

TV FICTION CLASSICS

Volume# 18

"NEAR MISS"

*Noel's mother wanted a daughter,
but only had a son. She had an idea.*



Published By
SANDY THOMAS ADVERTISING
P.O. BOX 2309
CAPISTRANO BEACH, CA 92624-0309 USA

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MAGAZINE

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By Vickie

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NEAR MISS

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ISBN: 1-893708-16-0

QUOTE BOARD

“Old Japanese Saying:

What I know is Dishwater.”

NEAR MISS

by Vickie

The town of Graybull, Wyoming, is situated on the Graybull River between the Rockies and the Bighorn mountains. The rugged scenery can only be described as breathtaking, and nature, generally spared the ravages of modern society, still reigns supreme. On a summer's night, when more stars glimmer in the black sky than there are fleas on a hound dog's back, some claim you can hear echoes of Indian war dances from a time long past.

In an world of fads and constant change, Graybull retains a simple charm. Men and boys wear cowboy hats, jeans, and boots, and ladies and girls wear pretty cotton dresses. Even in the late sixties and early seventies, men wore their hair short and girls kept their legs clean-shaven. Everyone knows who he is in Graybull; it's how things ought to be. The locals figure life's just a lot easier without all the confusion.

In Graybull, they believe in the good, old-fashioned ways. They have in time for strangers but the town folk are all like "kin" and always pull together in a dilemma.

The big event of the year is the fourth of July rodeo and barbecue. There are games, plenty to eat, and enough excitement to sustain the town through the rest of the year. A big square dance caps off the festivities with people of all ages putting on their best western dress and having a great time.

The locals were good people. Like Jan McIntire and her son Noel who lived in a pretty little white frame house on a tree-lined street one block from the river. Mrs. McIntire had had tough life and it showed. She never laughed and rarely smiled. She was, nonetheless, a good if distant mother to Noel, and was known throughout the community as a God-fearing and upstanding woman. Most who knew her remembered a time when Jan McIntire had been different. In those days she'd been full of life and always ready to laugh at a joke, even if at her own expense. But things change, even in Graybull.

The Beginning

The early morning sunshine fell gently on the McIntire house. Spring was early this year. It was only March but the air, filled with the urgent peeping of courting birds and the buzzing of countless insects, was fresh and sweet with the smells of the river and spring wildflowers.

“Mom? I’m out of underwear.” The boy’s voice carried to his mother’s bedroom. What timing! thought the mother. Here we are getting dressed for church and only now does he think to check his undies. “Just a minute,” the woman replied. “I can’t have him going in dirty undies,” she thought. Automatically, she went to her lingerie drawer and removed a pair of her pink satin briefs. “Here,” she said as she walked into his room. “Now maybe next time you’ll check the night before.”

As she handed him the panties, the boy blushed. “I can’t wear these,” he muttered, “they’re ladies’ panties—and they’re pink.”

“Of course you can,” replied the mother. “You’re not going to church in dirty undies, and besides, nobody will even see them. Now hurry up or we’ll be late.”

As his mother left the room, Noel took off his pajamas and slipped into the panties. They felt very soft and silky—not at all like his jockey shorts. He went to the closet and, without thinking, selected a pair of lightweight, white cotton pants. He then grabbed a V-neck cotton pullover and put it on while running out of the room. His mother met him in the hall. As he walked ahead of her to the car, she saw the faint but unmistakable pink shadow of the panties and the clearly-defined panty lines under his white slacks. “There isn’t time to do anything about it now,” she thought. “Probably no one would notice anyway.”

They arrived at the church with little time to spare. Entering through the large front doors, they saw an open pew about one-third of the way up the aisle. As they walked toward their seats, one older lady, seeing the tell-tale outlines of the panties, whispered to her daughter. Small towns were like that. On the surface everyone minded their own business but underneath. .

.anything out of the 'humdrum predictable' was 'busybodied' quickly around town.

During the service, the events of the morning entered the mother's thoughts. She found herself daydreaming—which she never did in church — about the daughter she never had.

Janice Casey was the only daughter of an immigrant Irish farmer and his American-born wife. She had a happy childhood, and was showered with affection by both her parents. Her mother was an excellent cook and homemaker, and her father had a sense for real-estate values. In the course of ten years, he acquired over 150 acres of what was to become the outskirts of Graybull. When Jan was fifteen, the sale of 100 of those acres gave the family sufficient resources to make them independently wealthy, and Mr. Casey was able to retire to a life of ease.

She was married at nineteen to a boy named Arnold McIntire, a hard-working lad who had a job as a salesman at a local furniture store. It had always been Jan's greatest hope to have a little girl. When, within five months of her wedding, she found that she was pregnant, her hope became a consuming desire. From that intuition mothers often have concerning their yet unborn children, she felt sure her baby was a girl. She went to one of the "fortune reader Gypsies" who confirmed that she was bearing a baby girl. So certain was she, that she picked out the name 'Noel' for her yet-unborn daughter.

When the doctor announced she had birthed a boy and that, due to complications in the pregnancy, he had been forced to remove her ovaries, Jan's mental state and her life changed. All hope of a little girl had vanished as a result of some obscure malfunction she didn't even understand. Where a few days ago she had been happy and full of hope, her life was now shadowed by a grey cloud of despair. On the form, where it asked for the baby's name, she simply wrote 'Noel', not even bothering to take the time to select a suitable boy's name. Her husband didn't much like the idea of naming a boy Noel, but, in view of her grief, chose not to make an issue of it.

The loss had a permanent impact on her. She seemed to lose interest in life, and dealt with the boy baby as just another task—a job to be carried out with efficiency but without affection. The changes in her personality and attitude had their effect on her marriage and, within four years, it ended in divorce. Her ex-husband ultimately moved to Montana where she heard he owned a

cattle-feed store. She hadn't seen him since, although he sent cards at Christmas and on birthdays.

The twelve years that followed had been difficult. Her father died just three years after the divorce, and her mother passed on only eighteen months after that. It was almost too much for the poor girl to take. The large inheritance did make life considerably easier on her, however, and she was able to quit her part-time job at a local department store to devote herself to raising Noel, now almost sixteen years old.

Many times, over the years, she found herself envious of the mothers and daughters going shopping together or dressed up to attend a church social. A pain so real that she could feel it pierced her deep inside when she would see a little neighbor girl playing skip-rope, giggling with a friend, or just flouncing around in a party dress and petticoats. She envisioned all the experiences that the girl and her mother would share—talking girl talk while the mother brushed her hair, just the right reassuring word when the little girl was assailed by one of life's myriad disappointments, going into a store hand-in-hand to buy her first bra.

Now, in some funny way, Noel's wearing the undies gave her a nice feeling. Not like having a daughter, of course, but just a little something shared. It was like a small spark glowing in the depths of a fire that had long gone out. She was smiling as she realized that people were walking out. The service was over and she hadn't heard a word of it.

For the first time ever, Jan suggested that they go out for brunch after church. Noel was thrilled. Although always solicitous and concerned, his mother had shown little affection or desire to be in any way close to her son. They went to an elegant restaurant on the river called Matty's and were given a window table with a spectacular view of the Graybull river.

After they'd ordered, the mother asked casually, "Now that you've been wearing them for a couple of hours, how do the panties feel?"

"I almost forgot I was wearing them," the boy replied. "They're so light."

The mother sensed an opening. "I could never figure out why they don't make such undies for boys. They're definitely better than those heavy cotton things, and they wash easier too." Noel just smiled.

He was trying to sort out his thoughts. As a boy, he should be humiliated to be wearing girls' underwear. However, inexplicably, he'd felt a little thrill when he put them on, and he still felt it. Telling his mother he'd almost forgotten had been a fib. But, if wearing them were wrong, his mother wouldn't have given them to him. Most important of all, she was paying more attention to him now than she ever had, attention which he desperately craved. She'd never done anything like taking him to a fancy brunch before. All Noel knew was that he was suddenly happy.

After finishing, at Jan's suggestion, the two spent the next hour in the fresh morning air, walking along the river bank. The rest of the day was uneventful, with Noel quietly reading a mystery novel and Jan working on some embroidery and hand washing one pair of Noel's underwear for school. After a nice supper, they stayed up for a while watching a movie on TV, and then went to bed. Nothing more had been said about the underwear episode although it was on both of their minds.

The Planting

The next morning, Noel went off to school and Jan, remembering that her son was still out of clean underwear, went to the hamper in the hall closet to collect the white clothes for the wash. On top of an assortment of socks, shirts, and pants lay the pink undies. Setting them aside with the other hand-washables, Jan took the whites to the washer and got them started. Then she came back and took her lingerie to the sink, where she carefully washed them by hand in a gentle solution of suds and warm water. As the various loads finished drying, Jan would place them in their proper drawers or on hangers. Taking her neatly stacked lingerie to her room, she paused when she came to the pink panties.

A wistful expression swept over her face as she stood and once again thought of the daughter that would never be hers. If things had been different, some of the lingerie would be going into a little girl's drawer. She imagined ribbons and frilly dresses. Still holding the panties, she impulsively took them to Noel's room and placed them on top of his newly-washed cotton undershorts. With a sigh, the mother resumed her Monday chores.

The next morning, after Noel had skipped off to school, she was drawn to his room. She stood for a long moment before summoning the courage to open the drawer. A twinge of disappointment touched her as she saw the airy garment stuck in a corner of the drawer. Nevertheless, she left it undisturbed.

This went on for the next three days. Noel would go to school, Jan would look in his underwear drawer, and she'd sadly find the panties still setting in the corner of the drawer.

On the fifth day, she decided to take the panties back. The decision let loose a flood of conflicting thoughts. It was such a small thing. Couldn't God have let her keep just this little happiness after denying her a daughter and taking her beloved parents? It was impious to think this way. Besides, it had been a silly thing to do. What should she expect?

The mother walked slowly up the stairs, feeling the old sense of emptiness returning like a winter storm that takes away all color and leaves nothing but chill and quiet.

She opened the drawer and felt her heart leap as, looking down, she saw that the panties were gone. Recovering, she realized that Noel, finally tired of seeing them, had probably just returned them to her drawer. She ran to her room and yanked open her lingerie drawer. Almost recklessly, she rifled through the contents, searching for the pink undies. But they weren't there! That evening, after the boy had kissed her and gone off to bed, Jan checked the hall hamper. There, on top of his socks and undershirt, were the panties. He'd worn them of his own volition!

Jan couldn't sleep that night. Her mind was filled with far-fetched fantasies. In one, she and her daughter would be shopping. In another, they'd be giggling over some silly joke. And so it went. She must have finally dozed off, as the next thing she heard was the sound of Noel bustling around in his room. As she was always the first one up, Jan concluded that she must have slept in.

Getting out of bed, Noel stretched and went over and opened his underwear drawer. He was disappointed in finding only his own jockey shorts. Yesterday, he'd been elated all day because of the silken thrill. Even a girl at school commented, telling him he looked "like the cat that had eaten the canary". "Nuts," he thought to himself. "Why should I care about that? They're just girls' underwear anyhow!"

Jan noticed the difference in her son's demeanor that morning. She couldn't help but wonder if it were connected to the

panties. After Noel left for school, a thought hit her. She quickly dressed and made up and then drove down to Andrea's department store, where she'd worked as a saleslady herself eleven years earlier.

The lingerie section was in the rear of the store. Jan walked over to the panties and slowly perused the inventory, declining the saleslady's offer of assistance. "I'll stay simple," she said to herself, selecting a dozen pair. Although none had any lace, save the usual leg trim, they were all nylon, both hip-rider briefs and bikinis, in pink, white, yellow, and blue. She paid for her selections, and then almost skipped as she left the store. Once home, she neatly placed the soft undies in Noel's drawer, obscuring the boy's cotton undershorts. Now, she thought, will it happen? Oh, if it could just be!

Friday morning, Jan was up earlier than usual, making scratch pancakes, Noel's very favorite breakfast. She knew that this morning would tell her what she needed so desperately to know. She heard the light sound of the boy's footsteps as he came down the stairs. "Good morning, Noel," she said smiling. He came over to her and, throwing his slim arms around her neck, gave her a kiss on the cheek. "Good morning, Mom," he said. Jan just stood there dumbfounded. They had not been at all demonstrative towards one another before that, probably more her fault than his, she thought. Certainly, she could not recall the boy ever doing anything like this. "My!" she exclaimed. "To what great fortune do I owe such affection?"

The boy's lips parted softly as he said, "It's just such a beautiful day."

He smiled, thinking again of how he'd reached into his drawer this morning without even looking. At first, the softness of the mass of nylon didn't register. But when he looked down and saw the profusion of pastel colors, he was momentarily astounded. It took only a second, however, for him to realize that they had been bought for him by his mother. There was something special about the knowledge that they were his; could he, should he? It connected somehow to something within him—something clicked and made him feel wonderful. His very own panties!

Noel fairly floated out the door for school, and Jan was overcome by a sense of joy reminiscent of the time of her pregnancy. She sat down on the kitchen chair. Now she began to feel guilty about buying the panties, fearing she might make a sissy out of her boy. She reflected on Noel's delicate and

loving nature. How he'd always preferred the company of girls and women and, now that she thought about it, had never been aggressive or rough like the other boys. She remembered the time she'd actually forced him to play football with some classmates. He'd been about ten. Within minutes, he'd come running into the house bruised and crying. He'd hated it and seemed upset that she'd been the one to make him play against his will. She also noted how very happy he was today. How could this small thing be bad if it made them both happy?

