

TV FICTION CLASSICS

MAGAZINE

THE "GIRL-MAKERS"

Reed is given a chance to audition for a feminine finishing school. But does he want finished?



Volume 52

A SANDY THOMAS PUBLICATION
P.O. Box 2309
CAPISTRANO BEACH, CA 92624-0309

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MAGAZINE
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THE GIRL MAKERS

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ISBN: 1-893708-50-0

QUOTE BOARD

**"No man understands a book until he has
lived at least part of its contents."**

THE GIRL MAKERS

By Y. DNAS
Hair by Dawn Bell

Somehow after the chemical plant closed, things were different. Reed's small town became more tolerant of people being different. There were more drunks, housewives going berserk, and some boys who weren't like, well, boys.

Reed strolled across the floor of his summer theater arts class, trying not to cry. Reed had been one of his school's drama students for years now and he hadn't ever cried in class. Not when he sprained his ankle the first time he wore pointe shoes; not when people made fun of him and not when several guys in PE replaced his clothes with a tutu. Not even when he was nine years old and his father died and Nancy enrolled him in ballet lessons the week after his funeral.

For sure, he hadn't cried in front of Miss Ellis. Not yet.

The last boy in town like Reed had cried plenty though. Every time the teacher yelled at Parker, he had squeezed out crocodile tears to get sympathy. But he had cried real tears of joy two years ago when he found out he had been accepted at New York City's School of Acting. He was just eighteen then, a year younger than Reed was now.

Reed came in late and scurried out of the way of the line of girls crossing the studio in walking exercises. Miss Ellis sat straight and tall on a high wooden stool and shouted over the roar of a truck downshifting outside on Main Street.

Reed hurried past the dark-haired teacher, but Miss Ellis seemed to look right through him. Although late, she didn't say a word to Reed.

He looked for his friend Nancy and sat, slipping on a pair of well-worn high heeled pumps with a three inch

heel.

"My whole life's about to fall apart and there's nothing I can do to stop it," he thought looking again for Nancy.

Today was the end of what Reed felt was the worst summer of his life. Five days a week for nearly two months he had worked-out in the sweltering studio filled with girls. And five days a week, without fail, Miss Ellis had singled him out for correction after correction, as if he were the only person in the crowded room. He was the only boy.

At first Reed had appreciated the attention. After all, to be an actor was his dream but this theater arts class was a modeling class for GIRLS!

No one blinked when Nancy signed herself and Reed up for the course. They were inseparable friends. Besides, nothing surprised anyone about Reed since the moment he put on ruby red, sequined high heels and walked into his school's spring dance when he was twelve years old. Many thought it was cute and Nancy acknowledged she'd forced him to do it.

Reed was old enough now to realize his odd interests meant more than getting a laugh. It was like a hobby he and Nancy shared. Over the years, Reed had shown up at almost every community function dressed just like Nancy! Sometimes it was for fun, like a Mardi Gras party, other times it was just a Spring Dance. No matter what the function, it was obvious the two worked very hard at getting Reed to look as feminine as any girl there.

So seeing Reed sign up for the advanced modeling workshop was no big surprise. But Reed loved "drama" and "acting" and didn't mind being out of place as long as he knew someday his dream of being on stage professionally would come true. Besides, there weren't any other acting classes for boys that summer.

Lately his dream had seemed more like a nightmare. Miss Ellis hadn't said one positive thing to him all summer. Nothing Reed did lately seemed to be right, or good enough, and he had begun to wonder if he should just give up. Perhaps it was his teacher's subtle way of telling him he couldn't make it as an actor.

Reed found Miss Ellis's silence far worse than her shouted corrections. Today before class, the teacher had called Reed's house and said simply, "I want to see you in my office after class."

Reed thought he knew what was coming. She's going to tell me the class was for girls only. The thought of quitting anyway had tumbled around in Reed's head all morning. What good was learning to walk, turn and model dresses going to do when it came to acting? Nancy said it was important but he knew she just wanted company in the class.

Now class was on break and nearly over. Reed mentally prepared himself for the inevitable. "She's going to tell me to stop this foolishness and get back into pants," Reed murmured to himself in a soft voice.

"What do you mean stop? You aren't going to quit!" said Nancy, who had snuck up behind him in the back of the room, putting blush on her freckled face with a big brush.

Reed straightened up and blinked. Nancy's puzzled expression came into focus. Reed hadn't meant to speak his thoughts out loud.

He looked down at the floor, rubbed the toe of one high heel against the other, and gave an embarrassed shrug. "It's okay, sometimes, I just feel silly." Reed's shaky voice betrayed him. He looked at himself in the mirror across the room.

"That leotard looks great on you," Nancy said.

Reed studied his legs on the heels and the way the leotard clung to his slender frame.

"It not that," he said without glancing up, adding under his breath, "You know how Ellis's been treating me. Well, she wants to see me in her office after class."

Nancy had been studying drama with Reed through high school, but she had no intention of becoming an actress. Her mother insisted she take acting, modeling, ballet, violin, home economics and other girl things. Nancy insisted Reed take them with her. Nancy loved being a girl but hated taking classes. She'd much rather be shopping or in a beauty parlor. Reed envied Nancy.

If only there were something else he wanted to do

with his acting, it seemed like all he did lately was hang out with Nancy and dress up like a girl. He squeezed his eyes shut to hold back the tears. When he opened them again, he looked directly at his friend.

Nancy's brown eyes widened as Reed's news registered. "Whew!" she gave a low, sympathetic whistle and pushed her red bangs out of her eyes. It was rare for one of the students to get called into Miss Ellis's office. Nancy patted Reed's arm. "Maybe it's not bad news," she said without much conviction. "The class description didn't say, 'GIRL'S ONLY!'"

All summer Nancy and Reed had hashed out Miss Ellis's attitude toward Reed. At first Nancy believed the stern, dark-haired teacher was trying to push Reed harder. , to make him better. It was obvious to the whole town that Reed was a good female impersonator but this was a small-town without even one night club.

Theatrically, there was only one, three week stage production a summer and Reed had played a girl's part in that for the last three years. The producer said he was good for ticket sales since Reed wore the costumes around town for the rehearsals.

Reed knew he'd have to move to a major city eventually---a move like the one Parker had made. First Parker had gone to New York to study. Now there was a letter from him posted on the dressing room bulletin board: he had been signed on in Los Angeles at the The Queen Show Lounge.

Lately Reed had begun to share his doubts with Nancy. Maybe Miss Ellis was trying to tell him something. He confided, "Maybe I'm built all wrong for acting? Maybe I'm just not even good enough to be a female impersonator?"

"You look great! I'll wait for you after class," Nancy whispered. Reed nodded and turned his back on his friend. He made a big production of looking in the mirror and tucking a strand of his thick blond hair back up into his ponytail.

For a moment he froze, with one hand on his head, he stared at his reflection as if he were looking at a perfect stranger. He adjusted the ice-blue silk and lace camisole leotard that was just like Nancy's---just as he

had worn a hundred times that summer. He took a hard critical look at his reflection and wondered if he could ever play a man's part in a play again.

Reed had filled out a little over the past couple of years. At five foot six, he weighed just over one hundred, ten pounds. He was sure he hadn't gotten too fat or too muscular or too tall. His long legs were strong but shapely and not a muscle bulged anywhere. He kept them smooth and shaved. His face was pretty, in a rosy-cheeked, all-American sort of way. He had uncommonly large and round blue eyes for a boy and his fair skin tanned easily beneath the California sun.

Reed's light blonde hair was not natural but it's darker roots highlighted its luster. His hair had grown more than five inches in the last year, making it break over his shoulders in shining waves for the first time. Lately, strangers thought he was a girl even when he wasn't trying.

"Yes," he thought objectively, "I look good enough to at least be a professional female impersonator."

"Reed! Are you going to stand there admiring yourself all day?" Miss Ellis's voice was harsh and Reed jumped. Nancy started giggling nervously.

Reed blushed, then drew himself up very tall and stepped into line with the other girls. He sensed Nancy falling into place next to him. "What are we doing?" Reed whispered through clenched teeth. He hadn't been paying attention. He had no idea what exercise was next.

"Runway," Nancy prompted in a whisper.

Reed nodded. He could figure it out. As the bass boomed out of the small tape recorder on the floor, he pointed his right foot in preparation. Just hearing the rocking sounds of a modeling show did something to Reed. This might be the last moment of the last modeling class he'd ever take, and he was determined to make this last runway his best. He wanted to show Miss Ellis just how good he really was.

He forced everything out of his mind and abandoned himself to the fiery rhythm of the music.

He waited two measures, then sprang strongly onto his right heel. He spun around quickly and swayed out

on the imaginary runway. In spite of his mood, a joyous smile came to his pink lips as he wiggled across the floor. With every step Reed took he felt more buoyant, more at home in his high heels. He knew he had the most feminine walk and could turn on a dime in the highest heels with the slightest wobble.

Nancy was smiling. It was her high heels that he learned to walk in. Now, of course, he had many pairs of his own.

FACING THE MUSIC... .

After class, when Reed walked into the office, Miss Ellis stood with her back to him. Reed didn't have to see her face to know this wasn't going to be a friendly rap session. Her body language gave it away. The way she was standing spoke louder than any words: it was bad news.

Reed rested one hand on the back of a chair, and whispered, "Miss Ellis? I'm here."

"Sit down." Reed obediently sank down. Out of habit he crossed his legs above the knee and draped a sweater over them like a skirt.

Reed shifted restlessly in his seat. Inwardly, he pleaded for his teacher to be quick and get the whole awful mess over with. To get her attention, Reed cleared his throat.

Miss Ellis walked behind Reed and closed the office door. Reed adjusted the sweater a bit, glad to have something to do with his hands.

Miss Ellis perched herself on the edge of the desk and took a sip of coffee before looking directly at Reed. When she finally met Reed's apprehensive grimace, her dark eyes softened.

"Remember that attractive woman that was here several weeks ago---the one who stood quietly in the back?"

Reed nodded. He was always aware of strangers. He wondered what they thought of a boy taking a modeling class.

Miss Ellis watched Reed. He was so frail. His long slender fingers twirled around a narrow unisex gold ring he wore on his right hand. Reed looked as if he

were about to burst as he then clutched the arms of his chair very tightly.

Miss Ellis continued. "She came to our class to check out what I'd told her." Miss Ellis stood up and femininely adjusted the back of her short black skirt as if to flaunt her own stake in womanhood.

"Oh!" Reed thought, "A state inspector! That's why he was being thrown out."

After an excruciating moment, Miss Ellis folded her arms across her bosom and said, "That lady was very impressed, particularly with you, Reed."

"Impressed?" Reed gulped. For a moment he actually felt dizzy though still confused.

"The point is, I wanted to get a second opinion---- about your interests in girl things."

"A shrink?"

"No!" Miss Ellis almost laughed. "That lady was a talent scout and was impressed enough to set up an audition for you. . .for entrance this fall into a San Francisco finishing academy."

