wasn’t going to guess the real answer. “My Roger likes to think big.”

My Roger? Dee Dee thought to himself. *I’ve had too much to drink.*



Days later, the sun broke into Chet’s eyes as the sun rose outside his window. Soon, nurse Kinkade arrived, politely knocking on the door.

“Come in, Mrs. Kinkade,” Chet responded. He sat up in bed, stretched and yawned at the same time. He pulled his hair out of its’ night-time pony tail and shook it loose.

“Good morning, Tiara, sweetie,” Mrs. Kinkade said as she put the breakfast tray down beside Chet. “Did you have a good sleep?”

“Uh-huh!” Chet replied, enthusiastically. It had been a good night’s rest. Since he came here, he’d slept more soundly than he ever had in his life. “That smells wonderful!” He said, making a deep whiff of the breakfast tray.

“Cinnamon rolls,” the nurse said. “Eat up! Today is big day for you!”

Chet had already started in on his food, a bowl of mixed fruit, two small cinnamon rolls and juice. “Bif dray?” he asked, his mouth full.

“Chew your food, then talk. You’re not a caveman!” Mrs. Kinkade scolded. She busied herself with changing the towels in the bathroom while Chet finished.

Chet chewed his food carefully, as he had been told to chew each bite 32 times before swallowing. When he was finally done, he neatly dabbed his lips clean with a napkin and walked over to Mrs. Kinkade, arms behind his back, ready for instructions.

“It’s a big day for me, Mrs. Kinkade?”

“Yes,” the woman said. “I and the staff here have decided that you are now fourteen years old.”

The news caused Chet to bounce on his toes in excitement. That was the biggest achievement he could make here. Every time he advanced a year, it meant more things to do, more activities and more clothes. “That’s awesome!” he bubbled.

“Congratulations. I know it’s been hard, but you’ve earned it.” Mrs Kinkade kissed Chet on the forehead.

Chet couldn’t wait to get started on the day. Having been through a few “birthdays” in the past weeks, he knew what he was going to get. It meant he had new clothes to wear, a new daily routine, new TV shows would play on his screen and he’s get new toys to play with. What he didn’t seem to notice was

that overnight, they had moved him to another duplicate room, this time with everything properly sized. Even Mrs. Kinkade herself had removed the risers from her sensible nursing shoes so she was a less intimidating six feet four. She still towered over Chet, though.

“Today we’re going to take you out into the clinic,” Mrs. Kinkade said.

“*Outside?*” Chet replied, his voice leaping up to an even higher register. “Outside my room?”

“Now that you’re fourteen, it’s time we had you meet some other people at the clinic. You can’t stay cooped up in here forever!”

Chet’s face was a mess of fright and joy. “I can go out? But *who’s* out there? There are other people here? What will they... I can’t go out!”

“Of course you can, Tiara. In fact, there are a few girls your own age here who already know that you’re here. They’re very eager to meet you.”

“Girls?” Chet said with alarm. “I can’t...”

“You will go out and meet them, I don’t want to disappoint them. They’re very nice.” Mrs. Kinkade motioned for Chet to remove the nightie he was wearing, and he quickly tugged it off and handed it to her. “Did I mention that you get to wear makeup now?”

“*Makeup?*” Chet’s heart went aflutter. He had been allowed to wear some lip gloss and fruity perfumes, but that wasn’t really makeup. He had been curious about it since those commercials started to play on his screen about long, thick mascaras and shiny, wet lipsticks. They had been playing all the time for weeks now, and he couldn’t help but grow interested. He never said anything out loud, of course, but he was excited to hear that he’d get to try some out, finally. “I guess that’s okay,” he said downplaying it.

Chet had removed his bra and panties, and handed them over to Mrs. Kinkade, and walked to the bathroom. “Your bandages come off today, too. At least most of them.”

Chet froze in mid-step. “When?” he asked eagerly.

“Right now is as good as any. Sit down on the tub seat, dear.”

Chet practically skipped his way into the bathroom and quickly seated himself in anticipation. Mrs. Kinkade took a pair of safety scissors from her gown pocket and started to snip at the bandages and gauze around Chet’s abdomen. He had been anticipating this, and dreading it, for a long time. He had such horrible visions of what they had done to him, sometimes picturing the most vile mutilations of his body he could imagine.

“Stop fidgeting!” the nurse said.

“Sorry, Mrs. Kinkade,” Chet replied. As she continued to snip away, the tension was killing Chet. He had to talk to distract himself. “So, um, what do I need to do to become fifteen?” he asked.

“Wait a year, just like everyone else.”

That puzzled Chet. “What?”

“Fourteen is your natural age, Tiara. That’s what you’ll be until next year.”

“Really?” Chet was a little disappointed to hear that. He had enjoyed the progression in getting a year older every few weeks. Was that over, now? “But I’m older than fourteen!”

“Little girls are always wanting to grow up. Enjoy being this young! You’ll always wish you had when you’re a woman my age.”

“But...” Chet started to say. A quick serious glance from Mrs. Kinkade closed his mouth. He knew what that look meant.

“There you are!” Mrs. Kinkade pulled the bandages away and tossed them aside. She then backed away so Chet could see for himself.

Chet bent over, spreading his legs. His front was flat and smooth, as he well knew by now.

“Before you panic, just touch that little nubbin with your finger,” the nurse said. She pointed to it. “That little bit there.”

It was small and no bigger than a Tylenol capsule. He had to be directed to it twice before he could really see what the nurse was referring to. Reluctantly, he did touch it, just lightly tapping it with the tip of his finger for an instant. As soon as he did, he smiled. He recognized it.

“That’s your old man part, Tiara. The doctors just moved it inside you. The same with your scrotum.” A great sense of relief swept over him. That was the worst thing he had been imagining — losing his penis. But it was still there, concealed, and he could definitely feel it.

“Now the opening below it is something that looks like a vagina,” the nurse explained like she was talking through the instructions on assembling a bicycle. She pointed to another spot. “And here is where you pee.”

Chet was relieved. Everything was going to be okay. Nothing was “cut off” or gone. It was survivable. Sure, it did look real, but as he had been told, it was just a little surgical procedure to push up his genitals into his body, and it could be undone. “A couple of stitches,” is what the nurse said.

Of course, as Mrs. Kinkade well knew, it wasn’t undoable. Chet had undergone three different surgeries to construct a working and natural vagina. Thanks to some rather unique skin grafts, he wouldn’t even need to dilate himself. But he didn’t need to know that for now.

Impulsively, Chet hugged Mrs. Kinkade, practically on the edge of tears. "Thank God!" He said. "It's going to be okay!"

"Of course it is, darling," Mrs. Kinkade said, hugging him back.



That afternoon, Mrs. Kinkade escorted Chet to the common area of the clinic, an open-air patio that was half covered and half open to the sky, where Chet could see out above tree tops and to building in the distance. The nurse had her big arm wrapped around Chet's shoulders, as he directed him to a table where three teenage girls sat, waiting.

"This is the girl I've been telling you so much about, ladies," she said. "Meet Tiara Van der Slyke. From Beverly Hills."

"Hi," Chet said, simply. He stood tall and stuck out his chest, just like Mrs. Kinkade told him to. "Don't be shy. You'll want to make a good impression and not look timid," she told him.

"Wow! Beverly Hills!" one of the girls said, impressed. "Are are the boys just as great as we see on TV?"

"What if they ask me about boys?" Chet asked Mrs. Kinkade as he got dressed an hour ago. "What'll I say?"

"You're like any other girl your age, Tiara. You're crazy about boys." She answered.

"They're amazing!" Chet answered the girl.

"I can imagine!" the girl said. She had a bright smile and dark blond hair "My name is Chelsea."

"I'm Kat," a girl said with long, straight black hair. She elbowed the girl next to her, who was engrossed in a Nintendo 2DS.

"I'm Penny," the girl said, without breaking her concentration on the game.

Mrs. Kinkade addressed the group again. "Would you mind if I left Tiara here with you girls? She's been here for a very long time and this is the first time out of her room in quite a while."

"Sure, Big K," the blond Chelsea said.

Chet looked at the nurse funny. "It's a nickname," Mrs. Kinkade explained. She then turned away. "I'll be back in a little while after I've made my rounds. Be nice, now, Tiara."

Not sure what that last comment was about, Chet took a cautious seat next to Chelsea, who sat on a chair opposite where Kat and Penny were. "So this is your first time out, huh? What are you here for?" Chelsea asked.



“What do I do if they ask me what I’m here for?” Chet had asked Mrs. Kinkade.

“Tell them you were here for a little procedure. They don’t need to know the details.” Was her answer.

“I was just having a procedure,” Chet said.

“Oh,” Chelsea replied. Her eyes immediately looked at Chet’s chest, and then at his nose. Chet noticed this and looked across at Kat. She was doing the same thing. Even Penny had bothered to look up and make an examination. It was clear that they assumed he was here for plastic surgery. “If you don’t want to tell us, that’s cool.”

“It’s just a little personal,” Chet said.

“I broke my leg,” Kat said, pointing to the large and bulky cast that was sticking out at an angle. “But you probably guessed that. They put a rod in there and five screws. I have to stay here for a while because the lack of blood flow in the bones might cause them to die.”

“I broke mine, too,” Penny spoke. “Got it caught in a boat propeller and it sheared off my foot.”

Chet gasped.

Penny shrugged. “It’s okay, they sewed it back on. It’s just going to look a little gross now, that’s all.”

Chelsea just smirked. “I was in an auto accident. I’m just kinda getting over it,” her eyes momentarily gazed. Then they came right back into focus. “So what’s Beverly Hills like?”

“It’s okay. I live in a mansion and go to a prep school nearby.” Chet said, just as he’d be told to answer. “Life could be worse.”

“Yeah,” Kat said, “I *guess*.” The contempt in her voice was syrupy thick.

“I love your outfit!” Chelsea said, looking Chet over.

“I picked it out myself!” Chet replied, thinking he was pointing out how clever he was. What the girls heard was that he might be used to having a servant pick out his clothes for him.

Chet wore a black spaghetti strap floral dress with a light blue blazer, a pair of sheer black tights and big blue leather boots. He added three gold necklaces and two or three gold bangle bracelets to each wrist. It was casual, but still unmistakably preppy. Suddenly, it seemed like he should return the compliment. “I like your shoes,” he said to Chelsea.

“Thanks!” Chelsea squeaked.

“How long does it take to do your hair?” Kat asked, a slight sneer in her voice.

“Oh, it takes a little while. An hour or two at least,” Chet answered. He wasn’t sure why, but Mrs. Kinkade had him doing more and more things to his hair. Today, he had spent at least a half hour with a hair dryer at the lowest setting, another forty minutes with a curler another twenty with a hair straightener, and then another twenty to put in the hair “tufts” and “fringes” that gave him the bangs and length he needed. Only then was Mrs. Kinkade satisfied.

“Wow,” Kat replied. She and Chelsea exchanged a look. “So it must kind of a drag hanging out here at the clinic.”

“It’s not a lot of fun,” Chet said, tempering his language. He wasn’t quite sure if these girls were telling him the complete truth. They were glancing at each other in what Chet interpreted as a conspiratorial manner. He didn’t think it was impossible that these clinic people had engineered this entire meeting, with actresses playing these parts, just to influence him. For what purpose, he could only guess. At least they seemed nice.

“I bet,” Kat said.

Roger, in the surveillance room, leaned back in his chair and smiled to himself. He looked across the four screens he was using to watch this encounter, and he was satisfied. This was going very well, as far as he was concerned. Not just for his plan, but for his project.

He turned to the doctor seated next to him.

“Well, the only thing I’m worried about is I don’t want a lesbian for a daughter.”

“Oh, Chet will be quite attracted to boys, I assure you.”

“But he *is* heterosexual, isn’t he?”

“Thoroughly. But people’s sexuality isn’t nearly as set in stone as you might have been led to believe.”

“We can force him to fall in love with men?”

“No. But what we can do is have him respond sexually to stimuli consistent with sexual intercourse with a male, and also have him respond emotionally to men.”

“Really?”

“Since his brain is still essentially wet cement, we can have him re-discover himself, sexually. We’ll put him in social situations where he’s expected to respond like a young girl. He’ll make himself see men through the eyes of a girl, and begin to associate men with being sexual and emotional partners. With his new thoroughly feminine life and mindset, he’ll view men as a missing aspect of life. When he does that, we can then stimulate his senses. It becomes pavlovian. He’ll think of men or boys, and then we’ll trigger endorphin responses in the brain to make him feel good. Then, physically, he’ll naturally stimulate himself.”

“But he won’t get any satisfaction from what’s left of his male genitalia. What good is that going to do?”

“What we can do is feed the same neural responses a female has to sexual stimuli into his mind. He won’t quite understand it at first, but he’ll eventually come to recognize that he’s having female sexual desires.”

“Female sexual desires?”

“He’ll have a feeling that he wants to be penetrated. He’ll feel like he wants to come to a female orgasm.”

“That can be done?”

“It *has* been done. I’ve treated many people who felt bisexual or homosexual and wanted to become heterosexual. This treatment is quite solid.”

“You can change someone’s sexual habits like that?”

“To a degree. What it really does is remove the mental stigmas of having a quote-unquote ‘deviant’ sexual desire. The mental stigma of responding sexually to the ‘wrong’ gender can be removed. You know what they say, that the mind is the biggest sexual organ. There’s a lot of truth in that. This treatment just lifts that mental block from responding to different sexual responses.”

“Huh. So with Chet, he’ll...”

“He will no longer have any mental block of responding to men as sexually desirable. He’ll still have his heterosexual responses, though.”

“Is there any way to get rid of that?”

“No. Not currently, at least. You really don’t want to do that, anyway. That can cause severe psychological trauma. However, in Chet’s case, it really won’t matter. Just like his brain is going through a second childhood, he’ll also be going through a second puberty. With the female hormones and anti-androgens in his system, he hasn’t had any sexual gratification for months. Once he starts

to develop secondary female sexual characteristics like breasts, he'll be able to have sexual stimulation again. Essentially, he'll have a re-awakening of himself. He'll find that he's not able to get any joy from his male genitalia any more. All his sexual satisfaction will be through reaching female orgasms that come by new stimulations of his body and mind."

"He'll have a sexual revelation that he's no longer a man."

"He'll have a moment where he realizes that he's female when it comes to sex. When that moment comes, it will be imprinted on him for life. Everything from that moment on of his life will be different."

CHAPTER 10

“Dee Dee!” Roger called out, leaving his luggage at the door. “Sweetie!” He had told him that he was coming home tonight, and Dee Dee had said that he would be here. “Dee Dee?” he called out again.

The patio door slid open and Dee Dee came in, empty drink in hand, dressed in his one-piece white swimsuit, beach wrap and a gold chain belt. It was a ridiculous outfit Hayley had talked him into buying, so he felt the need to wear it just once, based on how expensive it was. Of course, this was the fifth time he had worn it. “I thought I heard someone come in!” He said.

“I see you’ve really taken to the new pool,” Roger said.

“I *love* the pool!” Dee Dee replied. He walked over to the kitchen where he started to mix himself a new drink. “How was your flight? Would you something to drink?”

“I’m fine and... I’m fine,” was Roger’s reply. He walked over to dee Dee, kissed him on the cheek and then sat himself down at the nearest chair and melted into it. “Chet is coming along very well.”

Dee Dee sipped his drink and took a seat on the armrest on the couch nearest to Roger. “As much as I enjoy thinking that Chet is getting his just desserts, what in the world are we going to do with him after he’s out of the clinic?”

“Well... He’s going to be moving back in with us.”

“Really?” Dee Dee said. “*Really?*”

“I’ve got him enrolled in prep school already. He’s... Well... She’s expected in



the fall.”

“You can’t be serious about that.”

“When he’s finished with that program, there will be no trouble enrolling him in school as a teenage girl, and he’ll be happy to do it.”

“If you say so,” Dee Dee said with deep skepticism.

“Have I lied to you?”

“It’s not a matter of lying... It’s a matter of confidence. Overconfidence.”

“I would have even doubted it just a month ago. But if you saw what I saw at the clinic, you’d have no problem believing it will happen.”

“All right, as long as you’re being honest with yourself.”

“Speaking of which...” Roger sat up in his chair, leaned forward and folded his hands in between his legs. “Something did come up.”

“Uh oh.” Dee Dee could tell he was being serious all of the sudden.

“I don’t know exactly how she got a hold of the information, but my mother heard I’m getting married.”

“You have a *mother*?” Dee Dee asked. “Of course you have a mother, I mean, everyone does. But... I just didn’t know...”

“And I didn’t *want* you to know. She hasn’t talked to me in years, and I’ve not talked to her in years.”

“Father?”

“Dead.”

“Sorry.”

“Anyway, my mother wants to meet my new bride,” Roger said, then pursing his lips.

“You’re not serious,” Dee Dee said, nearly dropping his drink.

“I got two voice messages from her new husband when I got off the plane. She wants to meet her future daughter in law.”

“So what did you tell her?”

“I told her ‘no.’”

“That’s all right then I guess.”

“She’ll be here in three days.”

Dee Dee stood up straight. “You cant let her!”

“How can I stop her?” Roger said, tossing his hands in the air. “If she wants to come here, she’ll come here.”

“Well, then just keep her out of the house? Or we could just not be here? How hard is that?”

“I mean, sure, you can try that, and you’re welcome to.” Roger fell back into his chair again. “Trouble is, my mother doesn’t give up. She’ll get to you. Sooner or later, she’ll get to you.”

“You make her sound like Freddy Krueger.”

“Freddy Krueger at least started out as human.”

“You have to get me out of this! Fooling people you work with is one thing, but fooling your own mother?”

“I can’t stop this now, Dee Dee. I need you to do this for me. I need you to do this for us.”

“Roger, I can’t keep this up forever!”

“Darling, you’ve been fantastic. What’s different about this?”

“Honey, I can’t fool everyone! Someone is going to figure this out at some point! I’ll make a mistake... Say the wrong thing...”

“You’ve been the perfect fiancée, Dee Dee. You’re so into this, why worry about being seen as the person you used to be?”

“What do you mean, used to be? I’m as much of a man as I ever was!” Dee Dee said, putting his hand on his hip, causing the gold chain around his slender waist to swing back and forth.

“Dee Dee, and I say this with all honesty, you are much better person today than the man you were when I met you.”

Dee Dee held up his drink and looked at it as he turned to left and right. “I’m going back to the pool,” he said. “Let me now when Frederik has dinner ready.”



“Here she comes,” Chelsea said to Kat. “You said we were meeting here at ten, right?”

“That’s what I told her,” Kat replied.

“So sorry I’m late, girls. My hair wasn’t doing anything I wanted it to,” Chet explained.

“Just let us know!” Kat said, emphasizing her point with her popping eyes. “Call or text!”

“I don’t have... Well... They took my phone when I came here.”

“Oh my God!” Penny exclaimed, in genuine shock. “That’s not fair!”

“You should sue!” Chelsea said. “I would!”

Kat was just as surprised. “That’s totally unconstitutional!”

Just not so long ago, Chet would have punched these girls in the face. Where he used to hang out, in the bad part of town, letting some bitch give you attitude was an invitation for a beat-down. Bar whores and street walkers didn't get away with treating him like this. If they gave Chet any lip, he'd whack them upside the head. How would they get any 'dates' with bruises on their faces? That would teach them a lesson. That would show them their place.

But now, he was not only letting it happen, the words hurt. He wanted their approval. He wanted their friendship. He just want to be one of the... Gang.

Their fiery outrage against the powers that be lasted just a moment. "So are we ready to go?" Chelsea asked the group.

This was going to be a trip outside. Kat and Penny were going to be using wheelchairs, so it was up to Chelsea and Chet to push them. Both Kat and Penny were capable of wheeling themselves short distances, but their strength couldn't keep it up for very long. With an able-bodied person to push each wheelchair, it now meant that the four could go out and see what there was to see in this area.

The clinic was at the end of a gravel road, nestled in some dense trees. "What city is this, anyway?" Chet asked, hoping not to sound too strange.

"I think this is somewhere outside Orlando." Chelsea said. "I think. I was kinda out of it when I arrived."

"West Miami," Kat corrected. "Really out west, in the swamps."

"I think I see a building!" Chelsea said, excited. She pointed farther on down the road.

Even as slow as it was, pushing two wheelchairs down a gravel road, they quickly made their way along the half-mile road to paved roads, and were excited to see what the building was. A shopping mall? A café?

"It's a post office," Kat said, dejectedly. "Nice one, Chels."

"Well that's not my fault!" Chelsea protested. "Oh! Look over there!"

"Now what?" Kat said, rolling her eyes. Her chair was quickly whipped in another direction and pushed down a sidewalk.

"Wait up, guys!" Chet called. He pushed Penny along as fast as he could to catch up. "What's the big deal?"

"Look!" Chelsea said, with a little squeak in her voice.

"That's a high school!" Kat said, using her hand to block the sun. "At least I think so."

It turned out that's exactly what it was. It was a modestly-sized school, in session, and the four had approached from the back. They approached through the athletic fields, a football field surrounded by a running track. There was a fence around the field, but a gate was open, and the four went through.

“I think there’s a P.E. class going right now,” Kat said, looking ahead. “We must look like a bunch of freaks.”

There were a small set of bleachers on the far side of the field, far enough away that they weren’t going to get hassled for trespassing on school grounds. Besides, at 14, they were nearly old enough to be mistaken for high school students. Kat and Penny were quite happy to get out of the chairs and sat next to Chelsea and Chet on the aluminum bench.

“Look at those uniforms! Why can’t they ever design decent looking gym uniforms?” Chelsea said.

“It’s hard when the school colors are purple and green,” Kat said. “Kick Tiara in the foot and see if she’s still alive over there.”

“What?” Chet said, defensively.

“I’m used to Penny being the quiet one,” Kat answered.

“What do you want me to say? It’s hot, I’m sweating, I’ve been pushing a wheelchair for a half hour...”

“Oh, I’m sorry your highness!” Kat replied.

“Guys, shut up!” Penny said. “I think those guys are coming this way!”