The Flowering

Soon, the school year was at an end and summer had arrived. During the time since his mother had bought his new undies, Noel hadn't once worn any of his old ones. In fact, a couple of weeks ago, he'd set them out of his drawer. He loved the new pretty pastel shades and soft textures, and wearing them never ceased to make him feel good. Not just physically, but emotionally too, which confused him a lot.

He rationalized that it shouldn't amount to much. They were just about the same as boys' undies anyway, except a little softer, prettier and no fly. Well, maybe they weren't much like boy's underwear but just wearing panties didn't make him a sissy. Now Jackie Forbes was another matter. Jackie lived two blocks down on the same side of Custer Road. He was a nice enough kid alright, but they were real poor and he had to wear hand-me-downs from his sister. Rumor had it that he even wore his big sisters dresses around the house to save wear and tear on his few school clothes. You'd think that everyone would think he was a real sissy. Funny thing was, everyone in the town knew but in a small town, you better just keep your mouth shut unless you are willing to help. Oh, people talked (behind their backs) and some of the tough guys at school made fun but Jackie didn't seem to mind. Why was he thinking of Jackie Forbes anyway?

As June wore on, Jan began to take a renewed interest in her appearance. The townspeople spoke of how she seemed to have taken ten years off her face. And, she was wearing dresses that flattered her figure. Most noticeable of all, she smiled almost all the time!

At first Noel hadn't dared hope that his mother's happiness and closeness to him would last. But it had. Several times,

she'd taken him shopping with her. Instead of just leaving him to sit on a chair as before, she now took the trouble to explain things to him that he'd never even been aware of before—sizes, complementary colors and shades, how certain dresses were appropriate for some occasions and not for others. The world of women's fashion was sure more complex than what he was used to, or expected. Why did he even want to know? Yet somehow it excited him.

Jan extended his education even to cosmetics, explaining patiently how the subtle shades of lipstick, nail polish, and eye shadow could alter an overall impression dramatically. Noel was a very smart boy and easily absorbed the quantities of feminine wisdom that his mother fed him. Soon, he was taking an active role in her buying decisions. To give him an outside source of authority on the subject, Jan ordered a subscription to several women's magazines, which Noel would pick up and read.

Then one evening, while doing her nails, Jan noticed Noel watching intently. Since that fateful morning, she noticed his interests had become increasingly feminine. He once had said that it was unfair that girls got to do all the fun things like doing their nails, and wearing pretty clothes while boys couldn't. The mother sensed the boy's feelings now and, on a hunch casually asked, "Would you like to try doing my nails?". "Sure," the boy said quickly. She was amazed at the expertise with which he filed and applied the polish. "I think I'll let you do my nails from now on," she said laughing. "Where did you learn to do that so well?"

"Just by watching you," the boy replied softly. An idea struck her. "You know, your nails would benefit from some hardener. How about applying some of that know-how to yourself?"

"Oh no," the boy said, his eyes as big as saucers. "That's only for girls."

"What nonsense!" the mother retorted. "This is just hardener, not color. It just keeps your nails nice and healthy. Try it, you can easily take it off if you decide you don't like it." She handed him a small bottle of nail hardener before he had a chance to answer. What she said made sense. He'd seen Jackie Forbes parading around one day with his sister's winter coat and white boots on. Heck, this was just clear, not at all like that girl's stuff. He took the emery board and rounded the corners,

and then began applying the clear liquid to his nails. Soon, they shone with the effects of the shaping and polishing.

Jan found her mind wandering. She saw herself with her daughter, doing her hair in braids and bows. Convinced that barbers were just a waste of money, she'd always been the one to cut the boy's hair. She only cut the bottom and since March, she hadn't cut it at all and, as it had already been fairly long, she surmised that it wouldn't take much for it to be long enough to style. It was naturally curly and straightened would look much longer. If she could get him to let it grow just a few more inches ...

"Noel," she ventured, "You have such lovely hair. Why don't we let it grow out so we can style it a little?"

"What does that involve?" the boy asked.

His mother answered, "Oh, just conditioning and trimming and maybe occasionally combing or curling it into different hairdos. You can do so much with long hair, and yours would only have to grow out a couple of inches or so to touch your shoulders. I promise, it would look beautiful."

"Would it be okay for a boy to have his hair long?" Noel queried.

"Of course," Jan fibbed. "Boys do it all the time now. Even football players. They just don't talk about it. How about it?"

"Gee. . .," Noel agreed. "If I don't like it I can always get it cut."

"That's the spirit!" Jan exclaimed, giving her son a hug.

The truth was that the towns people were beginning to talk. Several mothers wondered if Noel wasn't one of those hippy types. Since it was always clean and Noel obviously wasn't on drugs, the grapevine soon turned to more interesting topics. In fact during this time, there was a rumor about the mayor's wife and the sheriff that was much "juicer" to talk about.

Noel and Jan regularly did their nails together now - it was a Friday night ritual that they both looked forward to. One evening in August, Jan got up the courage to try something she'd been planning for months. "Noel, your hair is a mess!" she said.

"I know, Mom," the boy replied. "It's just too long. I mean, I like it and all, and you've done a great job trimming it,

but it's uncomfortable at night, especially when it's hot. Maybe you should cut it."

"Cut it?" she asked with a look of horror. "Most girls would die to have hair like yours. There are other ways to be comfortable at night."

"You mean I can have it long and it still won't be in my way at night?" the boy asked.

"It's easy," Jan replied. "I'll make it so it won't bother you at all, and when you wake up, you'll find that your hair is also easier to brush because you won't have any tangles."

"Really?" the boy asked hopefully.

"Absolutely," she replied. "Strip down to your undies and meet me in the bathroom." The boy did as he was told. When he arrived in the bathroom, a bathtub full of hot water awaited him. "Hop in," his mother commanded. Noel dutifully stepped into the tub. As he washed himself, she gave him a shampoo, and then a conditioning. She let the conditioner sit for a couple of minutes, then rinsed it out of his hair. "Dry your hair real good and then get into your PJ'S and meet me in the den." Noel had a quizzical look on his face, but accepted her directions without question.

Several minutes later, Jan saw the boy appear in the den, his hair clean and lustrous from the shampoo and conditioning. "Come, sit beside me," she said. Taking a comb from the table beside her, she had him bend forward slightly and parted his hair down the middle. She then separated the left half of his hair into three sections and began to braid it. "What are you doing?" the boy asked. "Patience. You'll see," she laughed. He then became engrossed in a television game show, leaving her to deal with his hair.

She felt a twinge of guilt as she realized that she was feminizing the boy more and more, but her guilt was soon replaced by a sense of fulfillment that the simple act of braiding gave her. She hummed a tune. It was just like she'd always dreamed. Having finished the right braid, she quickly secured the tip with a pony-tail band as she had with the left one. "Is it finished?" Noel asked.

"All done," replied Jan. "Now you're guaranteed a good night's sleep and no tangles in the morning. Come and take a look," she said, beckoning him to follow her to the hall mirror.

At first, Noel's face showed nothing. Then his eyes widened and a small moan escaped his lips. "You braided my hair," he whispered.

"Of course I did. That's what's done with long hair to keep it out of the way. Actually, the smart thing would be to braid it earlier in the day. It gives a change of pace from just letting it hang, and it keeps you cool too. Of course, you could take it down if you planned to go out." She caught herself. She was talking too much. Better to just let it soak in.

The boy stared at his reflection. The braids accentuated his feminine features, making him look like a girl. At first he wanted to protest, but for some reason, it felt nice having his hair in braids. His mother's hands were placed lovingly on his shoulders and she had a beautiful smile on her face. Even if he'd felt like it, he couldn't have done anything to ruin the moment for her.

As he climbed into bed with his new braids, he felt at peace and excited all at the same time. He knew that boys didn't wear braids, and he knew that he wouldn't have either, six months ago. Something was changing in him - something he didn't understand. He also felt that little tickley nice feeling in his tummy. That night, he had a strange dream in which he kept seeing a strange but familiar girl sitting on a sofa, sewing or crocheting. That girl was wearing the softest most feminine pink dress. He was intriguingly attracted to this girl who had her hair braided just like his.

Embarrassed and confused over his feelings, Noel let his hair hang straight for several nights but, realizing that the braiding really did make him more comfortable, went to his mother and asked her to show him how to braid his hair himself. Inexorably, he was becoming used to sensations that boys never experience.

For her part, Jan knew that as long as the changes were well spaced and set in the context of practicality, he would accept the subtle process of feminization. She rationalized that these things just made him look nicer, and were somehow appropriate for a sensitive boy like Noel.

Jan thought again of her daughter, except this time the daughter was her son, Noel. At first, she rejected it as a silly fantasy, but the image of Noel in a skirt or dress kept coming back. He did have such a fragile, pixie face. And his gentle nature was more suitable for a girl than a boy, there was no

doubt about that. She then had an image of herself at fifteen, helping her mother clean house on a Saturday, just as Noel helped her. She was wearing her white apron and dress, however. That gave her an idea, and she called the boy in to take his measurements.

At first, she didn't let on what she was up to, but the cat was out of the bag when she had him stand up on a footstool several days later to try on the almost finished garment for a final fitting. It was an apron, a white frilly full apron.

"Is this for me?" the confused boy asked.

"Yes. Isn't it pretty?" she replied.

"But Mom, it's so . . ." he seemed at a loss. His feelings were in a turmoil. Just putting the thing on made him feel weak and funny inside, giving him that by-now familiar tickle sensation in his tummy. The apron was pure white, with ruffles around the skirt hem and an eyelet border on the little puff sleeves. It wrapped completely around and tied in back. "It makes me look funny; like a girl," he blurted. "Besides, everybody will make fun of me, just like they do of Jackie."

"My goodness, did you think I was going to make you go out in it?" Jan asked with a smile. "This is just for keeping your good clothes from getting soiled when you clean house. It'll be our secret. Besides, I used to wear one just like it when I was your age. It'll be our special little family tradition." As she said this, she gave him an affectionate pinch on the cheek and smiled. Noel reflected on what she said. What the heck, if it was just for inside, and if it made her happy, why not? It excited him yet left him queasy. The pinafore apron hung in a place where he saw it every time he opened the closet door.

One afternoon, Noel was dusting, wearing this apron pinafore with his hair in braids, when the front doorbell rang. He felt so at home in the pinafore that he completely forgot he was wearing it. He opened the door to see Sandra Reed, a pretty woman in her early thirties who lived down the street with her husband and three year old daughter. Noel liked Mrs. Reed, and had even had a secret crush on her at one time. She was always very nice to Noel, even inviting him in for ice cream or cookies from time to time. Only when he saw her look of astonishment did the boy realize what he'd done. In a second, his face was a deep crimson.

"Noel, what did you do to deserve that?" she asked. At first, he hadn't the faintest idea what she meant, but after a moment he realized that she must think he was being punished.

“Uh, I broke a vase of mothers,” replied the red faced, embarrassed boy.

“Well, I’ll bet you’ll be more careful in the future,” she laughed. “You know, you do make a very fetching young lady.”

Then, still smiling, she added laughing, “You look so pretty, you might consider dressing up all the time. You’d be stiff competition for the local girls. By the way, is your mother home? I need to borrow some sugar.”

“Oh sure,” Noel answered, “She’s in the back yard cutting flowers.”

“I’ll go ‘round back then,” the woman stated. “And, don’t get used to dressing up like that, it could be habit forming.” She gave him a knowing wink, and then walked down the steps and back towards the yard.

Now, the boy was more confused than ever. She must have been kidding when she called him ‘pretty’ and ‘stiff competition for the local girls’. But then, why didn’t she say so? And how did she know about it being habit forming? Did other boys get to like wearing dresses? Somehow the woman’s comments created a storm of conflicting emotions deep inside. He was both embarrassed and, at the same time, excited. He had a funny hunch that Mrs. Reed might approve if she knew that, not only wasn’t he being punished, but that he liked wearing the apron and going around with his hair tressed in braids like a girl.

The First Bouquet

One Saturday, over breakfast, Noel suggested a picnic by the river. “What a lovely idea!” Jan gushed. “We could make a vegie salad and bring some lemonade in the thermos. But first we must clean the house.” Noel never complained about helping her, although Jan conjectured that he might rather be doing other things.

Noel went up to his room, returning in his white apron. It made Jan feel good every time she saw him wearing it. He looked so darling, so pretty, so like the daughter she wished for. Besides, what harm did it do? He only wore it in the house.

And when Sandy Reed had, by mistake, seen him wearing it, she'd actually complimented Jan on how pretty he looked!

As for Noel, he'd really gotten to like wearing the apron and found himself wanting to put it on even when he wasn't house cleaning. He would occasionally slip into it just before dinner, wearing it until bed time. His mother did not object to this. He now realized that his initial objections to wearing the garb had been perfunctory. He'd known that his mother would present a good argument and that he'd concede. He just didn't want the responsibility of agreeing to wear what amounted to a girl's dress without being talked into it.

By eleven they'd finished cleaning, and Jan prepared the salad and made the lemonade while Noel changed from the pinafore. In fifteen minutes, they were on the front walk, picnic hamper in hand, headed for the river. There was a spot near the bridge where there was a pretty grass area and several willows. The mother and son spread their blanket under one of the trees and sat. Both had brought books, and Jan turned her radio on to a country station they both enjoyed. Mother and son were soon face down on the blanket, reading.

"Hi Noel." The cheerful voice caught them both by surprise. Noel looked up and saw Jill Wheatly, a girl from school. He'd seen her sometimes at school and although he didn't know her well, she seemed real nice and was also quite popular at school. Jill was a cheerleader and wrote for the school paper. Noel introduced Jill to his mother. "I was going to walk down to the sand bar to meet a couple of girlfriends. Wanna come along?" Noel looked at his mother. Jan gave an understanding smile. "Go along, Darling. I'll be fine with my book. We can eat when you get back." Noel was happy for the opportunity. Although people seemed to like him, he didn't have many friends.