"Audition?" Reed repeated incredulously. "Finishing? You mean----they think I could get into an acting academy?" His dainty white hands started shaking so hard he clasped them together. A second ago he had been sure his dream of being an actor was dashed. Now he was about to be given the opportunity to try out for some kind of 'academy.' Reed suddenly didn't know if he was going to burst into laughter or tears.

"The San Francisco Institute of Femininity is more of a 'finishing' school than an acting school, Don't get your hopes up too high but I think you stand a chance of getting into the Academy. It's a small school and they usually train only ten boys at a time, but this year they have expanded to accept eighteen."

"I don't understand. . .it's only for boys?"

"Boys like you. Remember that lady? He was once like you."

Reed gasped, "Finishing School? Like one for girls. . .only for boys?"

"S.F.I.F. is very exclusive. You would be 'finished' as a girl."

"How many will be trying out?" Reed asked.

"Over a hundred," Miss Ellis replied.

Reed's eyes grew big. "A hundred?" he repeated in astonishment. "Like me? Oh, Miss Ellis," he said, shaking his head back and forth. "That many boys want to be 'finished' as girls? Are they pretty?"

"Some are very pretty and some have been living as girls for years. .

"Why would anyone pick me?"

"Because you're gifted," Miss Ellis responded instantly. "You have an innocence that makes you glow. Finish the rough edges and you could be. ."

Reed wasn't sure he was hearing right. He blushed, feeling awkward in the face of such an odd compliment. This summer Miss Ellis had always treated him as if he were some weirdo, but now Reed felt incredibly excited.

Miss Ellis continued with a warning note in her voice. "But being cute isn't going to be enough to get you in." After a pause she stated, "You'll need to take this seriously?"

Reed stared at his teacher in disbelief. "Are you asking if I want to audition?" He started to laugh. "Are you kidding?"

He sprang to his feet and threw his arms around his teacher's neck. "Oh, Miss Ellis, I want to audition more than anything in the world. . .but what does being finished mean?"

Miss Ellis returned his hug warmly, then held him at arm's length. Her own eyes filled seeing his innocence glowing and said, "You've fit right in here with the girls in my class. It's hard for me to believe you are the same boy that Nancy pulled in here a few months ago."

"I've tried to fit in," Reed apologized.

Miss Ellis gestured with her manicured fingers towards Reed. "Even in boy clothes, you are beginning to look and act like a real female, Reed."

Reed blushed before he realized that it was a compliment.

Miss Ellis gazed at Reed a long moment. "It's been quite an experience to have a boy in my modeling class," she said wistfully, "I'm afraid if you too seriously

consider your future, it's time for you to move on. I've taught you all I can here."

"Oh my, I have so much to do," Reed shrieked as his hands flew up to his hair. "I'll never be ready! Do they want me to audition as a girl?"

"Of course dear. If I were you, I'd start getting into the role. The academy starts in a few weeks. If you get in, you'll only have a week or two to pack your clothes before going back to begin classes."

Reed paced over to the window and back again with that catlike walk. He looked at Miss Ellis with wide and frightened eyes. "What would I wear?" he asked, sitting in the chair with a defeated thump.

"Show some confidence. . .make them think a real girl got into the audition! That's all." Miss Ellis struggled to keep a smile off her face. "Haven't you noticed how well you fit in with the girls in my class. Even when you're not trying, people think you're a girl?"

Reed stared at his teacher and slowly a look of understanding crossed his face. "That's why you picked on me all summer, isn't it? That was part of the training!"

Reed suddenly felt awful for all the terrible things he had thought about Miss Ellis. All along his teacher had only been trying to help him, prepare him for an acting career. . .even if it had to start with female impersonation. "I thought you were going to tell me I couldn't make it as a girl?"

A pained expression crossed the teacher's high-cheekboned face. "I was pushing you very, very hard." Reed shifted uncomfortably as his teacher went on. "I had to see exactly how far you could come in a couple of months. To see if you were really ready psychologically."

"That's why you made me wear the heels, leotard and skirt?" Reed asked.

Miss Ellis nodded and resumed in a sterner tone. "That's behind you now. When you get to that audition, I want you to remember that no matter what happens, you will be different because of all this."

Miss Ellis sounded so compassionless yet she was helping him, right? He nodded in agreement even

though he wasn't sure he understood.

Miss Ellis sighed again. "I'm sorry if I undermined your confidence." She sounded worried. "I just want you to realize that this Academy is a very competitive place. If you do get in, my summer's classes are going to seem like a trip to Pamperland."

Miss Ellis gripped Reed's shoulder firmly and said in a clear no-nonsense voice, "You were born to spend your life in dresses, Reed. No matter what happens to you, never, ever doubt that for one minute."

Reed had heard that before but still blushed every time someone said it. Miss Ellis cleared her throat and continued. "Now let's talk reality. Beauty counts for a lot but at your audition there will be plenty of boys just as pretty as you."

Reed frowned. The possibility of getting a chance like this and not getting in was too awful to think about. He knew that in acting there was always a younger, prettier face who wants in your 'heels'.

Reed's face fell. The teacher reached out and affectionately tucked a stray wisp of blond hair behind Reed's ear. "But it's the chance to perform and share your gift with people who love beauty."

"Nothing could make me stop now!" Reed responded vehemently.

Miss Ellis smiled. "So we start tomorrow. I want to see you here at ten AM. We'll work out a detailed schedule of rehearsals then. Be prepared to work into the evening at least a couple of nights. I want you to talk to your mother tonight and get her okay."

"Oh, she'll say okay," Reed declared.

"10 A.M. sharp! I want you here in dresses, your face made-up and hair done. No more of this flying in here late and sticking on a pair of heels."

Reed shuddered, it was beginning... Reed took off his wrap skirt and heels and slipped denim overalls over his leotard and tights.

Reed rolled his eyes at Nancy's question. Sometimes his friend's ignorance of what he was doing was

astounding. "I'm a boy, silly! They can't have us sleeping on the streets while we are being finished!"

"Why not? You are more graceful and feminine than any girl in this town."

Reed tilted back his head and laughed. The sun was bright in his eyes and he pulled down the big round sunglasses perched on top of his head and looked at his old friend with affection.

"I'm really going to miss you, Nancy!" he blurted out. He and Nancy had been best friends for ten years, had walked home together every day after school, and had spent most evenings together.

Sometimes Reed was amazed they were still friends because they were so incredibly different. Nancy was strikingly beautiful but was also a straight A student. Reed wasn't any of those things and had always been glad to have Nancy around to help him with his homework.

Nancy shared everything with Reed. Neither had a single secret or even a held back thought. She was so head-strong----everything revolved around her interests.

Reed could barely remember a time in his life when Nancy hadn't been around to confide in. Nancy was the one person who knew how Reed felt when he was teased by guys but he went ahead with all of Nancy's little plans anyway.

He leaned back on one arm and repeated thoughtfully, "I am really going to miss you."

"Oh, you'll be too busy becoming a star to remember your old friends," Nancy said with an exaggerated giggle. "I can see the headlines now----HOMETOWN BOY MAKES GOOD: MARRIES A PRINCE AND BECOMES A QUEEN!"

Reed tossed a nylon from his bag at Nancy. "Things like that don't happen in real life," he chided, but his heart skipped a beat, But things so wild and wonderful might actually happen to him!

Nancy shrugged. "Well, even if you don't become an overnight starlet, I know you'll change a lot."

Nancy kicked off her sandals and wriggled her bright red manicured toes. "Remember when I first painted your nails?"

"I'm not going to forget my friends," Reed stated emphatically. "Besides, it's not exactly a boarding school. We don't live on a campus. Academy students are placed with host families."

Nancy sat up straight and looked right into Reed's eyes. "You know what this all means, don't you?" she said in an ominous tone. "You are going to leave and never come back again."

"Come off it!" Reed dismissed Nancy's prediction with a wave of his hand. "I haven't even gotten into the academy yet. Don't forget, I've got to go up against a hundred other guys who are just as home in high heels as I am."

Nancy laughed off Reed's fears. "You'll get in. You're the most feminine person in this town. . . maybe more of a girl than me!" Nancy cut off Reed's protest before Reed had a chance to open his mouth. "The point is, you're going to go to San Francisco, study there a couple of years and become so beautiful I'll never see you again," Nancy concluded in a tragic voice.

Reed was speechless. So far Nancy's reaction to his news hadn't been at all what he'd expected. Nancy was supposed to be happy for him and here she was looking positively glum.

"Nancy?" Reed asked, "I get the impression you don't think my being 'finished' is such a great thing."

Nancy gulped. "Oh, I do. I mean, I love it that you will be 100% girl for so long." She paused, then added dramatically, "I like having you as my best girlfriend."

"And I love being your girlfriend!" Reed said, "Without you, I would have never taken the modeling course or let my hair grow. . ."

"Or bleached it blonde! You hussy." Nancy added.

Reed started to giggle, but the deepening gloom on Nancy's face stopped him.

Sometimes his best friend was really exasperating. Reed hoisted the straps of his blue overalls back up on

his shoulders and looked down at Nancy.

This was the best thing that had ever happened to Reed, and Nancy didn't seem to be the least bit excited for him. If something equally good had happened to Nancy, Reed was certain he'd be overjoyed.

"I said I was going to miss you. And no matter what, we'll still be girl friends," Reed asserted testily. "Why should a school I go to change that? It might make me a better GIRL friend!"

Nancy stared at Reed skeptically for a minute. "I guess I was really looking forward to going to college together. You know, the dances, the parties. . .remember how fun it was meeting guys who didn't know about you?"

"That was fun for YOU!" Reed didn't know what else to say. Of course going off to the Academy wasn't something every young man would do. But Reed wasn't like "every guy." He was feminine, had female interests, loved to do hair, make-up and his legs looked good in a short skirt. He was marvelous at doing girl stuff.

But there was more. Just seeing a pretty new dress in a store window sent chills down his spine. Reed knew that someday he'd be standing backstage in the wings listening to the overture, nervous, frightened, waiting for the curtain to rise and ready to show the world his talent...but for now his feminine charms seemed to be the ones opening doors.

But Nancy didn't seem to understand that. Few did, except Miss Ellis and she was sending him away to a different world...one where he might fit in.

Reed looked at Nancy and suddenly felt let down. "I didn't think being girl friends meant we had to be joined at the hip," he said irritably. "What happens when you meet some guy and get married...and he gets transferred out of state and. . ." He stopped and kicked his low heeled loafers against the sidewalk.

Reed had to control himself to keep from shouting. How could his best friend in the world not understand that he was being given the chance of a lifetime? "I thought you believed in me," Reed said, "and thought I was good?"

"I do. I believe you will make a great girl." Nancy shook her head in disgust. "But I'm not sure I believe in you as MY girl friend anymore."

"Just because I want to go away?" Reed cried.

He picked up his bag and slung it over his shoulder. His voice trembled as he went on. "I know what's wrong with you, Nancy. You're jealous!" Reed fumed, his eyes flashing fire, "You wish you were in my heels right now. A chance to get out of this small town and make it big! Pretty dresses, fashions. . ."

Reed planted his girlishly hands on his hips and stared at his friend.