The other three looked where Penny was, and saw two guys headed in their direction. There were still a fair distance off, but there was no doubt they were coming.

“What do you think? Are they gonna kick us out?” Chet asked.

Kat shook her head. “I don’t think so. They’re just curious.”

As the boys approached, one of them took off his shirt and wiped his forehead with it.

“That’s what I’m talking about!” Chelsea said.

“Shut up!” Kat said, as they were just getting close enough to hear.

“You shut up!” Chelsea replied. “Do you think they have girlfriends?”

“Hey girls!” One of the boys said, trotting up to the bench. The other boy followed.

“Oh, hi!” Chelsea said. “What’s goin’ on?”

“Not much, not much. My name’s Shaun,” the taller and shirtless boy said. He punched his friend in the stomach lightly. “This is Craig.”

“I’m Chelsea,” Chelsea said.

“I’m Bianca,” Kat said. The other three flashed a glance at her. She didn’t break face.

“I’m Penny,” Penny said. There was a long, empty pause. “The quiet one is Tiara,” she added.

“So, you live around here? I haven’t seen you guys before.”

“We’re from out of town. Tiara here is from Beverly Hills.”

“Beverly Hills, huh? How old are you?” Shaun asked Chet.

“Sixteen,” Chelsea answered for her. “We’re all sixteen.”

“Really?” Shaun said, skeptically. “You guys don’t look sixteen.”

Another small sliver chipped off of Chet’s already pebble-sized pride.

“How’d you break your leg?” Shaun asked Kat.

“My chute didn’t open,” Kat replied. “I’m a stuntwoman.”

“Oh, yeah. That must have sucked,” Shaun replied with uncertainty. “What about you?” He asked Penny.

“Bear attack,” Penny replied. “Bear mauled my leg and chewed off my foot.”

“Wow, seriously?” Shaun said, inexplicably believing this story more than Kat’s.

Penny nodded. “Yeah. I had to shoot him, slit open his stomach and get my foot back. Doctor sewed it back on.”

“That’s awesome!” Shaun said in respect.

“So, uh...” Shaun’s friend Craig finally spoke. “So...” He was also speaking directly to Chet. “Uh... What’s Beverly Hills like?” It was clear to everyone, except possibly Chet, that Craig was attempting to chat Chet up.

“It’s nice,” Chet replied. “Warm.”

“Yeah. I bet.” He visibly struggled for another question. “You go to school there?”

“Prep school.”

“Oh,” Craig replied. “You have a boyfriend?” Shaun punched him in the stomach again, this time a little harder. He recovered quickly. “What?” Craig asked, pointlessly.

All of the sudden, like someone had flipped a switch, Chet’s heart started beating hard. He felt nervous. He was unsure of himself. “No, I don’t have a boyfriend, Craig,” Chet said. The oddest impulse had come over him. He needed — craved, more like it — to have Craig like him. There was nothing more important that he had ever wanted than to get Craig’s approval.

“Oh...” Craig answered. “So, I guess...”

He’s going to ask me out! Chet thought to himself. *Please ask me out!* He started to play with his hair, and looked downwards, bashfully. *Like me! Like me! Like me!*

Craig was obviously fighting a major case of the nerves. “D’you wanna go eat a movie and see some dinner?” He asked.

“H...hokay,” Chet said, the rush of being accepted pulsing through his small body.

“Why do the rich stuck-up girls get all the cute guys?” Kat whispered to Penny. Penny nodded agreement.



“What’s wrong, Tiara?” Mrs. Kinkade asked the next morning. She had come in with breakfast as usual, and was changing the towels.

Chet was only a little concerned that the worry and fear he was feeling were this obvious to the world, but he had gotten used to Mrs. Kinkade’s odd ability to know exactly what he was thinking. “A boy asked me out on a date... A sixteen year old boy!” Chet said, gripping the bedspread to his chest.

Mrs. Kinkade didn’t even react to the news. “Did you say yes?”

“Mrs. Kinkade! A boy! A sixteen year old boy!” He buried his face in the sheets. “I said yes.”

Now that got a reaction from the nurse. “Oh! Congratulations! You must be happy to meet such a nice boy.”

“There’s nothing to be happy about!” Chet objected. “I’m eight years older than he is!”

“Don’t you start on that!” Mrs. Kinkade told him. “We’ve had this discussion!”

Chet rolled over to one side. “It’s like I was drunk... I couldn’t think straight. All I wanted was for him to like me.”

“It was like that for me when I was your age, Tiara.”

That gave Chet a moment to pause. How was it that he was having the same impulses a real teenage girl would have? He couldn’t figure it out.

“Where did you meet him?” the nurse asked.

“Well...” Chet lingered on the question. “Chelsea and Kat and Penny and I went out and down the road. We thought we’d find a place to eat or a store or something, but instead we found this post office.” Chet sat up in his bed. “And that was Chelsea’s fault, because she made us practically run all the way there, and we didn’t know it was a post office, and when we found out it was a post office, we’re all like ‘thank, Chels,’ and she’s all like ‘nuh-uh! not my fault!’ and it totally was.” Chet turned to Mrs. Kinkade and started to get very animated about his story. “And that’s when Kat saw the school, so we run all the way to this school, I guess it’s a high school. There was a class in session out there on the football field. Maybe it was a P.E. class, but we didn’t ask anyone, so I’m only making a guess. Anyway, we find this bench, and it’s far enough away...”

“Tiara... About the boy.”

“I’m getting there!” Chet said. “Anyway, Craig and Shaun are there, and we’re saying hello, and Kat makes up this totally bogus story about how she got her leg broken, and the Penny makes up this even weirder story. So Shaun is all like trying to impress us by being smooth, and then Chelsea is saying we’re all sixteen, which they didn’t believe, and suddenly Craig is asking me all these questions...” Chet paused for air. “...And all I can think of is how I want him to like me. It’s so weird!”

“That the way it is for girls, sweetie pie,” Mrs. Kinkade told him.

“I’m not a girl!” Chet objected. “All right, I know I’m not supposed to talk about it, but I’m not a girl! I’m twenty four years old and I’ve never wanted a boy to like me... Like that!”

“Tiara, I am not going to have this argument with you! We’ve been over this again and again. You are a fourteen year old girl! One look in the mirror tells you that!” Mrs. Kinkade picked up her things and headed for the door. “You have to ask yourself, are you going to accept what everyone sees, what you see, and what you feel. You are a young girl inside and out, and it’s time you just stopped fighting it! You know what you are.” With those words, she left.

Chet could barely understand why, but a huge tidal wave of emotion took him, and he started to cry into his pillow. Then the crying turned into a wailing waterfall of tears and anguish. He hadn’t felt emotions like these in years, if ever.

Did he truly know what he was inside? He was beginning to think he did. That’s why he was crying.

That night, at five thirty, Chet found himself in front of the full length mirror, primping his hair. He had spent hours on it today, and he still wasn’t satisfied. Ever since he woke up that day, one thing had been on his mind — the date. He had been on many dates in his life, but he had never been this anxious. It was all he could think of.

Now, as he looked himself over for the date he was about to go on, he was obsessing about every little thing. Was his hair okay? Was he wearing enough makeup? Too much makeup? Were these shoes too tall? He was having the most trouble with his skirt. Every time he looked at it, it seemed so incredibly long. He kept adjusting it, until, inch by inch, it moved from being just above the knee to just below indecent. Still, he wasn’t sure he wasn’t sure Craig would like him. Guys liked legs, right?

“C’mon, Tiara!” Chelsea said, quickly sticking her head in Chet’s room. “They’re waiting!”

That date was at five, and Chet had been such a helpless scatterbrain, he hadn’t been able to stop fussing. The boys were waiting out front, and he just couldn’t decide if he was ready. Shaun was going out with Chelsea, and Craig was waiting for him.

“That’s it!” he yelled at himself. “No more!” He headed for the door to let himself out. Just as quickly, he turned right back around for one last look. “No! Time to go!” He said to himself.

Out front, at the reception desk, the kids finally sighed relief when Chet arrived. “Hi, Tiara,” Craig said. There was something unmistakably adorable about seeing the young man in a dress shirt, neatly pressed pants and his hair slicked down. “You look great.”

Chet was dressed in a shimmering gold lamé camisole with a black cardigan, and a haltingly brief black flippy skirt. He wore simple ballet-style shoes with a two-inch heel, which Chet was relieved to see didn’t make him taller than his date. That was important to him, somehow. “You look great, too, Craig,” Chet said.

“Are we ready to go?” Chelsea asked. She held out her hand for Shaun to take, and he took it. Chet, almost unconsciously, held out his hand as well, which Craig took.

It wasn’t a very long walk to the nearest theater, although it seemed quite long to Chet, who could not work his hand free from Craig’s grip. It wasn’t that he was holding Chet’s hand firmly, it was that Chet couldn’t think of a way to let go that wouldn’t look funny. They got tickets to go see a PG film, because Chelsea didn’t want to have to prove they were old enough to see a PG-13, and the boys paid for them and snacks.

The boys insisted on seats at the very back of the theater. When the lights went out, all Chet could think of was that someone was going to stand up in their seats and point at him, telling the world that it was a boy in girls’ clothes. He scanned the tops of people’s heads, looking for curious glances back his way. All he saw were shadows. He wanted to straighten up and stand to see if there was anyone closer up front who might be suspicious, but Craig had a hold on his hand again, keeping him close.

How close was made apparent when Craig pulled his hand closer, bringing the two face to face. With Craig so close, Chet could smell him. He could feel the heat coming off his body. Craig drew him in even closer and put his hand on Chet’s breast. Chet was startled, but when he knew he should have been repulsed, all he could think of was: *Did he like my breasts?*

Chet had more questions as the night went on, like ‘did he like my neck?’ ‘did he like my lips?’ and ultimately, ‘did he like my tonsils?’ It was a passion like he had never known before. It was like whatever stigmas he had ever had about loving someone were suddenly gone from his mind, and an unbridled, wild lust was set free. It was only when the lights came back up that Chet gained control of himself, and understood what he had just done. Was he ashamed? When they left the theater, he hung on to Craig’s arm with both hands, looking up at him with puppy-dog eyes in total teenage infatuation.



It had been a ragged two days for Dee Dee. He was having a hard time figuring exactly what image to project. Did he want to be seen as the perfect homemaker? The loving wife? The sophisticated socialite? The nurturing mother? What did Roger's mother expect to find?

Dee Dee had been prodding for more information from Roger, but he seemed to have no interest in discussing the topic. He figured that whatever happened between the two must have been pretty severe. So here it was, the big day, and all Dee Dee had to go on was that Mrs. Van der Slyke was just a little less human than Freddy Krueger. That didn't help.

He had shopped the past few days to find the perfect outfit, and had his hair and nails done just this morning. The problem was, he had completely over-shopped and had piles of clothes that were just confusing the hell out of him now. He'd pick one thing up and like it, but couldn't match it with anything. Then, he'd start all over again. It had been hours. He wished it was like the old days, when he was trying to just make himself look feminine. It made it easy to pick clothes — he just wore whatever made him look female. Now, that was no longer a factor. He looked good in just about anything. What a curse! Dee Dee grabbed his phone. "Hayles! Help! I'm having a total fashion meltdown!"

"Get a hold of yourself, Deets!" Hayley replied. "We'll get through this together!"

Even on the other end of a phone line, Hayley talked the panicked Dee Dee down and they picked out a perfect outfit. He had forgotten all about that cute salmon dress he had bought last month. It had a mesh neck with rhinestone details, perfect for looking sexy, mature and sophisticated. Dee Dee also loved the cut of the hem, which showed off his developing hips he was working so hard on. He added a pair of platforms with a 4 and a half inch heel that he bought just yesterday.

"I love it Hales! You're a lifesaver!" Dee Dee said to her phone.

"Send me a picture and good luck!" Hayley replied. Dee Dee snapped a photo of himself in the mirror and texted it to his friend. He looked himself over in the slim dress, and thought he looked kind of like Sarah Jessica Parker in 'Sex in the City.' Which was a much better show than he had given it credit for, and he watched an episode every night religiously. Still, he thought that it needed one final touch. A white bolero jacket with the silver broach he had bought last month. Just as he clipped it on, he heard the doorbell ring.

With one final look in the mirror, and a smile plastered on his face, Dee Dee headed downstairs.

The doorbell rang twice more as Dee Dee skittered across the floor to the front door. He took a breath and opened it. "Yes?" he said.

"You can't be Roger's fiancée," the old woman at the door replied. She turned to her limousine in the driveway and signaled it was okay to park. "I'm Evelyn Van der Slyke. Roger's mother."

"Hi, I've been..."

"And you can invite me in," the woman interrupted.

"Oh, of course! My fault." Dee Dee apologized. "Won't you come in?" He added, after Mrs. Van der Slyke was already walking past.

"Horrible," the woman said upon examining the house. "I don't suppose Roger had the decency to be here today?"

"He's in Florida," Dee Dee explained. "It's a very big project he's working on. Did you know he's going to be promoted to CEO?"

"Immaterial." The woman stood stiff, and turned to Dee Dee, expecting something.

"Won't you have a seat?" Dee Dee said, when he realized what she was waiting for. "Would you like some tea?"

"Don't trouble yourself." The old woman sat, and as she did, Dee Dee couldn't help but look closer. There was a vague resemblance to Roger in the eyes and nose, but it was hard to tell, as her facial features had given away long ago to massive sagging on her face, and she lacked any sign of a chin. She sported the most amazing turkey neck, as if her skin was upholstery draped over her frame rather than a part of her. With the sagging chin and neck, she bore more than a passing resemblance to a tortoise. Her resemblance to a turtle applied to her whole body as well, as she was short, slightly hunched over and round at the back. "I only have a few minutes."



“That’s a relief,” Dee Dee said — aloud. “I mean, a relief for you, I’m sure. This can’t be comfortable.” Dee Dee had so far screwed everything up, and wanted to go throw himself off a cliff. He was trying to relax, but failing badly.

“Your name is... Dee Dee?” Mrs. Van der Slyke asked.

“That’s a nickname. My real name is Daphne,” Dee Dee said, thinking that was the first thing he had spoken he didn’t want to kill himself for.

“How did you meet my son?” The woman asked, making deliberate eye contact.

“We met in a bar.”

“Typical,” Mrs. Van der Slyke interjected.

“It was late, almost early morning, and he ordered me drink, thinking I was someone else.”

“What were you doing in a bar at that time of night?” Every question from Mrs. Van der Slyke sounded like a pointed accusation.

“I was in a... Play. I used to be an actor...ess. The play had gotten out, and we were celebrating.” That was close enough to the truth.

“Did you have sex with him that night?”

Dee Dee almost swallowed his tongue at that, but recovered as quickly as he could. “No. We got to talking, and had a nice conversation. One thing led to another, and...”

“You moved in together.”

“I needed a place. I had been thrown out of my apartment, so Roger offered me a place to stay.”

“His bedroom.”

“He had a very nice cottage out back which was completely private.” Dee Dee said, finally starting to feel a little sure of his answers.

The old woman glanced at the rear patio door. “There is no cottage out back of this house.”

“Not anymore. Roger just had the new pool put in. They had to tear down the cottage to make room for it.”

“Now you sleep with Roger.”

“I moved in upstairs, but in my own room.”

“Do you expect me to believe you haven’t slept with my son?”

“Well... We’ve shared a bed on trips, but... That’s all.” Dee Dee didn’t think Mrs. Van der Slyke would believe that, but again, it was the truth.

The woman’s eyes narrowed in skepticism. “Do you intend to wear white at the wedding?”

Dee Dee had to think about that for a moment. They were a religious family, and wearing white was a sign of purity. Besides, that dress he wanted was white. “Yes, I do.”

“Is that appropriate?”

“I can honestly say that it is,” Dee Dee replied, restraining a smirk.

“How much did that dress you’re wearing cost?”

“Three hundred and seventy five dollars.”

“And the earrings? What did you have them appraised for?”

“Roger gave them to me. I don’t know what they’re worth.”

“A guess.”

“I’m hoping these are fake diamonds. Otherwise, I don’t know if I’d really have the nerve to wear them.”

Mrs. Van der Slyke then rose. She did so slowly, slowly enough that Dee Dee thought he should help, but the old woman didn’t seem the type to accept such assistance. Once she stood, she spoke again. “Did Roger tell you why we don’t speak?”

“He didn’t want to talk about it.”

“But you did ask.”

“Of course.”

The old woman then started for the front door. “That’s all the time I have for this nonsense.” She said. Dee Dee leapt in front, to open the door for her. Once the door was open, Mrs. Van der Slyke turned to Dee Dee. “I approve. I can sense these things, you know. I can tell when a gold digger is trying to latch herself onto Roger. But with you, I don’t see that. In fact, I think you care deeply about Roger. I can spot true love, and that’s what I see.”

“Uh...” Was Dee Dee’s urbane reply.

“Henson!” Mrs. Van der Slyke called out, presumable to her chauffeur. The limo was quickly brought around. “Don’t bother with an invitation to the wedding,” she said just before she got in and the door shut.

When the room stopped spinning and Dee Dee caught his breath, he decided to cancel his appointments for the rest of the day. He poured himself a nice soothing iced tea (with rum) changed into a bathing suit, and gave Roger a call from the pool. “She’s gone,” he said.

“You survived to talk about it,” Roger quipped.

“It wasn’t that bad. Just incredibly awkward,” Dee Dee replied. “How did you ever live with her?”

“I didn’t,” Roger said. “What’d she say?”

“She approved our marriage, for what that’s worth.”

“Wow. That’s... That’s... Unbelievable. She must have liked you.”

“Strange woman. How’s Chet?”

“I can’t wait for you to see him. He’s really come along.” Roger paused. “He’ll be coming home with me.”

“Great,” Dee Dee said, with no enthusiasm. “I can’t wait for him to ruin my life again.”

“Don’t worry about him. There’s nothing much left of Chet anymore. You’ll be shocked when you see him.”

“Yeah, yeah. Where do we put him up? The basement?”

“He can’t go back there. He’ll have to move into your bedroom, I suppose. There really isn’t any other room.”

“My room? I’m not going to sleep on the couch.”

“You’ll move into the master bedroom.”

“You mean... With you.”

“With me, yes. We did this on the yacht and we can do this...”

“I am not sleeping in the same bed with you, Roger. That’s insane.” Dee Dee was getting testy.

“We can’t have you or Chet sleeping on the couch or the basement. That’s going to raise questions. He’s going to need his own room. Unless you want to sleep in the utility closet, it’s the master bedroom.”

“Not in a million years.”

“I have a lot more closet space and a much larger bathroom.”

“Okay, those are good points, but I’m not sleeping in the same bed with you! Why would you even ask that?”

“Dee Dee, when you see Chet, you’ll understand why. He’s not really a ‘he’ anymore. We have to give him his own room. Trust me.”

“This is the dumbest idea...”

“Just move your stuff into the master bedroom, try it out, and we’ll work it out later. I have to go.”

“I am not doing this, Roger!”

“For me, Dee Dee.”

“Don’t you hang up...” The phone hung up. Suddenly, Dee Dee had the uneasiest feeling he had just had a lover’s quarrel with Roger.



Chet jerked back in bed, tossing the sheets almost clean off himself. He had thought, initially, he had broken something. Some part that was stitched up and become undone. Something that was sending a feeling through him that he had never quite felt before. What had he done? What went wrong?

He had been thinking about his date with Craig. And his date with Shaun. And his second date with Craig. And his date with the usher at the theater where he and Craig went. Naturally, as he thought about how the boys had kissed him, he moved his hand down his body to stimulate things. Only, when he expected to feel the jolt of his old body hitting an orgasm like a hammer, he had this slow, building, wave of joy flow through him. He tried to ride it, pushing it harder and making it faster, harder and faster, harder and faster until his finger slipped into... Something.

Then, he found the peak of this fantastic feeling. He found something new and wonderful and he thought right there and then, that he had broken something in his body and he was experiencing the last shot of joy before he died. Because, surely, nothing could feel this good and still let him live.

He rolled over on his back, laid his sweaty arms aside and felt his breathing return to normal. He was still alive. In fact, he felt great. He was a little tired, but he felt great. As he looked down to see his heaving chest, he also realized he didn't feel like he was finished. Unlike what he knew, it wasn't a one-time deal. Using his hand again, he found that the feeling was still buzzing around, and he could coax it back to try and scale that mountain again. He tried and tried, but only when his fingers slipped into... *Something...* again, did it really start to get crazy.

As he started to relax once more, it was then that he realized where his fingers were going and why it felt so good. He was fingering himself. In his vagina. He was penetrating himself. Was that possible?

Now, for a third time, he had to try once more. He penetrated his slit, stuck his fingers in and started to go ride that hot trip to heaven again. It was true, he now understood, he was having sex like a woman would. As he got closer and closer to the peak, he then had a wicked thought enter his mind. He pictured Craig. He couldn't really help it, he was just too curious. Was he so much a woman that when he thought about boys...

In that moment of seeing him in his mind, everything got turned up a few notches. His body went into overdrive as he twitched, shook and bucked. A moan escaped his mouth and even that seemed to make things accelerate. So he moaned louder and louder as he explored and teased himself, seeing Craig... And Shaun... And all those cute boys he had been dreaming about...

"*Oaaah!*" he screamed, as the sensations threatened to tear him apart. He stopped what he was doing, satisfied and content. Then, as his body and his

mind settled themselves, letting the heat from his body dissipate into the cool air, only then did he realize that inside, now, he was Tiara Antoinette Van der Slyke. She was fourteen. She loved God, she loved her daddy, she loved being rich, and she loved being beautiful.

And most of all, she loved boys.

CHAPTER 11

Roger paced near the reception desk, trying not to look nervous. To anyone looking on, it was if he were an expectant father waiting news of his newborn. “They’re headed up,” the receptionist at the desk said. Roger steadied himself, wanting to look stoic.

From down the hall came the unmistakable chatter of a flock of girls headed Roger’s way.

“You *must* tell Craig and Shaun how much I’ll miss them!” Tiara said, striding confidently.

Behind her, Chelsea hung on every word. “Anything else you want me to tell them?”