"I like your nails," Jill observed. The boy blushed. Was she teasing? He looked at her; she had a friendly smile on her face.

"Thanks, I try," Noel said. "My mom taught me how to do them. She says that even boys should take care of their appearance."

"Your mother is absolutely right," agreed Jill. "I wish more boys had your sense." Relieved, Noel was beginning to feel very much at ease with his new friend; soon, they were talking and kidding like old pals. Noel reveled in the experience of sharing his interests with someone his own age, and Jill was

pleasantly surprised to find that quiet little Noel was able to talk knowledgeably on topics like fashion and cosmetics.

The sand bar was well within eyeshot of Jan's blanket. She watched as her boy and his new friend talked and laughed animatedly. As she saw two more girls join them, she observed with great satisfaction that Noel seemed to fit in very well. The four of them were obviously having a great time. "This is really fun," Noel said finally, "but I'd better go back and join Mom. She's waiting lunch for me." Jill offered to walk back up with him.

Noel was beaming as he and Jill approached Jan. "I could tell you were all having fun," she observed.

"Mrs. McIntire," began Jill, "I must complement you on your son. I've never met a boy who knew the difference between a hem and a cuff before. I only wish my boyfriend were more like Noel. If I even try to talk to him about anything except sports, he goes to sleep!" Noel and his mother laughed at this, but were both secretly flattered by the girl's comment.

Once Jill had left to rejoin her friends, Noel spoke up. "She's really nice, don't you think Mom?"

"She certainly is," replied Jan. "And, I think she likes you a lot too."

"Do you really think so?" the boy asked hopefully.

"Without any question," replied the mother. "It hasn't been that long since I was a girl. I know she was being sincere."

About a week and a half later, just before dinner, Jan heard Noel answer the phone. Although she couldn't make out the words, she could tell he was enjoying the conversation. Presently, he came into the kitchen to join her. "Who was that on the phone, darling?" the mother inquired.

"That was Jill, Mom. You remember? From the river the week before last?"

"Yes, I remember," said Jan. "She invited me to a party over at her house next Saturday night. She's having her cousin, Ralph and three of her girl friends too. Can I go Mom? Please?" Jan's face showed her pleasure. Then remembered that while close, how hilly and unpaved the road was to get around the river to their house.

"That's a dark and dangerous drive late at night. What if it's raining?" Jan asked.

"Oh," Noel beamed, "She said I could spend the night. They have lots of room."

"You know that's quite a special compliment, her inviting you to a 'pajama party'. I told you she liked you. Of course you can go. I'll do some shopping tomorrow and buy you a special nightie. It's always nice to wear something new to a party."

The next afternoon, when Noel got home, Jan promptly brought a paper bag out from the closet. "Look what I bought for you," she announced. Reaching into the bag, she pulled out a white cotton nightshirt with small bunny rabbits imprinted all over it. One bunny was roller skating, another was eating an ice cream cone, and so forth. There were matching cotton panties.

"That looks kinda girlish," Noel objected.

"They had one with footballs on it but you know how Jill feels about sports," his mother stated. "These just happened to be in the girl's department." He didn't seem convinced. "Look," Jan asserted, "you've been invited to a pajama party. If you wear something plain, you'll feel out of place and won't enjoy yourself. You watch. I'll bet everyone will just love your new nightie."

Noel reasoned that she had a point. What the heck, girls wouldn't find something so pretty objectionable, that was for sure. He was just worried about Ralph. He decided to wear it, besides, he really liked the nightie. He began to feel badly for being so ungrateful, and said "I'm sorry for being such a numskull. Thanks, Mom. I love it."

For Noel, the next couple of days crawled by. The last time he'd been invited to a party was in sixth grade, and that had been a surprise party where the mother had invited the whole class. At last, it was Friday night.

It occurred to Jan that this would be the perfect opportunity to do something with Noel's hair. After all, it should be pretty for the party. "Noel, honey," she chirped, "I think we'll set your hair tonight and make it special for when you go to Jill's."

"Okay, Mom," he agreed. She took him upstairs and began with a thorough shampoo followed by a hot conditioning treatment. Next, she sat the boy down in front of the vanity. Expertly parting his hair into sections, she applied setting lotion

to each section and then put it up on a 3-inch roller. This will give your hair body, she explained.

It made Noel feel embarrassed, kind of girlish having his hair fussed over like this, but his mother didn't mind. In fact, he rather enjoyed the attention and the special almost scary feeling in his tummy. He knew that 'boys' did not have their hair curled, yet he was having his set.

When Jan had set the last roller, she placed a portable dryer on the boy's head and gave him a Seventeen magazine and said, "See, we're doing it like this," pointing to an attractive young girl in curlers set just like his.

"Oh my. . .," Noel said, afraid to turn the page to see the 'after' picture.

Noel just sat like in a trance for twenty minutes. He didn't even flip through the magazine. He just stared at the girl in curlers. Soon, Jan turned off the dryer and pulled one of the rollers free. The hair was tightly sprung, and bounced perfectly. "My, you have lovely hair!" she said, as she removed the rest of the rollers. Next, she gently brushed the curls into a full and rich style. The effect was unmistakably feminine, making Noel look very girlish, and Jan took her breath in sharply when she saw the result of her efforts.

She hadn't anticipated the degree to which the styling would soften the boy's face. She would have known if she'd thought about it, she concluded, but it was done now. Noel saw the cloud of concern pass over his mother's face. "Don't you like it Mom?" he asked, his eyebrows arched in apprehension.

"Of course I do, my angel, how could I not. You look beautiful!" This made the boy blush, but deep inside, he felt good. He tenuously turned the page in the magazine to see what the 'after' girl looked like. He looked in the mirror, then in the magazine, and back again. The hair was exactly the same. Soft and feminine, completely girlish and moved with every move of his head. The girl in the magazine had make-up, earrings and an evening dress on but the hair was the same.

"Too girlish?" he asked.

"Not for you," Jan insisted. She had him wear a hair net to bed that night to protect his new hair-do.

Noel had trouble getting to sleep that night. His heart was pounding with excitement. When he looked in the mirror, and saw the reflected face of a pretty girl, it really knocked the wind

out of him. He just wasn't ready for how feminine the hair-do made him look.

The most incredible thing was that he actually liked it and didn't care what Ralph thought. What was happening to him? Here he was, lying in bed with a hair net on, looking forward to a slumber party with a group of girls. He couldn't get over how his life seemed to have gone from shades of grey to a beautiful rainbow of pastels almost overnight. His mother showered him with attention now and he loved it. It was true that the things they shared were definitely on the feminine side, but that seemed a small matter.

Finally, Saturday afternoon rolled around, although none too soon for Noel. Jan had him pack his new nightie, toilet articles, and clean undies in a colorful overnight bag she'd bought for him. Driving to Jill's house, she couldn't help but think back on her first pajama party. As they pulled up in front of the lovely, ranch-style home, she decided to accompany her son to the front door. A pretty woman in her late thirties opened the door. Jan introduced herself and her son. "I'm so pleased to meet you both," said the woman. "You know, Noel, Jill has said so many nice things about you, I just couldn't wait to meet you. She says you're very special."

"Thank you, Mrs. Wheatly," Noel said shyly. "I think Jill is very special too."

The girl's mother laughed kindly. "Well, I'm sure this party's going to be a great success with such mutual admiration as you two seem to have. I'm sorry, Ralph's mother called and he can't come. I'm sure you'll have fun anyway."

Jan kissed Noel on the cheek and, declining an invitation from Jill's mother to come in for a cup of coffee, left for home.

Mrs. Wheatly showed Noel to the den, which was toward the back of the house. Two of the other girls, Karen Phillips and Barbara Pinto, were already there. Noel knew Karen from school. Barbara attended St. Bonaventure, the Catholic high school. They had both been there that day when he met Jill by the river. The girls were having a great time over some of the outrageous styles worn by the models in one of Mrs. Wheatly's Vogue magazines.

"Jill, I think this would be just the outfit for you to wear to the prom," Barbara giggled, holding up a page showing a model wearing a gold lame mini-skirt and a red bolero top.

"Oh, that's too conservative for me," replied Jill, "I definitely think that outfit was made for Noel. He could wear it to church tomorrow."

Noel, instead of being offended by the joke, took it in good spirit, responding "I couldn't. What would Barbara have for the fourth of July square dance?" This threw them all into a renewed fit of giggles.

Soon the fourth girl arrived. Cindy Fledstrom was, like Jill, a cheerleader at Graybull High, but hadn't been with Jill and the others at the river that day. As the afternoon was quite hot, Cindy suggested they all go down to the river for a quick dip to cool off. It seemed that all had brought swim suits except for Noel. Jill didn't want to have Noel miss out on the fun.

"I've got an extra one-piece if you don't mind wearing a girl's suit," she offered.

"Gee, I'd be too embarrassed," the boy responded. "What if someone saw me."

"It's just us, besides with your hair and slim build, they'll just think you're one of us," Karen said. "Come on, don't be such a worry wart." Noel shrugged his shoulders good naturedly and followed Jill into her bedroom. She produced a simple, one-piece white lycra suit from one of her drawers and motioned Noel to the bathroom.

Closing the door, Noel took off his jeans, shirt, and panties and slipped into the girl's swimsuit. The tight fit made him feel almost naked, although this suit covered far more of his body than his own trunks. Looking in the mirror, he saw that he looked just like a girl. A slim girl without much shape, but a girl, nevertheless. A year ago, he would have ripped the suit off and declined to go swimming. Now, inexplicably, just like the braids and so many other things in his life, he accepted it without a qualm. The fact that his mother, and now the girls, seemed to find it appropriate for him to wear girls' clothes lessened his own resistance.

"Great fit—almost," Jill exclaimed as he came into the bedroom. She had put on a cute little print bikini while Noel was changing. "We just need to make you a little more convincing." She took a pair of foam-rubber inserts from a drawer and placed each into a small pocket hidden within the fabric in the bust of the suit. Noel blushed as he saw that the inserts had caused small mounds of flesh to swell up above the suit.

"There!" Jill exclaimed with satisfaction, "Now we can go swimming."



“There was something different about Noel and the town’s people could see it.”

When the two came back outside, the others had changed and were ready to go. Nobody said anything about Noel's swimsuit, although Barbara made a feeble attempt at a wolf whistle. The river water was still on the cool side even though it was the end of summer, but it wasn't so bad once you got in.

The teenagers had a wonderful time splashing and throwing pieces of slime and river weed at one another. Barbara made Noel shriek when she tried to put a live crawdad down the front of his suit. He got back at her by throwing a gob of river slime on her arm, causing her to scream, "Noel, you're so gross!"

Ultimately, the flouncing and cavorting in the river took its toll and the girls became ravenously hungry. Like young puppies, they dashed back to Jill's house where Mr. Wheatly was just putting hamburgers on the barbecue. "It looks like we've got a herd of hungry females to feed," he laughed. The girls giggled at the fact that Noel had fooled Jill's dad, but nobody corrected his misconception. Not soon enough for the hungry youngsters, the hamburgers were finally served, with chips, salad and soft drinks available on a 'serve yourself' basis.

As the sun set, and after having their fill at the barbecue, Noel and the girls retreated to the den once again now anxious to get out of their still damp swimsuits.

"It's PJ time!" Jill announced, then turning to Noel said, "I guess this is one moment where you do need some privacy, so you can change into your nightclothes in the guest bathroom. Don't take too long!"

Noel took the overnight bag his mother had packed for him and entered the bathroom and closed the door behind himself. He unzipped it wondering why it seemed so full, considering it only contained his nightie and toothbrush—or so he thought. Pulling the neatly folded nightie and matching panties out and laying them on the counter.

Noel slipped out of the bathing suit and into the cute panties. Lifting the nightie over his head he put his arms through and let it slide over his slim body, coming to rest on his shoulders with the hem just past his knees. Looking in the mirror he saw a quite feminine-looking person with damp, long, messy hair. His comment to this mother the other day about his new nightie came back to him. Yes, it was a very girlish-looking garment. Was it really sold as a unisex item?? Hmmm, he wondered.

Before leaving the bathroom he took the opportunity to use the facilities, then dug out the hairbrush and tried to make his

damp hair look presentable. Well, the pretty hairdo he had this morning was gone, that's for sure. He caught himself thinking that it needed to be "put up" again. "Gee whiz! I'm a boy, remember?" he chuckled to himself.

Finally, he emerged from the bathroom and found Jill, already dressed in a cute blue nightgown, alone in the den.

"Gee Noel, we thought you got lost in there!", Jill teased, "and they try and say that we ladies take a long time primping in front of the mirror!"

Noel laughed and put his hands up to fluff his hair while lisping, "Oh Jill, darling. It's this humidity...I can't do a thing with my hair!"

This cracked the pretty young girl up. She playfully tossed a small cushion at her new friend.

"You know, Noel. The girls were just saying that they didn't think they'd ever meet a boy who was as easy and fun to be with as you." This caused Noel's cheeks to redden a bit and he tried to change the subject.

"Speaking of the girls, where are Barb, Cindy and Karen?"

"They're in the other bathroom shampooing each others hair. They're getting ready for our 'Beauty Night'. When they're done, it'll be our turn."

"Beauty night? What do you mean?" Noel asked hesitantly, his tummy beginning to feel those tingles of excitement.