"This is one friendship I'm glad is over." The honk of Nancy's mother's car horn cut her off.

"GUESS WHAT MOM.. .

The night wind had picked up and the pink curtains fluttered out from the wide open window of Reed's ground floor bedroom. He knelt on the floor in front of his dresser sobbing over his fight with Nancy. They had fought many times before, but not like this. Reed was half listening for the phone to ring, but he knew it wouldn't.

Nancy never made up first. She was too stubborn and Reed was still too angry to call Nancy himself and say he was sorry. Anyway, he wasn't sorry. Nancy had betrayed him.

Sniffing back his tears, he energetically began to sort out his wardrobe into three different piles: too boyish, girlish enough to wear and great things for the audition. The audition pile was woefully small. For a moment, he wished he'd worked more hours at the Frosty Freeze but the Manager wanted him to wear the girl's uniform. "I'm not some freak to put on display!" Reed muttered to himself but he missed having the money for a better wardrobe.

Looking around his room, he saw tiny vats of multicolored eye makeup and open tubes of lipstick cluttering his desk. He and Nancy spent a lot of time in his room puttering around. Restlessly, he began putting hairbrushes, combs, barrettes, make-up and other girl-

ish things that were scattered about into his drawers. In one drawer was a half empty box of tampons----an indication of how close they were.

Reed tried to focus on the Academy. If Reed ended up actually getting into the school, his mother could probably afford to send him. Of course, his mother didn't even know about the audition yet but Reed went about his preparations for the intensified practice schedule.

Reed tried to relax, painting his toes and fingers pink while squinting out the window into the dark. His mother's car was nowhere in sight. She wouldn't be home from work until close to nine. Reed curled his bare pink tipped toes in the thick rug and tried to focus on the last clear coat frying on his fingers. He closed his eyes and carefully lifted his hair off the nape of his neck. He was wearing it down and it fell thick and straight to the middle of his back. A cool breeze played gently with his hair.

When he was a little boy, he'd lie in his bed and look out his window at the swirling stars and fall asleep dreaming about his future. . .none of which involved having long blonde hair and wearing flirtatious dresses.

An instant later headlights beamed down the long driveway and against his wall. "Mom! Thank goodness you're home!" Reed cried, tearing out barefoot onto the grass. His mother walked slowly toward the house, one arm full of groceries.

Reed held open the door as his mother entered the kitchen. She turned around and faced her son. The warm welcoming smile on her face turned to a frown of concern. She saw his pink fingernails and swollen eyes. "Reed, has Nancy been here? You've been crying." She reached up to touch Reed's tear-stained cheek. "What happened?"

Reed stepped back, confused. He had forgotten to wash off his face. "Nothing," he stated, suddenly feeling embarrassed about his fight with Nancy. But his news was too big to think of Nancy for very long.

"Oh, Mom! Everything's happened!" He reached for his mother's hand and pulled her gently toward the family room where Reed had laid out several of her

dresses.

"What's going on? That's my favorite dress!" Reed's mother protested. "Reed, you'd better tell me what this is all about." She eyed her son suspiciously.

Reed's mother folded her hands firmly in her lap and studied Reed carefully. She was as dark as Reed was fair. Reed had inherited his father's coloring, but he had his mother's small slender build, delicate features, and beautifully sculpted face. "If you want to borrow one of my dresses, you do know you have to ask?" Reed's mother asked.

Reed turned around in the doorway and shifted from one foot to the other, trying to figure out how to begin. "In class today," he finally cried, sinking to the floor at his mother's feet. "I'm going to San Francisco to audition for this Academy. . .Miss Ellis says I have a good chance of getting in. . .I need to. . ."

Reed kept his eyes on his mother's the whole time he spoke----stringing his words together too quickly to make sense. When he paused, the expression on his mother's face made his heart stop.

"Mom?" Reed said in a frightened voice. He plopped down next to her on the sofa. Reed's mother sat still as a stone. The color had drained from her face and her eyes were fixed on her dresses scattered about the room.

Finally, she patted Reed's hand and said in a quiet, tired voice. "This academy or finishing school. You'd be wearing dresses?"

Reed got up slowly, afraid to say a word but finally burst out, "Please say yes!"

"Why don't we start at the beginning," his mother said with a brave smile. "What is all this about. . .how, where, when? You know, all those unimportant details."

Reed pulled up an old rocking chair and curled his legs girlishly beneath him. He pulled his sweater over his chest, accenting the impression a lightly padded bra made on its front. This was no time to hide his girlishness.

He told his mother about his talk with Miss Ellis, ending with, "Miss Ellis told me that if I want to become an actor or actress, I have to go to someplace bigger. I

guess this is my big chance.” Reed's voice dropped very low.

“She's right,” Reed's mother said, her voice sounding more like a groan. “You're too pretty to stay here even though everyone has been nice. I've always known that someday you would have to leave.”

Reed sprang to his feet and threw his arms around his mother and hugged her tight. At that moment Reed only wished there were some way to make his dream come true without leaving his mother.

He swallowed the lump in his throat and looked up at her. “Can I go?”

His mother smiled through her tears. “Of course, dear. It'll be lonely without you here, but I'll manage.”

Reed's mother sat down in a chair and looked around the room. She reached for a tissue. Her eyes rested on a framed photograph of Reed's dad. “I'm not sure your father would have wanted you to go but he believed you were born to do something special with your life. Becoming a female actress would certainly be special!” Her voice was surprisingly steady. “We talked about it once.”

“But I was just a kid when Dad----died.” Reed still found the word hard to say.

“You were pretty even then. Even as a baby, people thought you were a girl.” Reed's mother reached out and tousled Reed's long hair. “What if you don't get in, Reed? Can you face that? Are you prepared to fail?”

Reed's mouth fell open in surprise. Suddenly all his newfound confidence vanished. Nancy not believing in him was one thing, but his mother too?

Reed's mother laughed. "I don't think you are going to fail, but when you try out for something like this, it's like putting yourself out there for public inspection. Some may not like what they see no matter how feminine and pretty you feel."

His mother's meaning began to dawn on Reed. "You mean, do I think I'm feminine enough no matter what anyone else thinks?" Reed asked.

His mother nodded.

Reed sat very still and studied his hands and manicured fingernails. He wore faint pink polish on nails that were almost 1/4 inch beyond the fingertips. He spent a lot of time on them and knew they were "nicer" than most of the girls he knew.

When he finally looked up at his mother, he admitted with a sigh, "I've always been girlish," he admitted with a force that even surprised him. "I'm not going to stop now."

"I don't think you will either," his mother stated firmly. "I gave up trying to influence you long ago. I've seen you give up a lot to pursue your dream: the fun of playing ball, time with friends."

"I haven't missed any of that boys stuff. . .I've had Nancy," Reed objected.

That night Reed crept into bed too exhausted to sleep. His legs ached from practicing his runway walk in his highest high heels. He had the beginnings of a blister on his right heel. His mind was racing at the thought of being trained to be a girl by the best! But he had a strange hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach. Cuddled alone in his favorite little nightgown, he lay in his bed thinking about the audition. Reed didn't feel as confident of his future as he had earlier in the day.

What if he didn't make it past the first cut in the audition? He would be so humiliated. Reed choked up at the thought of his mother. As far back as Reed could remember, his mom had encouraged him in whatever interested him. She'd always been there, never teasing, always with helpful suggestions.

While Reed's mom had never pushed him, in fact,

she'd urged Reed to take it slow. When Nancy first tweaked Reed's interest in girl things, his mother was there. How many moms would buy their son nail polish or barrettes for his hair so he could tinker around with a girlfriend? When it began to blossom, how many moms would have bought her son a babydoll nightgown so he could have 'slumber parties' with his girlfriend?

Reed liked girl things and his mother had helped him every step of the way. Tears came to his eyes when he remembered his mother first suggesting, "Reed, maybe we could get you a dress for your play times with Nancy." Now he was leaving her.

He knew his morn would do just fine. She had lots of friends, and had even begun dating again recently. Reed's bond with his mother was strong and he couldn't imagine being without her supporting presence.

What would life be like without his mom and Nancy? Suddenly, even the prospect of being a girl morning, noon, and night wasn't exciting.

Part of the lure of being feminine was being close to them. He could share the excitement of a new short skirt or getting a new hairdo. With Nancy he shared every girlish secret from her periods to which boys made her feel what. Tears built up behind Reed's eyes and he willed himself not to cry. He had work to do.

The day finally came for Reed's trip to San Francisco. His bags were packed on the floor beside his bed. He swung his smooth shaven legs out of the bed and stood up brushing the silky skirt of his long nightgown smooth. He looked at himself in the mirror and squinted at his night cream-coated cheeks and bulging hairnet that barely covered the large hair rollers that his mother had helped him put his hair up into for the night.

Reed was struggling with mixed emotions. There was the thrill of the opportunity to dress and live as a young woman in the big city versus the sadness of leaving his mother and best friend behind.

Slowly he slid the nightgown off of his slim hairless body and stepped into the bathroom to wash off the face cream and to do his morning toilet.

His mother had selected his clothes for the trip. For underwear his mother had purchased a new set of exquisite lingerie. He pulled the gleaming, lace-festooned silk panties up and over his slim hips carefully pushing his lightweight maleness back between his legs. He had a tight dancer's gaff for the auditions, but for the long bus trip this would do.

Next, a matching white garter belt and suspenders were fastened around his tiny waist and the long suspender tabs were slipped through the panties and attached to the tops of sheer nylon stockings. As the stockings were tugged firmly upwards by the elasticity of the garter belt it sent a shiver of satisfaction through the feminine boy's body. Not many guys knew how such complex lingerie was worn.

Reed lifted the beautiful, lacy white bra. It was a B-cup that perfectly enhanced his figure with the help of some silicon breast forms. On his size frame, the B-cup gave him the perfect sexy figure for his age. He slipped the bra straps up his arms and over the shoulders. With the practiced experience of a lithe young woman he easily reached around back and hooked the strap. The breast forms were then lovingly slipped into the cups and concealed.

As Reed looked at the mirror. Staring back was a pretty young woman in sexy lingerie with her hair still up in curlers. But he wasn't finished.

Reed's mother had always taught him that a proper young lady should wear a slip under her dress. Daintily, he picked up the new slip which was as beautifully detailed with lace as the other pieces of lingerie and carefully let it drop over his arms and down his chest.

A smile broke on his lips. From his toes, all the way up to his shoulders he was enveloped in the light, slick feel of his silken lingerie. As he was enjoying the morning breeze from the open window tickling the lace at the hem of his slip there came a soft knock on his bedroom door.

"Reed, are you awake?" His mother called.

"Come on in Mom. I'm getting dressed."

"I thought you might like help with your hair."

"Thanks, that would be great. Let me put my dress

on first.”

Reed's mother watched as her only child, both a son and daughter to her, took the cute summer dress off of the hanger and prissily slipped it on over his head.

He turned his back to her, mutely requesting her help with the zipper. As she pulled it closed and fastened the hook at the top she sighed.

“What's the matter Mom?”

“I'll miss you.”

“I'll miss you too Mom. . .but I'll be back.” He comforted.