Tiara wore a pink tank with a wide black belt around her waist, and a short white A-line skirt. He also added a pair of gold gladiator sandals that matched the bracelets and her golden blond hair. She also wore a thin black choker with a white hairband and pearl earrings. “Tell them... If they’re ever in Beverly Hills to look me up,” Tiara paused to think. “Of course, they’ll never find me, and if they did, I’d deny ever having met them, but it’ll make them feel good to hear that anyway.”

“*Ha ha!* You’re so funny, Tiara!” Chelsea said, laughing.

Penny and Kat, hobbling behind them on their crutches rolled their eyes. “Suck up,” Kat whispered.

Tiara put a pair of sunglasses on. “Well, girls, it’s been wonderful, but it’s time for me to go! What are you going to do without me?”

“Aw, Tiara!” Chelsea gushed. “Everyone’s going to miss you!”

“Yeah, it won’t be the same without you,” Kat said, dryly.

Tiara smiled smugly back. “Kat, you’re priceless. Now does everyone have my number?”

“Yeah. Do you have mine?” Penny asked.

“Oh, I’ll be so busy once I get back,” Tiara said, “it’s probably best you call or leave me a message, don’t you think?”

The group had now reached the threshold of the clinic hallway, and was on the edge of the reception area. “This is it!” Chelsea said.

“Group hug, why not?” Tiara said, leaning slightly forward, making every one of her friends stretch awkwardly in to return the hug. “All, right, my ride is here, toodles everyone!”

“Keep in touch!” Chelsea called after her.

“Uh huh,” Tiara replied without tuning back. She got no more than a half dozen steps before she was stopped by the immovable presence of Roger.

“Did you enjoy your time at the clinic, Tiara?” He asked, looking down at the young girl.

Seeing this man for the first time in months triggered Chet, or at least what was left of Chet. He had one message that he had repeated in his head over and over again for so long that he couldn’t help but blurt it out. “I hate you, Roger,” Tiara replied.

“Hold up girls!” Roger called to Tiara’s friends. They had already started to leave, but turned around. “Come on back.”

Tiara looked puzzled, but when Roger grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her to the waiting room chairs, she was getting scared.

“That was disrespectful of you, Tiara. Now you need to be taught a lesson!” Roger growled. He then sat in the chair and patted his knee. “Bend over!”

“What?” Tiara cried. “No!”

“I’m going to count to five!” Roger commanded. He looked up into Tiara’s confused eyes and grabbed her by the arm. “Five!” he said. With a screech from Tiara, he pulled her over his knee and gave her a good spank. Her romper was so short that it exposed most of her posterior and made for a loud swat.

Both Penny and Kat giggled and nearly fell right off their crutches in a fit.

“I hate to be so cliché, but...” Roger swatted Tiara again. “Who’s your daddy?” Swat. “Say it!”

“You are!” Tiara cried.

Whap! “What am I?” Roger asked. Swat!

“Ow!” Tiara wailed. “You’re my daddy!”



Even Chelsea joined in on the laughter. The girls enjoyed seeing the stuck-up rich girl get her comeuppance. “Sweet!” Kat cackled. “Wicked sweet!”

Roger let her up off his lap and Tiara hung her head in shame. She glanced back to see her friends walk away and exchange high-fives in celebration.

“You never disrespect me, Tiara, darling. Especially not in public. Is that clear?” Roger asked.

“Yes,” he whimpered.

“Yes what?”

“Yes, daddy.”

“Get in the car.”

Tiara scooted along, unconsciously covering her bottom as she did so. Roger waited a moment, straightened his tie, checked his cufflinks, and then followed Tiara out to his rental car. It was a short and quiet trip to the airport, where Tiara was only mildly shocked to see that two first-class tickets had both Roger’s name and hers, with proper and legal identification for the fourteen year old female daughter, Tiara Van der Slyke.

The plane trip to LAX was in total luxury, except for the electric sense of anxiety Tiara felt every moment. For the in-flight dinner, Roger ate a steak with wine and Tiara had the children’s meal with macaroni and cheese, yoghurt, chocolate bar, juice and a coloring book. When they had finished and taken the food away, it was then that Tiara worked up the courage to speak.

“What are you going to do with me?” he asked, in a voice so quiet and high, it could have come from a toddler.

Roger, who took his time finishing his wine, looked sideways at Tiara. No one on this plane or who had observed them get on could have suspected anything else but what they saw, a teenage girl and her father flying home. There was something wonderfully delicious about this moment, where all the hard work and planning that had come to this point in time, where he could say just about anything he wanted to and this fool would have to do it.

“You’re coming home with me, Tiara,” Roger said. “You’re my new daughter.”

Tiara sunk back in her seat and stared at her hands for a while. “What if I don’t want to?”

“That’s not your decision. You’ll find that you are legally my daughter, and I am legally your father. If you should run away or resist, I have all the rights in the world to do whatever I please to force the issue.”

“I don’t have to do what you say,” Tiara said. “I’m an adult.”

“You are a fourteen year old girl. You look like one, and you act like one. You will not be treated as an adult by anyone. Your protests are useless.”

Tiara looked around the cabin, and noted that they were the only people seated in the twenty-seat first class section. There was no point in making a scene, because there was no one to see it. "Why did you do this to me?"

"I'm your father, Tiara. I don't have to explain myself to you." Roger opened up a magazine and started to skim the pages.

"I won't fight you," Tiara said, after a long pause. "I don't want to be shocked anymore. I don't want to be drugged. I'll just keep to myself in the basement. You don't have to worry about me."

"As long as you will do what I tell you to do, Tiara, we'll get along just fine. I do believe in strict discipline for my children, but I only use it as a last resort." Roger put down the magazine. "You had better think about your situation, sweetie. You may believe that you are being controlled and manipulated, and to a certain extent that's true. But if you want it to end, it will end today."

That prospect excited Tiara. "What do you mean? You won't do anything more to me?"

"I've done everything I needed to do to make you look and act like the girl you now are, Tiara. It's now up to you. I can make your life a living hell of doctors and being locked away, or..."

"Yes?" Tiara asked, when Roger paused.

"You can live like a princess. You'll have everything you've ever wanted."

"But..."

"Your own room, a closet full of pretty clothes and a credit card to buy anything you want."

"No... It's..."

"You can go anywhere, see the world, live in the finest hotels and eat the finest foods..."

"I don't..."

"You'll be the most beautiful girl in any room, and the envy of every girl you meet."

"I can't..."

"You will have all the boys drooling over you, and desperate for your attention."

"There's..." Tiara's mind was buzzing. On one hand, the old part of her wanted the control back, it wanted the freedom. But every word Roger said was a shiver of delight. Living like a princess, all the clothes he would want, money at will, travel, jealous girls and... Boys. "I guess I don't have a choice, do I?"

“Sure you do. But I don’t know why you’d make one. All I want to do is show-er you with love and affection.” Roger held out his hand. “Will you be my daughter, Tiara?”

Looking into Roger’s eyes, Tiara could only see honesty in them. Tiara put her tiny hand in his and sighed. No longer afraid to show how happy and excited she was to be a spoiled little rich girl, she smiled and used her free hand to clear the stray hairs from her line of sight. “Yes, Daddy,” she said, eagerly, and gave him a peck on the cheek. “I love you, Daddy.”

CHAPTER 12

“Thank you for seeing me, doctor,” Dee Dee said when the round-headed Dr. Pfelter greeted him.

“Well, of course, Dee Dee. It sounded urgent on the phone.”

“It is!” Dee Dee exclaimed. He headed straight for the typical psychologists’ padded lounge and laid back on it, the back of his hand against his forehead. “I don’t know what to do!”

The doctor pulled a chair from a table and moved it so he could sit by the lounge. As he did, he noticed how amazingly and convincingly feminine his patient had become. Not only was there no discernible difference between Dee Dee and a woman, but he had become a tantalizingly attractive one. In fact, he reasoned that Dee Dee may be his most beautiful patient — and he wasn’t even a real woman. “Shame,” the doctor muttered to himself.

“What?” Dee Dee asked.

“What seems to be the trouble, Miss Summers?” The doctor inquired.

“It’s Roger! He’s bringing home...” Dee Dee was pretty sure he couldn’t tell the whole story, so he had bend the truth a little. “He’s bringing home a teenage girl for adoption as his daughter. She’s going to be living with us.” That seemed like a safe way to put it. “Then Roger’s mother came by! And there’s the wedding in just a few weeks. We’re scheduled for rehearsal the Tuesday after next! I’m not ready for this!” Dee Dee looked over at the doctor’s rugby-ball-shaped head and pleaded. “I didn’t sign up for this! What does Roger think he’s doing?”

“How does that make you feel?”



The doctor asked.

“Like the world is going crazy!” Dee Dee exclaimed.

“Yes, yes. A heightened sense of anxiety. Quite.” The doctor massaged his chin. “Do you blame Roger for this situation?”

“I don’t know who *else* is responsible for it!”

“But you trust Roger. You know he’s a solid thinker and very deliberate in the things he does.”

“I trust him, but maybe he’s bitten off more than he can chew.”

“Mmm-hmm. Yes. Very interesting.” Of course, he already knew the whole story. He just mumbled these psychologist expressions for show. “Our time is short today... Let me show you some ink blots.”

As had happened at every session, Dee Dee was unconscious in a matter of seconds. He never even noticed when he was strapped to a gurney and wheeled out the back door of the office. They made a quick trip up the elevator to the MRI machine, and sensors applied to Dee Dee’s head before he was sent into the machine.

“Can you hear me, Dee Dee?” Doctor Pfelter asked.

“Yes...” Dee Dee replied, in a half-conscious state.

“I want you to focus on the words I am about to say to you, can you do this for me?”

“Yes...”

The doctor flipped the scan on, and saw the rainbow-spectrum images of the inside of Dee Dee’s head. “Bicycle,” the doctor said.

In the monitors, a certain part of Dee Dee’s mind started to glow, indicating that he was using that part of his brain to think about bicycles.

“Showering.”

Another section glowed. That was enough for calibrating. The scanner was working fine.

“All right, now picture fashion. Women’s fashion.”

As these sections glowed, the doctor flipped a few more switches.

“Women’s hairstyling.” The doctor said, and flipped switches. “Celebrity Gossip.” More switches. “Make up.” “Nail polish.”

Once had the reading he needed, the doctor prepared a syringe.

“Women’s hairstyling.” Flip flip. “Celebrity Gossip.” More switches. “Make up.” Flip. “Nail polish.”

Over the course of the hour, he repeated the same phrases, causing Dee Dee to think about the subjects. As he did, the doctor injected a drug that altered

his ability to metabolize serotonin. He repeated the phrases over and over again, forcing Dee Dee to think of nothing else but these subjects. He repeated them over and over again for hours.

“Miss Summers?” The doctor said, gently waking Dee Dee from his sleep.

“Wh... What?” he looked around, and realized he was still in the doctor’s office.

“You fell asleep, Miss Summers,” Doctor Pfelter said.

“Oh, I... I’m sorry, doctor.”

“No need to apologize. I was trying to help you relax, and that indicates we’ve met with some success.”

Dee Dee tried to recall the last thing he was thinking about... But it was a bit fuzzy. Fashion? No, that wasn’t it. Although, it was something to think about, how the styles for summer season were coming up and...

“Miss Summers,” the Doctor spoke.

“Oh! I’m sorry,” he replied. “My mind drifted off there...” As he talked, he noticed that his nail polish didn’t quite match his clothes. It looked darker in the bottle, and must have...

“You said you were concerned about Roger.”

“Yes, Roger!” Dee Dee said, remembering what he had come here for. “I think he’s trying to do too much...”

“But as I asked earlier, don’t you trust Roger?”

“Of course I do, but...”

“Do think he’s a good thinker?”

“He’s very smart...”

“Smarter than you?”

“Well... I suppose so...”

“Why then, worry about it? He’s perfectly capable to handle the thinking for the both of you, isn’t he?”

“The both of us?” Dee Dee was a little stunned to hear the doctor say that. Was he inferring that he should let Roger make all the decisions for him? That was deeply insulting! He was able to make tons of decisions, like what clothes to wear and how to do his hair and what gossip was true and what were obvious lies. That story she heard today about Britney Spears, for instance, had to be true. Why would the limo driver lie about a thing like that? She has this reputation, and...

“Miss Summers?” the Doctor interrupted.

“Yes?”

“About Roger.”

“What about Roger?”

“Maybe we ought to leave it there,” the Doctor said, putting away his note pad. “I’ll see you next time.”

“Yes. Of course. I’ll see you soon, Doctor Feller,” Dee Dee said, getting up from the lounge. He checked his makeup in a compact mirror.

“Pfelter,” the doctor corrected. He escorted his patient to the door and said his goodbyes. It appeared to be another successful treatment. What he had done was cause a mild case of obsessive compulsive disorder in Dee Dee’s mind. There would always be a small part of his brain thinking about fashion, hair, makeup and gossip. It wouldn’t do any damage to him, but a percentage of his brainpower would always be focused on these feminine tasks. It might leave him appearing scatterbrained or even a bit of an air-head, but that would be a reasonable price to pay for the awe and respect he would get for being on top of fashion, style and gossip. Therefore, he would be respected, revered and admired — in the new life he was going to lead.



Dee Dee had only been home for five minutes when he heard the front door open.

“Darling, we’re back home!” Roger called out into the house. “Come meet my daughter!”

Hiding in the kitchen, Dee Dee took some deep breaths before he convinced himself to go out and meet them. He had no idea what to expect, and was as nervous and tense as he had been that first night out as Roger’s fiancée. Deciding he better just get it over with, and at least do it with style, Dee Dee strode out into the living room with a bright sunshine-y smile and a cheery attitude. “Have you brought the little angel back home, dear?” he said, first seeing Roger and then the girl behind him.

Dee Dee then looked left and right, trying to spot Chet. Wordlessly, Dee Dee gestured with his open hands to indicate he was a bit lost.

“Say hello to your future step mother, Tiara,” Roger said to the girl.

Out stepped into plain sight a young girl no older than fourteen or fifteen, her face flush with embarrassment. “Hello, Miss Summers,” she said in a quiet, immature voice. “I’m sure we’ll get along much better this time.”

Dee Dee looked at Roger first for some information, the steady expression told him that he was serious. Then Dee Dee had to give this girl a closer look. She was so thin and feminine, that it would just be impossible to really believe that this was... But there was something about those eyes. He recognized it.



Not the guileless innocence they now portrayed, but the color and the the shape. They couldn't be...

Just as Dee Dee looked into Tiara's eyes, she looked into his. It didn't seem possible to Tiara that this woman, this beautiful lady-like woman could be... But that was Nick's face in there. The nose, the eyes... It wasn't possible, was it? He had changed so much in just so little time... No man could be made into that, could they?

"That can't be... Who is that?" Dee Dee said to Roger. Roger's lack of a reply, made it clear that he wasn't going to help ease his fevered mind.

"What happened... To him?" Tiara said, turning to Roger. No answer came.

The two former men were left alone, to silently look at each other, their mouths agape, their faces slack and their minds blown. The stress got to Dee Dee who dropped to one knee.

"Oh! Honey!" Roger said, leaping to help steady Dee Dee. "Everything will be all right. You knew that this was happening. Just take it easy and relax." Roger pecked Dee Dee on the cheek with a kiss, which did seem to lighten Dee Dee's mood.

That further shocked Tiara, who could only guess as what that meant. She wished that someone would help her stay on her feet, as she felt like fainting.

“Chet, what happened to you?” Dee Dee asked. “You can’t be Chet!”

“I’m not, Miss Summers. My name is Tiara Van der Slyke now, and I’m a girl.” Tiara wasn’t sure why she felt the need to come out and declare herself so proudly, but it felt good and it felt right. “Surely Daddy told you what was happening to me?”

“Of course, but...” Dee Dee stood again, but only briefly enough to set himself into the nearest chair.

“I do look like a *girl*, don’t I?” Tiara asked, with doubt in her voice.

“You’re very much a girl. Really very... Girlish.” Dee Dee covered his mouth with his hand, in shock. “You’re happy?”

“I have time to adjust, but...” Tiara’s expression looked as if she was deciding right on the spot the answer to that question. “I am happy. I’m not on drugs. I love God. I love being rich and I love looking beautiful. I’m very happy.”

“You enrolled her in school!” Dee Dee suddenly asked Roger.

“I think you can see why. She’s just like any other girl her age. She needs to go to school, and get a good education.”

“Plus boys,” Tiara added.

Roger smiled. “She was very into boys at the clinic.”

“It wasn’t my fault, Daddy!”

That comment sent Dee Dee into a swoon of mental turmoil. “I need a drink,” He said.

“I’ll get it for you sweetie,” Roger said, and he left the room.

Tiara took some tentative steps forward to get a better look at Dee Dee. “Is that really you, Nick?”

“Me? You’re asking *me* that? You can’t be Chet!”

“I’m not! Not anymore. Chet was nasty. Chet was all crazy on drugs and mean and... I’m not that... *Thing*.”

“Christ almighty,” Dee Dee said.

“But why are you so surprised?” Tiara asked, “You don’t look or act like Nick anymore. You look like a rich, socialite wife! You know that, right?”

“Well, that’s what I’m trying to do, Chet...”

“Don’t call me that! I’m *Tiara*. Don’t you love that name? It sounds so... Magical!”

“Here you go,” Roger said, putting a screwdriver into Dee Dee’s hand. Dee Dee took a sip and then held it to his forehead for the ice cool touch.

“Roger,” Dee Dee turned to him. “What have you done? He can’t go back to his old life.”

“I don’t want to go back, Daddy!” Tiara desperately objected.

“You don’t have to, princess,” Roger replied. He turned to Dee Dee. “She’s not going back. You heard her. She loves being my daughter, and I will love her like a daughter. That will never change.”

Dee Dee took another, longer, sip from his drink. “This is unbelievable. Absolutely unbelievable.”

“Now, would you mind showing my daughter up to her new room?” Roger asked Dee Dee.

Dee Dee placed the drink aside, making sure it was on a coaster, and rose. “Why not. What the hell. Let’s go... Tiara.”

“My own room!” Tiara shouted with childish glee. She dashed up the stairs at top speed, zooming by Dee Dee. Once he had arrived the top, Tiara was practically hopping on her feet, her boundless energy every bit as child-like as her appearance. “Which one is mine? Which one?”

“Over here, Tiara. This used to be my room, now it’s yours.”

“Woooooww!” Tiara said, her eyes wide with delight. “It’s so big!”

The room was large, so large that Dee Dee had just used a corner of it to sleep in. The rest of it he had been used for piled up boxes and bins of clothes and shoes. He had spent the better part of the day clearing it out, and moving the clothes into Roger’s closet. He hoped Roger didn’t mind him packing up some of his older, dustier suits to make room.

“I want a bed here, and a desk over here... A nice dresser here and a mirror here...” Tiara was zooming around the room going from spot to spot. Then she rushed to the window to look outside. “Wow! Is that a real pool?” She asked. “I can invite all the boys over!”

“What is it with this *boy* thing?” Dee Dee asked.

“I’m a *girl*, Miss Summers! Why would you ask me that?”

“But you’re acting like some boy-crazy teenager.”

“You mean... You don’t...” Tiara hesitated to finish her thought. “I just thought that you and Daddy...”

“Thought what? No!” Dee Dee made a face like he had just smelt a used diaper. “Never!”

“Oooohhhh...” Tiara said, catching on. “Well, I mean, I know I used to be one and everything, but I can’t help it. I think boys are so cute and adorable!”

“Seriously?”

“And you *don’t*?”

Dee Dee just had to pause and look at Tiara. “What did they *do* to you?”

Tiara just sighed that heavy sigh teenagers give, and shook her head. “It doesn’t matter. It’s not like anyone died or anything!”

“Fine,” Dee Dee said.

“So if you and Daddy aren’t... And this used to be your room... Where do you sleep?”

“Never you mind!” Dee Dee said, before leaving the room swiftly.



It was about three in the morning when Dee Dee quietly slid out of the bed he was now sharing with Roger. He hadn’t slept a wink since he had been forced to move into Roger’s room. It had been three days now, and he couldn’t convince himself to relax enough to fall sleep. Catching up during the day wasn’t easy, either, with Tiara running amok, screaming and giggling with every new discovery she made in the house.

Dee Dee made his way into the walk-in closet. He liked the closet. The clothing-lined walls deadened noise, making it the quietest place in the world. It felt like it was a private dimension, apart from reality.

In here, he wasn’t Dee Dee anymore. He was just Nick, the disguise of female clothing yet to be applied. The instruments of his deception were on the hangars in front of him, lifeless and benign.

Chet’s return, and his metamorphosis into Tiara, was troubling him. If Roger was capable of turning a greasy, grimy 23-year old man into a rambunctious 14-year old girl, what did this mean for Dee Dee’s situation? Could, if Roger really wanted to, do the same to him? Could Roger just decide he was never going to let him return to being Nick, and imprison him in this disguise forever?

He pulled the nightie off him and walked to the full length mirror to look at himself. Without makeup, without clothes and without any elements of his disguise, he gave himself a deep, critical look. His skin was smoother, his lashes longer, his lips fuller. His hair, now a copper blond, flowed over his slim shoulders. His curvy, slender body showed a classically female figure.

Yet Nick didn’t see any of it. It had all come on so slowly, so gradually, and with his full cooperation, that it was invisible to his perception. As he pulled his long wavy hair back, and looked himself in the eyes, he was certain that if Roger were ever to attempt to change him, he could stop him before it got serious.

However, he could never see Roger doing something like that to him. He was such a good man, so generous and so honest. Roger was a man who got what he wanted out of life, and wasn’t afraid to break some eggshells in the process, but



he trusted Roger more than he had ever trusted anyone in his life. The idea that he'd ever betray him in the slightest way was funny enough to make him laugh.

Still, he had been meaning to ask Roger about his chest. The breasts he had been growing felt bigger lately, but he wasn't convinced they *looked* any bigger. Roger saw his breasts every single day, and he hadn't said anything about them. Surely, if there was a problem, Roger would take care of it.