"Oh, you'll find out. We'll have a great time. You'll find out how a girl has fun at a 'Pajama' party." Jill gushed, as she came over and fingered the smiling boy's long hair. "You wouldn't want your mother to think that we didn't fix that nice hairdo that got ruined by our swim this afternoon, would you?"

"Uh...no...I mean...com'on, don't kid me Jill," Noel finally managed. He felt suddenly embarrassed, here he was a boy in a girlish nightie, talking about his pretty "hairdo." Jill sensed that he was feeling embarrassed and quickly changed her tone.

"Noel, I don't mean to embarrass you. I'm being sincere. You are a wonderful friend and Barb and Cindy agree on that issue. We just thought that you were different than all the other boys our age."

Jill and Noel then noticed that Cindy and Barb were already in the doorway, with towels wrapped around their heads turban style. They must have caught the last part of the conversation because they came over and jointly hugged Noel. Barb spoke, "Jill's absolutely right. We've never had such a relaxed time

with a boy as part of the group. If we tease you a little, it's only in fun, like we tease each other. Don't you have fun with us too?"

"Oh, I've never been so happy girls," he confessed with tears starting to well up in his eyes. "I've never had any close friends before. I just thought that you might think I'm 'funny'."

"Come off it Noel," Cindy exclaimed, "you're now one of the Fab Five! And you and Jill are holding up Beauty Night!"

With that Cindy gave him a quick kiss on the cheek then slapped his backside playfully indicating with a nod of her head the Jill and Noel should repair to the bathroom and get ready.

Without any further talk, Jill took Noel's hand and dragged him into the bathroom.

"Ok, my boy," Jill said as she pointed to the main sink, "I'll wash your hair first, then you have to wash mine." Soon the lad was bent over the sink while Jill worked on his hair. Conditioner and a good rinse finished the job. Then it was his turn to return the service to Jill. He enjoyed the feeling of this close physical contact with the pretty young woman. Next the girl showed Noel how to dry his hair partially then wrap it up on top of his head with the towel. In minutes all five of them were sitting around back in the den.

"How about this?" Barb squealed, pointing at a picture of a cute blonde girl in a hairstyle magazine.

"Sure that looks neat!" responded Cindy. Before he realized what was happening the girls had all picked out new hairdos they wanted to try and now were talking about him.

"Hey?" Jill giggled, "look familiar girls?" Noel suddenly realized what they were looking at! It was the same issue of that magazine that his mother had given him to read when he was sitting under the hair dryer with his hair up in curlers on Friday night. They must have found the picture of the girl with that same style he had worn.

"Oh yes...tres chic!" Cindy answered and held the photo up to Noel to see. "Your Mom must have set it for you, didn't

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she? I knew that your hair couldn't have gotten those curls, wave and body without the help of rollers, right girls?"

"Uh...well...yeah, sort of. It's too long and she just wanted it to look special for this party," he mumbled once again getting a little self-conscious.

"Noel, I hope you brought your hair rollers like we all did," Jill asked while holding up a pink plastic bag. She now sounded quite serious and not at all teasing.

Noel turned red. "Sorry."

"No problem," Jill said, then disappeared for a minute returning with another colored plastic bag full of something quite bulky. She threw it to him.

Noel and looked inside. "Oh, oh!", he groaned to himself. The plastic bag was full of plastic hair rollers, a plastic box full of the necessary hair pins, and a hairbrush.

"Great! Now we are all set!" Jill instructed, "Noel and I will do one another's hair, and you, Barb and Cindy do each others. Then we'll experiment with makeup and nails!"

Soon all the girls were sitting on the carpeted floor playing records and preparing to set each others hair in curlers.

Noel found himself sitting beside Jill on the couch flipping through the pages of several hairdo magazines. At first he felt a little silly discussing possible hairdo's for himself that were all modelled on pretty girls in the pictures. Jill selected a very curly style for herself and began showing Noel the setting instructions.

"Gee, Jill. I don't really know if I can do your hair. I've never set anyone's hair before. It looks kinda tricky," the nervous boy remarked.

"Nonsense, it's easy," she insisted. "I'm sure you'll be a whiz at it in no time. Just think how surprised your mother will be when you show her that you can do her hair for her sometimes, and even handle putting your own hair up whenever you like."

Noel again blushed and was silenced by the girls persistence.

Sure enough, just as with all the other feminine things he had mastered in the past months, he proved to be an unusually fast learner! He studied the photo in the magazine to see how the rollers were placed, and began duplicating the same set on Jill's hair. Karen had a very boyishly short style that didn't require any great styling effort...much shorter than the only boy

in the room. In fact, Jill pointed out that Noel's hair was longer than any of their's except for Cindy!

Soon Noel finished setting Jill's hair. He was quite proud of his work, it was very neat and professional looking. How come he always seemed to be so good at such truly feminine grooming skills?

The girls looked up to see Noel in his gown and each knew what the other was thinking. Jill said it, "Let's set Noel's hair." The others all agreed.

Noel protested but was soon surrounded by the girls, each debating how to style and curl Noel's hair to "make him pretty." Barbara said, "*She's* got such nice high cheekbones, I say we do it up."

Each argued until Jill said, "Let's see who can find a picture of a style for Noel and make this rather ordinary boy into a gorgeous girl." All giggled as they went through the magazines.

"Oh, this is it girls!" squealed Cindy as she thrust an open hairdo magazine in front of them all. There was a picture of a teenaged girl in a party dress with masses of ringlets streaming down from the top of her head where her hair was swept up and tied with a pretty red ribbon.

"Yes! His hair is the perfect length. Cindy you start setting it while I get some ribbons from my bedroom," Jill instructed as she skipped out of the room. Noel looked nervously at the picture then back at Cindy who devilishly patted the seat of the chair she wanted him to sit in.

He watched in a mirror as Cindy quickly sectioned and set his hair with curlers. A setting gel called "Dippity Do" had first been thoroughly combed through his damp locks. The girls giggled continuously as they enjoyed performing this feminizing activity on the already effeminate boy.

"There, just like one of us!" announced Cindy, referring to the fact that all but short-haired Karen had their hair up in the colorful curlers.

"Now you know why I like to keep mine cut as short as a boy." Karen explained, then added with a giggle, "But...then again, you're a boy...aren't you?"

The girls had a couple of portable hair dryers, and Cindy and Noel were designated as the first ones to use them, because of their longest hair. While Noel sat there excited and somewhat confused by his mixed emotions, he watched with interest

as one of the girls used tweezers to shape Cindy's eyebrows. Suddenly, someone had a hand on his chin and was turning his face upwards and to the right. It was Jill...with a pair of tweezers!

His feeble protests were pooh-poohed by the girls, assuring him that they were just going to "clean up a few straggly hairs." They continued for almost long after Cindy's eyebrows were finished. Tears came to his eyes as hair after hair was plucked from his brows. Little did he know that the result was not in the least boyish looking.

Noel and Cindy swapped places under the dryers with the remaining two curled girls. Cindy took Noel aside and indicated that he should sit on the sofa. She made him put his feet up on a stool and she placed some newspaper underneath his heels. Taking a bottle of bright pink nail polish out of her bag, she quickly began applying the liquid to the boy's toes. By this time Noel just relaxed and enjoyed the attention. The facial cosmetics that followed were actually accepted with undeniable interest!

By the time the girl's hair were dry, Noel's face, nails and nightgown presented only one possible image...cute teenaged GIRL! The combouts were done one at a time with all girls participating and adding suggestions and help. Noel was saved for last. As he sat in a chair in the middle of the room, the girls removed his curlers and squealed with delight at the tight, long ringlets that fell to near his shoulders. Carefully, with brushes and combs, Jill swept the curls up onto the top of his head, where a bright pink ribbon (to match his nails and new lipstick) was tied into a neat bow holding them up—just like the girl in the magazine!

"Oh gawd...he's gorgeous," Cindy exclaimed, followed by enthusiastic agreements from all the others.

Karen fixed his bangs so waves cascaded over one eye for a look that was sexy and a little wild. "Wow," the other girls sighed.

Barbara said, "I wouldn't want him around my boyfriends." They all chimed in, "He'd have all the guys panting."

Noel blushed deeply by all the attention but felt they were all having fun and it was better than sitting alone. He was amazed at how long his hair appeared, like a tumultuous head of curls.

Jill ran and got her camera and took a picture of the finished product. Noel was beautiful and the picture showed it.

Just then, Jill's mother popped her head through the doorway.

"We're going to bed now girls...try to keep it down to a dull roar, ok?," Jill's mother said. She looked at the transformed boy with a look of surprised astonishment, which quickly turned into a smile of understanding. "Goodnight."

The girls got bored and Jill put on a video tape starring the teen heart throb, Tom Cross. No one offered to remove Noel's makeup or made any comment so he left it on.

The girls treated him like "just one of the girls." Noel was surprised at the giggles and observations concerning the star and his muscular body. The girl's giggled and made sassy comments every time Cross would appear in tight jeans. It became a joke. At every crotch shot, all the girls would loudly swoon and screech like they were about to faint.

Jill's father came in once to see what was going on, saying "Try to keep it down," and quickly left. He didn't understand teenaged girls so he tried to stay out of their way.

All the girls had seen this picture many times and were waiting for the scene where Tom Cross dances in his underwear to a rock song. When it started the shrill screams of the girls increased as each feigned fainting, falling into each other. Jill fell into Noel's lap. Seeing that Noel was quiet, she whispered, "Hey! You're one of us tonight. You're not one of those 'queer' girls are you? Let me hear you swoon."

"AEEEEHHHAAAA," Noel bellowed conspicuously to the shock of the other girls. They all laughed. Noel got into doing what the other girl's did. It was sort of fun.

There was never really a bed time. One after another pulled up a blanket and fell asleep on the floor. Noel nodded off and awoke when the National Anthem was playing. He reached up and turned off the TV. Jill who was dosing on the couch above him whispered, "Noel, you are beautiful. You know, in the right dress, you could have any boy you wanted."

Noel flushed, suddenly remembering how girlish he had acted that evening. It was all very disturbing.

When Jan came the next day to pick her son up for church, she was once again greeted at the door by Mrs. Wheatly.

Having allowed more than enough time, she this time accepted the woman's offer of coffee and was given a seat at

the kitchen table. "It was so nice of Jill to invite Noel to the party. It really meant a lot to him," Jan said with a smile.

"I must say that you've raised a very sweet and unaffected boy," stated the woman. "He fit in so well with the girls." Mrs. Wheatly looked flustered as she added, "I don't mean he's like the girls or anything, he's just so nice and he. . .he just fits in well." The woman was obviously uncomfortable and wishing she hadn't said anything at all.

Jan laughed. "I know just what you mean, and thank you for saying so. Noel is very special. When I saw him two weeks ago with Jill and her friends, I had the very same thought as yourself. He just seemed to fit in perfectly, and, unlike some people, I don't think that's at all bad."

"Thank you for setting me at ease," replied the girl's mother. "I was afraid you might be offended. I know lots of boys' parents have a phobia about anything in the least feminine in their offspring. I think this often suppresses the boys' sweeter sides and causes them to be unnecessarily rough and insensitive."

"I couldn't agree with you more," Jan smiled. "I'm afraid we'd best leave now, or we'll be late for church."

Jan McIntire gasped when she saw her son walk into the Wheatly kitchen. His hair curled and traces of makeup gave her a clue as to what happened last night.

Even Mrs. Wheatly couldn't help thinking to herself, "What a little doll."

Jan said nothing as she simply loaded her son's stuff in the car and drove away.

"Who was that?" Mr. Wheatly asked as he walked into the kitchen.

"Oh that was Mrs. McIntire, Noel's mother," replied his wife.

"Noel's new, isn't she? I mean, I don't think I've seen her around before."

Mrs. Wheatly couldn't repress a giggle. "Noel isn't a girl, darling. That's one reason you haven't seen 'her' before."

"Oh, right. And what is she then, an underdeveloped woman?" the husband joked.

"Dear, 'she' isn't a she at all. She's a he. Noel is a very sweet boy friend of Jill's." The girl's father just stood staring at his wife with a puzzled look on his face.

Recovering, he spoke up. "Hey, get off my back. I think by now I know the difference between a boy and a girl." He was sure his wife was playing some kind of joke. At that point, Jill skipped in with Cindy.

"Hi Mom, Dad," the girl chirped.

"Honey," the mother began, "Your father was concerned that Noel, being a boy, might have felt out of place among all you girls."

"Oh, no," the girl declared, munching a cookie. "He felt right at home. The girls all think he's sweet. Really fits in." Grabbing a handful of cookies each, the girls went outside.

"Well that's sure one on me," Mr. Wheatly laughed. "Hey, wait a minute—he was wearing a girl's swim suit yesterday, wasn't he?"

"That was one of Jill's," remarked Mrs. Wheatly. "He hadn't brought one, and he didn't want to miss out."

Mr. Wheatly just shook his head and went out to feed their chickens. He was going to throw a tantrum about a boy staying with his daughter but then realized that Noel was not really a boy to worry about.

On the way home, Noel fairly gushed, telling his mother of the fun things they'd done. And, his nightie hadn't caused any comment at all. Jan felt good realizing that, notwithstanding the methods, her little boy was enjoying life more than ever before in his young life.

Once home, he bashfully took off his shoes and showed his mother how, on a dare, he'd let Cindy Fledstrom paint his toenails a bright pink. "My goodness," Jan exclaimed. "I didn't know they even sold such a color."

Jan then noticed something else different about her son. She asked, "Did they do something to your face?"

Noel blushed and admitted, "They said no one would notice. I think they plucked too much."