“I know son. It's for the best. Such a wonderful opportunity. You are so talented. . .and pretty!”

Reed smiled at his mother as she led him to the vanity and sat him down facing the mirror. He watched as she undid the hairnet and carefully lifted it off of the rollers. There was something so warm and fuzzy about the way his mother did his hair. Her focus on making him feel “pretty” was done with such obvious love that it made him want to cry.

Pins and rollers were removed and long, tumbling curls spilled down onto his shoulders. Taking a brush she slowly ran it through his hair from front to back. Gently the curls were coaxed into a full, sweet hairdo that gave him that pure country girl look.

Taking a silk ribbon matching the pink shades of his dress, Reed's mother slipped it under the back of his hair and brought it up to the top of his head where she tied it into a cute bow. . .he was too cute.

Reed's mother asked, “Maybe I should accompany you to San Francisco. It's not right that a young, pretty girl travel all alone.”

“Mom, please. I'm not a little boy anymore. I can take of myself.” They both giggled at his slip of tongue.

“Seriously,” his mother said, “I'm worried.”

“What could happen?” Reed said, putting on another coat of pink lipstick.

Reed's mother shook her head. He was so trustful and naive. She wasn't about to take that from him.

Reed stood and gave his mother a long hug hiding the real nervousness and uncertainty that he also felt. Sure, he was used to being seen dressed as a girl in

their small town. Most everyone knew he was a little different but he had never been to a big city, much less dressed and only carrying girls clothing.

OFF....

He sat inside the nearly empty Greyhound bus, his head aching, his eyes red from crying all day. Now that leaving home had become a reality, Reed was tempted to run off the bus and fly into his mother's arms and forget about the big city.

This was not how Reed thought it would feel. He felt goofy in the short, print dress of rayon that was both eye-catching and chicly simple. Nude colored nylons, two inch heels and simple gold earrings provided the finishing touches. His big travel handbag strap was still over his shoulder.

Reed felt so small and helpless in the big bus, his long blonde hair tumbling about his shoulders. He was scared. This wasn't acting. . .this was real life.

Even the new outfit he wore didn't help. Reed hadn't thought leaving would hurt like this. He knew Nancy's not coming to see him off made it worse. He hadn't told his mother about the fight with Nancy. They hadn't talked all week.

Reed sat with his nose pressed against the window, trying to smile at his mother through the grit of the dirty bus. He was afraid he'd get something on his dress.

Reed stared out the window at his mother. Leaving made Reed feel so insignificant and unloved. Seconds later the bus pulled out, and Reed felt free to let his tears flow.

A gallant sailor on his way back to the base asked, "Miss, are you okay?"

The sailor was about Reed's age and he wanted to tell him everything but just nodded and pulled out a "Seventeen" magazine. Seeing how the sailor was dressed, Reed felt indecent. He thought, "That's how I should be, not flitting about the state in a short dress."

The sailor gawked at Reed for the whole trip but Reed just read and did other girlish things. Being stared at was not new to Reed.

Reed found himself standing on a windy corner holding down his short skirt while trying to read a San Francisco street map. Unable to figure out which way was up, Reed giggled nervously. Like a girl, he couldn't read a map!

Trying to find some comfort, Reed nervously put on a fresh coat of pink lipstick and tried to figure out which way to the Academy. There were cars and buses and pedestrians all looking at him as he made his way across a busy intersection carrying a suitcase filled with only girl's clothes.

His heart sank. How could he prove he was confident in his skirts when he was too shy to ask directions.

"Excuse me, but are you a female impersonator?" a sultry voice drawled from somewhere close behind Reed.

Reed whirled around and found himself looking into the inquisitive green eyes of a truly beautiful girl. Her thick auburn hair was pulled back into a high ponytail and her pale creamy complexion was flawless. Reed's hand automatically went to his hair and checked his skirt.

"Uh? Why yes," he stammered and admitted to the girl. "I'm a boy!"

"Told you!" A merry laugh went up from another, shorter girl, no "boy" standing next to the redhead. Wild dark curls tumbled down to the boy's shoulders, and a thick barrette did little to keep his hair back out of his eyes, which were a startling deep shade of blue.

"Are you guys. . .?" Reed asked.

They both nodded and postured to show off their figures and legs. Reed liked them instantly.

"See, Donnie," the short feminine boy said, looking at Reed with frank admiration. "When I spotted you on the corner, with your hair blowing around---holding a map, I figured you were yet one more victim for this year's S.F.I.F. auditions. We are too. We ran into each other on the airport bus."

Reed returned the girl's warm inviting smile and said, "My name's Reed, and I am heading to the Academy, if I can find it, that is."

"My name's Day, short for David, if you want to be formal about it. No one calls me that." He turned toward the redhead. "This is Donnie, he's from Miami. I'm from New York. Neither of us have been here before. It's awfully cold for September," he added with a shiver, and pulled his jacket over his pert breasts.

Reed started to tell them WHY he was dressed as a girl but they weren't interested. Donnie cut him off, then touched his arm, "Let's just get there!"

Reed was startled by Donnie's long slender fingers with long, brilliant pink nails.

Reed nodded agreement as all three checked their skirts in the wind. They became aware of a couple of boys staring at them. Donnie arched his finely penciled eyebrows and smiled back at the guys and whispered, "Shall we tell 'em?"

Day and Reed giggled nervously before Donnie with an impatient tone asked, "Where is this place anyway? I'm exhausted. I just want to get out of these 'killers,' take a hot bath and go to sleep in my nightie."

He projected his foot and showed off the highest pair of heels Reed had ever seen. Even having spent all day in them, Donnie walked with the smoothest wiggle he'd ever seen on boy OR girl.

"I bet he's been wearing heels for years," Reed thought enviously. He looked at Donnie more carefully. The redheaded boy's luxurious jacket didn't conceal his trim feminine figure. Beneath his leather miniskirt, his shapely legs looked round and sensational. He was a curvy, rotund type, not thin and lithe like Reed. "Could that be real cleavage?" Reed thought. In fact, even covered with casual clothes, his looks alone would probably get Donnie into any of the major acting schools.

Donnie's hair was longer than Reeds. The length of a boy's hair was a good indication of how long he'd been fooling with girl things. Donnie's wavy red hair was almost waist length and bobbed about his back as he walked.

Reed turned to Day. The dainty dark-haired boy was not the ideal height for a female impersonator, but he was perfectly proportioned. Even standing still Day

exuded a girlish, innocent quality that covered any boyish characteristics. He had enough suitcases with him for a month, and was juggling them around trying to find some way to carry them all at one time.

Everything about Day indicated that he was very serious about being feminine.

All at once Reed realized what he was thinking and blushed. Never in his life had he looked at other boys and sized them up as competition. Just five minutes of talking to Donnie and Day had shaken Reed's confidence. They were so feminine. Even in their street clothes and tired from long trips, they were able to respond girlishly. They were the most feminine boys Reed had ever seen up close.

Yes, men were checking all three of them out. Reed wished he could poll them and find out how he stood up. Maybe he should just get on the return bus?

Miss Ellis had warned him about exactly how competitive things would get during audition week, and at the Academy itself if he actually got in. Reed wasn't used to feeling competitive with girls. With Nancy and his mother, he was special.

"So now that we know we're all going to the same place, how do we get there?" he asked brightly, determined not to let competitive vibes get in the way of making two new friends.

"Cab!" Donnie declared, shifting his Gucci handbag from his right shoulder to his left.

Day's blue eyes bulged. He stood on his high heel's toes and said, "According to this we can walk. It's only a mile or two, right up this way." He gestured with his long red nails.

"Walk?" Donnie repeated scornfully as the wind gusted around the corner. He tossed his pony-tail girlishly behind his shoulder and eyed Day with obvious disdain. "Where I come from, girls don't walk the streets. Not if they can help it."

"How quaint!" Donnie commented twenty minutes later as the three boys stood in front of the huge Victorian mansion that housed the Academy.

Reed wasn't paying any attention as he stood spell-

bound in front of the school that might be his home for the next three years. He let out a sigh. Three years of wearing nothing but girl's things, doing girl things, living a girl's life.. .

He had come to S.F.I.F. only because he wanted to become an actor and maybe even an actress. Now he was beginning to realize fully what next week's audition, acceptance and several years 'finishing' would mean.

"Well, I don't know about you two, but my heels are killing my feet. Let's get inside," Donnie suggested.

Reed wasn't about to argue. He was starting to get scared. They hurried down the path across the spacious front yard and up the broad front steps of the porch. Next to the door was a brass plaque:

S.F.I.F.

it said, and in smaller print just below,

**"SELF-LOVE, is not so vile as
SELF-NEGLECTING."**

Shakespeare

Before anyone could knock, the door swung open and a striking dark-haired girl swept out and stopped and yelled back in, "Look what the wind blew in!" she called back over her shoulder to someone Reed couldn't see. Her voice was haughty, and she looked disdainfully from Day to Donnie to Reed, then smiled in a very superior way. "Auditionees, I presume."

With that she gave an exaggerated bow and motioned them through the door. Reed realized that this was also a boy!

"Jimmy, close the door behind you, PLEASE," a voice cried out from the dark foyer. But the boy didn't seem to hear as he headed down the sidewalk with a pretentious slink and giggled, "Good luck BOYS!" The



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way he said it sounded almost like a sneer. "I have a date!"

Reed cringed. "Same to you," he murmured under his breath. He looked at the condescending boy with obvious distaste, not that he was unpleasant to look at. His hips were shapely and full, almost womanly. His little, fitted dress clung to his curves and his provocative cleavage was compelling. From his walk Reed could tell he had spent a lot of time in dresses and high heels. He was definitely one of the most feminine and breathtaking boys Reed had ever seen, but also one of the rudest people he'd ever encountered. He watched as Jimmy disappeared into a cab waiting at the curb.

Reed entered the building wondering if all the guys in the school were as stuck up as Jimmy.

"Jimmy's very cute!" Day muttered under his breath as Reed caught up to him. "but I hope he gets what he **DESERVES!**"

"So catty," Donnie said.

"Are you guys here to audition?" A kindly voice spoke up from farther down the hall. Reed nodded and headed for the long table that filled the width of the spacious entrance. Behind the table the hall ended with a large modern picture window that looked out over the backyard. A couple of modern looking stone buildings lined the edge of the property. One was clearly the bubble topped swimming pool the school had proudly advertised in its fliers.

Reed wondered if anyone ever found the time to swim.

At the table sat a sandy-haired older woman who was probably also born male. He had small laugh lines around his mouth and his face was very kind.

He introduced himself with a laugh. "Call me Bandy. Anything more formal makes me feel much too old. Why don't you put those bags down over there," he continued, motioning to an alcove beneath the wide spiral suitcase. "I'll have the school van drive you right to your assigned boarding houses. You boys are probably tired from traveling and will want to relax the rest of the afternoon."

Reed was delighted to find himself assigned to the

same boarding house as Day and Donnie. Having familiar faces around tonight would help.