Strangely, Dee Dee had been feeling reluctant to bring the subject up. The thing was, he had the biggest breasts amongst the girls he socialized with, and that was a kind of status symbol. He got looks from men and women when he walked down the street, their eyes locked on his chest. Despite himself, he was proud of his breasts. He had started altering his posture ever so slightly, so he stuck his chest out when standing or walking. The attention he got reminded him of when he played the Martian Queen, giving him the same kind of gratification.

While a part of him was deeply troubled by the development of his chest, an ever-growing part of him was enjoying it. He wasn't sure, even if Roger produced a miracle anti-dote, he'd let them go so easily. When he returned to his male life, they would definitely be that hardest thing to give up.

Besides, he had bought so many lovely bras, it would be a shame to waste them before he had a chance to wear them all. No, he might just hold on to them for a little while longer, and keep his concerns to himself. Another few months wasn't going to hurt anyone.

Dee Dee pit his nightie back on, slipped out of the closet, and looked at Roger's unconscious, slightly goofy expression.

He would never admit it to him, but Dee Dee had grown to really appreciate Roger as a partner. He was always here for him. Despite his situation, Dee Dee had a felt himself developing a real soft spot for the big lug. He really wanted to see Roger get his promotion and succeed with his spa project. In fact, he had become quote passionate about it, cheering him on and encouraging him. If being a wife to him helped him get what he worked so hard for, then Dee Dee would do his best, too.

He slid back into bed, trying not to disturb the blissfully slumbering man, and curled up on his side. He still couldn't sleep.

It was another hour of trying tricks to calm his mind before Dee Dee was resigned to another sleepless night and lousy semi-conscious day ahead. All of the sudden, Roger stirred and his big arm came crashing down on Dee Dee. He wanted to heave it off, but there really wasn't a way to do it without making a scene and waking him.

Yet, as Dee Dee lay there, with Roger's arm embracing him, he felt closer to falling asleep than he had in forever. Testing this theory, Dee Dee snuggled closer to his bedmate and found himself more and more relaxed. Before he knew it, he was letting Roger spoon him and was drifting off, a smile on his lips. It had been so long since he felt so relaxed, and was so desperate for sleep, he didn't care that he was in Roger's embrace, as long as it was working. Once again, Dee Dee mused, dependable Roger was saving the day.



“And who is this?” Nora said, upon seeing Tiara for the first time. Dee Dee had reluctantly brought her along on his shopping trip, at Roger's suggestion. This afternoon, Dee Dee was out at the bridal store, having a fitting, and Nora Greenway, the wedding planner had met up with them to have a look at the

dress Dee Dee was scheduled to wear at the ceremony. Nora claimed that she needed to “design the wedding around the dress,” whatever that meant.

“My name is Tiara, ma’am,” Tiara replied, sweetly.

Dee Dee explained she was “Roger’s daughter.”

“And your future stepdaughter!” Nora pointed out.

Dee Dee groaned inside.

“How old is she?” Nora asked.

Tiara was still aglow, flush with all the attention. “I’m fourteen, ma’am.”

“My my. You’re so tall for fourteen.” Nora turned to Dee Dee. “You’ve got a real heartbreaker on your hands there. Better lock her up at night!”

“Or even during the day,” Dee Dee said. “Let me change and I’ll try on the gown for you to see.”

As Dee Dee changed out of his dress, he was happy for the few moments of privacy. Since Roger had brought home Tiara, she had been underfoot every day. As he was with sleeping with Roger, he had lost almost all of his privacy.

Sleeping in Roger’s bed had become real problem for Dee Dee, but for reasons he had never expected. Now, unless he was actually in physical contact with him, Dee Dee couldn’t sleep. He had to have his arm around him, or feel his body against his in order to nod off. He tried once again to talk Roger in to letting him use one of the other rooms in the house, like the second guest bedroom, but Roger was steadfast. “What if we have a guest?” He’d say. “What if someone asks why we aren’t in the same bed?” He also would say. They were weak arguments, but it was *his* house, after all.

Another adjustment he had to make was getting used to sharing the same space to dress and undress. Sure, they were both guys, but it still felt awkward to walk around bare-chested in the same room with Roger.

“Are you padding?” The seamstress asked Dee Dee as she adjusted the dress.

“What?” Dee Dee replied. “Oh, uh. Yes.”

“The chest would probably fit better if you removed the pads,” the seamstress said. “You’ve gotten bigger since I last fit the dress, sweetie.”

“Oh,” said Dee Dee, slightly embarrassed. He reached into his bra and pulled out the gel pads.

“That’s still a bit too big. I’ll have to make some adjustments.” The woman made some marks on a notepad. “Size D,” she said as she wrote.

“I’m a D-Cup?” Dee Dee exclaimed, astonished.

“You’ve also lost some waist and gained some hips. If I don’t know better, I’d say you have a whole new body.”

“I’ve gotten a personal trainer. He promised I’d be down to a size four by my wedding day.”

“You’re there now.”

“*Reeeally?*” Dee Dee squealed. “Oh my God! That’s wonderful!” Dee Dee’s head was spinning with all the new dresses he could buy at his new size. He already had his eyes on this darling Armani Collezioni textured matelassé dress in salmon he hadn’t even dreamed of trying on until he was down to size. He also saw this silver lamé tank mini dress at...

“Miss?” The seamstress said.

“Um... Yes?” Dee Dee replied.

“I said, you can go out and show it off. I’m done.”

“Oh, thank you!” Dee Dee replied. He picked up the skirt of the dress so he could walk and headed out the changing room door.

As he did, he was greeted by the overwhelmed expressions of Nora and Tiara. Dee Dee really hadn’t critically looked at himself in the bridal gown he had chosen, his selection was actually designed to tick Roger off with its’ expense. But it was clear by the reaction he was getting that he looked good. Sweeping his skirt as he turned to the mirrors, it was a moment he would never quite forget.

There, in the reflection was the image every man or woman has in their mind when they imagine a bride. Young, thing, pure and elegant. His dress was pure white, with a full satin skirt that gathered at the waist, rippling out in waves, and split at the center. There, a tulle skirt was exposed which also was fluffed out to maximum volume. Behind him, the satin material tuned into a train that trailed behind at ten feet. His upper body was encased in tight white satin that was covered in vintage lace. It was backless, exposing everything from the small of his back on up. Dee Dee’s naturally thin waist was accentuated by the dress, making him feel that every exhausting workout was well worth it. Elbow-length satin-and-lace opera gloves on Dee Dee’s slim arms looked old-world elegant. A thin near-invisible veil covered Dee Dee’s face, ending at the chin, leaving bare skin from his neck to the tops of his strapless bodice. A pin of silver and crystal kept the veil in place, where his hair was in a bun.

“Exquisite!” Nora sang. “Incredible! Gorgeous!”

Tiara was just as effusive in her praise. “Pretty pretty pretty! You look so pretty Miss Summers! Daddy will love you!”

As Dee Dee swung his body to the left and right, he was at a loss to understand what he was feeling. It was a stunning dress on a breathtaking woman. Such a bride would be the stuff men would fight wars over or steal millions to impress. Yet, still, he knew it was a man in the reflection. He wasn’t a bride, nor a woman. He was frightened to be in the shoes of such a beauty, as if he

were fooling the world so thoroughly, surely the world would seek grave vengeance on this deception.

Although he had styled his hair in a bun, that was just for today. In his mind, he saw a flurry of twists, braids, upsweeps, bangs, tufts, weaves and clips for his hair. In his bridal magazines he had highlighted what he wanted, sometimes just a half of an idea or a whiff of inspiration. He had whittled down his early selections to about five hundred finalists, and was going to take that down to the last 200 before he settled on no more than fifty. Once at fifty, he'd...

"Miss Summers?" Tiara said, breaking Dee Dee's train of thought.

"Hum? What?" Dee Dee replied. "So what do you think?"

"At the ceremony," Nora said, in deep reverence, "you will have fifty men jump out of the aisles and fight Roger to marry you!"

"Oh, stop — the both of you!" Dee Dee said, feigning embarrassment.

"So what about the bridesmaids dresses? Do you have the sizes for your bridesmaids?"

"My... Bridesmaids..." He hadn't even considered it. After all, there wasn't going to be a wedding, so why bother? Now, with just a few days to go, there could possibly be a ceremony, so maybe he'd better get some bridesmaids lined up. He started to run over the list. Gwen was practically a shoe-in with her love of weddings, then Hayley and Margot. He'd see if Brenda was interested, too. "I'll have the measurements to you by the end of the day."

"Fine," Nora said. She stood up and looked at Dee Dee again, from head to toe. She held out her arms in satisfaction. "You are going to be the most beautiful bride in California, Dee Dee! This will be the highlight of my career!" She leaned in, over the voluminous skirt to hug Dee Dee. "I'll be in touch with you tonight for the measurements, but don't you worry about a thing!" She collected her purse and headed for the door. "I'll handle every little detail! All you need to do is survive the bachelorette party!"

"Party?" Dee Dee said to himself.

With Nora gone, it was just Dee Dee and Tiara in this part of the store. Dee Dee put his hands on his hips. "It seems such a shame for a wedding that's never going to happen," he said.

"What do you mean, Miss Summers?" Tiara asked. "Aren't you going to marry Daddy?"

"Well Daddy... I mean... Roger and I aren't getting married. We only did this for appearances. This was all for the promotion. Since he has that in the bag... There's no reason for the ceremony."

"You mean all of this isn't gonna happen?" Tiara said, despondent.

"I'm afraid not. This is a wedding that will never, ever take place."

CHAPTER 13

Dee Dee dressed for his wedding this morning, unable to understand how this day had come to pass. His mind was a little bleary, after the late night bachelorette party with the girls, but he had recovered enough to know he was going to have the worst and longest hangover of his life today.

“I really have to thank you for doing this, sweetie,” Roger said, coming out of the bathroom.

“Don’t even talk to me. You promised this would never happen!”

“I never made a *promise*, honey. I just said it was a total long shot.”

Dee Dee wasn’t in any mood to argue. “Just make sure I get through this.”

“All you need to do is smile and look good,” Roger said, kissing him on the cheek as he passed by. “You’ll be great.”

“Well, just tell me when you’re getting this promotion.”

“This’ll all be settled by the end of the month.”

“Fine,” Dee Dee sighed. “Gwen is due to pick me up in ten minutes. I’ll see you at the church,” Dee Dee said, kissing Roger on the tip of the nose before he left. He walked down the hallway and knocked on Tiara’s door. “Are you ready to go, Tiara?”

“Just a minute, Miss Summers!” Tiara shouted. Some loud bumps and slamming drawers could be heard behind the door, before it popped open. “All set!”

Dee Dee headed down the stairs and into the living room, checking out the front window for Gwen’s limo. “Not yet,” he said.

“I think this is the last day I’ll have to call you ‘Miss Summers!’” Tiara said.

“What?” Dee Dee was puzzled.

“After today, I’ll call you *mumsy!*”

“Great,” Dee Dee replied, deadpan. As he went over the agenda for the day in his mind, he snacked on a banana in the kitchen. First, they were going to have their hair & nails done at Velosh’s, a quick lunch, dressing, posing for photos, and then the ceremony. After that, the reception at the Fairbanks Hotel ballroom, and then back home. All he kept telling himself was that in 18 hours, things would be back to normal, and he could enjoy a nice drink by the pool. He still hadn’t quite decided on a hairstyle yet, so he was going to show Velosh his final twenty ideas, and let him take it from there. He had decided on a pink pearl polish that had a silver-ish tone to it that would work well with the satin in the dress. Makeup would be fresh and bright, a flowery spring perfume he bought last week was perfect...

“Dee Dee!” Gwen said, tapping him on the shoulder.

“Yes?” Dee Dee replied. He looked around to see he was already in the back of Gwen’s limo with Tiara. He didn’t even remember getting in.

“Don’t worry, I was a bit of a space-case on my wedding days, too,” Gwen said with a smile.

At Velosh’s, he took the scraps of pictures Dee Dee handed him and discreetly tossed them in the trash, then performed his usual magic. He then spent the better part of an hour working on an elaborate braid that would also serve as a bun at the top of Dee Dee’s head. His eyes were lined lightly, his lashes were curled hard for maximum effect, but only given a light touch of mascara for a more natural look. A light pink eye shadow and blush was used for a fresh appearance along with a natural toned lipstick with a wet glossy finish.

Dee Dee was a little bemused to see that Velosh had done Tiara in almost the exact same way, just with Tiara’s slightly blonder hair.

It was then a trip to a hotel, just across the street from the church, where they had rented a few rooms for the day. There, after a quick yogurt, they got on to the process of getting dressed. Nora Greenway was shuttling between there and the church, handling the preparation there and also getting the ballroom set up at the Fairbanks. She was doing an amazing job, as she had everything in place just when it was needed. The dress had just been delivered with final alterations, right when lunch was over. The bridesmaids dresses were also delivered to Gwen and the other girls at the same time.

Gwen stripped down to her underthings as she changed, as did Dee Dee. He was wearing a pair of silky boxer-shorts-style panties for the occasion, not only because he loved the feel, but because he needed to cover himself for this situation. Both dresses had built-in support, so neither needed a bra. As Gwen removed hers, she looked over to her friend. “You can’t tell me you didn’t have work done, Dee Dee,” she said, walking over to him. She picked up with her hand Dee Dee’s left breast and weighed it in her hand. “It feels so natural!”

Dee Dee smiled. “It’s all natural, Gwen. I’m just a late bloomer.”

“In your twenties? No one goes from a B to a D at your age!” Gwen countered.

Dee Dee grabbed one of Gwen’s breasts and returned the favor, feeling a definite extra-firm insert in there. “You on the other hand...”

“I got three good husbands with these pads! The girls just needed a little help and I have no regrets!” Gwen said. She playfully slapped Dee Dee’s hand away.

Dee Dee dusted himself with powder, sprayed on his perfume and then sat and gently pulled up the stay-up sheer white stockings up his legs. Once Gwen had her dress on, she and Tiara helped Dee Dee into his gown. He stepped into the center of the mass of material and then the other two hoisted it up, so he could feed his breasts into the support and slip his arms into the fine lace and satin. He was helped to sit in a chair, where the skirts and layers were

raised so the silky garter could be slipped up his shapely leg. The white satin pumps were perfect for this outfit, and he had gone through dozens of pairs before settling on this particular set. The heel was only three inches, but he was going to have enough trouble balancing in this outfit without going skyscraper with the shoes.

Tiara then helped with the gloves, slipping each on patiently as Dee Dee pulled and tugged them tightly into place. While this was happening, Gwen was pinning the veil into Dee Dee's hair. Then, Dee Dee rose to his feet again to test everything. He swirled his dress this way and that in the mirror, and took a few steps to make sure everything stayed in place. He had to drive himself like an 18-wheel trucker, as the gown and train were slow to steer, and going in reverse was impossible.

Looking at himself in the mirror again, it occurred to him where he had seen this image before. It had been bothering him for a little while, because the combination of hair, makeup, and dress had left the impression he had seen this woman, in this dress, in some fashion. It suddenly hit him who he saw: Cinderella. The large skirt of the gown, the gloves, the slightly bluish tint to the white stain, the blond hair and the even the person inside it reminded him of Cinderella. Was there a parallel? Was he once a pauper and now a princess?

The door burst open and Hayley and Margot arrived, dressed in their baby-blue bridesmaids dresses. "You're stunning, Dee Dee!" Margot said, fighting back a tear.

"Oh my God! Deets! You look incredible!" Hayley added. She tried to hug her friend, but just couldn't maneuver in close enough around the dress.

"You're gorgeous!" Gwen said, dabbing her teary eyes with a handkerchief. "So beautiful!"

Tiara, who had changed into a bridesmaid dress of her own was jumping around, excited. "It's gonna be such a great wedding! This is awesome!" she said as she bounced.

Too soon, Nora appeared and said it was time to make their way into the church. The party of five were escorted across the busy street from the hotel to the church, creating a bit of a scene. The photographer was snapping away, capturing everything for posterity.

Once they arrived at the church, they were escorted into a side room where the final back-stage preparations were made. The photographer had Dee Dee pose for pictures, with the bridesmaids and Tiara, and then some solo shots. Dee Dee was shot on a couch, looking out a window, and in reflection. The priest came and made some standard-issue statements about marriage, God, commitment, blah, blah, blah.

Nora then reappeared and said that it was time for the bridesmaids to take their positions. It took a good five minutes for her to wrestle them away and

literally push them out the door, but once they were gone, Dee Dee found himself alone. With the chatter of the girls no longer present, and the organ music playing, he was aware of the low rumble and murmur from outside. He had been telling himself not to get excited and just get through it, but his curiosity gripped him tight, and he opened up the door to take a look outside. He was more than a little fazed to see every seat in every pew taken. There were hundreds of people there! He had only made up a few dozen invitations, mostly for the girls — how had so many come? Since he recognized most of them as employees from the hospital offices, he suspected that Roger may have added a few (hundred) names to his list.

As for Roger himself, he was standing at the altar waiting. There was something that struck Dee Dee as charming, the way Roger nervously fiddled with his cuffs and collar as he stood there. His Best Man was someone named “Ed-die” who Roger described as an “old college friend.” It was actually the first “friend” Roger had introduced him to that wasn’t an employee of the hospital.

No sooner had Dee Dee closed the door than a knock came from it. It was Dick. Dick Porter. “I’m giving you away,” he explained. He handed over a bouquet of pink flowers.

“That’s sweet of you, Dick,” Dee Dee said, feeling honored to have him perform the duty. He took the flowers.

“I lost a bet last night at the bachelor party,” he explained. “Let’s get a move on.”

With a burst of fanfare, the organist started playing Wagner’s *The Bridal Chorus*. The sound sent a chill right through Dee Dee’s spine. Despite that, he took Dick’s arm and walked to the head of the aisle.

Everyone in the church turned to see the bride, and even as the loud music played, there was a very audible gasp. The sight of Dee Dee in feminine splendor was just breathtaking. A girl who Nora must have hired sprinkled petals in front of him as he walked, and Dick made sure the walk down the aisle was slow and measured. Dee Dee turned and smiled at everyone, even if he didn’t know many of them at all. His feeling of embarrassment from a few minutes ago turned into swelling pride as he reached the steps up to the altar, knowing that all the women in the church were jealous. *Face it, I just love being the center of attention*, he told himself.

Hayley, Margot and Gwen nodded and smiled in silent excitement as Dee Dee slowly navigated the steps, Dick giving him stability by holding his hand. He then stood on one side of the priest as Roger stood on the other.

“My God,” Roger said, upon seeing his bride. “No offense, father.” The priest did not reply.

“Dude,” the Best Man said, in awe. “*Duuude.*”



The priest began the ceremony, but Dee Dee barely heard a word, as he savored the look of reverence on Roger's face. His mouth was just slightly open as his eyes slowly worked up, down, left and right. Dee Dee had tasted the power beautiful women have over men, but this was that feeling multiplied by a thousand. He realized he had Roger completely entranced. He could have asked for anything in the world at that moment and gotten it.

Tiara took the bouquet for the ceremony, and the two stood closer together. "Do you take Roger," the priest said, "to be your wedded husband, to share your life openly, standing with him, in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in hardship and in ease, to cherish and to love, so long as you both shall live?"

Dee Dee made it look good, looking up into Roger's eyes and gave his best impression of a living angel, and said, in the dreamiest voice he could muster, "I do."

The priest turned to Roger. "Do you take Daphne to be your wedded wife, to share your life openly, standing with her, in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in hardship and in ease, to cherish and to love, so long as you both shall live?"

Roger looked down and with the most sincere and sober voice said, "I do."

The priest turned to the bride groom. "May we have the rings please?"

Eddie fumbled the rings a little bit, but quickly produced them from his pocket.

"Roger, place the ring on Daphne's finger, please look at her and repeat after me. I, Roger, promise to love, respect and cherish you, Daphne."

"I, Roger, promise to love and cherish you, Daphne."

"And to be faithful to you, giving you all of myself, all of my tomorrows, all of my life."

"And to be faithful to you, giving you all of myself, all of my tomorrows, all of my life."

The ring was slipped onto the finger of Dee Dee's gloved hand, the satin so thin and skin-tight that the ring could go on all the way. It was as large a stone as Dee Dee had ever seen up close. It was a rectangular shaped diamond that was as wide as his finger and as long at the distance between his knuckles. He had expected extravagance, given the engagement ring, but this was enormous.

It was now Dee Dee's turn. "Daphne, as you place this ring on Roger's hand, please repeat after me. I, Daphne, promise to love, respect and cherish you, Roger."

"I, Daphne, promise to love, respect and cherish you, Roger."

“And to be faithful to you, giving you all of myself, all of my tomorrows, all of my life.”

“And to be faithful to you, giving you all of myself, all of my tomorrows, all of my life.”

Dee Dee slid on a smaller and far more masculine version of his ring onto Roger’s finger.

“Mr. Van der Slyke, you may kiss your bride,” the priest said.

Roger flipped the veil, and he cupped Dee Dee’s face in his hands, engulfing Dee Dee’s lips in a smothering, warm, and deep kiss.

The priest projected his voice loudly to the room. “Ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to present to you, for the very first time, Mr. and Mrs. Van der Slyke. Congratulations!”

The music struck up, the crowd got to their feet, and cheered.

Then, Dee Dee and Roger were finished kissing.



The reception at the Fairbanks was lavish, as the large convention-sized ballroom had been decked out in tasteful fabric and flowers. Live music was being played in the corner and a huge five-story cake was the centerpiece of the room. The wedding party was energetic but under control, as it seemed no one was missing the chance to enjoy the party atmosphere.

The cake was sliced, the bouquet was tossed — to Gwen, naturally — and Dee Dee even survived an awkward dance with Dick. When it came time for the garter, Roger lifted the skirt and was greeted by a loud series of wolf whistles.

“Whistle all you like, she’s mine!” Roger told the crowd.

“Awww,” was the collective reaction.