Noel's eyebrows were no longer thick and bushy like a boy. They were high above his big eyes in delicate, high thin arches. Perfectly arched and curved but belonging on the face of a girl. Jan was surprised at how such a simple change had added an aura of femininity to his face. Seeing that Noel was embarrassed, Jan said, "They look very nice; however, you have to keep them clear of straggly hairs. I'll buy you a pair of tweezers tomorrow and you are to check them daily."

Noel gave his mom a sour look. It had hurt a lot when the girls plucked them bringing tears to his eyes and now he had to do it himself.

True to her word, the next day, Jan showed Noel how to keep the delicate arches of his eyebrows clean of stray hairs. With Noel's soft, delicate complexion, the brows gave him a indelible girlish appearance.

Fall came, and Noel was back at high school. He'd become good friends with Jill, Cindy, and Karen and the four were almost inseparable on campus. A few teachers talked among themselves about the change in Noel but said nothing to his mother. Soon, the cold winds blew down from Canada, and the Indian summer gave in reluctantly to a series of snow storms.

The Full Garden

Christmas had never been a particularly exciting time for Noel. Jan had made only the most minimal of concessions to the holiday in the past, but this year was going to be different. As Christmas approached, Noel saw the presents piling up under the beautifully decorated tree. For his part, he'd taken his carefully saved allowance and bought several gifts for his mother, including a Teflon coated frying pan she'd shown a liking for and a blue bathrobe. The purchases had left him with only twelve dollars, but he didn't care. The boy was filled with Christmas spirit and a new sense of belonging.

A Christmas Eve storm had left several inches of fine white powder on the ground, and Noel gazed from his upstairs window at the fairy land which lay below. The fresh blanket of snow was marked only by some rabbit tracks which looked pale blue in the morning light. Icicles had turned the bare trees into glistening crystal veils. As Noel bathed, his mother busily prepared breakfast. Soon, the boy came downstairs in his robe.

"Merry Christmas, my little angel," smiled Jan.

"Merry Christmas, Mom," Noel replied, giving her a big hug.

"You get to open one present before church," Jan said as they sat down to a breakfast of hot cakes and bacon. The boy's pretty mouth widened into an angelic smile which melted Jan's heart.

"You look so sweet when you smile," she sighed wistfully. Wait here and I'll get one of the smaller presents for you to open." She returned with a package a little larger than a wallet wrapped in shiny red paper and a gold bow, explaining, "It's just something practical; we'll save the fun things for after church."

"It's so pretty I hate to ruin it," the boy said, carefully pulling the bow and undoing the paper where it was held together with clear tape.

"Don't worry so about the wrapping," laughed Jan, "you'll never see what's inside." The boy lifted the lid of the box and found a pink leather case. Opening it, he saw it contained a full professional manicure set, including hardener, clear polish and a few bottles of bright red and pink polishes.

"Oh, thank you," he said. "I've wanted my own set for a long time. I don't need the colored polishes though."

"I know, but you needed one and that one was the best," said Jan, "and I thought you might want to use it before church."

Noel began immediately, removing the old polish and then applying, first a base coat of hardener and then a top coat of clear polish. Somehow, the sight of how the boy looked at his glistening nails told Jan she had done the right thing. She was filled with anticipation over how he'd react to the rest of the gifts she'd bought for him. Today was a day of culmination for her. She hoped as she had never hoped before that it would go right.

The church service seemed interminable for the boy and mother, although it was only slightly longer than usual. All during the service, Noel couldn't help but wonder what was in all the presents. He'd had some silly fantasies when he first saw the gifts starting to pile up, but he'd dispelled them as impossible and put them out of his mind. Nevertheless, the car was filled with the electricity of expectation as they rode home. Both talked, but neither paid any attention to the words. As they walked in the front door, Jan suggested, "You go into the den and I'll make us some hot chocolate. But don't open anything until I get there."

Noel looked at the array of packages under the tree in their bright, festive wrappings. As he gazed wistfully, he found his fantasy of before coming back to haunt him. It only hurt to think that way; he knew there was no way his mother would know or, even if she knew, could possibly have gotten him the

things he'd hoped for so. He cheered himself with the knowledge that this was their first real Christmas, and that was enough ... almost.

"Don't burn yourself, darling, it's hot," Jan warned as she sat the steaming mug on top of the coffee table. She then turned and brought one of the larger packages from beneath the tree.

"Start with this one. I hope it fits," she giggled, somewhat nervously. Noel's fingers couldn't tear through the wrapping fast enough. In a second he had the top off the box and had removed a grey wool skirt, a white satin blouse, and a pink angora sweater. Jan held her breath, staring at the boy intently and watching for any negative reaction.

The suspense was almost too much for her to bear as the boy just looked at the clothes with a surprised look on his face.

"These aren't for me, are they?????" Noel asked.

Jan's heart sank as she saw him blush a deep red.

"I'm sorry, darling, I'd hoped you'd like it. It was silly of me." She babbled her apologies as the hopes built over the past year crashed into dust in the matter of a few seconds.

"Why would you be sorry?" the boy replied. "They are very pretty. . . I was wishing for something pretty to wear around the house, but then thought myself silly."

He got up and hugged his mother who, by now, was beginning to sob. Now she knew that her decision regarding the gifts had been right, and her heart was close to bursting with happiness.

"Look at us," she sniffled, "Sitting here like a couple of little kids who lost their dolls."

Noel laughed at this and dabbed his eyes with a hanky Jan had handed him.

"Can I try it on?" he asked.

"Of course," replied his mother, "but wait 'till after we're through opening the presents. I feel better now."

This time Noel went to the tree and handed her one of the presents he'd bought for her. When she opened it, it was the blue bathrobe. "Oh, how did you ever know?" she exclaimed. "I can't wait to put it on. I'll wear it tonight."

After giving her boy a big kiss, she selected another present and handed it to him. Noel held his breath as he tore the gaily-wrapped package open with no regard for either paper or ribbon. "Oh Mom, I love it!" he moaned as he held up a white nylon camisole. "I'll wear it with my new outfit."

And so it went. Each of Noel's presents comprised another part of a feminine wardrobe. She'd thought of everything - a full starter set of cosmetics, a cute little baby doll nightie, two dresses, a pretty yellow coat, two pairs of low-heeled shoes, two skirts, blouses, slippers, six pairs of new panties, and an assortment of hair ribbons, barrettes, and clips.

"Now, you can put on your new outfit," Jan said. "Do you see why I wanted you to wait?"

"Oh yes," said the boy, smiling. "Thank you so much, Mom."

He went to her and gave her a big hug. Then, taking the camisole and skirt outfit, he began to skip out of the room. "Wait," cried the mother. "Don't forget your panty hose and shoes."

"We can go for a little walk before lunch, she added. But you should shave your legs before you change, otherwise you'll scandalize the neighbors."

"Speaking of neighbors," Noel said with a shocked look on his face, "what if they see me? They'll laugh."

"When you're outside with me, no one will laugh, I guarantee. You'll look like just another pretty teenage girl out walking on Christmas day. And, if anyone should stop to say hi, I'll introduce you as Noel's cousin 'Natalie'. Now go on upstairs and call me when you're dressed. I'll have to help you with your makeup the first time."

Noel ran upstairs with the clothes tucked under both arms. Within thirty minutes, Jan heard him call that he was dressed. Her heart beat much faster than usual as she walked up to see her child.

Despite the anticipation, she was nevertheless taken aback to see Noel dressed up in the new outfit, his light brown tresses cascading over the soft pink sweater. He was lovely - certainly prettier than most of the girls his age. After all the years of despair, she finally saw her daughter.

Wiping a tear from her eye, she motioned Noel over to the vanity. "You don't need much making up," she observed, "we don't want to spoil that fresh, innocent, girlish look."

Noel looked a little tentative about all this 'outside' stuff. Inside was one thing, but to go outside wearing makeup????

"Here, I brought up your new cosmetic set," she said, laying out the case before him. "Pick out a lipstick."

Noel hesitantly selected a light red, recalling his lessons on hair and skin color.

"I'll let you apply it," Jan said, "just open your pretty mouth and glide it on, first over the lower lip, then the upper. Good, now blot." She handed him a tissue.

Noel couldn't believe the excitement surging through him. He loved the outfit, especially the fluffy sweater.

"Let's put on a little mascara," Jan suggested, handing him the tube of lash lengthener. The boy unscrewed the top and skillfully twirled the brush against the under side of his already thick, long lashes. "That's fine!" exclaimed the mother. "Now we'll take our walk."

Finally, the boy stood up and took in the whole picture. His fantasies had come true! He looked just like a girl. He knew he should feel perfect; this was what he'd wanted. But he was conscious that, although his face was as pretty as that of any sixteen year-old girl, his figure lacked the curves that it should have. He ran his hands down the front of his dress.

"Don't worry my sweet, that will come," Jan murmured. Noel gave a small shudder.

"What?" he asked.

Jan explained, "After carrying you for nine months, don't you think I know how you feel? Besides, it shows all over your lovely face. You were wishing you had a softer shape, am I right?"

The boy smiled. "I feel wonderful. This is the happiest day of my life. It's so ungrateful of me to want more."

"And you will have more, I promise," Jan vowed.

"Mom," the boy moaned, "you're wonderful, but there's nothing you can do about that. You can't give me a new figure wrapped up like a Christmas present."

"You're right," she said, "I can't get it in time for this Christmas. But by next Christmas, my flower, your wishes will be reality." The mother had a loving look on her face.

That afternoon when it was almost dark they quickly walked down the road and back. Jan admitted to herself that Noel had a long way to go.

Back at the house and in his room, Noel remembered the present Jill, Cindy and Karen had given him the last day before Christmas break. He opened card on the long skinny tube. It said, "Open quietly!. . .Love, Jill, Cindy, and Karen." He

opened the end of the tube and removed the contents. It was a life-size poster of TOM CROSS in a leather jacket, no shirt and extremely tight jeans. Noel detected some spooky emotions as he remembered that night "swooning" with the girls. Spooky, particularly now as he stood wearing a skirt and underneath his very own pink nylon panties. Nylons, high heels, and a blue hair ribbon completed his outfit.

For the next couple weeks, Noel would come home from school and put on his make-up. At first, he had trouble with his eye make up and selecting the right shade of lipstick to go with his fingernail polish. Noel liked having polished nails and almost nightly polished them, only to have to remove it for school. "Practice makes perfect," and soon he had his ladylike chores perfected. His mother was always there to comment, helping him to look nicer.

Friday night, Jan watched Noel set his hair in curlers before bedtime. He was wearing only a negligee, his feet in dainty mules. Noel had spent every waking moment at home in his new feminine finery. He had asked many questions. Some silly, like, "Mom, do women ever get tired of wearing panties?" to the serious, such as, "Mom, can you teach me to walk with a wiggle?" She knew it was now time.

Jan asked Noel, "Remember when I was even afraid you'd hate the Christmas presents and me for buying them?"

Noel nodded.

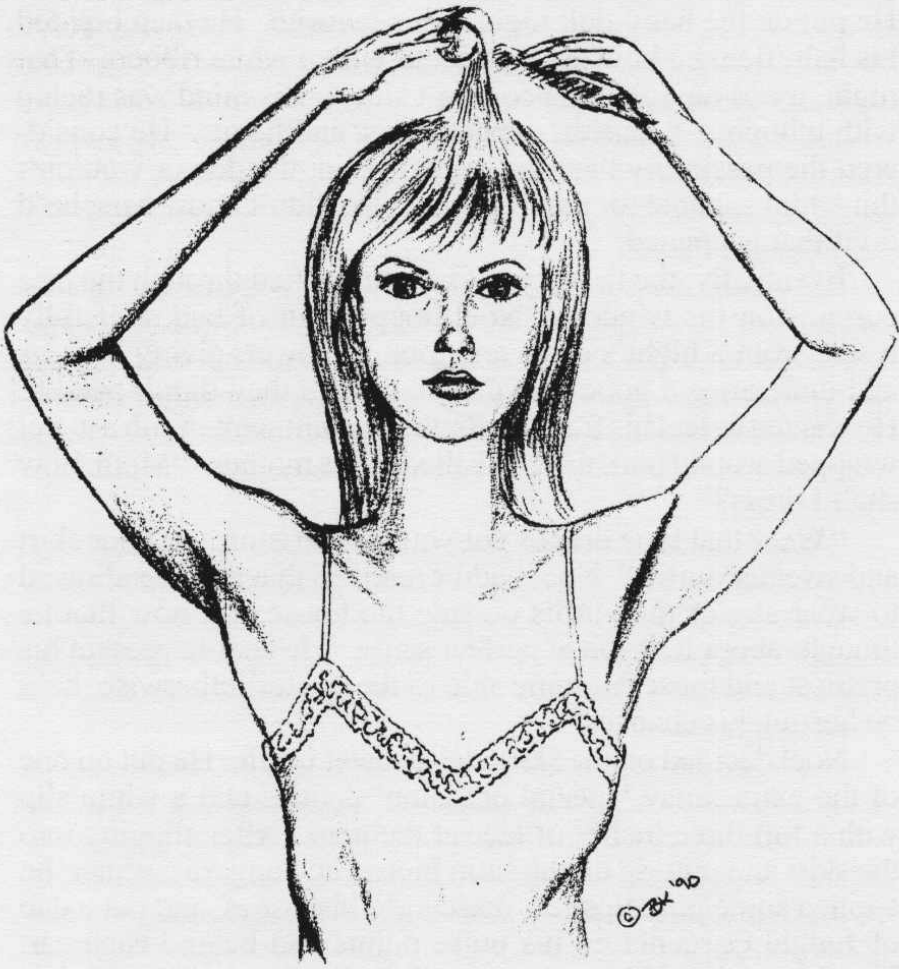
"I got this idea," his mother said wavering whether to finish. "I don't know how you'll take it. I made a few inquiries. It seems there's a very progressive doctor in Basin who will prescribe estrogen for pubescent boys if the situation seems right and they check out medically. I set a tentative appointment for next week."