"You can walk back and forth from class. Most of our housing facilities are pretty close to the school. Oh, here's the director, Didi," Bandy said as a young woman wearing a black leotard, navy blue sweater, pink tights, and raggedy gray leg warmers appeared out of a room marked, "Workout."

Reed's eyes widened. Didi had been featured in last month's issue of "Like a Woman" magazine as one of the top young female impersonators in the country. (Watch for the future issue of "LIKE A WOMAN" magazine by Sandy Thomas)

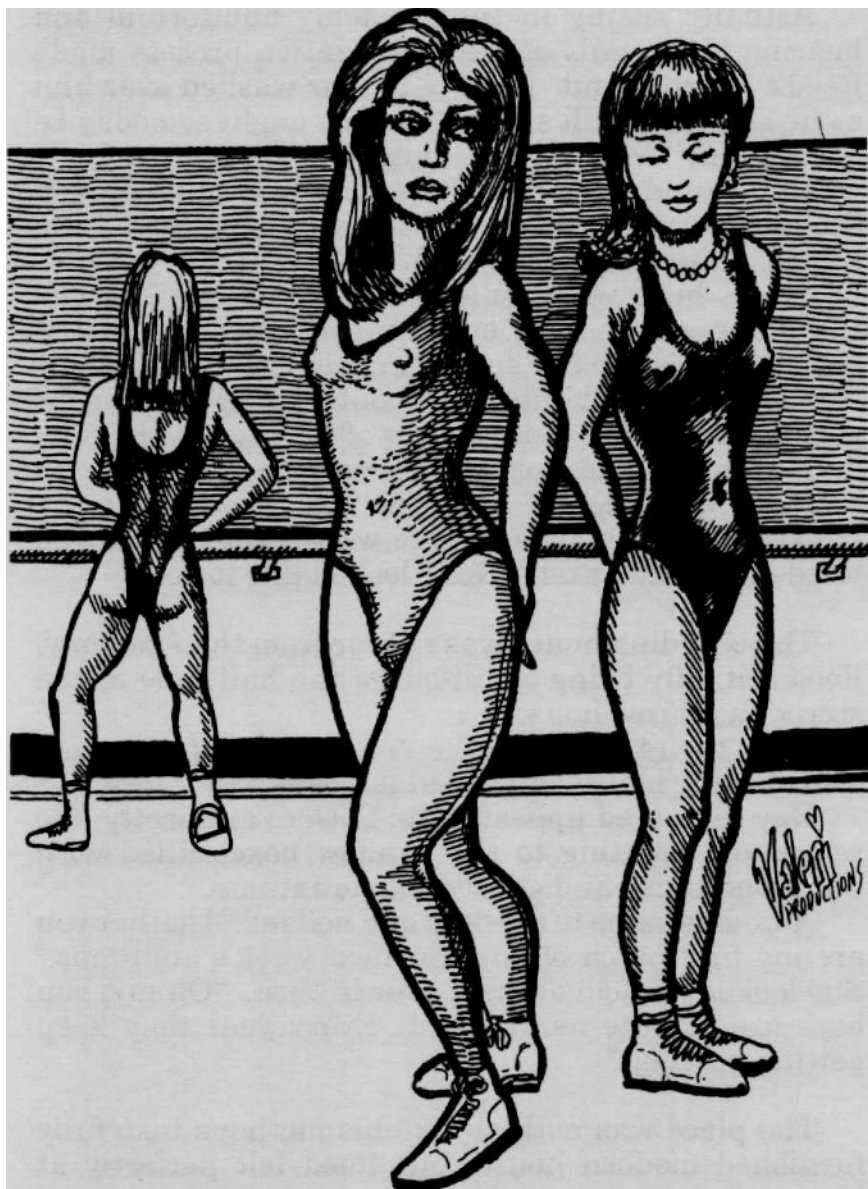
He had looked very desirable and romantic in the feature photos, not at all like someone who'd wear ballet slippers and be sweaty. He was carrying a clipboard in one hand.

Didi smiled warmly at the three boys. "Most of the other guys are already here," he said. His voice was light and musical. "I'll give you the grand tour and tell you a little more about the school and what you can expect----if you get accepted."

For the next half hour Reed felt as if he were on some kind of crazy roller-coaster ride. Didi's tour of the facilities left him breathless as did just being around such a feminine beautiful creature. Didi's leotard did nothing to hide his most vivacious curves and in turn showed "nothing" where there should have been "something."

There was everything: a swimming pool, a workout room, a doctor's clinic, the dance studio, an exercise room, a ballroom and more. It was more like a resort hotel than a school.

Didi's tour ended in what he affectionately called the school auditorium. It had formerly been the "small" ballroom of the old mansion. Didi said, "Some of the staff is still away on vacation, but our fall work schedule is starting up this week. If you look at your orientation envelopes, you'll see your class assignment: We've tried to divide the auditioning students up so that there are professionals, current students, and some of you guys in each morning class."



Reed would be working out in the gym with
the other boys. . .

It was most humiliating.

Actually sitting in the Academy auditorium and hearing the details of the feminization process made Reed's heart pound. A wave of fear washed over him as he looked at Didi and realized he might someday be as womanly. . .if he was accepted.

Didi stated, "You're required to attend class only in the morning until the actual audition. The rest of the time is more or less your own."

Reed's head was spinning by the time he followed the other girlish-boys out the side entrance of the building and onto the small parking lot. The more he saw of the school the more confused he was about getting in. But the more he saw of the competition, the more convinced he was that he would not make it.

Reed wondered if everyone who worked at the school was really male. There were women staff members who Reed just couldn't tell. None looked like it now!

The boarding house was not far from the Academy. Reed felt silly being chauffeured the half mile to the stucco-faced row house.

After the grandeur of the Academy itself, the modest boarding house was a real letdown.

Day remained upbeat. "The flowers are pretty," he remarked, pointing to the window boxes filled with purple petunias and showy red geraniums.

A woman came to the door and nodded. "I gather you are my first batch of boys for next week's auditions." She looked at each of them over in turn. "Oh my, you boys are as cute as buttons! Every year they keep getting prettier!"

The place was nothing like his mother's tastefully furnished modern house, but Reed felt perfectly at home.

"Wow, something smells great!" Day exclaimed, trying to get a glimpse of the kitchen. The hearty aroma of something cooking wafted out of a door to the left of the stairs.

The woman stopped bustling in the hall closet and turned to smile. "And it isn't half as fattening as it smells," she chuckled. "I haven't been feeding the stu-

dents here for twenty years without learning a thing or two about figures.”

Reed had read that diet was strictly controlled by the school but the woman's plump figure didn't exactly inspire confidence. “Why don't you guys go upstairs and settle into your rooms. I'm sorry you won't get to meet the rest of the boarders. The house is fairly empty now. Most of the regular students are home for vacation.”

As the boys grabbed their bags and started toward the stairs, the doorbell rang again. “Batch two!” the woman announced happily. Turning back to the boys, she suggested, “Now you go and get yourselves settled, take baths, and a little nap.”

Reed helped Day cart his bags up the steps. On the landing Day stopped to massage his arms. “I brought all this because if I do get in, I won't go home again before classes start.”

“It's probably smart to think positively,” Reed observed as he put Day's hand bag down at the head of the stairs before continuing up to the next landing. “Everyone I've seen is already really pretty. It makes me wonder why anyone would pick me over someone else.”

“Everyone feels like that when they get here,” a heavily accented voice said.

Reed looked up. A lad stood in the doorway of a bedroom at the top of the stairs. He was taller than Reed and his black hair was pulled up into a pretty upsweep. His lips were unusually full and he was wearing a deep red gloss. His jet black knit dress contrasted sharply with his white, unblemished skin. Reed couldn't quite tell how old he was and wondered if he was there to audition, was already a student or a teacher at the Academy, or maybe even a real girl!

He shifted uncomfortably under the unwavering gaze. If he turned out to be another “auditionee,” Reed was sure he was going to be a “loser”. How could he compete with a boy who looked so completely feminine?

Day grinned at the boy and said, “Hi, I'm Day. I'm here to audition.”

The boy's full lips turned up into a smile and he put

a manicured hand on his hip. "I'm already a student here. So you don't have to size me up as competition," He flashed a quick glance at Reed. Reed got the uncomfortable feeling the boy could read his thoughts.

Turning back to Day, the boy said, "You can call me Shon."

Reed studied Shon more carefully. With high cheekbones and full lips, Shon moved about comfortably in his dress with that feminine "something" Reed had hoped to refine. Shon leaned back against the door frame and crossed his slender arms over his pert bosom.

"And who are you?" Shon's deep breathy voice rose up the stairs after him. Reed turned around and looked down at Shon.

"Reed," he replied.

Shon arched one fine dark eyebrow. "Well, welcome to S.F.I.F.," he said with an offhanded shrug, then bent down and picked up Day's last two bags.

As Reed made his way up the stairs, he wondered if all the students at the Academy were going to be as stuck-up and arrogant as Shon or as rude as Jimmy.

Reed stepped out into the cool foggy night. He inhaled the damp air. It felt fresh and soothing against his warm skin. He always felt flush wearing nylon. "It's a beautiful night," he said to Donnie. "I'm glad we decided to take a walk."

"Me too," Donnie said shyly. "I hope there are some boys around here. It gives me confidence when they stare at me. I heard that Jimmy is dating an big attorney in town!"

"You mean that rude person?" Reed asked, as a couple cute guys gave them the once over.

Donnie took Reed's hand in a girlish style and said, "Have you noticed the figure on Shon? He wasn't wearing a bra!"

"And the way Didi looked in that leotard. . ."

"I really have to watch my figure," Donnie complained trying to check out the outfits on a crowd of girls giggling up ahead.

Reed wondered vaguely what Nancy was doing now.

It made Reed feel lonely to think of Nancy.

In the next few minutes Donnie proceeded to analyze and dismantle the other boys they had met over dinner at the boarding house. He "dished" them all.

As soon as they got back to the boarding house, Reed called his mother. He had made a decision. "Mom," he said softly on the phone, "I think I want to come home. This stuff isn't for me."

"What stuff, honey?" she said then continued, "I knew we should have bought you a few more new dresses. You are just being insecure. Are the others really feminine?"

"Yeah, but. . ." He was interrupted by his mother.

"Honey, don't let them get to you. I don't want to hear another word about quitting," she stated. "You belong in a dress and don't you let anyone make you feel otherwise!"

NO SLEEP.. .

That night Reed lay on top of his bed with the light on, unable to sleep. He curled his toes under the hem of his long nylon nightgown and held his pillow to his chest. Reed longed for something familiar with the scent of home about it.

Reed wondered how anyone actually got into the school. What did the judges look for when any boy there could win a regional beauty contest. They were all so serious about being girls. This wasn't what he expected.

Reed rolled over onto his stomach and flicked out the light at last.

The following morning Reed took his bath and thought about his upcoming day. Quitting was out. With hands shaking with excitement, Reed laid the garments on his bed that his mother had selected for him to wear; all were new since his "break" and bought at great expense.