Dee Dee was able to turn down offers to dance, blaming his dress and a “nervous stomach.” He spent most of the evening at the big table, with a bottle of white wine as a companion. Well, a couple of bottles. Time passed slowly for him, and he spent it trying to hear what people were saying to him over the noise. When he wasn’t idly picking grains of rice from his hair and dress over the next few hours, he was thinking about the new outfits he could try on at his size 4, especially now that he was dressing as “the wife” rather than “the fiancée.” Checking the time, he lamented that he was missing Extra and Entertainment Tonight. Hopefully he had programmed the TiVo correctly.

“Ten minutes, and we’ll be out of here,” Roger came by to say.

Dee Dee could just barely hear him. “Don’t we have to stay and thank people...”

“When you’re the bride & groom, they expect us to leave before they do.” Roger grabbed a bottle of champagne from an ice bucket and handed it to Dee Dee. “For the ride home.”

Dee Dee decided he should at least make the rounds and thank everyone. Margot and Gwen were overjoyed with the wedding and told him he made the most beautiful bride they had ever seen. Hayley was dancing up a storm, and air-kissed her good-bye to him. Tiara was also dancing, and Dee Dee watched as one boy after another cut in to dance with her. Where had she learned to dance as a girl?

Nora, the wedding planner, thanked Dee Dee “for the opportunity” and asked if she could use photos in her portfolio. Of course Dee Dee said yes. He then fought through a slew of people he’d never met before, all congratulating him, and Dee Dee treated them like old friends. The husbands were all clustered around Roger, and even though he didn’t want to, Dee Dee entered into the fray. Predictably, the men all made comments that were suggestive and borderline offensive about Roger’s beautiful bride, but it was all in good fun. Probably.

“Time to go, Honey,” Dee Dee said, grabbing Roger by the hand. He figured he could get out of here faster if he looked like the ‘impatient’ bride. It worked very well. The crowd cheered and whistled as they left the ballroom and headed outside, ultimately finding their way to the back of the limo.

Once inside, finally by themselves, they both took a deep breath. Roger pulled Dee Dee close and kissed him on the cheek. “You were fantastic.”

“This is over, right? There’s no more,” Dee Dee asked to clarify. He laid back in the padded leather seat.

Roger grabbed some glasses from a compartment. “Nothing more left to do but...” He looked around for the bottle, and then looked at Dee Dee. “What about the champagne? You didn’t forget...”

“I didn’t want to look like a lush, darling.” Dee Dee lifted his skirt and hoisted out a sweaty chilled bottle of champagne from where he had been hiding it.

“Ha!” Roger laughed. “Now that’s why I married you.” He popped the cork.



They arrived back at the empty house. The Porters were to drive Tiara home when the party broke up, later.

Making a show of it, Roger grabbed Dee Dee and carried him over the threshold. Dee Dee protested, but was too tired and too drunk to do much

about it. Instead, he started to laugh. Roger continued to carry him all the way up to the master bedroom, where he dropped him onto the bed.

As Roger went into the bathroom, Dee Dee clumsily fought with his dress to get it off his body and tossed it on the floor. He knew he should be more careful with it, and store it properly, but he was way too out of it to even attempt that. Maybe tomorrow. His eyes drifted out into the distance, his head still buzzing too hard to completely let go and fall asleep.

He almost didn't notice when Roger kissed him full on the lips. "I really appreciate everything you've done, Daphne," Roger said, holding his face close. "It's been a great day for me." He went in for another kiss.

That was when Dee Dee felt Roger's hand slip onto his breasts. He wasn't sure if Roger was just being clumsy, but when he started to flick Dee Dee's nipple, it was clear this wasn't an accident.

Dee Dee shuddered at his touch. He hadn't yet realized how the nerves in his body were now so sensitive around his areola. He was realizing it now, though. Months of sexual repression exploded like a crumbling levy. When he should have backed away or pushed Roger off, the jolt of his reactivated sensuality kept him from taking action. Roger interpreted this as an invitation, and he made his move.

He trailed his kisses down the side of Dee Dee's neck as his hands danced along his wife's body. Dee Dee was paralyzed in ecstasy. Only now did he realize his female body was capable of such incredible sexual potency. Only now did he become aware of what a skilled man could make a woman feel and only now did he fully understand that he was no longer an interloper in a woman's world. He was the woman, now.

Only a woman can understand how the passion of sex can override every rational thought, and threaten to drive sanity away for good. Now, Dee Dee knew. He knew that from this moment on, there would be no way to ever forget what a female orgasm felt like. He was cursed to forever pursue this feeling over and over again.

"I love you, Daphne Van der Slyke," Roger whispered. "Please tell me you love me." He licked a nipple.

Dee Dee attempted to speak, but instead a moan of pleasure escaped his lips. "Please say it, Daphne." Roger repeated. His fingers ran over Dee Dee's ribs, tickling them, as his face dove in to kiss right behind the ear.

He had been fighting it for so long. He had felt it so many times over the past few months, and denied himself the reality. It was true, though. It was so deeply, profoundly true. "I love you," Dee Dee said. "I Lo... Lo... Lo... Love you!" he repeated, stuttering the word as another orgasm tore through his body.



No, that was the wrong way to think about it. It was a female body, now. Maybe not in the clinical sense, but for all that Dee Dee could feel, it was. It responded as a female body would. It was shaped like a female body should be. Yes, it was female and Dee Dee loved it. Roger flipped the both of them over, rolling to the center of the bed. There, some instinct told Dee Dee to spread her legs and she felt something big, hot and hard against her body.

The next instinct told her to enjoy it.

CHAPTER 14

Dee Dee woke in her husband's arms the next morning. It felt warm and wonderful, but Nick was nauseous inside. Dee Dee's body may have been female on the outside, but deep in his mind, he was still Nicholas O'Brien. What had he *done*? What had the passion of the moment *cost* him? What *catastrophic* mistake had he made?

Roger rolled up top and whispered, "you look so beautiful."

Just that quickly, all those doubts flew from Dee Dee's mind. A smile from Roger made it all better. "Good morning," she replied with a kiss. When Roger headed for the bathroom, Dee Dee quickly whipped out a hand mirror from the bedside table and made sure her hair and face were presentable. Getting up, she decided she needed a stiff cup of coffee, and selected something to wear downstairs. It was a super-short pink silk kimono she had bought, originally intending to match it with pants, but this morning, she just didn't think that was necessary.

Roger arrived some time later downstairs, shaved and dressed for work. He nuzzled into Dee Dee's neck, which she enjoyed more than seemed possible from simple human contact. Roger skipped coffee and made his apologies. "The big presentation is tonight. I have to go through it with my team until it's perfect," he said. "I gotta go."

He stepped up to Dee Dee and kissed her full on the lips and pulled the belt of the kimono loose to gain access to her body.

"Good morning," Tiara said, arriving for breakfast.

Dee Dee quickly tied her robe back in place. Roger tried to look casual, as he put his mischievous hands in his pockets. "I'll see you later," Roger said. "It's going to be a late night. Frederik doesn't need to cook for me." He grabbed his keys and was out the door.

As Dee Dee sipped her coffee, a glance at Tiara showed the broad, gloating smile on her face. She knew.

"What would you like for breakfast, Tiara?" Dee Dee asked with a smile of her own.

"I'd like some of those *divine* poached eggs and toast of yours — Mumsy," Tiara replied, that grin of hers not fading.

"Delighted," Dee Dee said. "Daughter."

As the water boiled, Dee Dee's mind was free to drift a little. That previous sense of debasement and corruption started to work its way back into her thoughts. She pulled her robe tighter as flashes of what she had done last night

came back. The eggs were done, the toast popped and Dee Dee put it on a plate and brought it to Tiara.

She sat down in one of the chairs, and looked down at the table, waiting for the inevitable bragging she expected from the girl.

“You don’t look so good,” Tiara said, as she ate.

“I don’t want to talk about it. I don’t want to *think* about it.” Dee Dee sipped her coffee. “What’s happening to me?”

Tiara put her fork aside. She lowered her voice to a hushed tone. “He didn’t hurt you, did he?”

The statement took Dee Dee by total surprise. She didn’t expect the focused, concise statement from the slightly dingy Tiara. It sounded more like...

“Chet?” Dee Dee asked.

“It’s just a name... Nick,” Tiara said, before happily tucking into her eggs again. “Name. Nick. Nick name,” Tiara said to herself, and giggled.

“What do you know, Chet?” Dee Dee asked.

“I know my Mumsy and Daddy love each other,” Tiara replied, eating her food.

“I’m going to go shower and change,” Dee Dee said, unsure what just transpired.

“Are you going shopping today?”

“Yes,” Dee Dee replied.

“Can you drop me off at the mall?”

Dee Dee looked closely at Tiara, seeing just the behavior and appearance of a fourteen year old girl. “Of course, Tiara.”

“Thank you!” Tiara replied. “You make awesome eggs.”



“For some years now, we’ve seen our industry crushed under medical insurance,” Roger said to the assembled employees. The room was dark, and Roger couldn’t see any faces, but he didn’t have to. He knew that this was the one opportunity he had to make everything he was working for pay off. “As such, it’s limited our profit potential severely. Being the mercy of self-interested conglomerates who don’t have our interests or our patients’ interest in mind had made this a grim business. Further, it’s driven the uninsured to our emergency rooms and further damaged our profitability. In the last three years alone, we’ve closed fifty percent of our emergency rooms and two hospitals.”

“The logical conclusion, then, is to turn our attention towards businesses that are free from such issues, and can deliver sustained revenue streams.” Roger was dramatically pacing from one side of the room to the other as he spoke. “Year after year, elective surgery continues to see growth. The majority of this is cosmetic surgery, laser eye surgery, non-invasive facial surgery, and other non-critical services. The increase in these vanity and non-critical procedures can be attributed to the growing use of the medical arts as a lifestyle enhancer. Patients see our services as part of the good life, and see us as the people who can deliver happiness.”

“Celebrities are constantly getting cosmetic procedures and using personal training. They also tend to spend long stints in so-called rehab centers. In our celebrity-dominated culture, people now ask themselves a very interesting question: ‘Are these services available for me, or just the rich and famous?’”

“What people seem to want is something in between health care and rehab. They have physical and mental health care needs that don’t fit into conventional medicine. They want to take advantage of all the things modern medical care can do for them in a one-stop environment. It’s not unlike a spa getaway, where multiple therapies and treatments are given to the patients.”

“What our research shows is that people want to have the sort of therapies and treatments that will not simply fix issues they have with their bodies or mind, they want to improve themselves dramatically. Rightly or wrongly, they perceive that medicine can be some sort of magical method to make them look like movie stars and find some sort of inner happiness.”

“We need to meet this perception and build facilities to service these patients. Such a facility would be a high-turnover, production-line clinic, able to do what is normally quite expensive by using our facilities and our professionals at 100 percent of availability. This will cut costs dramatically, and enable us to offer a single price point for our services.”

“This is what we’re going to call ‘Malibu Spas.’ What Malibu Spas will provide, at least from a marketing perspective is a holistic approach to total well-being and improvement. A one-stop shop for cosmetic surgery, beauty treatment, body building and toning, medically enhanced mental health and intensive life-coaching.”

As Roger paused for a moment, he could hear some muffled coughing. Someone’s chair was making a squeaky noise. He glanced over the room, to see what he could, which was just a sea of black.

“Internally, our goals will be to process patients quickly and provide them with an entirely new start on life. Think of it as an extreme make-over for every patient. No medical procedure to be spared in the pursuit of health and beauty. We’ll literally make new people out of them. By providing mental health services, which will give patients a positive self-image, they will embrace cosmetic

procedures and beauty treatments, even if they may not have explicitly consented to have them.”

“Liabilities will be negligible, as we’ll be asking them to sign a contract that will give us the rights to perform whatever procedures we deem necessary, rather than signing off on multiple procedures one after the other. They come to us because we’re the experts, and they will leave the decisions up to us.”

“Profitability will be maximized, because there will be no insurance or red tape to deal with. Our prices will be relatively reasonable, and easily financed. In the long term, we’ll make our most money on word of mouth and repeat customers. They’ll need to go through regular upkeep every few years. A nip there, a tuck there. Plus, the mental health aspects will inevitably decline. They’ll never feel as good as when they leave a Malibu Spa, and they’ll pay willingly to experience it again. We will have a steady, loyal stream of customers.”

Roger could feel the tension in the room. He had just proposed the biggest change the hospital’s business model since it began. “So, what do you think?” Roger said to the room. The light flicked on, and the smiling faces of his staff were revealed. “Is it ready to be shown to the board?”

He was all smiles, knowing that he had his presentation down tight. It was a devastatingly persuasive argument. Yet, he knew he was just about to walk out on a limb and was putting himself at risk of being pushed off at any moment. There was just one more thing he needed to make it a slam-dunk. He just needed one big something to close the deal. A big, *big* something.



As she came out from the shower, Dee Dee looked on the bed where she had left the Merkin Device. It looked miserable and tired. It was just a thin piece of translucent flesh-colored rubber, with a tuft of artificial hair that looked nasty. It was a lie. It was shame. Yet all Dee Dee wanted to do was put it back on. She didn’t like looking at her little man dangling between her legs. It had shrunken and lost shape and definition over time. Now, it seemed like *it* was the fake part of her, that flaccid piece of flesh. Once, it was the pride and focus of the life Nick once led. Not anymore.

Dee Dee squirmed into the device and positioned Nick’s parts back into a comfortable and familiar position. She then chose a pair of panties and slipped them on, still — after all these months — relishing the feel of the fabric on her hairless, smooth body.

As she took a moment to think, she looked around her closet. It was stacked to the rafters with dresses, blouses, skirts, shoes and other feminine garments. They were in wonderfully soft fabrics like silk, rayon, satin, chiffon and even some angora. She nuzzled into the hanging garments, feeling the fabric with

her cheeks. They smelled like her, too. They smelled faintly of her favorite perfume.

It all seemed so strange to her for a moment. It came back in a flash. As a child, she remembered looking at her mothers' clothes with mystery and a twinge of fear. It was an alien world, what women did behind closed doors. Their clothes and makeup were an impenetrable and dark secret no man dared know. Today, Dee Dee didn't feel that way at all. Everything in her closet had meaning to her. She could remember all the things she had bought, why she bought them, and what she wanted to do with them. Her panties and bras were familiar old friends. There were no more feminine mysteries in her life. These were her clothes — her normal, everyday life.

She turned to Roger's increasingly marginalized corner of clothes, and took one of his recently worn dress shirts from the hamper. She put it on and tried to fasten the buttons, giving up because it was difficult buttoning from the other side with her long nails. She then stepped into a pair of his black dress shoes, only to find them comically large on her tiny feet.

Standing in front of the mirror, a melancholy feeling of resignation came over him. The man's shirt hung on him like a child. Worse, was the unintentional appearance of a lovesick girlfriend dressed in her lovers' shirt. She didn't mean to do it, but that's just what she looked like. She sniffed the shirt, just like that same lovesick girl would, just to smell her man's scent.

The odor brought back memories from last night, unexpectedly overpowering memories, that caused Dee Dee to fall back onto the bed for support. Her heart started to race a little. Her skin started to sweat. She was breathing harder and harder, and rolled around in the still-unmade bed as she tried to understand what was happening. When the orgasm hit, she suddenly understood. The shock and the peak of her excitement hit her at the same time, and she screamed into a pillow with a mixture of pleasure and anguish.



She understood. She understood what she was, now.

Getting to her feet, she looked for a suitcase. She needed to pack. This had gone too far and she needed to leave. She needed to get as far away from this as possible.



Dee Dee pulled up at the curb in front of Dempsey's bar. It hadn't changed one atom since she had last been here. It still looked like a fire hazard. Dee Dee had decided to stop by on her way home. She hadn't been able to find any suitcases for packing up her things, and had to go buy some. With these impulses of escape and a return to her old life in her mind, she felt compelled to come here. Stepping inside, the room went quiet for a moment when Dee Dee appeared. The murmur of the chatting patrons then picked up again slowly.

"Miss?" Said the bartender. "Can I help you? Are you lost?"

"Oh, hi Carl," Dee Dee replied with a smile. "Long time no see."

"Uh... Yeah," the bartender replied. His face then twisted and strained and he desperately tried to remember where in the world he had met this person before. "Oh, Matt's here!" Dee Dee said, spotting someone sitting in a booth.

"Good to see you, Carl," she said, as she walked away.

A large corner booth with four guys talking and drinking was Dee Dee's destination. The guys quickly interrupted whatever globally imperative discussion they were having to notice Dee Dee's approach.

"Hi, Matt," Dee Dee said to her old friend and drinking buddy.

"Uh, hey," Matt replied, unsure why this woman was speaking to him, and how she knew his name.

Dee Dee didn't initially understand his confusion. But she caught on. "Oh, yeah. I guess we haven't, um... Met... Before."

"I'd remember that, I'm sure," Matt replied.

"I'm a friend of... Nick's. Could I talk to you... If that's okay?"

"Nick?" Matt replied with uncertainty. "Do I know a Nick?"

That was a crushing comment, but Dee Dee kept smiling. "You know, Nick. From Saturday nights at the theater."

"Sasha's boyfriend!" Matt replied, the name finally registering. "Oh, yeah. I haven't seen Nick in... Forever. What did you want to talk about?"

"Well... Do you mind if we could grab a table? I don't want to interrupt you guys."

"No interruption..." Said one of the other three guys seated in the booth.

Matt quickly whapped the guy's shoulder with the back of his hand. "Sure. We'll get a table."

The guys shuffled around the booth to let Matt out, and he followed Dee Dee's swaying ass to a table far enough away so they couldn't be heard.

"So, you know Nick?" Matt said as he slid into the seat. "He's not your boyfriend, is he?"

"What?" Dee Dee said. "No. No. He's an old friend. I've known him... For almost all my life."

"Ah. So... What did you want to talk about?"

"Well, I haven't seen Nick... For a while." The interaction with Matt was unsettling. Dee Dee wanted to just relax and start talking about... Things... Sports or whatever, but she didn't even know where to start. All he felt prepared to discuss was fashion and hairstyles. Why was this so difficult all of the sudden?

"I haven't seen him around here for... Jeez, about a year." Matt's eyes would occasionally glance upwards, but they seemed to be hovering around Dee Dee's chest, for some reason.

The whole way Matt was talking to Dee Dee was odd. He was reserved, but had a look in his evaluating eyes that was trying to do the talking for him. It wasn't how Dee Dee remembered Matt behaving at all. "I was in town, and I was trying to see if anyone knew where he was," Dee Dee said. She had to make up some excuse for dragging Matt from his friends, and this seemed like the best way to do it. She wanted to just kick the topic aside, though, and see if she had any way of talking to him, man-to-man.

"Well, I don't even know what his deal is. I haven't heard from Sasha, either. I guess she's still in Europe," Matt said, his eyes still looking shifty.

Dee Dee had all but given up on Sasha. The number Roger had gotten her wasn't connected, and their apartment had been rented out. Maybe she'd try and get in contact with her parents, but that was going to be awkward. "You haven't heard from either of them?"

"No. Not a thing," Matt said. "Shame, too. They missed the last night at the Pacific."

"They closed down the show?"

"They closed down the theater. It needed a seismic retrofit, and they couldn't afford it. So it closed for good about three months ago."

"Oh, no!" Dee Dee said, getting a little emotional.

"Yeah, a couple of the guys said they'd try and rent another theater, but I haven't heard from them in a while. I really should shoot them an email n' see what's up."

"That's awful!"

“You heard about our little show?”

“Well, Nick used to talk about it. He really enjoyed those days.”

“Yeah. But what are you gonna do? Time marches on.”

“Oh, that’s so sad,” Dee Dee said, looking down at her hands.

“Let me get you something. Hey, Carl!”

“No, you really don’t...”

“Another beer for me, and for the little lady a...”

“I’m driving.”

“A Shirley Temple for...”

“Um, Daphne.”

“For Daphne.”

“Look, I don’t want you to go to any trouble...”

“That’s not trouble. I can’t let a nice lady just sit here, without a drink.”

“Well, thank you.” Dee Dee adjusted her skirt by hopping in her seat and tugging the hem. “So... I...”

“By the way, How’d you recognize me, Daphne?”

“Oh, Nick sent me pictures from time to time of you guys.”

“Hopefully we were behaving ourselves. What do you do for a living?”

“Me?” Dee Dee blurted. She was not prepared for the conversation to turn to her. “I’m just a housewife, I suppose.”

“Married?” Matt asked.

“Just married.”

“What does your husband do?”

“He’s in medicine.”

“Figures. That’s where the money is. I bet you’re used to much better places than a hole in the wall like this.”

“Pardon?”

“Well, I mean, you’re definitely the best looking woman who’s walked in here for a while.”

“Oh, it’s not that bad.”

“Trust me. You’re much too nice to be hanging out in this dive.”

Carl silently interrupted with the drinks. He placed a beer bottle, glass and napkin in front of Matt and a tall, sparkling pink drink with a cherry in front of Dee Dee. He then added a bowl of popcorn and some extra napkins.

Dee Dee smiled back appreciatively. “Thank you!” she sung.

As Carl exited, Matt poured his beer. “See? Even Carl likes you. And that’s not easy.”

Dee Dee’s curiosity about the show prompted her next question. “So what do you guys do for fun?” She asked. As soon as she said it, she realized how it sounded and blushed. “I mean, now that the show has closed down. What do you guys do on Saturday nights, now? That’s what I meant.”

“Well...” There were those shifty eyes from Matt again. “We just find stuff to do. Nothing special. Sometimes I just stay home with the girlfriend.”

“You have a girlfriend!” Dee Dee remembered Matt as being the habitual bachelor-type. “How wonderful for you!”

“Sometimes. We’re going through a little bit of a rough patch right now.”

Instinctively, Dee Dee placed her hand on Matt’s. “I’m so sorry!” She wanted to let him know she felt for him. “Relationships can be tough.”

“You’re nice to say so. You have a very lucky husband.”

“I guess we’re going through a rough time, too. I completely understand how it is.”

“What? How could any guy treat you like that?” Matt said, taking another drink. “If you were my girlfriend, I’d treat you like a queen.”

“That’s sweet of you, Matt. But it’s a little bit deeper than that. I don’t know what’s going to happen...” Dee Dee said, slightly slumping. She truly didn’t know what the future held.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Matt asked.