"Will this es . . ."

"Estrogen", Jan prompted.

"Thanks, estrogen will give me a girlish figure?"

"That and then some. It's what makes girls different from boys, darling. It'll make you soft, give you round hips, a tiny waist, and a bustline, just like any girl your age. The doctor won't prescribe it though, unless he feels you're absolutely committed to becoming feminine."



Friday night, Jan watched Noel set his hair in curlers before bedtime.

Noel burst into tears. Jan came over to hug her child, herself crying for joy. "Thank you, Mom," the boy sobbed, "for making this the best Christmas season ever."

"Oh, look at you," Jan sniffled, "we're going to have to clean you up and do the mascara all over again." Noel laughed as he dabbed at his eyes.

The six days passed like a hundred, but finally Tuesday arrived, the day before their screening appointment with Dr. Miller. During dinner, Noel showered Jan with questions about how long the treatment took and what the stages were. She patiently explained to the boy that the doctor would answer all

his questions the next day. Noel went up to his bedroom at ten. He put on the baby-doll nightie, his favorite. He then braided his hair, tying a bow on each braid with a white ribbon. That night, try as he might, he couldn't sleep. His mind was racing with thoughts, fantasies, expectations, and hopes. He considered the possibility that, for some reason, the doctor wouldn't think him suitable for the treatment. He didn't know what he'd do if that happened.

Eventually, the first rays of morning sifted through the lace curtains on his window. Noel hopped out of bed as if fully rested from a night's sleep and took a shower, giving his legs and underarms a good shave even though they didn't need it. He wanted to feel his freshest for the appointment. With a towel wrapped around him, the boy called to his mother. "Mom, how shall I dress?"

"Wear that blue dress I got you for Christmas or your skirt and sweater outfit." Noel hadn't realized that he'd be allowed to wear any of the outfits outside the house, but now that he thought about it, it made perfect sense. He should present his prettiest and most feminine side to the doctor; otherwise, he'd be hurting his chances.

Noel decided on the skirt and sweater outfit. He put on one of the extra fancy 'special occasion' panties and a white slip with a full three inches of lace at the hem. After slipping into the skirt and putting on the satin blouse and angora sweater, he applied some pink lipstick, mascara'd his lashes, and put a dab of Jungle Gardenia on his pulse points and behind each ear. Finally, Noel and his mother set off for Basin and their appointment. Noel had lost his uneasiness about going out in public dressed up. He hadn't lost the thrill from the feeling of the soft, sleek fabrics on his skin, however. This morning was indeed special.

It took just under a half hour to cover the distance to Basin, a quaint, picture-postcard town with a main street, drug store, and even a real, old-fashioned movie theater. The doctor's office was located over a dry cleaners. Dr. Miller shared the quarters and a pretty, brunette receptionist with Dr. Haskins, a dentist. The mother and boy walked up to the receptionist to announce their arrival. "Hi, I'm Janice McIntire; Noel and I are here for our ten o'clock appointment with Dr. Miller." The receptionist glanced briefly at Noel and, without any hint of surprise, smiled at the mother. "The doctor will be right with

you. Please have a seat and, because you're new, would you mind filling out one of these forms?"

"Not at all," Jan replied, taking the form. They sat near a table full of magazines. Noel picked up a copy of *Glamour* while his mother filled out the form. Any other time, he would have been devouring the fashion photos and beauty tips but today he thumbed through the pages without absorbing a thing.

"The doctor will see you now," the receptionist trilled. Noel felt his knees begin to shake as he got up with his mother. Jan gave his hand a reassuring squeeze, which helped, but he was still nervous. The receptionist showed them into a small office. Behind a cluttered desk sat a small man in his mid forties with greying hair. He looked up and smiled. "Good morning, Mrs. McIntire. And you must be Noel. Please sit down." He motioned them to the only available seats in the room, and glanced briefly at the history form the receptionist had placed into a jacket bearing Noel's name on the index tab.

Looking directly at the boy, he plunged right in. "Noel, you're about sixteen years old, is that right?" The boy demurely nodded his head. "I know this must be a bit scary for someone your age," the doctor intoned with a kindly smile, "but I want you to relax and talk to me as openly as you would to your mother."

"I will," the boy said in a tiny, fragile voice.

"Good," said the doctor enthusiastically. "Let's begin."

"Why don't you start by telling me why you're dressed as a girl and not a boy, not that you don't look very pretty you understand, but this is a key question, and it bears directly on the outcome of our screening."

The boy looked to his mother for help, but she just smiled as if to say "Just tell the truth and everything will turn out fine." The boy then tossed his head, flipping the hair off his right shoulder.

"The reason I dress as a girl is that I feel right and so wonderful dressed this way. It's hard to explain, but it makes me feel like I'm walking on air; I feel suddenly in tune with the whole world." The doctor was jotting notes on a legal-sized yellow pad.

"How do you feel when you're dressed as a boy?" the doctor continued.

"Plain, constrained, unexciting, and yucky," Noel replied, wrinkling his nose on the last word.

The doctor laughed. "Plain, constrained, and unexciting are pretty bad all by themselves, but it's the 'yucky' that makes it really unbearable, right?"

"That's the worst part!" Noel agreed, going along with the joke, and loosening up with the doctor's attempt at humor.

Doctor Miller asked several more questions, many of them posing masculine, neutral, and feminine alternatives in a 'which would you prefer?' format. Noel responded honestly to every question asked him. Finally, the doctor put his pencil and pad down on the desk, removed his eyeglasses, and became serious.

"Let me tell you what hormone treatments do," he began. "At first, they do nothing. You take a pill every day and get up the next morning looking for results and you see nothing. So for openers, you're disappointed," Dr. Miller continued. "After about three to five weeks or so, you start getting emotional. Things you might laugh off now, will send you into a fit of tears."

Noel's heart jumped at the doctor's use of the future rather than conditional tense.

"Soon after that, your nipples will become sensitive to the slightest abrasion," the doctor cautioned. "They will grow and become firm as will the aureola, the dark areas surrounding them, and they'll be so sore for a while, you won't be able to lie on your tummy at night. You'll notice swelling in your breasts, which I'm sure comes as no surprise. That's what makes it all worth it, right?" He smiled at Noel.

The boy's full pink lips parted in a smile, but his voice wouldn't respond. He just looked at the man helplessly. The doctor seemed to understand and continued.

"You'll have to watch your diet, otherwise you'll tend to get plump. Most of what you eat will go straight to your breasts, hips, thighs, and cute little fanny. If you eat normally, the fat distribution will be normal too and you'll see your figure develop into that of a young lady. Your waist will remain small and may even diminish, and your skin will soften. The little body hair you have will lighten to the point of being practically invisible. Your arms, back, chest, and legs will lose muscle mass. This will offset the buildup of fatty tissue to result in a net weight loss. Your strength will decrease noticeably." The doctor paused to fish some papers out of a pile on the left side of his desk. He handed them to Jan.

"This is a set of information, dietary recommendations, what to expect, and what to watch out for. You should each

read it carefully, and then discuss it together. If you have any questions or if something doesn't seem right, call me - anytime. I'm scheduling you for a follow-up visit in two weeks and once a month after that."

"Oh," he said with a weak grin, "almost forgot." He took a ball-point pen and scribbled on a small pad. Handing the small, illegible paper to Noel, he said. "We can't forget this. Here's a prescription for the estrogen pills in a regular type dispenser. Take one purple pill a day for twenty-five days, then take the white ones for five days. It's just like a natural female cycle. You may feel a little moody during the 'white' days. It's natural."

Then he added, "Remember, you can't make this go faster by overdosing. I've never had a boy do it, but I've heard stories of some who have. Believe me, you don't want to do that."

Noel made his most serious face and vowed that he'd follow the doctor's directions to the letter.

"Just take that to the pharmacy next door and they'll fill it for you. While you're there, you can stop for a soda-pop. They've got a fountain that, if the crowds of kids are any indication, must be outstanding. You can start the medication cycle tomorrow morning."

Noel felt the pent-up emotions of the past year welling up inside him. As they got up to go, he couldn't help going up to the kindly physician and giving him a big hug and kiss on the cheek.

The doctor blushed, saying, "You'd better not let my wife see you do that or I'll be in big trouble." At that they all laughed and the doctor showed them out, advising the receptionist of the date of the next appointment.

The pair went directly to the pharmacy. Jan took the prescription to the druggist, a man in his thirties who looked like his face would crack if he laughed. A minute later he returned with some pink plastic containers, handing them to Jan. After paying him, Jan suggested they follow the doctor's advice and go to the fountain for a soda.

As Dr. Miller had said, there were several teen aged kids milling about, joking and laughing. Noel saw one boy elbow his companion roughly as they passed. Both boys eyed Noel. He saw the first one put his hand to his heart. Noel tossed his hair and smiled, at which point the boy mock swooned against

his friend. Two girls at the counter just glanced and went back to their discussion without any apparent interest in the dramatics which had just taken place.

As Noel passed, one of the girls said, "Don't pay any attention to them and they'll stop being such fools." As she spoke, she rolled her eyes to the top of her head, and she and Noel giggled.

As they sat at the counter, Noel whispered, "Mom, I can't believe it. I was afraid everyone might laugh at me all dressed up like this, but here are these kids treating me like I was just another teenaged girl."

"I don't see why that surprises you, responded his mother; you do look like a young girl. Wait for a few months and those boys will pass out when they see my little princess."

Noel's eyes shone. "Do you think it would be okay to cheat and take one today?" he asked.

"I can't imagine it would hurt at all," Jan answered in an understanding tone of voice. They ordered root-beer floats, and Noel pushed one of the tiny pills from the cardboard and plastic container and held it in his hand for a moment. With a reluctant toss, he popped it into his mouth. Washing the pill down with some water, he looked down at his chest and said, "The doctor was right. Nothing happened."

Jan started giggling, covering her mouth with her hand. This in turn started Noel. Soon the two were in a fit of hysterics, trying in vain to suppress their laughter over Noel's absurd exaggeration of the doctor's admonition.

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After they finished their floats, Jan had an idea. She took Noel into a shoe store near by. It was unusual to have a fashionable shoe store in such a small town but it was also a mail order outlet doing big business in cowboy boots and the fashionable stuff also sold. Jan bought him several new pairs of high heels: several pair with two and three inch heels and a pair of gold high heel mules, with pink fuzzy pom-poms on them; also a pair of ladies 5" black spike high heel pumps with ankle straps.

Noel sat nervously as the clerk slipped the five inch spikes onto his feet and buckled the ankle straps. For the first time he protested, stating that they hurt too much, and that he'd never be able to stand in them.

Noel was taken completely by surprise as his mother whispered rather annoyed, "You have to learn how to walk in spike high heels if your going to be a woman, now won't you dear?"

Jan nudged him up, but he could hardly stand. He felt as if he was constantly falling forward. Jan said, "Pull your shoulders back to maintain your balance. You have such beautiful, girlish legs, it would be pity to wear flats." This caused him to emphasize his girlish stance, which brought a smile to her face.

Jan went to a "nylon rack" and picked out several pair of nylons and then she sighed, picking out a pair of real silk stockings. She opened the package, saying, "Real silk stockings. I can't believe it. What we girls used to do for a pair of these. Here."

She handed them to Noel. As frail as cobwebs, Noel took the stockings in his fingers, asking, "Should I put these on?"

"Sure. Don't worry, dear," Jan said to assure him as she also handed him a white lace garter belt. "You'll get used to ladies high heels, silk stockings and everything else before long."

Noel went into the dressing room and very very carefully put on the garter belt and stockings. Noel had never worn a garter belt and the experience was novel but not unpleasant. The silk stockings felt magnificent on his legs. They embraced and caressed every inch of his legs, almost like someone tickling them. Noel thought, "What a delicacy this was. What ecstasy." He stood for a moment, his heart filled with happiness, wearing his dress, his high heels, his stockings, his panties. His veins flowing with his own sweet feminine hormones. Smiling widely, he joined his mother. It was all like a dream.

Jan also bought Noel a black everyday purse, and put her lipstick, some tissues and a compact with mirror in it.

“Noel, since you’re becoming such a pretty young lady, you’ll want a nice purse to carry. Be sure to hold it in a very feminine manner, sweetie. Then drape it over your shoulders. Now, I know you’ve seen lady’s walk before so I don’t want to be disappointed by your conduct. It’s okay to wiggle those hips a little!”

“Yes, Mother”, Noel answered.

As they left the shop, Noel had to catch his balance against the door, as there was very little room for him to move his legs in the tight skirt, and walking down the street in 5" high heels was next to impossible. Noel had resolved to put on a good performance for his mother. The shoes were tight, but Jan was patient, walking slower allowing Noel to get his balance and equilibrium.

Noel wiggled his way down the street to where they parked with his new black purse clutched daintily in his small, feminine hands.

By the time they got home, Noel’s feet felt numb and twisted from the high heels and his poor legs sore from the strain of the five inch height. He couldn’t wait to kick them off when they walked in the door.

Jan giggled to herself. Noel was learning what womanhood was all about. Seeing his legs trembling, she comforted, “Before long, you’ll have no difficulty maintaining your balance in even the highest, spike high heels. You’ll learn to adore them.”