There was the short cotton dress of pale pink flowers, decorated with imitation pearls and tied with a sash of heavy white silk below the bustline. Then there

was the filmy slip sewn with white silk roses, and matching white silk panties, frilled with pink lace from waist to around the legs. Finally, there were white leather high heels fit for a princess---as was the rest of the outfit. There was a garland of dried white roses for his curly blonde hair.

Once in lingerie, Reed put on the dress slowly then lifted it's skirt and slip so that he could see his thighs. Checking his panties and nylons, Reed folded back the pink dress and the satiny slip and smoothed them in place across the fullest curve of his bottom and upper thigh. With the utmost gentleness and care, he checked the fit of how every stitch of girlishness conformed to his figure.

"No boy should look like this," Reed muttered under his breath. He began to stir in response to his reflection and the feeling of his hips as he moved from side to side as he walked.

Reed uttered a little gasping cry. "No boy should ever FEEL like this," he breathed heavily, his face alight and his eyes glowing. Reed took time to re-adjust his slip and skirt, feeling their silken luxury against his thighs.

Reed walked into the Academy's morning class wearing the pink, little flowered dress. . .it was just like the ones Nancy always wore to school.

The other boys auditioning for the coveted openings in the coming year were easy to pick out: they all clustered at the back of the class, wearing dresses that showed off their best features.

The rest of the students were outfitted in a colorful hodgepodge of outfits from designer to jeans, sweaters, baggy shirts, weird suspenders. One boy came in wearing brown hip-hugger polyester pants and a beige just-over-the-navel top that everyone thought was inappropriate.

Shon was there and that boy, Jimmy. Reed wasn't surprised to see them talking together in the corner. He had a feeling they knew each other well. They certainly looked attractive. Jimmy was wearing black stockings and a black one-piece tight knit dress. Shon

wore a fitted reddish-brown strapped dress with a big necklace around his neck.

When Didi walked into the room, Reed was relieved. At least he had met the teacher. Didi set a container of tea on the piano and clapped his hands together sharply. "Places please!"

Reed glanced in the mirror and checked the waist of his dress. His hair was pinned up tidily and his makeup was subtle but played up his fine features. He wore his mother's favorite turquoise earrings that brought out the color of his eyes.

When Reed woke up that morning, the last thing he felt like doing was putting on a dress. Somehow all this commotion made him feel silly. He wished his mother was there to help him get dressed. It took resolve but he had to take particular care with everything---even his lingerie matched and its new laciness made him dainty and a bit better.

Miss Ellis had warned him that no matter what anyone said, every move he made, particularly in class, would count toward his final score at the audition. As he caught Didi looking in his direction, he suddenly knew Miss Ellis was right.

He sat quietly, his heart pounding as he waited for Didi to demonstrate walking. Cat like, his hips undulated so smoothly any man would be mesmerized. Didi scanned the room and smiled. "Okay, you new guys, stop hiding in the back of the class. Don't be shy! Let me see you all walk around the room." His voice was tinged with sarcasm.

Reed blushed, and joined the scramble to walk around the room. At first his eyes were riveted on Jimmy's girlish bottom. Jimmy's hip movements were slightly different from Didi's but Reed was surprised at how well he moved in heels and a tight skirt. He was surprised that such a rude person could move with such intense grace. He also wondered if Jimmy could ever play a male role.

"Now let's turn it down," Didi cruised the room, and explained how to turn the ankle a bit to make the hips move less. "And more. . ." she said watching each boy's

hips and bottom.

Reed was amazed. In just minutes, he'd gained control over what he was learning was "hip expression". It was like finding out your blender has 10 speeds instead of two!

Didi tapped on Donnie's skirted bottom, and said, "Very nice." Reed tensed as Didi approached, but he passed by without seeming to notice him. As the pace of the music changed, Reed learned about controlling his wiggle and his feminine sex appeal. It was so simple yet so profound.

Just when Reed was about to "jump ship", he learned something insightful about acting. Reed wished he could share his new knowledge with Nancy or show his mother.

For the next hour the class went through exercises, learning more about body language, appeal and control than he'd learned in a summer in modeling school. It was difficult. In spite of his own struggle to focus, he couldn't help but watch Shon across the way. Shan was very good. He worked easily, with flawless technique. Knees were always together, his manner soft and beautiful.

Watching him, Reed wished he could develop such control over his body movements. Shon was destined for a brilliant acting career. Reed was sure of it.

"Reed. Pull that weight up off your hips! Shoulder's back!" Didi's sharp reprimand startled Reed. He bit his lip but continued the stroll.

"Sorry," he murmured, and blushed furiously as he turned his fingertips inward and tried to lift his weight off his high heels giving it more grace.

It never dawned on Reed that auditioning students would be corrected in class. Then he realized Didi hadn't said one word to any of the other new boys.

Reed moistened his pink lips and blocked every thought from his head except the hiss of his nylons as his knees moved together. He could feel his panties, slip and dress all intermingle as he moved about on his heels.

"Now GET my attention," Didi ordered. The music continued and Reed tried to turn up his sex appeal.

Somehow he got mixed up and his hips jerked from side to side.

"Reed!" Didi called. Before Reed had a chance to turn around, he sensed the teacher coming up behind him. "We're simply showing someone that we are a lady, not a hooker. It's not that hard. Watch Shon," Didi instructed. Shon flashed Reed a curiously sympathetic look, and then sauntered across the room smoothly and very sexily.

Reed was humiliated and on the verge of tears. At his modeling school it was Reed who was always called on to demonstrate. Of all the students for Didi to pick to give a demonstration, it had to be Shon. Reed suddenly felt stupid and awkward in his dress.

"Reed! Now you do it!" Didi ordered. "Try to imagine someone in the room that you want to impress. . .impress with your girlishness."

He suddenly remembered Miss Ellis again. Everything counts. Maybe this was some kind of test. His chances of getting into the school were probably nil now but he did have his pride. He took a deep breath, and when the music began, pictured Nancy and his mother watching.

He blocked out his anger and unconsciously mimicked Shon's perfect hip movement. With each step, his slink became more natural and smooth. At the end of the exercise he knew he had never had more control over his femininity.

He truly wished Nancy could see his hip control. Didi didn't say a thing---just asked whole class to go through the exercise one more time,

After class, in the "ladies" lounge, Reed sat on a bench, dazed, too tired and dispirited to even smile. One boy walked up. Reed could see by the expression in his eyes he was about to console him. Reed braced himself. He wasn't in the mood for pity right then. The boy said sweetly. "I think Didi was being a bit unfair. You have a nice walk."

Reed shrugged. The other boys meant well when they clustered around him after class and told him not to be discouraged. Two times Didi had singled him out. The second time he had downright humiliated him by

making him watch Shon. Reed's cheeks burned at the memory.

"Didi wasn't being unfair," Shon spoke up suddenly as he entered and moved over to a mirror and began to fix his hair. He reached for a barrette in his purse and pulled back a large tendril of hair then checked his skirt. He sauntered toward Reed with a hip movement that meant "submissive".

Reed was uncomfortably aware of the other boys doing their hair and make-up and that were listening. "Didi wasn't picking on you. He was giving you a compliment."

Reed rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. "I'd say you're the one who got the compliment."

Shon arched one eyebrow and shrugged. "Hey, I'm still a student here. You learned something, right?"

"Correction in class is the best kind of notice a boy can get," Shon said simply. Shon sat down on the bench and watched Reed as he checked his nylons and straightened his skirt. "So what are you doing now?" Shon asked.

Reed spun around, startled by the question. Had he imagined it or did Shon actually sound friendly?

Before Reed could reply, Shon said, "I was thinking maybe you'd like to go out for lunch. I could show you around the neighborhood."

Reed stepped back in surprise. "Lunch?" he repeated suspiciously, not sure how to react to Shon's invitation. Going out with Shon wasn't something he was sure he wanted to do, even if he could. He stared directly into the boy's dark eyes, and decided this was a person to be careful of. Reed drew in his breath sharply and let out a tense laugh. "I guess I can't," he said.

The open, friendly expression immediately faded from Shon's face. "Oh," he said tersely.

Reed started to say he had other plans, but Shon grabbed his purse and swept out of the room before he could get out a word.

Shon was the most peculiar person Reed had ever met, one minute remote and cold, friendly the next. "He was like Nancy at the worst time of the month," Reed thought. Even though Shon was the one who had

just walked off in a huff with hips that showed 'anger,' Reed found himself feeling as if he were the one who had behaved like a sorehead. He stopped at the mirror just outside the dressing room and angrily tugged his brush through his long blond hair. With sharp gestures, he bunched it up out of his face and into a ponytail. He opened a tube of lipstick, meticulously coating his tense lips with a gloss moistener.

Reed shook his head and thought, "All this is turning me into a bitch!"

Halfway down the hall toward the stairs, Reed heard Shon's throaty laugh. He peered into a studio. There was Shon perched sexily on a piano watching Jimmy practice "runway" in front of the mirror, Reed hadn't heard the first part of Shon's conversation, but now his words rang out loud and clear into the hall. "Sweet, but Reed is so upright. I can't wait until he faces the sour pussies in the audition."

"Don't you wish you could be there!" Jimmy said, coming out of a pirouette and striking a haughty pose in front of the mirror. He admired himself a moment, then threw back his handsome head and let out a loud laugh.

SHOPPING FOR...

"Look at these heels. Aren't these just the coolest things you all have ever seen!" Donnie cooed. Before Reed could protest, Donnie marched into the tiny boutique.

Day let out a tired sigh and leaned against the wall, working his ankle around in a circle. "Bandy's class this morning was a killer. We worked on hand movements and sitting pretty. Donnie loved it. He's got incredible poise.

"Donnie's been going to ballet camp since he was seven. He told me all about it this morning." Day peeked around Reed's shoulder and tried to catch a glimpse of Donnie. "Donnie can afford to spend all this time here. His rehearsal's not scheduled until four. Mine's at three. How about you?" Day sounded anxious. "Same as you," Reed replied. "I want to get back.

"These streets are killing my feet."

Reed wasn't as tired as Day, at least not physically, but mentally he was drained. This was just the first day of audition week, and Reed wasn't sure how he'd make it through to the end. In the meantime, he had to act as if he were going to make it. He had to eat, drink, and sleep his femininity.

He flashed Donnie an annoyed look through the glass door to the store.

Donnie was leaning over the cluttered countertop chatting easily with a salesman. He was counting change into his hand. Donnie stopped him and pointed to another pair of strapped black patent leather pumps. Reed let out an exasperated sigh. "Is he trying to make us late on purpose?"

Just as Reed was about to go into the store to get Donnie, he flounced out. "You won't believe these prices. I don't know what's the matter with you two. You're just crazy to pass up such bargains from such a hunk of a salesman."

"Donnie!" Reed cried impatiently. "Do you know what time it is?"

Donnie shook his head. He gave an embarrassed shrug and pointed to his wrist. "Why? I forgot my watch today."

"Oh, never mind," Reed groaned. "Listen, we've got to get out of here. Day and I are scheduled for rehearsals in forty-five minutes. Now, where are we exactly?" Reed looked around trying to figure out what direction they had come from after getting off the bus from school. With any luck they'd make it back just in time.