“Not really. It’s... Complicated.” Dee Dee smiled warmly back at Matt. He really was a nice guy. “You’re wonderful to ask. Your girlfriend doesn’t know what she’s got.”

“You really think so?”

Dee Dee reached out again to touch Matt’s hand. It was just a natural thing for her to do, when she talked to people, now. “Of course. All a girl really wants is to have her boyfriend listen to her. You’re a great listener.”

“Thanks,” Matt replied. “Where on Earth were you when I was unattached? You’re incredible.”

Dee Dee blushed again. “You really think so?”

“Ab-so-fuckin’-lute-ly,” Matt said. “I mean, you’re the most beautiful woman I think I’ve ever seen. That smile of yours is amazing.” Obviously, the beers Matt had been consuming were lowering his inhibitions a little bit. “The hair, the clothes... I mean, you literally look like a million bucks.”

“Please, Matt, you’re embarrassing me,” Dee Dee said, bashfully, meaning she didn’t want him to stop.

“If I had met you at any time in my life I’d have robbed a fuckin’ bank to buy you whatever you wanted. A lot of girls look great, others have a fantastic personality. You never find both in the same person. But you must have heard this all before...”

“Not as often as you might think...” Dee Dee said, looking off to the side for a moment. When she looked back, she noticed Matt’s eyes were going to her chest again. In the deep v-neck of her buttoned silk blouse, were the objects of his attention. Dee Dee’s D-cup breasts. That and the white, milky cleavage in between them. She sat up a little straighter.

“I mean, I never meet girls like you.”

Dee plucked the cherry from her drink and placed it in between her teeth, before sucking it off the stem. The red shiny fruit glistened in between her matching red lips. She took one quick bite and then swallowed it down, discreetly putting the pit in her napkin. That seemed to divert Matt’s attention from her breasts.

“So tell me about your girlfriend,” Dee Dee asked. “Where’s she from, where did you meet?” Dee Dee wondered about her. Did she dress nicely for him? Did she wear those cheap denim skirts to show off her legs? Did she wear some dishrag halter top to attract his attention?

“My girlfriend?” Matt replied, absently, before shaking himself out of his reverie. “Well, I met her at the community college where I do the groundskeeping.”

Dee Dee tried to picture what the girl looked like. She probably had deep brown chestnut hair. She kept it braided in a pigtail down the back of her neck. She could picture her plain but attractive face.

“What does she do?” Dee Dee asked.

“She’s still going to school. And she works nights at a Burger King.”

Dee Dee saw a girl, slightly overweight. Big in the hips, but still cute. She’d get off of work late, dressed in her uniform, drips and drops of grease on it. Matt would pull up and she’d jump in the passenger door. She’d be exhausted and smelled of French fries. But she’d still muster up enough strength to kiss Matt on the cheek. Lonely all day long, he’d twist himself to kiss her full on the mouth.

As they drove down the dark, empty streets in their tiny, broken-down car, Matt wouldn’t be able to wait. He’d pull over in some badly-lit parking lot and flop over to smother her with his body.

“She sounds nice,” Dee Dee said. “How long have you been together?”

“Six months.”

In the car, Matt would work his hands under her shirt and raise it up so he could feel her big, fatty breasts. He’d unbutton her pants and slide them down,

revealing her cheap, thin panties with little flowers printed on them. He'd struggle to pull them down so he could feel her smooth crotch. She kept it shaven, just for him. It would all be a mad rush of fumbling passion, as they desperately wanted a moment of satisfaction from an unsatisfactory life.

"Do you love her?"

Matt pursed his lips. "I guess so."

"I bet she loves you," Dee Dee said, running her finger around the wet rim of her drink. "Or at least she needs you. Sometimes girls keep that sort of thing to themselves."

"She does a damn good job of that."

"Oh, Matt!" Dee Dee giggled. "A woman needs a man. Even if they play it cool." Dee Dee looked over Matt, and imagined what his girlfriend saw in him. He had a big, hairy chest, or so he remembered from long ago, and he had a great, thick, head of hair to run her fingers through. What was he like to live with? Dee Dee wondered. Would he tell her what to do? Would he tell her how he liked it? No, Matt was too passive when it came to women. That was why he never could get a decent girlfriend. "You just need to tell her what you want. Be more assertive," Dee Dee said. "And don't let her tell you she doesn't need you. She does."

"Can I buy you another drink, Daphne?" Matt asked.

Dee Dee cocked her head to the side, smiling coquettishly. "Why don't you go visit her, Matt. I know she wants to see you."

"Are you sure?"

"I think she's a very lucky girl. Sooner or later, she'll realize it!" This time, when she put her hand on Matt's, she knew exactly what she was doing. She clutched it for a few seconds, and let herself really feel his warmth, the blood running through him and the beat of his heart. "I gotta go," she said.

"Right now?"

"Yeah. Right now." Dee Dee slid out of the seat and stood, grabbing her purse and placing the strap on her shoulder. "Promise me you'll go talk to her."

"Sure."

"I mean it! Promise me!" Dee Dee demanded, in a good-natured way.

"I promise, Daphne."

Dee Dee took a step forward and pressed herself against Matt, as she picked a piece of lint from his shirt. "When you stick your fingers in her," she whispered into Matt's ear, "that'll be me screaming." She then turned away and swished her tightly-skirted butt out of the bar, her heels clacking on the wood floor.

She returned to her car and sat in the plush leather seat, both hands on the steering wheel as she returned her breathing to normal levels. "Fuck!" She said

to herself. “You *stupid* bimbo!” That was the last test. She had gone into that bar to see what he could resurrect from Nick’s old life. There was nothing left. He had somehow destroyed his past completely, and wasn’t even smart enough to keep on topic about it. She wanted to ask Matt everything she could about Nick, and even tell him that Nick was moving back into the neighborhood. But instead, she’d lost her head. Like some sort of... Woman. She’d gotten so scatterbrained she couldn’t keep from thinking about clothes and sex. She was outright flirting with him! It was time to get back to Roger’s place and pack up. This was going to come to an end.



“I got the promotion!” Roger said, hugging Dee Dee and twirling her around. She had just walked in through the front door and barely had gone three feet before Roger came at her, as ebullient and emotional as she’d ever seen him. He spun Dee Dee around twice before setting her down and then dancing a little jig.

“What?” Dee Dee said, desperately trying to catch up with what Roger was talking about. “The what?”

“They loved the presentation!” Roger grasped Dee Dee by the shoulders. “I’m going to be the next CEO of St. McGivens! Me! I got the job!”

“But... You did? How? I thought they were going to...” Dee Dee was also trying to stay on her feet, being slightly dizzy.

“It all paid off! It was all worth it!” Roger declared. He walked over to a bottle of champagne he had already uncorked and poured a glass. He then started to hand it over to Dee Dee. “It was a long long way...” He then looked at the glass he was handing to Dee Dee and then drank it himself. “Screw it. Give me your shoe.”

“What?”

“Shoe!” Roger repeated.

Dee Dee stepped out of her pumps and handed over one of them. Roger quickly grabbed it, filled it with champagne and drank from it. “I’ve always wanted to do that!” he said.

“You’re out of your mind!” Dee Dee said, her voice breaking into laughter. “You’re nuts!”

Finishing up the champagne from Dee Dee’s shoe, he wiped his mouth with his sleeve and tossed the shoe aside. “That... Tasted horrible.”

“Ha!” Dee Dee said, unable to keep from feeling just as elated as Roger.

Roger swept Dee Dee into his arms and kissed her, clumsily. “I can’t thank you enough. It’s been tough, but it’s... I owe you so much.” He kissed her again. “I almost forgot! I bought you something to celebrate!”

Running to a long white box resting on the sofa, Roger grabbed it, tossed the lid off and pulled out its’ contents.

“Is that a...” Dee Dee started to ask. “Mink coat!” Roger finished for her. “Try it on!”

Roger started to drape it around her shoulders. “I didn’t even think they made these anymore...” Dee Dee said. “Is it real?”

“One hundred percent real mink fur. How does it feel?”

“Real fur? Isn’t that... Oh, it is warm.”

“Don’t worry about it. Real fur is worth the trouble.”

Dee Dee ran her hands along the coat. “It’s so soft!” She said. “It’s amazing! No wonder women used to love these! I could wear this all day long! But the animals...”

“I’m sure they aren’t cruel. Natural deaths and all that. Feel the real silk lining.”

Dee Dee did. “Ooooooo!” she said, her face lighting up with excitement.

“Do you like it?”

“Oh, Roger, I love it!” Dee Dee said, impulsively she threw her arms around Roger and kissed him with unexpected passion. “Thank you! But you really shouldn’t...”

“Don’t worry. We can afford it. I could buy you one every day of the year!”

“Every day?” Dee Dee was still tickling her hands with the downy soft feel of the fur. She had never felt anything even close to it. She loved soft fabrics so much. This must have been the *ultimate* in softness.

“The CEO makes 57 million a year, baby!” Roger said. “Even more in stock options!”

“Oh my *God!* You can’t be serious!”



“Now you know why I wanted this job!”

“We’re rich!” Dee Dee exclaimed. “Well, more rich than we were.” She thought about it further. “Well, you are, anyway.”

“Don’t be like that!” Roger said, resting his hand on Dee Dee’s shoulder. “This is something we both worked for. I can make you happier than you’ve ever dreamed, Dee Dee.”

Dee Dee pushed Roger away, and turned her back to him. “Don’t treat me like that, Roger.”

“Darling, I’m not...”

“Don’t call me darling!” Dee Dee spat.

Roger kept his distance. He waited a respectful moment before speaking. “You’re closer to me than anyone in my life. I really do think of you as a part of my family, Dee Dee. It’s up to you as to what you want to do. I hope you’ll stay here as long as you like.”

Dee Dee turned to look at him, over her shoulder. “Do you *want* me to stay, Roger?”

“I just said I did.”

“That’s not what I mean, and you know it!”

Roger approached and stood in front of her, looking down as she avoided eye contact. He placed his hand under her chin and turned her towards him. “I can’t read your mind, Dee Dee. God knows I’d love to know what you’re thinking.”

“That’s not true. You... Always know what I’m thinking... We’ll... Talk about this later,” Dee Dee said, her voice weak and uncertain.

Roger leaned in, and rested his forehead against Dee Dee’s. “I said I love you, and I meant it.”

Dee Dee’s legs wobbled as she heard him speak. His touch made her feel fluttery inside. His deep and powerful voice was hypnotic.

“I don’t *need* you to be happy,” Dee Dee said.

Roger smiled. “I don’t believe you.”

“Neither do I,” she said, and wrapped her lips around his.

CHAPTER 15

Dee Dee stirred on the bed, wearing her new mink coat — and nothing else. She heard the shower running and a jolly little whistle coming from inside. Reluctantly, she got up and went downstairs. It was about six AM, and Tiara was still asleep, so the house was quiet.

She walked through the living room, which was just dimly lit by the rising sun, and stopped at the small cabinet beside the door. She opened the drawer and picked her little pink cell phone out.

“I noticed you left that here yesterday,” Roger said, coming down the stairs in boxers and a dress shirt. “It’s not like you to forget your phone.”

Dee Dee dropped it into the pocket of her coat. “I’ve been kind of an airhead lately,” she said with a grin.

Dee Dee couldn’t have known it, but the white mink coat she was wearing wasn’t just a gift — it was a trigger. A trigger that activated months and months of conditioning Dr. Pfelter had left inside her mind. Knowing that once Roger had gotten his promotion, he needed to find a way to keep Dee Dee from leaving him. All those messages were now playing back in Dee Dee’s mind.

“You also had a 23-piece set of luggage delivered yesterday.” He pointed to a pile of leather bags over in the corner. “Were you planning on a trip?”

“You know, I was thinking we should hire a maid,” Dee Dee said, blatantly avoiding the question. “And maybe an assistant. My calendar is getting pretty complicated.”

“I’ll hire anyone you want, baby.”

Dee Dee bit her lip. She liked being called ‘baby.’ She removed her coat and let it fall to the floor. “There’s something about being rich that agrees with me,” she said.

“Get used to it,” Roger replied, hugging her nude body close. “Though I wouldn’t mind having you spend me into the poor house.”

“Careful what you wish for,” she said.

“I already have what I wished for,” he answered.

“Well, I never wished for any of this,” Dee Dee said as she tickled her long fingernail along Roger’s back. “Does that mean I have to give it back?” She then kissed Roger’s lower lip.

Roger brushed the hair from her forehead to get a better look at his bride. “You’re a tease, you know that?”

“Me? I’m just... A loving Beverly Hills housewife, darling,” she said. She was unaware of it, but that was exactly what the hypnotic messages were telling her. Dee Dee Van der Slyke had already embraced her new life, and slowly she

would become in body and soul exactly what she was describing — exactly as Roger wanted her.



Dee Dee was grateful for the busy morning. There was no opportunity to be judged by her so-called daughter. Tiara was a basket case, scurrying around and finding something new to panic about every minute or two. She was on edge, this being the very first day of school for her.

She was going to be an 8th grader at West Trinity Preparatory School, a co-ed college prep school, located just a few miles away. The school had a total enrollment of only eighty-five, from grades six through twelve, and was considered to be very exclusive. Or, at the very least, they charged tuition like they were very exclusive. They had two schools of students, a middle school and an upper school, and Tiara would be in the middle school.

Going back to school as a child didn't seem to phase Tiara much, as she was confident her high school education would get her through the classes. Finding clothes wasn't an issue, because the school had a strict uniform dress code, which didn't allow any options. What had worried her were two things — socializing with girls her assumed age, and even worse, choosing a great hairstyle.

“It has to be perfect!” Tiara whined to Dee Dee.

Dee Dee was trying to work on Tiara's hair as they were positioned in front of Tiara's vanity mirror. “Of course, sweetie,” Dee Dee said, with pins in her mouth. She really didn't want to be fussing with Tiara's hair, but the young girl had been insistent, and even threw a mini-tantrum that compelled Dee Dee to help. After all, she did have more experience with styling women's hair. “Now, sit still!”

She spray-gelled and blow-dried Tiara's hair straight, and then curled from the top of her hair down with an iron. From the back of the head, she was taking small sections of curls and pinning them up towards the scalp. That created huge amounts of body on the head from the ears down. It mitigated Tiara's square face with a round style. Dee Dee combed Tiara's bangs straight, but carefully arranged it with a little wax to keep them that way. At the sides, the curls were tight and Dee Dee used a little extra hairspray to keep them looking sharp and crisp.

“I hate it!” Tiara screamed, looking at her hair.

“You only have five minutes before we leave, so it's that or nothing!” Dee Dee declared.

Tiara looked at herself in the mirror turning her head back and forth. “I guess it's okay,” she said. “It makes my hair look so *short*.”

“So tomorrow, you’ll leave it long. Think how jealous the girls will be.”

“I just hope the boys will like it,” Tiara said, fluffing the sides.

Tiara drove her to the school, a short trip, but an annoying one. “I wish I had someone to do this for me,” she said to herself. She didn’t want to have to wake up early and drive Tiara every day. That would be intolerable.

She let Tiara out at the front entrance, and then watched as the young girl nervously approached the door, as others who knew what to do and where to go whizzed past her. Dee Dee noticed that she had left her bag behind, so she sighed and grabbed it. “Tiara!” she yelled out the window. “Your bag!” But she didn’t hear. So she got out of the car and headed for her. Dee Dee realized that she was playing the part of a mother, seeing after her daughter, and decided to have some fun with it.

“Tiara! My precious!” She yelled, loud enough for all the other students to hear. “You forgot your bag, sweetie plum!” She skittered up to a shocked Tiara, and hugged her. Well, squeezed the life out of her, was more like it. “Oh, I’m going to miss you, sweet pea!” She kissed Tiara several times on the cheek. “Now be a big girl for Mother!”

“Yes... *Whatever...*” Tiara grumbled.

Dee Dee pinched her cheek. “That’s my brave little princess!”

“Good-bye!” Tiara emphasized, adding, “Ugh!”

Dee Dee laughed all the way home in the car. Her classmates would be teasing her weeks. That would teach her to disrespect her hairstyling skills.



Returning to the empty house, Dee Dee finally had some time to herself. She deposited her purse at the door and retrieved her phone. “Darling,” she said, as she got her husband on the line, “We simply *must* hire a chauffeur.” Dee Dee felt a chill on her skin and walked upstairs as she talked. “I’m *not* driving your daughter to school every morning. I can’t get up this early every day. Especially after a night of fund-raising.” ‘Fund raising’ being a euphemism for drinking cocktails at a party deep into the night.

“And I was perfectly serious about an assistant for my social obligations. I’m sick to death of keeping my calendar straight. It’s absolutely *draining*.”

As she listened to Roger’s explanation as to why this would all take time and money he didn’t yet have, Dee Dee slipped into her fur coat. It was so warm, and so wonderful. It seemed to give her the strength to stand her ground.

“Sweetie, I certainly understand it will be *difficult*, but not *impossible*. Won’t you do it for your little Dee Dee? Besides, you already promised.”

“Wonderful!” Dee Dee replied when she got his reluctant approval. “And of course a maid, a butler, and a gardener are necessities we simply cannot live without. I’ll contact an agency immediately.”

“Yes!” Dee Dee said, after listening to Roger’s loud objections. “All of them, darling! You said it yourself, you can afford it! Oh, and a pool attendant. Leave it all to me!”

She had that man wrapped around her little finger — and she was at a disadvantage. Other girls had a pussy to control their husbands with.

“Imagine what I could do if I had my own,” she mused as she looked at herself in the mirror. She put her hands on her stomach. “I’m such a fat cow,” she said to her slender 120-pound reflection. “You’ll be lucky to keep Roger at this rate, Dee Dee. Time to go on a diet!”

CHAPTER 16

“Would you like to introduce yourself to the class?” The teacher asked Tiara. This was the third class where she had been asked to do this, and it wasn’t getting easier. Tiara stood up from her desk, and cautiously walked to the front of the room. She was the tallest of her classmates, and couldn’t have felt more awkward. No, she wasn’t *much* taller than some of the other girls, but she had already overheard the term “bean pole” more than once today.

She was dressed exactly like the girls did at East Trinity, in black loafers, knee-high black socks, and a pleated tartan skirt which allowed a few inches of her knees to be exposed. That was matched to the school blazer over a white cotton blouse. The ornate gold East Trinity crest was embroidered on the pocket of her blazer.

Deep breath. “Hi. My name is Tiara Antoinette Van der Slyke,” she announced in a halting and quiet voice. “I’m fourteen years old. I like to shop and make lots of friends, and I was born here in Beverly Hills and my Daddy just got married.”

The response was silence, and Tiara awkwardly smiled and hung her head. Every single eye in the room was on her. She just then slinked back to her seat and sat with her hands in her lap. The instructor went on with the usual first-day-of-class rituals of trying to describe what type of teacher they were, what behavior they would not stand for, hall pass rules, tardiness, etcetera, etcetera. Tiara heard almost none of it. This day was turning out to be a disaster, and she was starting to truly worry. The one thing that got her excited about being in school was the chance to meet friends. Well, by friends, she meant boys.

The former 23-year old man was beyond trying to understand what had happened to him, because his body and mind were so focused on young boys it was impossible to understand. It was like every cell in her body yearned for the attention of a cute guy. She was sure she was still kind of attracted to girls, but her new taste was overwhelming the old impulses.

The problem for her today was that the only attention she was getting was for being tall and gawky. When she walked through the hallway, she could see the couples. Dreamy boys talking to stupid sluts all over the place. No one even bothered trying to talk to her on her first day. Not a single one. Wasn’t she pretty enough? Her Daddy told her she was very pretty — all the time! Those girls from the clinic thought she was pretty. Why wasn’t she able to attract any boys?

Was it possible? Was it possible that they saw though everything and knew what a fake she was? Tiara was pained with anguish.

“Tiara!” The teacher snapped. “Are you paying attention?”

“Yes ma’am!” Tiara blurted. Startled, she knocked her pencils and pens to the floor, causing the kids to laugh at her. She felt humiliated. “No one understands me,” she mumbled to herself.

She silently sat through the rest of the class, and the one after, that before it was finally time for lunch. The lunch room at East Trinity wasn’t like a regular school lunch room. There were four large oak dining tables with china and silverware set out for the students. Once seated, they were personally served by a small staff of waiters.

The four tables were broken down informally by grade. One table was for the youngest, the second for students up to the eighth grade, the third for younger upper school students and then the last for the upperclass seniors. Once told how things worked by one of the waiters, Tiara had to hunt for a seat. She was the last to arrive, and food was already being served. She spotted the table that some of her classmates were at, and saw an empty seat that had she could use.

“Hey wait!” said one of the students at the senior table. “You’re new, right?”

Tiara looked at the person asking the question, a boy who must have been seventeen. A cute boy. “Yes.”

“Well, we sit according to seniority. You want to sit at this table,” the boy said. “Here, next to me!”

“Uh, but I...” Tiara started to say.

“Quick!” the boy insisted. “If you’re not seated by the time they start to serve, you get a demerit!”

Tiara looked around to see if there was any attention being paid to her, if anyone was stopping her. She saw nothing.

“C’mon!” The boy told her. With a sinking feeling that she was making her situation worse, she took the seat next to the senior boy. “I haven’t seen you in any of my classes,” he said. “It’s a small school. I’m sure we’ll have something together later today. My name is Tad, by the way.”

“Hi, Tad,” Tiara replied, still looking around for anyone who might be watching. “Oh, I’m Tiara.”

“Good to meet you, Tiara,” Tad replied with a grin. His eyes quickly glanced down at Tiara’s breasts. That’s when it struck her as to what was happening. He thought she was a senior! That’s why she was asked to sit at this table. “I think we have salmon today.”

“To eat?” Tiara asked. Which, she quickly realized, was quite possibly the dumbest thing she could have said. She had finally had a nice guy talk to her and she was screwing it up. She wasn’t nervous, was she? “Well, I mean, of course to eat. I know you eat salmon, I mean, what else would you do with it?”

“Right,” Tad replied.

Shut up! She yelled inside her mind. Shut up shut up shut up!