It had been a tough day for Noel. A threshold of sorts. Even though the first of female hormones were just beginning to flow through his blood and perhaps because of the confrontation with spiked high heels, Noel had a fresh, new loveliness about him.

“Well, now,” Jan thought to herself, “that should keep him happy and girlish for a while!!”

Noel was enraptured by the heels. His daily practice and mother’s coaching yielded results. Soon he had his girlish walk properly perfected, modestly swaying from side to side with complete stability and confidence as he wiggled about in his 5" spike high heels. He was proud of his accomplishment and rarely wore his low heels after that.

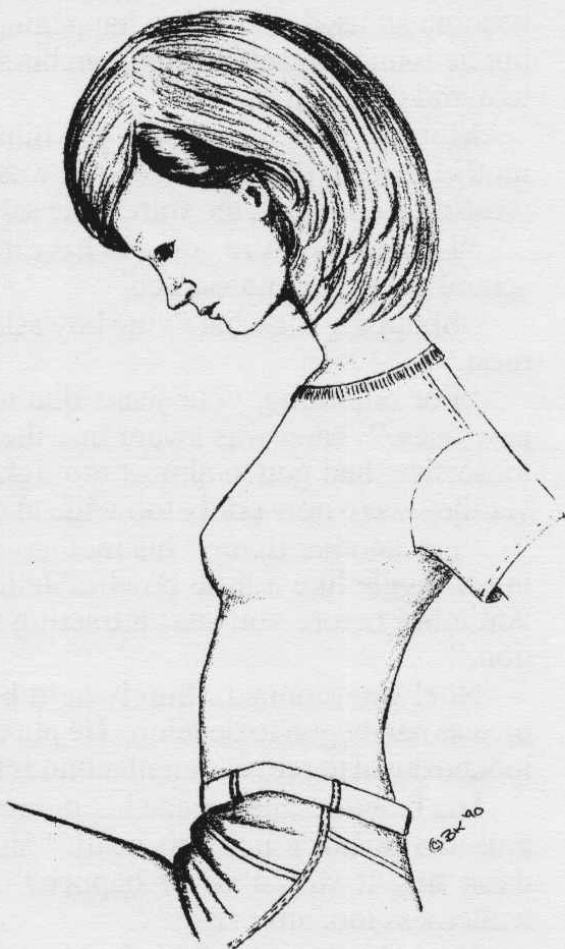
Jan noticed that Noel’s walk, even when wearing his school clothes, had changed. There was just the slightest posture change that caused him to arch his back slightly causing a

feminine roll to his hips. Jan didn't want his practice to become restrained so she didn't say anything to him about it.

The months passed, and soon it was March. Noel had been to see the doctor for his follow-up visits, and everything checked out normal. Aside from a slight increase in emotional sensitivity, Noel saw no other drastic changes. Although dressed mostly in boys' clothes when outside the house and at school, he wore things that a girl could wear too, like jeans and sweaters.

Imperceptible changes were happening, both mental and physical. Mentally, Noel was sometimes so cheerful and buoyant that he thought he might burst, other times he had trouble keeping the tears away. Occasionally for no reason, tears would border his eyes and stream down over his high cheekbones. Jan would find him in his room, staring at his reflection in the mirror. For hours, he sit brushing his shoulder-length, golden brown hair until it shined, then fluffing it, allowing it to float around his smooth bare shoulders. Jan would comment, "You're becoming a real beauty!"

"Really?" Noel would ask.



Noel blushed but was too enchanted to speak. He sat, his head down looking at the small points jutting out from his chest.

As time went by, he noticed new tenderness in the breasts. Intense sensitivity and a hardness under his nipples. He'd become so used to nothing happening, that he paid no notice, but he found himself sleeping on his side instead of his tummy to avoid discomfort.

Months later what brought him to his senses was his mother's acute perceptiveness. It was a school day and he was wearing jeans and a tee shirt as he sat down to breakfast.

"Looks like we're going to have to do a little shopping after school today," Jan observed.

"Shopping for what?" the boy asked, his mouth half full of toast.

"For one thing, your jeans don't fit well; you need some new ones." Noel was aware that the jeans, previously on the loose side, had gotten almost too tight over his hips to button, yet they were now oddly too wide at the waist.

"For another thing," his mother continued, "You're starting to jiggle like a little bowl of Jello, so we're going to buy you a bra before you start attracting the wrong kind of attention."

Noel was stunned. Surely he'd be the first to know if his breasts had begun to develop. He put a hand up to his bust, then looked down to see two small mounds beneath the tight tee shirt.

His bewilderment made his mother laugh. "You certainly took the doctor's point to heart," she exclaimed. "Did you think that it would never happen? I'll bet you've had the tenderness too, am I right?"

Noel slowly nodded his head, absorbing the reality which had come upon him so suddenly. "But how could I not have noticed?" he asked in astonishment, then realizing how tender and sore they had been lately.

"I believe that it's psychological," Jan explained. "You decided subconsciously not to check so you wouldn't be disappointed. Well, happy birthday, Honey. You're developing a figure."

Noel blushed but was too enchanted to speak. He sat, his head down looking at the small points jutting out from his chest. He had noticed a strange feeling lately, and now recognized that it was his boobs jiggling when he walked fast. His distended nipples were like tiny hills pushing out the fabric of his T-shirt. His previously flat chest now nudged outward girlishly.

"You'd better change into a looser fitting shirt or you'll be ribbed to death at school," his mother warned.

"You're right!" Noel said, a look of concern on his face.

Grabbing another bite of toast, he hopped up, taking about three big steps. He stopped, observing that there was movement at his chest. "Oh, my. . .," he said, looking at his mother with a look of bewilderment.

"Take smaller steps, dear," Jan said. Noel then with delicate steps went upstairs to change.

Jan just sat wistfully, looking out the kitchen window. She was thinking about a morning almost sixteen years ago when the doctor gave her the fateful news. She could never have guessed at the time that the pretty little baby she'd just birthed would become the daughter she thought she'd lost for good.

Life was beautiful, spring was in the air, and she was taking her 'daughter' to buy her first bra this afternoon. She couldn't understand the news reports of Chinese couples only wanting a "boy" child; sometimes killing the "girl" infants.

As Noel kissed her on the cheek, she smiled. "Have a nice day, darling, and don't be late. Remember, we're going shopping." She winked at him.

Noel gave a little grimace. "How could I forget about that?" he asked, smiling. "That's all I'll be thinking about." Noel could hardly concentrate at school. He looked at some of the other boys and wondered what they would think if they knew he was going shopping that evening for bras. He looked around the class; every one of the girls were wearing bras, even the flat chested ones.

By the time three o'clock rolled around, Jan had already made herself up and was fully dressed. She had also laid out Noel's shopping outfit on his bed. She'd gone out that morning to buy a pretty yellow jumper with white trim and a white sweater for him to wear. The sweater was just tight enough that the store clerks would have no trouble visualizing why Noel needed a bra.

Noel was surprised to see the new outfit. "Mom, you didn't!" he scolded.

"Did you think I was going to take you shopping for your first bra in jeans and a shirt?" she asked, her hands on her hips and a mock scowl on her face. "Now, you get dressed and off we'll go."

She couldn't hide her enthusiasm. To Jan, this was a milestone, not just another shopping trip. She vowed to capture every nuance of the event and to keep it locked in her memory forever.

She watched Noel get dressed. If at any time she saw "real resistance" she would stop all this. No, Noel looked excited and only slightly apprehensive at having developed enough to need a bra. The lightweight sweater, its knit fabric abrasively irritating Noel's noticeable protrusions. Jan seeing this said, "See? That's why you need a bra now."

It was a short ride to the local department store. Andrea's Boutique was an institution in town, having been founded in 1934 by Andrea herself. Two generations of women had taken the reins after Andrea retired, but had maintained the excellent service, reasonable prices, and timely fashions for which the store had become well known. As Noel and his mother entered the store, they headed straight for lingerie. A middle-aged lady in a blue skirt and white blouse approached them. "Is there anything I can help you with?" she asked, solicitously. Jan explained that they were looking for a youth training bra.

"Vanity Fair makes a very popular one, she began, as does Bali. Actually, they're all quite good, but the local girls seem to prefer those two because" - at this point she lowered her voice a little - "they are a little more grown up and 'sexy', if you know what I mean." She winked at Noel, who smiled prettily.

"By all means show us those," Jan agreed, knowing the lady would be disappointed if she said anything else.

Having settled on the Vanity Fair, Jan bought two: one lace and one a plain cotton. "You can get four for the price of three," the saleslady said hopefully.

"We'll come back later once Noel decides which style 'she' likes to wear." Jan replied. "For now, two will be just fine." Noel's heart was pounding as his mother handed him the bag containing his new girlish underpinnings.

They then walked over to junior sportswear. Approaching the department, Noel blanched and stopped dead in his tracks. "What's the matter, honey?" the mother asked.

"Right over there," the boy pointed with a slight movement of his head. "Sandra Phillips and Wendy Johnson, two girls from my class and they're right in the jeans section. I can't go in there, they'll recognize me for sure."

"Twenty bucks says you're wrong," his mother said with a grin.

"Twenty bucks?" the boy said. "You can't be serious."

"Put up or shut up," the mother pressed.

The boy hesitated. "Okay, you're on. But what if I lose?"

"In that case, you agree to go with me next Saturday and have your ears pierced." Noel gave a sarcastic grin at his mother. "Either way I lose," he said fearfully.

"Let's go," Jan said. "There's no other way out."

As they walked over to the jeans, Noel was conscious of a swaying motion in his hips. When had that started? He wondered, "Was it the estrogen, the clothes, or some knowledge locked deep inside?"

Soon, they were abreast of the two girls. Wendy looked right at Noel as he approached, but then redirected her attention to whatever she and Sandra had been discussing. She hadn't even batted an eyelash! "Looks like I'll have to start sharing my earrings next Saturday," Jan stated matter of factly.

The truth was that both girls knew who Noel's mother was and put two and two together. They had a good laugh later but were too polite to make a scene. They felt sorry for Noel, feeling it must be a hardship case like Jackie Forbes.

Jan bought Noel several pair of girl's jeans. They would fit him better around the waist and hips. Most were a "male cut, country" style but one pair (for around the house) had the zipper up the back and was made of a stretch material.

Later that night at home, Jan showed Noel how to properly put on his new accoutrements. "Slip the straps over your arms," his mother said showing him the right angle, "then position the cups over your nipples."

Noel was beet red. A long strand of hair spilled over his eyes and he brushed it back. His eyes had a hazy look of confusion as he did as he was told, adjusting the soft cotton cups precisely so that his pointed nipples conformed exactly to the contour of the bra cups.

"Now reach around and fasten the hooks in back," his mother coached. Noel struggled, unable at first to get the right hooks in the right clasps. Jan knew she could have bought the newer 'front hook' bras but felt that 'mastering the bra' was an important part of the 'feminine experience.' He would possibly be wearing them for the rest of his life.

Jan made him fasten and unfasten each bra several time until he got it correct easily. Noel appeared proud of himself.

While small, the slightly padded cups were full. "Oh, Mom," Noel said, "I feel so different. What have we done?" Noel stood looking in the mirror, adjusting the straps of the bra and smoothing the cups over his bosom. He realized that this garment by gently holding up and pushing forward, accentuated the budding physical symbols of his femininity.

Noel started to take his bra off but his mother said, "No, no, you might as well get used to wearing them now. Leave it on and you need it. You are to wear one at all times; except when you are at school. One to wear, and one to wash. Next week, we'll get you two more."

That night when Noel took his nightly pill, he realized what that harmless looking little pill was doing to him.

The next day, Noel came home from school and put on his bra and a tight pastel angora sweater. He couldn't get over how the bra highlighted his twin peaks, causing them to press out girlishly generating a crease in the soft fabric between the points.

Noel had been wearing his skirts and girl's clothes for sometime but the addition of the bra made him feel marvelously feminine. He no longer felt like a boy masquerading as a girl. Filling the small cups of his training bra, gave him confidence that he was doing the right thing; giving up masculinity, taking on femininity.

For the next week, Jan amusingly watched her son subconsciously fiddle and tinker with his bra straps and cups. She knew this was just what 'training' bras were for; to get the wearer accustomed to the lift and confinement of this 'foreign' garment.

That Saturday morning Noel had a tantrum. "Please mother," he appealed, "Do I have to have my ears pierced. Everyone will see!"

His mother had it all planned out. "Once they're pierced, we take a small piece of nylon fishing thread that you wear to school. No one will see what with your long hair and all."

"But it so permanent," Noel pleaded.

His mother said softly and firmly, "What do you think those things on your chest are? Goose eggs? Do you want to go back to being a boy?"

"NO," he said firmly.

Several hours later as a needle was thrust through Noel's ear lobes, tears formed in his eyes. Not from the pain but from being permanently branded as a girl. He only hoped that no one in town would find out. He would be very careful not to let anyone find out.

Little did mother and son know but the word was getting around. Many who have heard this story wondered why the town didn't do something. In this small town, people were polite. They wouldn't talk about you to your face, only behind your back. Also this wasn't new—remember Jackie Forbes.

By the end of the second week, Noel had accepted the unfamiliar restraint, bust prominence and pierced ears.

At school (with no bra, wearing only loose fitting sweaters), Noel was conscious of the girls and could see their bras clearly outlined beneath their blouses. Some were much more developed. Noel wondered if he'd ever be as "stacked".

At the end of a month, Jan sent Noel to Andrea's to purchase his own new bras in a slightly larger size.

Noel's lush, full pink lips gasp in horror, "By myself???"