"My, you really are nervous. Don't you worry about a thing. I have a sixth sense when it comes to direction." Donnie guided Day and Reed to the corner and made a right-hand turn onto a busy intersection.

LATE AGAIN ...

Reed was late! He had to peel off his dress and yanked on a skirt and blouse in record time. He hadn't bothered to change his panties or bra after that morning's class. Tying the pink satin ribbons in his hair seemed to take an eternity. "Calm down," he told him-

self aloud. "You're not that late, Take a minute to look pretty."

Just before he got to the rehearsal studio door, he stopped and looked into one of the many full length mirrors. He forced himself to at least look calm. Everything since coming to the Academy felt so different. He had no idea what he was rehearsing. All he knew was he'd be getting a better chance to see what the true audition comprised of.

Inside waiting was one of the most attractive creatures he ever seen. . . a graduate?

With the poise of a queen, the lady-like figure stood up and said flatly, "You're late. I can't give you extra time, someone else is due in one hour." When he didn't bother to introduce himself, Reed decided not to ask his name.

Reed's stomach knotted up. He had half expected he couldn't extend his session. Because of Donnie's mistake he was going to miss out on precious practice time. A momentary wave of dislike for Donnie swept over him, but then he realized being late was partly his fault for not speaking up when he was pretty certain the cable car wouldn't take them in the right direction.

The redhead was so cocky and sure of himself, he hadn't even thought about the consequences of getting lost. Reed said to the feminine trainer, "I understand about your schedule. Anything you can help me with is appreciated." He sounded so calm, he could hardly believe the words came out of his own mouth.

The aide-de-camp didn't reply. He shrugged and began, "Understand that every audition is different. Like the questions on your auto test but some things are standard. He began to ask Reed to do different girlish things.

Reed fought to keep his mind focused on the questions that came quickly without comment. "Put your hair up into a french braid," the tutor stated.

With innate skill, Reed's hands gathered his hair up and swept it up off the nape of his neck. Holding his hair up with one hand, his fingers divided the mass into three long strands and quickly braided it without taking his eyes off the mirror. With one hand holding the

braid, his pink fingertips searched his purse for a ribbon which he fastened at the bottom to hold it all together.

“Very nice, now do your lips. . .”

Reed took out a small mirror, lipstick and a lipstick brush. He carefully outlined then filled in his lips.

The tutor smiled and asked, “When did you start your last period?”

Reed stammered. A “demeanor” question. “On the first.” Nancy had taught him all about this stuff. “And when will you start again?”

“On the 21st or 22nd.” Reed said confidently, adding for effect, “I usually start my flow in the mornings.”

“Nicely answered. . . do you carry anything in your purse in case you are early?”

Reed nodded and opened his purse and pulled out a tampon. “Thanks Nancy!” he thought to himself. She always made him carry a few for her and they even came in handy a few times for his mother.

The tutor’s highly arched brows wrinkled as he checked off something on his clipboard. “I heard about you after Didi’s class today,” he said with a noncommittal shrug. “My name’s Roberta. Well, are you ready for some physical exams?”

Reed nodded.

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I AM OVER 21 YEARS OLD!

EVERYTHING SENT FIRST CLASS IN UNMARKED ENVELOPE.

Roberta had Reed walked around the narrow studio, dance and make different expressions.

This time he didn't miss a cue. The tutor yelled emotions at Reed and like a windup doll, he quickly and smoothly did his best. "SEXY!" "SHY!" "SCARED!" "MAD!"

When Reed finished his cheeks were burning and his mind was racing filled with imagined emotions.

When he caught a glimpse of himself in the wall mirror he realized that he was trying too hard. With great effort of will, Reed forced himself to relax his mind on nothing but the instructions. All at once his image changed, his face softened, his arms loosened, and he felt his whole body grow light and airy.

He took a second to enjoy the sensation of his lingerie and being so girlish. He forgot about the pressure, and the other problems that had popped up since he got here. At that moment nothing else existed but the fact that he was feeling as girlish as ever! A feminine glow and serene confidence over came him as he finished a runway walk in an imaginary long dress.

GETTING READY...

"All our appointments are taken." Reed stood at the beauty parlor not quite sure he'd heard right.

Reed's hands went to his hair and said, "But I need..."

"Sorry, dear." The woman double-checked the schedule. "Every appointment here is taken." Reed didn't move. He wasn't quite sure what to do next.

The receptionist gave him a sympathetic look. "Things get crazy around here during audition week," she continued. "One hundred of you boys, every one of you dying to look your best at your audition. Some have had hair appointments for months."

"But I just found out. . ."

He would have to go to another shop, one without experience doing boys.

He could kick himself for not having thought of his hair before now. Leaving, Reed found himself eye to eye with a red faced Donnie.

Donnie quickly hid something behind his back, then

dropped his purse. Makeup, wallet, a tampon, hair brush and everything spilled out onto the street.

"Donnie, what's wrong?" Reed asked with concern, noticing how flustered and upset Donnie looked. Reed bent down to help him gather up his things.

"Wrong?" Donnie said shrilly. He ran his fingers through his long red hair and took a deep breath. With a forced smile he looked directly into Reed's eyes, and said more calmly, "Why, nothing's wrong. What gave you that idea?"

"So what exactly are you doing?"

Donnie shifted uncomfortably and rummaged in his bag for his brush. Holding an elastic band between his teeth, he pulled his hair back and began braiding it, his fingers flicking like little whips. "Reed," he mumbled through his closed mouth, "I'm feeling so odd. Seeing those students like Shon and Jimmy make me wonder if I really want to be like them."

"So what are you doing out here?" Reed asked. Donnie looked around anxiously. He dropped his voice to a soft whisper and said, "You won't tell, will you?"

Reed shook his head, wondering what in the world Donnie was being so mysterious about.

Donnie paused before revealing his secret. "I'm waiting for someone," he murmured so softly Reed could barely hear him.

"What?" Reed said in a normal voice.

"Shhh!" Donnie put a warning finger to his lips. He rolled his green eyes up toward the ceiling and whispered, "Remember that cute shoe store clerk. . .".

Reed's innocent eyes widened. "He asked you out?" he whispered back. From something Reed had read, he vaguely remembered dating during audition week was against the rules.

"He just wants to show me around the city."

"But, Donnie," Reed said, sounding worried. "It's some kind of audition week regulation. . ."

"Oh, Reed, he's so cute," Donnie drawled. "Boys make me feel so feminine and I need a boost to get me through this week." He emitted a dramatic sigh. "Please don't tell anyone where I am."

"I won't lie." Reed looked horrified.

"No, of course not." Donnie looked offended. "Just don't say anything. Okay?"

Reed hesitated. "Okay, so I won't say I saw you. Are you sure this guy is okay?"

"Oh, don't worry about me," Donnie said breezily. "I have lots of boyfriends at home and I can take care of myself."

Knowing Donnie was on a date, even if he shouldn't be, would put everyone at rest, but Reed had promised not to tell. He looked down at his dinner. "I'm sure he's fine," Reed said as the landlady fretted about his absence.

Finally, the front door opened and closed quickly with a bang. The landlady jumped up and poked her head out into the hall. "Donnie! Where have you been?"

Reed held his breath. He glanced at the clock and frowned. Donnie had just been on the shortest date in history.

Donnie appeared in the entrance to the dining room. He caught Reed's eye and raised his eyebrows in an unspoken question.

"Well, I was at school." Donnie went on. "I just didn't feel well and I laid down in the ladies room." He paused and his eyes darted quickly around the table. No one seemed about to contradict him so he continued. "And I guess I just fell asleep," he said in an innocent, apologetic voice. His dress was wrinkled and makeup disheveled. Reed noticed Donnie wasn't wearing nylons!

What an actress Reed thought. He lowered his eyes and tried to keep the smile off his lips.

Donnie was still rambling on, managing to sound perfectly pathetic. "I have a terrible bellyache." He rubbed his tummy gingerly and leaned back against the door frame. "I hope you don't mind, after you went to all this trouble preparing dinner, but I can't possibly eat a single bite. I'd just like to take some tea to my room."

The landlady's worried face softened. "Audition week is tough on you young boys. Too much pressure," she mumbled.

With that Reed pushed back his chair and stretched his arms over his head. "I don't know about the rest of you, but I think Donnie has the right idea. I'm going upstairs to take a long bath, then crawl right into bed. Tomorrow's the last day before the audition, and I have a lot of work to do,"

He tossed his long blond hair off his shoulders and marched out of the dining room, avoiding Shon's gaze.

Upstairs, layer by layer, Reed pulled off his dress and slip. Undressing meticulously had always been an enjoyable expression of his meticulous nature. He carefully hung his dress up on it's special hanger. He felt the day's tension and rush-rush as he took some time for himself.

Looking at himself in just panties and bra, Reed took time to admire his girlish figure. The panties were very soft and satiny, fitting snug around his rotund hips. Some of the boys auditioning didn't have nice hips.

Reed undressed and slipped into a tubful of bubble bath of hot, fragrant water. Relaxed for the first time since arriving, he allowed himself to reflect on the day. A day spent in his little dresses, surrounded by boys all trying to be the perfect girls. Reed giggled about Donnie and his "date".

Even with the pressure, this was better than being in a small town with everyone laughing behind your back, he thought.

Reed washed his hair, shaved his legs, then unplugged the tub letting the water gurgled down the drain. Wrapping a thick fluffy towel around him, he wiped the steam off the mirror and peered at his reflection. His cheeks glowed a healthy pink from the bath but his blue eyes still had sadness about them.

He shook his hair loose and combed his fingers through the tangles before slipping on a nightgown Nancy had given him, It was becoming clear to Reed that he had contoured his outlook on femininity by imitating Nancy. Now without her instigation, he was losing the confidence to let himself feel feminine.

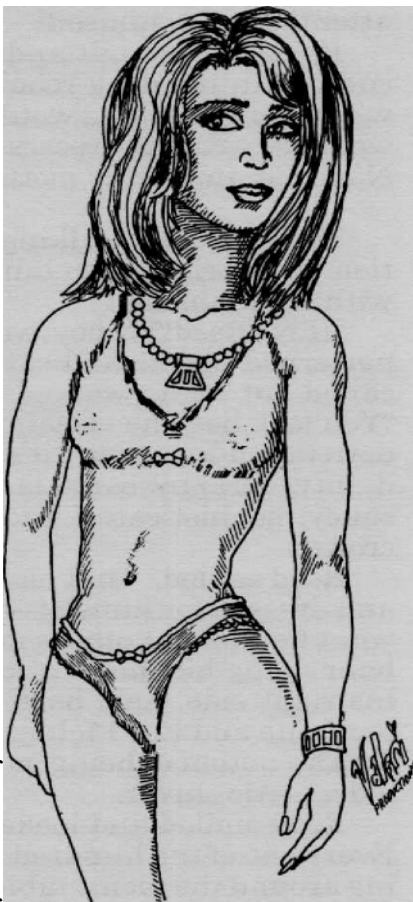
Reed snuggled into the silky folds of his nightgown

and tried to make sense of it all. With no Nancy and no mother, Reed's femininity had to be self-driven now. He threw himself down on the bed and hugged his pillow to his chest. "What will happen to me?" he whispered into the pillowcase. He turned off the light but lay there wide-eyed, his thoughts spinning around in his head. "I need to be doing this for myself!" he realized.