Fortunately, lunch was then served which was a salmon fillet with a small salad. Tiara earnestly started to eat, keeping her from having to talk. She just smiled occasionally, as she took tiny bites.

“You’ve seen people eat before?” Tad asked.

Tiara realized she was just staring at him as he chewed. “Uh, yeah,” she tried to fabricate a reason for her behavior. “You have... I did... The...” She couldn’t come up with a reason. “Sorry.”

Lunch went quietly after that, and when the students were done, they were served some fruit drizzled with chocolate for dessert. “I’ll see you around,” Tad said as he scooted himself out from the table. Tiara then smiled back, afraid to speak. Tad leaned back down to whisper in her ear. “You have lettuce in your teeth,” he said. Tiara’s face went beet red and she immediately covered her face with her napkin.



When the next class began, Tiara once more was asked to introduce herself to the class. Only this time, it felt a little different. The whispering was louder now, the staring and pointing was obvious. She took her seat once she was done and then stared at her desk.

“What did he *say* to you?” A girl whispered.

Tiara looked up, not quite believing someone was actually talking to her. It was another girl, dark hair and glasses, who was seated behind her.

“What?” Tiara whispered back.

“That was Tad Pinnegar! Student council president!” Another girl to Tiara’s left chimed in. “His father owns half of General Motors!”

“*Who?*” Tiara replied, befuddled.

“He asked you to sit with him!” the girl behind said, in awe.

Tiara was beginning to think that this Tad boy may have been kind of a big thing around these parts. “So?”

“That’s, like, a *major* deal!” The girl to his left said. “What did he say to you that made you blush?”

“Tell us!” the other girl asked.

With some sense that he hadn’t been born with, Tiara was enlightened to a uniquely feminine aspect of life at that moment: she was going to act dumb. “What?”

“C’mon, Talara!”

“Tiara!” She corrected. “Tiara Van der Slyke.”

“Whatever!” The girl from the glasses said. “What did he say?”

“He said his name was Tad,” Tiara informed them.

“Girls!” The teacher called from the front of the room. “Shush!”

When the class ended, Tiara had spent forty minutes devising a strategy to deal with the situation. It was her one shot at getting noticed, her one shot at popularity. She was going to ride it all the way. To do this, she was going to have to use a new strategy.

“I saw you talking to Tad at lunch,” a nice, cute boy said to Tiara in the hall. “What was that all about?”

“Oh my goodness!” Tiara said in a voice much higher than normal. “Can’t a girl have some privacy?” She pushed him in the shoulder, softly.

“Okay, fine...” the boy replied, with a grin. “My name is Chip, by the way.”

“My name is Tiara!” Tiara said, energetically. “Um, do you know where room... 107 is? You see, I’m new here, and I could use someone to show a poor little thing like me where things are.” A revelation came to Tiara as she sat in her class, remembering how attracted he was to girls who looked a little lost, a little vulnerable and were just a little bit dim. That, after all, was why Tad had been so chivalrous. She had been the damsel in distress. Tiara could use that.

“Sure,” the boy said, a look of interest on his face. “I can show you.”

“Could you? I have the most awful feeling that I’m lost!”

“Are you sure you’re fourteen?”

“Of course!” Tiara replied, “Chip...” She looked into his eyes and let her expression go slack in a display of unguarded naiveté.

“Do you have a boyfriend, Tiara?” He asked.

“Me?” she squeaked in wide-eyed innocence.



It wasn’t long before Dee Dee found herself in charge of her own staff. There were now eight employees of the Van Der Slyke household, all reporting to her. Not that she was a particularly involved boss, however. Her days were spent either shopping or lounging by the pool, and her nights in a gown in a ballroom or theater.

At first, she was quite aware of how her behavior had changed, self-consciously taking on the appearance of a privileged socialite wife. Night after night of picking dresses, collecting invitations, eating fine food and drinking far too many cocktails had blurred the lines between her performance and her reality.

“Frederik?” Dee Dee called as she strolled into the kitchen, affixing an earring. She was in a deep, deep plunging white halter top with a leopard-print micro-miniskirt that showed off her robust tan, perfect breasts and incredible legs.

“Yes, Mrs. Van der Slyke?” The chef replied, working on some pastries, flour up to his forearms.

“It will be just Tiara tonight,” she said. “Roger and I have a downtown premiere.”

“Yes, Mrs. Van der Slyke.”

“And don’t let her talk you into cake for dinner again,” Dee Dee said as she turned to exit. “She’s been looking a little chubby lately. If I can get my weight down, so can she.”

“Yes, Mrs. Van der Slyke.”

Dee Dee had come down to 105 pounds, although she was still convinced a few more wouldn’t hurt. Jacob, her trainer, had recommended she stop at 110, but she insisted, saying her “competition” wouldn’t be satisfied with 110. “My Roger has girls throwing themselves at him,” she continued, “and I’m not going to risk losing him to the next pretty young thing that traipses along into his path.”

Of course, Dee Dee was kidding... Although she wasn’t smiling when she said it.

Fact was, without Roger, where was she going to go? He was surrounded by *real* women all day, who could satisfy him much better than she could. No, Dee Dee was going to have to ensure he stayed interested.

“Maddie!” She called out into the living room.

A short, black-uniformed girl came dashing into the room, her short skirt fluttering as she did. “Yes, Mrs. Van der Slyke?” She responded, breathlessly. It was only her first week as the family maid, and she was still getting used to the demands of the position.

“Tiara should be home by five, and I’m putting it on you to make sure she doesn’t get into any mischief!” Dee Dee said. “No boys, no phone after eight, bed at nine, and no excuses!”

“Yes, Mrs. Van der Slyke!” She said. “Sorry about last time.”

“Just don’t let it happen again, and it won’t be a problem,” Dee Dee said with a smile. “I know she’s a handful, but you’ll be fine,” she added. She liked Maddie. She saw a lot of herself in the young girl, and patted her on the shoulder of her French Maid outfit.

Initially, she wasn’t going to wear a uniform, but Roger, who had recruited and hired her personally, had somehow talked her into it. In Dee Dee’s opin-

ion, it certainly added a touch of authenticity to the staff, so she welcomed it — even if she suspected Roger was being a little rascal by having her dress up. It was strange how she so strenuously objected to it, yet changed her mind so quickly, and now insisted on wearing it even when she was out doing errands. Even stranger was the hint of a French accent she had picked up in the last few days.

Maddie had been an employee at Roger's office, a fast rising star in marketing, of all things. Yet now, she was already talking about giving up on her executive profession and glowingly optimistic about her new career as a lowly domestic. *To each their own*, Dee Dee mused, and she wasn't about to talk her out of it. Good help is hard to find, as they say.

"Is Rothway around?" Dee Dee asked.

"Oui, Madame."

"Pardon?"

"Yes, Ma'am," Maddie replied, looking slightly confused as to why she had just spoken in French. "He's in the wine cellar."

"Thank you, Maddie," Dee Dee said as she proceeded to the basement door. Gone was the dank and barren dungeon-like room where they had held Chet. Tiara had been having nightmares about it, so they decided to remodel it for her peace of mind. Now it was a lovely little red brick-walled cellar with wooden racks full of expensive wines and liquors.

"Are you ready to leave, Ma'am?" The tall, bald butler said upon seeing Dee Dee at the top of the stairs. "I'll call the driver for you."

"Not yet, Rothway," Dee Dee replied. She didn't feel comfortable negotiating the stairs in her five-inch heels, so she remained where she was. "I was just telling the staff that Tiara is on her own tonight, and I don't want a repeat of Monday."

"No, of course not, Ma'am. Bed by nine, no phone after eight," he replied.

"And no boys," they said in unison.

The butler nodded. "I'll see to it personally."

"Excellent," Dee Dee said. She sighed, heavily. "Okay, enough parental nonsense. I am too young and beautiful to be a mother!" She grabbed the bridge of her nose. "You're in charge, Rothway."

Making her way back to the living room, Dee Dee mixed herself a screwdriver. It would be another hour until it was time to leave, and any downtime that didn't include texting, talking or drinking was impossible for her to deal with.

She swiped open her phone and checked for messages. There were four. One from Haley, another from Gwen, and two from Margot. She loved Gwen's catty little messages, so she played hers first.

“I just got the offer, darling and I’ll be delighted!” Gwen’s message said. “I need a vacation, and a spa sounds wonderful! Thank Roger for me!” Dee Dee didn’t quite know what that was about. She played Margot’s message next.

“Oh, Tiara, I know this is a bald-faced attempt to bribe my husband, but that’s never stopped me before! A spa vacay sounds delightful!”

Curious, she played Hayley’s message.

“Dick tells me that your husband has generously offered an inaugural stay at his new project. It sounds absolutely decadent and I can’t wait to see Roger’s handiwork. I know it will be amazing. I’ll see you there? Call me!”

That was odd. All of her friends were talking about a vacation? What was this about Roger? She played Margot’s second message.

“Darling, where are you? I must talk to you about this spa vacation! Have you ever been to Miami? I’ve been to St. Pete, but...” Dee Dee stopped the message there.

It suddenly struck her what this might be about. Roger’s project had something to do with spas, didn’t it? But where did this idea of a vacation come from? She called up Gwen.

“There you are, sweets!” Gwen said. “I thought you’d fallen off the face of the Earth!”

Dee Dee made her apologies. “Roger and I were celebrating, of course.”

“Celebrating? I should think you’d be on your honeymoon by now, dearest.”

“Roger’s quite busy,” Dee Dee explained. “Gwen, Refresh my memory. About this vacation at a spa...”

“Why it’s your hubby’s offer, Dee Dee. For a long vacation at one of his new spas in Miami.”

That flipped a switch in Dee Dee’s mind. Miami was where they had sent Chet to be ‘rehabilitated.’

“Malibu Spas?” Dee Dee asked.

“I *think* that’s what they called it. Yes.” Gwen confirmed.

“Oh no, Gwen. You can’t go!” Dee Dee said, urgently. “Whatever you do, promise me you won’t go there!”

“What? Why not?”

“I... I don’t even know if I can say. I have to talk to Roger. Just promise me you won’t go!”

“Why, certainly, sweetie. If you insist.”

Dee Dee was bewildered. She hadn’t heard anything about this ‘spa vacation.’ What was worse, she had just now connected the severe changes done to Chet with Roger’s project. If it was true that Roger had planned for these clinics of

his to do the sort of things Chet had gone through, what in the world was he up to? Just what did Roger think he was going to do to her closest friends?

She phoned Hayley and Margot, and left messages with them to not accept the vacation under any circumstances. This needed some explanation, and Dee Dee decided it couldn't wait. This was serious, and she was mad. Dee Dee put on her wonderful new fur coat, and then headed off in a huff for her first visit to the corporate headquarters of St. McGivens. "Call for the driver, Rothway!" She yelled. She was going to get some answers from Roger.

The determined woman walked through St. McGivens security with a dismissive wave of her hand and rode the elevator impatiently up to the top floor. There, she strode out in her seven-inch platform pumps, and headed for the reception desk.

"May I help you, miss?" a pretty blond receptionist said.

"Mrs.," the woman replied, curtly. She removed her sunglasses to reveal her stern expression. "Mrs. Van der Slyke."

The receptionist just stared in disbelief.

"You can tell my *husband* I'd like to see him," Dee Dee said.

"He's in a..."

"Now, sweetie. I want to see him *now*."

A minute later, Dee Dee whisked into Roger's office, with purpose and determination. "Roger," she said.

"Daphne?" Roger answered, getting up from his desk.

"What in the *hell* do you think you're doing?" She growled.

Roger walked over to place his reassuring hand on his wife's shoulders. "Have a seat, darling."

"I *know* what Malibu Spas is!" Dee Dee shrieked. "Why are you trying to *hurt* my friends?"

His eyes went large for the briefest of moments. Roger checked to make sure the doors to his office were closed. "Don't get excited. We can *talk* about this, Dee Dee..."

"You are going to explain to me everything, dearest darling husband!" Dee Dee commanded.

"It's a corporate issue, dear, I can't..."

"I knew when we sent Chet off, he would be a different person when he came back. I knew that and I *wanted* that!" Dee Dee tugged her coat tighter. She looked all business. "But what I didn't know was that this was one of *your* clinics, designed and built by *you*!" She stepped close to Roger, to look into his eyes when she spoke. "You *never* said this was *your* clinic. You made it sound



like you had hired these people and *found* it. But that's not true, is it?"

Roger just looked aside, avoiding eye contact.

"*Is it?*" Dee Dee barked.

"I really can't talk about this," Roger said.

"Enough secrets!" Dee Dee turned herself around and dramatically walked to the window. "You own and operate a clinic that breaks people's minds and cuts them to pieces! And now you want my very closest friends to go there, as well? Are you *insane?*"

Roger took several deep breaths as he seemed to contemplate his next move. "Which one told you? Maybe they're confused..." He asked.

"All three."

Roger's eyebrows raised in amusement. "They were supposed to keep it a secret. I guess that was a mistake."

"Why, Roger, *why?*"

Roger continued to think. "Fine," he said. "I'll tell you." He finally dared look his wife in the eyes. "Malibu Spas is my big project, you know that much, I assume."

"Of course. Do you think I'm stupid?"

"For the last several years, I've been developing this project. The principle idea behind it is that people will do anything to look and feel better as long as they don't know any better. We've known this a long time in the medical community. There's so many things we could do to make people feel younger and feel better, if they would just let us help them." He walked over to a plant in a vase and stroked the leaves with his index finger.

"Two things get in the way. Cost and fear. At Malibu Spas, we will give them everything they ever wanted from medical science. Just as long as they trust us." He tired of the plant and headed to his desk. "If people weren't so god-damned cheap and weak, we'd make them into the people of their dreams!" He nervously knocked on the top of his desk. "But no. Instead they only come when they know something's wrong. They can't pay, and they don't trust us. They live on compromise. They thrive on half-measures!"

Roger made fist and shook it at no one in particular. "Malibu Spas is going to change all that. We can do so much. But they keep tying our hands!"

"You don't have to convince me, Roger. Chet is proof of what you're capable of. But what were you going to do to Hayley, Margot and Gwen? What..."

"They're my *ticket!*" Roger said, quickly walking up to Dee Dee. "*Our ticket.*"

"What do you mean?"

"I told you I had the promotion. Well, it's still somewhat conditional."

“What?” Dee Dee exclaimed. “How dare you lie to me!”

“I *will* have this promotion!” Roger insisted. “We just need to prove to the board just what we can do. Your friends... They’re going to prove what Malibu Spas can do.”

“What *can* it do, Roger?” Dee Dee accused. “Make them into slave girls? Mindless sex dolls?”

“Daphne, no. No.” He rubbed his chin. “It’ll make them look and feel years younger.”

“And then convince them to submit to any medical procedure you want?” Dee Dee said. “I heard that part of your proposal at the house, dear. I know that much.”

“What *else* did you hear?” Roger asked, suddenly feeling at a disadvantage.

“I know you said you had two facilities, Miami and in the suburbs. You plan to roll it out nationwide soon. And you will use therapy to make people feel so good they become addicted to the Spa.”

“That’s right. You know it all.” Roger threw up his hands. “You’re the smart one here.”

“Don’t patronize me!” Dee Dee screeched. “You’re the one who’s built this monstrosity!”

“*Monstrosity?*” Roger countered. “Monstrosity!” He squared his jaw. He seemed to be making a huge internal calculation. “Have I once, even once, treated you badly?”

Dee Dee didn’t reply. She just replied with a startled look.

“I’ve made your life a living paradise! I’ve bought you everything you need, everything you want! You dress in the most expensive clothes, live in luxury, eat the finest foods! Do you dispute this? Would you say *that* was a monstrosity?”

“No,” Dee Dee muttered. “But what does...”

Roger cut her off. “What does that have to do with it? What did I say? We have one facility in Miami... And one in the suburbs. You call it *home*.”

Dee Dee could only express her bewilderment. “What?”

“Our home. Our home is where we’ve made the most progress in our procedures. Our big success!” Roger walked around his desk and looked at his diploma on the wall. “You may have heard of our first patient. We took in a young man by the name of Nick O’Brien. To prove our concept, we took this man and made him into something completely new. Using the latest technologies and therapies, we made him into a beautiful, gorgeous, desirable woman!” Roger glanced Dee Dee’s way. “Darling.”

Dee Dee's legs gave out and she slumped against the wall for support. The shock was an explosion of turmoil in her mind. What was he saying, she wondered. What did he mean?

In a seeming contradiction to the vicious tone in his voice, Roger swept in to support Dee Dee. He led her to a sofa where she could sit down.

"Roger?" Dee Dee asked. "I don't understand."

"You had to have known I was doing this to you, Dee Dee. You have to have known that."

"Yes... But..." Dee Dee was trying to focus. "It's all just a temporary situation..."

Roger got to a knee so he could keep his face level with his wife's. He held her hand. "Do you regret anything, Daphne? Honestly, do you regret being my wife?"

"That's not the issue, Roger."

"It is the issue, Daphne. Do you regret being Dee Dee Summers? Being Daphne Deborah Van der Slyke?" He paused. "Being in love with me?"

"I can't honestly answer that right now. I'm so... Lost."

"If you do regret becoming this beautiful, loving, lively woman you are, Daphne, then I've miscalculated. I *am* a monster." Roger clutched her hand harder. "But if you *do* like this, if you *do* want to be a respected and admired woman with friends and family who love you, then don't you understand? It doesn't matter what was done to get here."

"That's not true, Roger. Even if I do... Love..." She paused to swallow. "Even if I am this person, I can't pretend you didn't break my trust, violate my rights and my body... And my mind..."

"It is love, Dee Dee," Roger said. "I love you, and I know you love me. What got us here isn't important."

"How can you say that? How can you even *think* that?"

"Your friends, Margot, Hayley and Gwen. They'll have the same experience you and Tiara had. They'll have a new start on life, feeling healthier and happier than ever before." Roger got up. "What it comes down to is this. If I'm wrong, I'm the monster you think I am and you should run out of this office and never come back." He then took a seat next to Dee Dee on the couch. "If I'm wrong, you should tell your friends and anyone else who will listen about what I've done. Shut me down, arrest me and throw away the key."

"But I'm *not* wrong," he said, firmly. "When Dick and the board members see what Malibu Spas can do, they'll rubber stamp that promotion, and you and I can live the rest of our lives in luxury. Together."

“You think you can always sweet talk me into anything, Roger. Not this time,” Dee Dee said.

“I’ve made my argument. I leave it there.”



Walking down the hall the next morning, Tiara was enjoying the attention. She had the stares of all her fellow students, boys and girls alike. She hobbled along, swaying her hips, keeping that innocent and unaware look on her face.

“Tiara!” said Posie, her friend she had made yesterday in dance class. She skipped right up to Tiara. “What are you doing?”

“Doing?” Tiara responded. “I’m going to my first class.”

“Not that!” Posie said. “Your skirt!”

Tiara’s blank expression showed no sign of understanding. “My skirt? What’s wrong with my skirt?”

“You can’t wear them that short! It’s against school rules!”

That was why she had garnered the attention of her classmates. The boys stared because they were boys, and the girls because they knew the rules of this school very well. Not one of them hadn’t measured their skirts for length.

“But what’s wrong with it?” Tiara replied. “I think it’s cute.” The skirt barely covered the minimum on a girl. Tiara’s ‘flippy’ tartan miniskirt was flipping up and down with every movement, daring to reveal her silky little panties.

Posie was adamant. “Oh, you better fix it! You’ll get in trouble!”

“Tiara Van der Slyke!” Came a voice from halfway down the hall. It was Mrs. Lippincott, the math teacher. “You will come here immediately, young lady!”

Tiara scuttled over to Mrs. Lippincott obediently. “Yes, Mrs. Lippincott?”

“You will adjust that skirt to it’s proper and legal length!” She demanded.

“Oh, heavens, Mrs. Lippincott... That’s as far as it will go.” Tiara replied, innocently. “I’m afraid that’s just how long it is.”

“You will come with me to the Headmasters’ office!” She spat, angrily.

“Yes, Mrs. Lippincott,” she replied and dutifully followed the older woman down the hall.

The headmaster was an older, rotund man with thick glasses and a bald head. “You refuse to adjust that skirt of yours, young lady?”

“I can’t, sir,” Tiara replied. “I told Mrs. Lippincott, like, this is as long as it goes.”

The Headmaster sighed. "I'm afraid I'll have to call your parents, Tiara. You knew the rules and you knew what the consequences were going to be."

"Not my Daddy, sir! Please! I'm a good girl!" Tiara pleaded.

"It's too late for that, little missy." He dialed the number from Tiara's records. "Yes, I'd like to speak to Roger Van der Slyke. This is his daughter's school calling." He waited for a connection. "Yes, Mr. Van der Slyke? This is Dr. Demerest from East Trinity... Yes, It's about your daughter... No, she's fine. It's just we have a little issue with her *attire*."

The Headmaster glanced over at Tiara, a practiced move from several years of scaring the life out of his students. "Her skirt, specifically. We have rules at this institution, Mr Van...."

He had obviously been interrupted. "Yes, I am serious. Yes. This is important. It's about following rules, Mr. Van der Slyke..." Then something must have caught his attention on the other end of the line as his head jerked slightly. "Yes, we are in a fundraising drive. Yes, we are soliciting... That's a generous amount, Mr. Van der Slyke but..." Suddenly he turned to Mrs. Lippincott and waved at her and Tiara to leave, frantically.

Outside the office, they waited for five minutes. Tiara just hummed to herself and played with her hair, and Mrs. Lippincott gave her fierce stares.

"Well," the Headmaster said, exiting his office. He looked at the two women. "I want this to be very clear. Tiara, you will abide by our dress code to the letter. We do not make exceptions. That is final."

"Mrs. Lippincott, you'll tell the staff that if they see Miss Van der Slyke wearing any clothing they find violates our code to report it to me immediately.



Upon which time, I will take appropriate measures. No one on staff is to do anything until I say so.”

“This violation is an automatic suspension,” Mrs Lippincott pointed out.

“Thank you for informing me, Mrs. Lippincott. I will note the violation and take the appropriate steps to confront the issue.”