Apprehensive at first, Jan pushed him out the door saying, "You need new bras and I'm not going to hold your hand forever." Jan knew it was time that Noel developed some confidence without her.

Noel was wearing a blue, skimpy knit dress, light-colored hose and medium pumps that matched his dress. Stud pearl earrings were the only jewelry appropriate for a girl Noel's age.

Noel remembered what his mother had told him, 'shoulders back' and 'smile nicely'. Noel walked into the lingerie department past the rows of frilly nylons to the 'bra bar'. It was Saturday and other women stood examining themselves and lingerie in several wide mirrors. Noel saw himself in one and almost went into shock. His reflection provoked many feelings: fear, excitement, trepidation, naughtiness. His spell was broken as a clerk asked, "Miss, may I help you?"

"Ahh, I'd like to buy two bras."

The clerk was very helpful, actually too helpful for Noel's tastes. She insisted on doing a "fitting" which included careful measurements and a trial and error experimentation with several different brands. An embarrassed Noel stood naked from the waist up as the clerk ran back and forth with different styles of support garments. He was embarrassed by all the fuss the clerk was making over his "swellings". The clerk was intent on finding just the right style to "uplift" and "enhance" Noel's projections. As the clerk implied to Noel, "for your popularity with the boys."

He had never been given the 'hard sell' by a clerk on commission before and left with much more than he wanted. Several padded bra and panties sets, and matching slips.

Jan wasn't mad when Noel arrived with his many new garments and a radiant smile on his face. She knew he wouldn't be out growing the "A" cup for a while.

That night when Noel prepared for bed he caught himself staring at his shapely body in the mirror. Noel was tormented by what was happening and the slow but ongoing changes. To the discomfort caused by the chemical changes in his body, his mind was in a jumble. At school he tried to be one of the "boys," which was becoming more and more difficult, yet he didn't feel like one. At home, his mother treated him like a girl but he didn't feel *completely* like one. That night he cried himself to sleep, hoping that the turmoil would be solved, but the female hormones relentlessly continued to remold his body.

As time passed, Noel's body blossomed toward womanhood. His breasts, just budding at seventeen, were soon tight and straining against the cups of his "A" bra. Jan asked the doctor for a note that got Noel out of Physical Education classes. The doctor agreed, saying, "I doubt if it's a good idea to have Noel undressing in front of a bunch of boys with titties sprouting on his chest."

Behind his back, the boys at school referred to Noel as "Nipples."

With each month, Noel's chest seemed more full, more pert and more observable. So much so that Noel had to wear a tight bust restraining band to school.



*Jan had to buy new bras for her son—34B's.
His narrow waist flowed into soft and rounded,
feminine hips, rear, and thighs.*

Noel at eighteen, with only weeks left in high school, now was over flowing even the unpadded Maidenform 34A's which had become his daily companions. Jan had to buy new bras for her son—34B's. His narrow waist flowed into soft and rounded, feminine hips, rear, and thighs.

With his long hair, and unhideable shapely body, it was confusing to strangers. Was this a girl? or a boy?

For a while, everyone was talking. The boys at school had pretty much stayed away from Noel. It might have made for a bad time but Noel was best friends with the prettiest girls in school. Many times, some of the boys asked Noel to set up dates, being too shy to ask themselves. Under the surface of this little town many unusual things were happening. The joke was, "The men were men. . .and the cows knew it!"

The muscular weakening Dr. Miller had predicted was pronounced, but welcomed by the boy who had no desire for even the slightest trace of masculinity.

Dr. Miller recommended the use of a special garment known as "Impede™," He explained to Noel, "This comes from Europe and is engineered to give you a totally flat girlish look." It was like a pair of french cut panties only made of a shiny, satin material. The doctor showed him how to put it on.

It was very tight and made his small maleness "implode." Noel was amazed at how comfortable it was, remembering how at the beginning, just wearing panties made his maleness ache from the tightness.

"Wow," he said holding up his skirts as the doctor adjusted the hooks on the side. Between his legs appeared to be only the smooth triangle of a female. Nothing else.

Noel pulled up his panties, rubbing his thighs together he said, "It's like my legs are closer together." He then slipped on his hose and adjusted his little skirt.

The doctor said, "Noel, you are becoming a very attractive girl. Keep taking your medicine and in a month or two we'll increase the dose. You have changed a lot."

Noel blushed but knew it was true. Noel felt different under his skirt. Between the tops of his legs, he only felt his nylon clad inner-thighs touching and the frilly nylon strip of his panties cradling the top of his newly inverted triangle. Noel knew he'd never be the same again. He strutted out of the doctor's office with a new swing to his hips.

After graduation, Jan told everyone that Noel had gone off to college and "Natalie" had come to visit permanently. Both Jan and Noel thought that nobody knew, but in reality, *everyone* did but just didn't say anything. It was none of their business, at least on the surface.

It was a bewildering feeling for Noel as he watched the garbage men take the boxes containing his last remaining male clothes. There would be no more possibilities on role to take.

Jan noticed with a twinge of regret the too-fast growing up of her new daughter. She sighed over the forever missed, little girl experiences, but was elated looking forward to a lifetime of shared shopping trips, fashion shows, luncheons, movies, giggles, and gossip. She did not regret the feminization which had transformed her son permanently from bramble to flower. She could see with her own eyes the happiness that the miracle of the hormones had bestowed on her baby. She had also noticed that it was no longer only herself who was the target of admiring male glances, and knew that she could put off no longer a serious discussion of Noel's future.

As for Noel, every day was an adventure, filled with new and wonderful emotions and experiences. Although he had been dressing exclusively in girls' clothes ever since he'd gotten out of high school, he still thrilled at the sensuous swish of his panty-hose clad legs against a satin slip, or the fluttering weight of mascara on his eyelids. His dresses, day and evening were always short and cut to fit tightly across his well-developed bosom which was thrust up and outward by a French lace bra.

There was more too. Deeper than just surface feelings. Noel was innately contented in the role of "girl". He couldn't imagine being with out the full soft breasts on his chest or hips that flared out from a tiny waist. He loved doing his hair, makeup and wearing dresses. He knew that the role of female was complex and would require more development and even some anguish. Noel was willing to endure whatever needed encountered, knowing that in the end he will have cultivated a worthwhile femininity. After all he'd survived training bras, a girl's hormonal puberty, high heels, short skirts, hair curlers, panty hose and other "girl ordeals."

Noel recognized that his "adaptation" might encompass the erotic function proper for that of a female. This worried him because he had noticed that more and more boys, and now even men, were taking more than a casual interest in him.

They looked at him differently; with longing. Of course, these attentions flattered him, but they also stirred some funny feelings inside that he didn't know how to accept.

Over the last six months, his feelings for girls, which had previously been romantic, resulting in numerous crushes, were now more subdued. He still felt attraction, but now it was more like that of a friend or a sister. The romantic feeling had evaporated somewhere along the way while he was distracted by the many changes in his own body.

Noel knew that his curved figure was attracting the *opposite* role as it should but he was ill-adapted to respond as his genetic sisters. Noel could only attract as his feminine passivity inclined him. Instinctively, and due to the female hormones, he was ready to passively achieve his erotic destiny.

Like a woman's, this destiny was not an active mission. With Noel's shapely feminine figure, weakened muscular structure, delicate and dainty manner, he would just exist until a virile, aggressive partner would come along. Noel only needed to cultivate and beautify his feminine features, then wait.

In June, he met Jill by accident at the river bank one evening when he was wearing the yellow jumper, and she recognized him immediately. She wanted to tell him that he'd been the talk of the town for years but "Why," it would only hurt him. He was surprised that she showed not the least sign of shock at seeing him in a dress. She explained that she had always thought he'd look great in dresses anyhow and that it suited his personality, and that was that.

Jan and Noel attended the fourth of July festivities, with Noel wearing a plaid blouse and jeans for the rodeo and other daytime events, and changing for the evening square dance into a low cut calico dress he'd ordered mail-order. There were lots of tourists in town so it was fairly easy to blend in. That night he met Jill at the square dance and realized it was mostly just local town folk.

Noel's pulse never went below 120 that night because of the excitement of the dance and the fear of being caught. All evening he was surrounded by people that knew Noel, the *boy*.

Noel did his best to stay on the "girls" side of the room where the "ladies" giggled and whispered. On the other side,

near the bar, was where all the loud, masculine behavior was happening. The farm boys each trying to out do each other with arm-wrestling, beer guzzling and language that consisted of mostly verbs that drew their imagery from their phallic fixation. Noel knew that any kind of passiveness on that side was taboo. Noel was glad he was with the "women and children."

He made lots of "new" friends. Noel met Marie, who had brought her new-born son. Noel got to hold and feed the baby while she danced. It made Noel feel marvelous when a man came up and asked, "How old is your baby?"

He realized how contented he was holding a baby; his smile, his arm, the whole position of his body. It was a simple and uncomplicated identification; acceptance of a female spirit, even the ability to passively nurture a baby. He loved chattering with Marie, mostly about the baby and childbirth. With his heels tucked under him, Noel sat listening to the intimate details of womanhood and the demands of a nursing infant.

Marie had lots of advice for Noel, even offered to give him her old dresses. She had one that she couldn't wait to see Noel in, her "date bait" dress. A sexy one. She warned, "Don't have children too young, it ruins your figure." The two sat ruefully comparing the room's "husband" prospects and each man's probable behavior as a mate.

Marie moaned, "There's very few decent dates in this town and a lot of girls. In small towns the 'dating' can get very competitive. The more attractive you make yourself, the better chance you have of getting a 'good one'."

Marie detected Noel's inexperience and offered, "I'll help you if you want? You know, 'naughty, but nice!'"

In spite of the rumors and knowledge of "Natalie's (Noel's) past," several boys seemed intent on making Noel "their girl". There just weren't enough pretty girls in this small town and Noel was one of the prettiest.

It was a strange eventuality, the rumors had gone around so many times, changed so often, exaggerated, and stretched that no one was really sure what was true. The rumor somehow even got around that Noel had *never been a boy*. Just a "Tomboy" for many years like another girl in town that only wore boy clothes.

The red blooded cowboys only saw what appeared before them. The soft curves, delicate features and sweet receptive-

ness of a country girl. A submissive delectable young thing ready for cultivation, planting and picking. Just the kind of girl a cowboy would like to come home to.

Regardless of their intent, Noel found himself receptive to a drink of punch, a dance and conversation but he never let it go beyond. Noel was learning how to protect his budding femininity from adult males.

Oh there was some whispering even that night. As Noel danced and was courted by the towns most eligible bachelors, most everyone in town put the gossip to rest; all assuming that the last rumor was true. *Noel had never been a boy.*

The Pruning?

One evening in late August, Jan sat Noel down for a long talk after dinner. "Darling," she began, "the estrogen has worked the miracle of womanhood on you. That's a special thing that only girls normally experience. You're very fortunate to have it. You're also fortunate to have been blessed with a beautiful face and figure," Noel blushed. "I'm sure that by now you've noticed that men are starting to pay attention to you in a special way."

Noel's blush deepened. "I've noticed alright," the boy replied, "and it makes me feel funny."

"Funny good or funny bad?" the mother pressed.

"Well, funny good, I guess," the boy admitted. "It gives me a little kind of tingle in my tummy sometimes."

Jan smiled. "There's nothing funny about that," she said. "That's a normal feeling for girls and women."

"How do you like being a girl?" she asked. "Would you ever consider going back to being a boy?"

"I love my femininity," the boy exclaimed, "and I'd never think of being a boy again, no matter what."

"Then there's one last step you should consider," his mother continued, a grave look on her face. "The reason I asked if you'd ever go back is that this step is irrevocable. You're now a girl in every way but one," Jan said.

Noel nodded his head. "I know, I've been thinking about it a lot," he admitted.

"Then what do you want to do?" the mother asked, daring to hope what her child's response would be.

"I don't know if I want to become a girl in that way too," Noel said, his eyes misting.

"What do you mean?" Jan probed.

"It's Jill. She and I have had some long talks and she likes me the way I am. To be honest, I think I love her and we've shared a few special times together. We are talking of moving to Hollywood, California," Noel replied, a determined look on his face.

"What?"

Noel continued, "If I stick around here, what will happen? I'll marry some cowboy, move to his parents ranch, we'll build a house on the north 'forty'. He'll come home dirty everyday and I'll end up the 'little woman'. I want more out of life."

His mother thought Noel was crazy. Why wouldn't he want that?

The next day his mother scheduled a private consultation with Dr. Miller, who agreed that the final step was definitely called for. After a screening session with three other doctors, surgery was scheduled for early February.

But Noel never completed his last step into womanhood.

A week before the operation, Jill and Noel disappeared. Even Jan didn't know where they were for months.

Noel and Jill were now in California living together, dating boys and enjoyed many fulfilling new *big city* experiences.

Without her son around, Jan started to get out more. She too began dating, and occasionally day dreaming Noel was there to double date. She started dating Dr. Miller and they fell in love and planned marriage.

When Noel heard that his mother had "a life" he called her and came to visit. He knew that he had to get away to help his mother. He couldn't be her 'whole life.' Jan's life was now complete, a boyfriend, and a daughter to love and share life's experiences with. Noel was totally comfortable expressing femininity, feeling nothing for his lost masculinity.

He went back to California, to attend college with Jill.

Epilogue

In the years since that morning in early March, hardly anything has changed in Graybull. Men and boys still wear cowboy hats, jeans, and boots, and ladies and girls still get all prettied up in cotton dresses for a walk in town. Everyone knows who he is in Graybull; it's how things ought to be. The locals figure life's just a lot easier without all the confusion.

THE END



Sandy Thomas

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