“Doctor Demerest!” Mrs. Lippincott said, indignantly.

“Appropriate steps, Mrs. Lippincott!” the Headmaster repeated. “Now escort Miss Van der Slyke back to class.”

“What about the rules?” Mrs. Lippincott asked.

“The rules are the rules and still apply to every girl in this school. But since Miss Van der Slyke is new, we do have to acknowledge she has a... Learning curve when it comes to the rules. Allowances have to be made. Back to class, now.” He then shut his door.

Tiara strode confidently down the hallway as the bell rang and as the children were let out from class. She showed off her newly won freedom to everyone.

“Hi Tiara!” Chip said, running like a puppy to her side. “Carry your books?”

“But I haven’t got any books, Chip!”

Another boy came up to Tiara. “Hi Tiara... I like your... Look.”

“Thanks, Topher!” Tiara said with an honest smile. Another boy was right behind him. “Hi Skip!” she said. Looking around, she giggled. “What a friendly school! I’m going to like it here!”



Roger arrived home in the evening, finding his house dark. He put his keys and wallet aside as he entered the front door, and was about to flip the lights on. That’s when he noticed amongst the shadows a figure. “Dee Dee?” He asked. He didn’t get an answer. Instead he slowly approached the figure until he could see it was indeed her, sitting alone in the dark. When he got close enough, she looked up at him. Then she looked away.

He noticed that she was dressed in a gold lamé dress that radiated glamour, as well as the expensive diamond necklace he had given her on Dick’s yacht.

“Have you been here all day?” He asked.

Dee Dee just looked away, off into the shadows.

“Are you... All right?” He asked.

“I called the girls,” Dee Dee said with a slight crack in her voice. She hadn’t used it much today and it was a little rough. “I told them I was confused. I wished them well on their vacation at Malibu Spas.”

Roger took Dee Dee's hand.
"Thank you," he said, softly.

She just turned his way, looked him over and then turned back to the darkness.

The silence was so heavy, Roger had to fill it with a question. "Have you..."

"I don't want to regret it, Roger." Dee Dee said.

Roger took a moment to frame an answer. "You won't regret it. You won't."

Dee Dee turned back to Roger. "I don't want to ever feel like I betrayed them. Or like I betrayed myself." She adjusted the way she was sitting so she could face Roger more comfortably. "Can you do that?"

"I'll treat those women like..."

"No." Dee Dee interrupted. "Not that." She leaned forward. "Can you make it so I never regret any of this? I never want to feel regret. Ever again." She clutched Roger's hands. "Can you do that? Can you... Take it away?"

Roger kissed her hands as he held them. "No."

She turned away. "You're lying. Tell me what I need to do."

"If you really do want..."

"I don't care what I want!" Dee Dee exclaimed. "Just tell me what to do." She buried her head in her hands. "Treat me like your property, Roger. Treat me like you own me. That's what I'm in love with. I love being *yours*." She looked back at her husband, with tears in her eyes. "I need you..." She interrupted herself by her need to sob for a moment. "I need you to *finish* me."



CHAPTER 17

“Mademoiselle?” Came a sweet and hesitant voice in a heavy French accent. “Mademoiselle?” The voice called again. “I’m afraid eet’s time. Time to wake up, Mademoiselle.”

Stirring in her pink silk sheets, the beautiful mistress rose, still clutching her favorite teddy bear. She removed the lavender-scented satin sleep mask and her eyes blinked alive. “Good morning, Kentaro,” she said to her bear. “Good morning, Maddy!”

Madeline the maid removed the sheets from the bed. “Good morning, Mistress.”

The golden rays of the dawn flooded the room with warm light that danced off the whites and pinks of Tiara’s room. She stretched like a waking kitten and yawned. She stood and put her arms out, where Madeline helped her into her silk shortie robe, to match her silk nightie.

“Shall I draw a bath for ‘oo, Mademoiselle?” Madeline asked, skittering forward in her five-inch black pumps.

“Yes you may,” Tiara replied.

Soon, she was immersed in warm, sudsy water as Madeline scrubbed her with a loofa. It had been six months at East Trinity for Tiara, and she was now a fourteen year old teenage schoolgirl down to her very core. No thought of escape ever lasted long in her mind before disappearing in wispy puffs of pink mist.

When she stepped out of the bath and Madeline handed her a fresh, fluffy towel, there were no memories of sleeping in a boarding house. As Tiara let her body be dusted lightly in talcum powder, there was no impulse for a heroin fix in her mind. She bounced to her closet where her pink, perfect body nimbly selected a pair of panties and a bra for the day. She hopped into her silk panties with the little bows and shimmied them up her lithe legs, over her coltish thighs and rested them on her coke bottle hips. She settled her growing breasts into the lacy cups of her soft bra as the maid fastened it behind Tiara’s shoulders.

No thought of the past came though Tiara’s consciousness as she let Madeline file her nails. She had no deeper concern than her hair, her clothes and who was the best kisser in school. In just a few months, she’d be turning fifteen which meant that she was getting closer to being sixteen, when her daddy said she’d be able to go on *real* dates. The man who she used to be, ten years older and an indiscriminate copulator, was not even a faint concern.

Even the devious nature of Chet wasn’t of any use for Tiara. Her so-called ‘act’ of innocence and vapidness had been so easy to fall into, she was never go-



ing to be able to climb back out again. She didn't want or need to. A giggle, a sigh, a perky smile and a gushing 'thank you' was all she needed in this world to get by. There was no disguise anymore, she was just as simple on the inside as she appeared outside.

When she appeared in the kitchen for a breakfast of juice and a muffin, the chauffeur was standing by, a polite reminder that it was time to go. She curled up on the leather seat, texting her friends during the short drive. They talked about school, boys, TV, boy bands, hair and possibly something about boys. Also, spring break was coming up, and although she was just fourteen, that didn't mean she couldn't talk her daddy into letting her and her friends take a trip to the beach. It was time to go buy some bathing suits, maybe a bikini? Maybe.

"Oh my God, are you serious? A bikini?" Tiara's friend Posie said when Tiara got out of her limo. She was continuing the discussion from the texting.

"It's possible," Tiara explained. "Posie, darling, you never know."

"My daddy would never let me!" Posie said. "I guess... Maybe we don't have to tell our parents..."

"Lie to Daddy?" Tiara was aghast. "Oh, I can't lie to my Daddy," she pouted. "He thinks of me as his little girl."

"Mine too," Posie said. They arrived at the front door of the school. "Where is everyone?"

"What do you mean?" Tiara replied.

"We made it all the way to the door without a single guy trying to talk to you."

Tiara looked around. "Oh my goodness, you're right! That must be some kind of world record!" She then put a finger to her chin. "Do you think they've grown tired of me?"

"Hey, Tiara!" "Hi!" "Tiara, Hi there!" said an eager chorus of young boys when they opened the door. One took her books, another handed over completed homework for her and one even gave her flowers.

"I think you're just training them better," Posie said.



Light notes from a distant piano played in the background, as the formally dressed attendees drifted around the room, mingling and networking. It was the spring gala celebrating the opera's just-completed remodeling drive. Anyone who was anyone in the city was there. The mayor, the city council members, the local business leaders and of course, the principal sponsor of the fundraiser — the Van der Slykes.

Roger was looking every bit the role he now played. He was estimated to be worth nearly one billion dollars, soon. His inevitable inheritance from his family, once his mother passed away was worth a few hundred million, and his company options he had been granted as the CEO of St. McGiven's Medical was worth hundreds of millions more. The new Malibu Spas chain was a runaway success, and the value of those stocks went up day after day. You could practically smell the money on him. The tuxedo he was wearing was expensive and impressive, yes, but that wasn't what made him look like a billionaire. Even his serene and confident grin wasn't why he projected ultimate success.

The reason he radiated superiority was the heart-shattering blond on his arm. Her angelic face, doll-like beauty and hypnotizing smile were the reasons he commanded the room. As Roger shook the hands and slapped the backs of the other men, they made sure they had at least a token moment of eye contact with Roger, before openly ogling his date. The goddess he had brought to the party was the centerpiece of the whole evening.

As men would talk, the girl would stand by Roger's side, smiling, as she gripped his arm with both hands. She wouldn't comment on the conversation, in fact, she was next to silent, even as she continued to smile and look adoringly at Roger, her expression bordering on fascination from time to time. She only relinquished her hold with one hand when she had to shake hands with another guest. Then she quickly gripped her man by arm once again, briefly snuggling her cheek against his shoulder, and sighing.

The women in the room were jealous, of course, that such a perfect woman existed and their dates and husbands insisted on acting like horny teens around her. They noted her expensive silk gown, impossibly styled elegant hair, the soft mink stole around her shoulders, her ankle-snapping heels and jewelry that would pay off all third-world debt. That woman was making all of them look bad just by her very presence. What was worse, was the obedient and submissive behavior she exhibited. The female attendees couldn't believe how she just stood by her man, not talking, not involved, not ever leaving her place on his arm. How could any woman just stand there and be eye candy? In this age? It was unheard of — and setting a bad example for every other woman present.

The men, on the other hand, weren't thinking about her quite as deeply. They had much more base reactions to her presence. Her body was a dream, long lean legs, big hips, grabbably thin waist, and a chest of the plumpest, ripest produce one could pick. Her breasts were up, out and in your face when near her, and the heat off them melted any man in her presence. These men knew that she didn't have much of a personality, as she was kind just a mannequin, standing there, but that was not a negative in their eyes. It was a perfect woman in front of them, something they may never see again. When they would think about it, they wondered where they could find such woman like that. Wouldn't it be nice to spend an evening showing off a gorgeous and desir-

able woman who just treated her man like a king? Was that so wrong to want that for just one night? No. It was too much to ask. They were just mere mortals cursed with mere mortal women in their lives.

After a customary period of shaking hands, and a dinner followed by some short speeches, the evening wound to a close. "Thank you so much for your generous donations, Mr. Van der Slyke," said an overjoyed opera director, a portly woman with grey hair. She shook his hand vigorously.

"Of course, I'm always glad to contribute to the culture of our community," Roger replied. "And of course my wife has helped quite a bit, as well."

"Your wife?" the woman said, puzzled. She then looked closer at the blond. "Mrs. Van der Slyke?"

The woman on Roger's arm smiled. "So good to see you, Diane," she said. It was the most she had said all night.

"Oh, I almost didn't recognize you, Daphne," replied the older woman. She truly hadn't. She had heard rumors that she had some "work done," but she was unprepared for what she saw. The person before her could have easily been mistaken for a younger sister of Dee Dee's. If it was surgery, it was the best she'd ever seen. Her beauty was intimidating enough, but the large, buoyant breasts pointing out made even in the slightest social interaction sexually charged. "We have another fundraiser in May, would you be interested in participating?"

Dee Dee looked up at Roger. He nodded his approval.

"I'd be delighted," Dee Dee replied.

Roger handed over a card. "Give Daphne's social secretary a call. She'll fit you in into my wife's calendar."

Dianne took the engraved card and put it in her purse.

"Well, we *do* have to be going," Roger said.

"Thank you again," Diane, the opera director gushed. "I'll call your secretary, Daphne."

Dee Dee didn't reply as Roger turned her around and escorted her from the room, to the lobby of the hotel. There, they caught an elevator up.

They found themselves alone in the mirrored elevator cab. "You were wonderful, Daphne," Roger said to her.

She looked up at her husband and leaned her head against his shoulder. "I had a wonderful time," she said. "I hope I didn't trouble you too much."

"You were no trouble, darling." Roger kissed the top of her head. "You could never give me anything but pleasure."

Dee Dee felt a thrill flash through her. Her husband approved of her, the best feeling in the world.

The elevator reached the top floor of the hotel. The penthouse. Roger ran his private key card through the lock and the door popped open. He escorted his wife inside. It was an opulent room, expansive with stunning views of Los Angeles. A fire was already going in the fireplace, and a full bar had been set up. What made the room notable was that despite its' size, many rooms and elegantly modern furnishing, was the huge, round bed located in the center.

"We may have a minute," Roger said. "I'm going to fix myself a drink. Would you like something?"

"No thank you," Dee Dee replied, walking to the bed. She removed the stole from her shoulders and placed it aside.

A knock came from the door. "A little early," Roger said.

Dee Dee walked to the door and opened it. "Hello Gene. Hello Margot." She said. Gene kissed Dee Dee on the cheek while Margot proceeded on by, headed for the bed, where she put her coat.

"Nice shindig, Rog," Gene said, joining him at the bar. "Pour me a gin & tonic, would you?"

"Gotcha," Roger replied.

Over by the bed, Dee Dee and Margot met up. "Dee Dee, you're looking wonderful." Margot said.

"You look great, too, Margot," Dee Dee replied. She didn't just look 'great,' she looked incredible. She looked twenty years younger and had a glowing, happy face. There was little resemblance to the dour, catty Margot of just a few months ago.

"Thank your husband and his wonderful spa," Margot replied. "I like your dress, Dee Dee."

"I like your hair, Margot." Dee Dee replied, combing away a stray bang of Margot's hair with her hand.

"Why don't you two get started?" Gene said. "Dick and Arnie said they may be a while."

Dee Dee looked back at Roger for approval. "Go ahead," he said.

Margot unclasped Dee Dee's dress, and it fluttered to the floor. "I love your body," Margot said.

"What they do at Malibu Spas is just incredible," Dee Dee replied. She helped Margot out of her dress. They then helped each other out of their bras. "Are you wearing a D cup, now?" Dee Dee asked.

"They just keep growing," Margot said with a smile. "I guess I can thank Malibu Spas for that." She cupped them with her hands. "Gene loves them."

With the two women facing each other, standing only in their panties, jewelry and high heels, Dee Dee reached over and felt the breasts for herself. "I can



see why.”

“Yours are just amazing. They’re big and still perky,” Margot said, holding them. They now lived up to Daphne’s nickname. She pinched Dee Dee’s nipple.

“Ohhhh,” Dee Dee moaned. They fell sideways onto the bed. Dee Dee leaned over and kissed Margot, and she put her arms around Dee Dee’s neck as she passionately returned the favor.

By the time Gene and Roger had found comfortable seats, the girls had worked their way into a classic sixty-nine position, with Dee Dee plunging her tongue into her friend and Margot exploring the recently healed folds of Dee Dee’s vagina. “Damn fine work that spa of your does, Rog,” Gene said. “As far as I’m concerned, you not only deserve to be the CEO for this, but they out to make you king of the fucking universe!”

“You like the new wife?” Roger asked.

“I may just kick my mistresses to the curb,” Gene replied. “I’ve gone from having a fifty year old hag to having a lusty twenty-something sexpot who doesn’t talk back! Margie is almost too much for one man to handle.”

Roger nodded towards the bed. “Looks like my Dee Dee is handling her just fine.”

“I should take notes,” Gene said.

Another knock came from the door. It was Dick and Hayley, followed by Arnie and Gwen. Both women had that same slightly glassy eyed and dreamy look on their faces that Dee Dee and Margot had, as they were led inside. They also shared the same man-pleasing shape, like living Barbie dolls, different only in skin tone and hair.

“Make some room, girls!” Dick called out to the pair on the bed.

The two girls looked up and saw their friends approach, smiling broadly.

Arnie pointed to his wife. “We brought party favors!”

Gwen produced a baggie of white powder from her purse.

The girls squealed in delight. It was no more than a minute or two before Gwen and Hayley were nude and on the bed, cutting lines. The girls took turns snorting their share. Hayley took her line off of Gwen’s supple ass. Margot took hers off of Dee Dee’s tits.

Soon, the four girls were intertwined on the bed, licking and fingering each other in a mass of moaning and giggling. All four had the bodies of teenagers, the sex drives of porn stars and all wore their high heels. It was twenty minutes of entertaining foreplay for the men, as they drank their drinks.

“I saw where Gleason Pharmaceuticals is going to match our proposal,” Dick said to Roger.

“I knew they’d come around,” Roger answered. “Hayley’s not a natural blond, I see.”

“Actually, that’s one of the things I’ve always liked about her. Kind of a turn on when women make themselves over to appeal to their man, don’t you think?”

“Kinda,” Roger said.

If one had been listening closely, they would have heard Dee Dee moan softly when she heard those words.

After a few more minutes, Roger got to his feet and clapped loudly to get the girls’ attention. “Ladies! Time to pair off.” All four girls reluctantly released themselves and faced their husbands, waiting for instructions.

Roger held out a small box and Gene dipped his hand in. He pulled out a card. “Hayley,” he read aloud. Hayley hopped on her knees and yelped excitedly. She got up and scrambled over to Gene, and humped her naked form against him in joy.

“I always wondered what all the girls see in you, Gene,” Hayley replied dreamily.

“Oh, you’re gonna find out,” Gene said, as he then led Hayley off by the hand to one of the bedrooms.

Arnie was next. “Margot,” He read.

Margot sidled up to Arnie like a cat, drawing her long and slender arms around his neck. “I hope you’ve been keeping flexible, boo boo bear.” This wasn’t their first time.

Gwen was in bliss, realizing what that meant for her. Gwen sprang off of the bed and practically leapt into Roger’s arms. “I want to feel what it’s like to fuck a billion dollars,” she said, hanging off of him.

As they left, Roger turned back over his shoulder and smiled back at Dee Dee. She smiled back.

“I hope you’re not disappointed,” Dick replied, as he started to step out of his pants. “Big old guy like me. At least we get the big bed.” Once he was disrobed, he stood in ancient boxer shorts, his big hairy belly sagging over the waistband. His black socks were held up by mens’ garters, and his fat lips still puffed on his cigar.

Dee Dee walked up and bashfully protected her breasts from him. “Please be gentle with me, Mr. Porter, sir,” she said with a pout.

“Not on your life,” Dick replied.

Just like the other girls, Dee Dee was insatiable. She used Dick’s body like a trampoline and a jungle gym all in one. She denied him nothing, as he commanded her into positions an olympic gymnast would have broken themselves

trying. She was a screamer, viscerally returning every movement from Dick with noises of ecstasy and desire. He was a man who knew what he wanted in business, and sex was no different for him. He told her what to do, and she did it. Her only complaint was an apparent insistence on “more,” “faster,” and “harder,” which she tended to repeat often.

After an hour, the old man was out cold, exhausted and snoring. Dee Dee lay beside him, twirling her finger in his dense, grey chest hair. She wondered if Hayley left him like this every night. Maybe now that Dick was retired — more than just once a night?

A noise came from the distance, and it attracted Dee Dee’s attention. She saw her husband exit his room, dressed. Dee Dee carefully rolled off the bed and scooted on over to Roger. “Darling?” She asked.

“Gwen’s a fine girl. But she lacks stamina.” Roger slapped Dee Dee on the butt. “Get dressed, baby. We’ll head home.”



Dee Dee was seated in the passenger’s seat of Roger’s new Mercedes SLR Roadster convertible, letting the wind whip her hair as they drove. It was early morning, around three, and the wide streets were empty. Roger opened up the car’s powerful motor.

Roger looked over at his wife, his eyes locking with hers for a moment. It was a question. It was a question delivered silently, understood by two people who were close enough to know what the other was thinking. The question was simple: did you have fun?

Dee Dee shifted in her seat, and leaned into Roger’s shoulder, using her hand to run along his leg. It was her way of saying she had a great time.

Inside, she didn’t feel the tiniest bit guilty. Her only guilt was that she ever doubted her smart and wonderful husband. Her friends were certainly different now that they had gone through Malibu Spas. They were beautiful, bright-eyed and frisky now, but they weren’t much like the people she once knew. The cynicism was gone. The calculating minds that were planning their next marriage and divorce settlements were no longer so sly. Now they liked to talk about celebrity gossip, next season’s fashions and hairstyles, just like Dee Dee. They’d be happy with it, too, just like she was.

She liked her simpler, sexier friends so much better than the old ones. They craved sex almost as much as she did. These wife-swapping parties were a blast. Roger had told her to schedule another one next week, up by the lake, if the guys were up to it.

She was so happy to let Roger do the thinking for her. His idea to get the surgery to snip away her last little bit of Nick was so smart. Also, the recent trip to Malibu Spas did her face and body a world of good. Now when she and her daughter went shopping, the salespeople always asked Tiara about her “sister,” not her mother. Dee Dee never even thought to correct them.

Yes, she had gone to Malibu Spas for her treatments. She had been put through the “puppy mill” as Roger sometimes called it, and made into who she was now. The trip had finally finished her. She was complete. After returning from Malibu Spas, she was no longer capable of worrying about what was done to Chet and to the girls. There was no more complaint or worry in her life. She had a new role as a supportive and obedient wife.

As they sped along the road, Dee Dee looked up into Roger’s eyes and was in awe of the man she was lucky enough to have married. He was handsome, smart, rich and always knew what she should do. If only she had met him sooner. She felt like she had completely wasted her old life, before she knew the joy of total surrender to a loving and brilliant man like Roger. Her wonderful lover was the smartest man on Earth, and she was humbled to know she played the smallest part in his plan. His Malibu Spas would change the world, for the better. Roger’s love and wisdom would soon touch the lives of so many people, and she was helping him, in her small and insignificant way.

She was a trophy to show to his friends and rivals. She was a decoration on his arm. She was his fuck toy to use or trade. She was all of this, and she loved it — and was proud. Why? Because Roger told her she loved it and should be proud. That was all she needed to know.

Looking down at her as he drove, Roger smiled. Approval. It gave Dee Dee the best feeling in the world, of undiluted euphoria. Her man treated her like a queen, which all she really ever wanted, as it turned out.

The End





“What’s this?”

Having just returned home to the US, a year’s worth of mail had piled up for Sasha. She had spent the better part of her first day back sifting through it. One particular envelope stood out, though. A fancy envelope with a perfumed scent.

She eagerly ripped it open. “You are invited to a complimentary week of rejuvenation at Malibu Spas,” she read aloud. “All expenses and plane fare are taken care of,” she continued. “Courtesy Roger Van Der Slyke and family.”

“Huh,” she said to herself. “I don’t know where this came from, but it sounds amazing. I’ll absolutely take them up on it. I wonder what I did to deserve it?”