Reed rolled over on his side and ran his hands over the frilly nightgown and knew he could be a good female. As good as Shon or Donnie or even Jimmy. Reed just had to believe that.

Reed gathered the hem of his nightgown into his hand and thought about what dress he'd wear tomorrow. He reviewed the nuances of the new hip movements he'd

learned today. "That's it!" Reed realized. He wasn't there to get compliments or encouragement from anyone! He was there to become as close to a female as a boy can be! His mission was to show them he wanted to be the perfect girl! For himself! Not just to "out-fern" the other boys. Not for his mother! Not for Nancy's



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attention! For himself!

He felt very outlandishly odd and almost dizzy cuddled in the dark room. He tried to comprehend what being accepted would mean. For one thing, Reed would be wearing dresses for himself and not to placate Nancy or amuse his mother.

The next day, walking across the lawn to the audition week orientation lunch, Reed was still vacillating with his problems.

"Hey, Reed!" a boy wearing shorts and a brightly patterned blouse and carrying a sunhat in one hand, called out as he walked across the grass near Reed. "You look hot!" he exclaimed, pointing to Reed's polka-dotted sundress with its swingy, full short skirt and dainty, strappy sandals with a low heel. Reed felt saucy, sophisticated and very easy to notice in the crowd.

Reed smiled. That morning, he looked in the mirror and dressed for himself---what he felt like wearing not what he thought others might wear. He spent over an hour doing his hair. A long thick braid from high on his right side, held back with a satin ribbon. Ultra-feminine and Reed felt girly wearing it that way.

The notion of being so appealing as a girl gave him a dramatic shiver.

Reed smiled and looked around the crowded lawn. Every one of the hundred boys auditioning were hovering around the picnic tables. All the other faculty was there, too, trying to make the prospective students feel at home.

Without exception, the staff was remarkably different since most were trained to be females at this Academy. There were blondes, redheads, brunettes and everything in between. All ages, all looking prissy in afternoon dresses like any group of ladies.

Reed looked at Bandy and wondered what it was like to spend nearly one's whole life in dresses? Did he every have a masculine thought anymore? It didn't look like it.

Boys were walking away with plates heaped with salad, fruit, cheese, and bread but Reed had no appetite

at all.

Reed's mouth turned down in a frown when he noticed Jimmy coming toward him. He had on a bathing suit and a towel was draped casually over one soft white shoulder.

"Hi!" Jimmy said, as friendly as could be.

Reed did a double-take. "Hi, yourself." Jimmy's figure was just as voluptuous in the sexy swimsuit as it was in a dress. Reed was sure he was just showing off his soft curves to intimidate the auditioning boys.

Jimmy said softly, "I just wanted to tell you, I really enjoyed watching you walk and model. It made me wish I was still a boy! We could have babies!"

Although what he said was a compliment, the way he said it didn't sound very nice. Until Reed had met Jimmy, he hadn't understood what it meant to be talked down to. Reed had been teased by the guys at school most of his life but this was different, more personal.

Reed faced Jimmy, frantically searching his mind for a comeback. Jimmy's dark hair hung down his back and was wet from the pool. He'd slicked the thick curls back with his hand and looked at Reed very intently . . .not unlike groups of men sometimes did.

Reed felt very uncomfortable, like a specimen under a microscope. Who was Jimmy anyway? He couldn't be much older than him and was just a student too.

"Doesn't anybody look at anyone else around here without sizing them up?" Reed thought defensively but out loud he said, "Thank you, but that was private practice time."

"Oh," Jimmy said, reaching over to a table for a container of juice. "We have nothing to hide from one another around here. Everyone knows everything about everybody."

Before Reed could reply, Donnie walked up. He was wearing a snug green tank top and a pair of skin-tight, pink pedal pushers and white canvas, wedge sandals with open toes and heels.

"OH JIMMY!" Donnie gushed. "Let me see you!" Jimmy dropped his towel and did a pirouette. Donnie's eyes bulged and slobbered, "What I'd do for a figure like

yours!”

Reed thought, “What is Donnie doing, gushing over a guy like that?”

Jimmy sexily picked up the towel without bending his knees and quite deliberately focused his attention back on Reed. “My figure was like yours when I got here,” he said, looking right into Reed's eyes. “You'll be amazed at what they can do. . .”

“You could never be a boy again,” Donnie concluded before Reed could even open his mouth. Jimmy rested his hand lightly on Reed's arm and batted his long dark lashes.

Reed's mouth fell open. Jimmy wasn't exactly his cup of tea, but his overt aggressive behavior shocked him.

Jimmy arched his eyebrows and put his hands on his velvety hips. He gave Reed a flirtatious smile. “I bet that someday you'll be a pretty impressive female.”

Reed was too shocked to say anything else as Donnie dragged him away from Jimmy. Reed was just as happy to get away.

Jimmy had said nothing but nice things to him, but he somehow had a way of making nice things sound suggestive.

Donnie just kept talking as he held Reed's arm tightly. He went on and on about the morning's class and what a great teacher Didi was. Not once did Donnie mention his secret date the night before.

That night after dinner everyone gravitated to Day's room. Or almost everyone. Donnie had called the lady lady to say he'd be practicing his modeling late in one of the school studios.

Next week school reopened for the fall term and most of the regular students would be back. Reed looked around the room wondering if he, or anyone else would still be around then.

Tomorrow was the audition class with the regular staff. There'd be several audition classes running through the day. Day, Reed, and Donnie were scheduled for ten A.M.

Day had been telling everyone about Shon: how he'd

spent all afternoon coaching him. Reed listened carefully. Had he been wrong about Shon?

And Donnie, who had seemed like a friend at first, was beginning to give him the creeps. The way he had gushed over Jimmy was pretty disgusting. Reed had tried to dismiss that incident as the normal behavior of someone who was star struck. Jimmy had the kind of figure that would make boy crazy Donnie be envious.

Nothing at S.F.I.F. was the way it seemed, just as nothing about it seemed to make any sense. Reed just hoped this atmosphere didn't prevail after auditions.

He had to think that it was just from nerves and paranoia. He also had checked everyone out as if they were just a bunch of thoroughbreds lined up at the starting gate for a race.

The future for every feminine boys' dream was on the line here. Reed seriously wondered if any of them could really ever be friends. Tomorrow, everyone was a competitor.

The obvious sprang instantly to mind. There were obviously going to be boys that made a better looking girl than Reed. There was always going to be one with a better figure, or a more girlish attitude. "All of the boys there were like girls----some as good or better than you," Reed told himself. "You'd better prepare yourself to face that fact."

Reed bent over and smoothed his nylons up his legs and wiped away a tear that threatened to roll down his cheek. He had to get focused. Reed pulled a brush through his blonde hair and thought, "I guess I've always been in competition with girls before. Boys here are more like the ones on the football team----the ones always 'belittling' each other and picking on any weaknesses."

Reed had never been vying for any territory in the locker room but tomorrow's competition was a whole new ball game.

That night all the boys disappeared into their rooms early including Reed. All had beauty rituals to perform and other little things that made them feel feminine.

Feeling jealous of anyone else now wasn't going to help. Reed, like the others went about his routine. As he plucked a few stray hairs from his highly arched brow, he wished his mother was there to help. Her comments always made him feel so flawless.

He remembered the little gift his mother had given him just before he left on the bus. He ran to his bag and opened the side where he'd stuffed it. He hoped it was a ticket out of there! The card read, "Honey, I know these will make you feel as girlish as I know you are! Love, Mom."

Inside were the most feminine pair of panties and matching bra, Reed had ever seen. They must have cost a fortune!

Reed wanted to put them on right away but resisted the urge. He placed them prominently on his nightstand. They were just what he needed for tomorrow!

Not taking much time, Reed went back to his beauty rituals: A bubble bath, shaving his legs, a facial, manicure and curling of his hair. Reed used hot curlers and didn't often sleep in curlers but tonight was an exception.

Cuddled up in a pink babydoll nightie, Reed climbed into bed and picked up the frilly lingerie on his nightstand. They were so girlish and feminine and his heart thrashed just thinking about wearing them in front of a crowd. They seemed to be luminescent when he turned off the light and tried to go to sleep.

Tossing and turning he tried nipple stimulation, "nip -nastics" as one boy called it. Reed kneaded, tugged, pinched and tweaked his extended nipples until they were sore and red. The soreness tomorrow would make him attentive to his posture.

THE BIG DAY...

"This is your audition," Didi's voice rang across the studio as if no one knew why they were there.

Behind Reed a boy groaned softly, and muttered in a bitchy New York City accent, "Cut the talk and let's start being girls!"

In spite of his nerves Reed almost laughed. He didn't

know the boy's name but he had gotten a glimpse of him as they took their places for the audition. The boy's dainty pixie-like looks contrasted sharply with his street-wise voice.

Didi stared in Reed's direction. Reed cringed under the steely gaze. Didi definitely had charisma. When he was younger he must have been very beautiful and even now with his colored hair, piercing green eyes, and straight, elegant nose, he was striking.

He had to be nearly forty, but he stood as tall and straight as a teenager.

Didi cleared his throat and began again. The room was quiet, except for the sound of breathing. "An audition means competition."

The students all shifted uncomfortably and eyed one another. Reed knew the guilt he saw on each boy's face was mirrored on his own.

"But you're not competing against each other," the teacher continued, "you're competing against yourself and your ability to let the 'boy' go."

He paused for effect and folded one slender, well manicured hand over the other. He raised his voice, but his words rang out clear.

Didi went on. "If you keep worrying about the other guys while you're here, you will get nowhere. To be a good female you have to learn to comfort yourself and let other people be themselves. That is a heavenly trait of being female and moreover of being finished."

Reed wished Didi had said this the first day. Didi went on, "Let the petty jealousies, feuds, and rivalries so notorious among girls go. . .all that bitterness in your heart will not make you more beautiful."

Reed drew in a sharp breath. Reed's attitude toward Jimmy and Shon and his feelings about the other boys all felt so small and silly now.

Reed caught Didi's eye and for a second the director held his glance. His gaze seemed to penetrate to Reed's very soul. Reed dropped his eyes and felt ashamed and made a solemn promise he would never let jealousy of another person interfere again.

to the other, his high heeled pumps making a sexy pop on the smooth wood floor. No one in the room moved.

Reed felt as if he were watching a carefully polished performance. Not one gesture; even his hip sway seemed excessive, exaggerated, or out of place. Nothing about him was masculine; every movement he made was natural and befitting a female. "Didi was remarkable," Reed thought. "Someone to admire."

"Today is the first phase of your entrance examination. I will give you a modeling class," Didi continued briskly. "A class suitable for girls of your age and training. I will be as strict and MEAN as if you were in one of my regular classes."

Reed giggled at the joke along with the other boys. With graceful hand motions the class began. Reed ran his hand down his hip and felt his new panties under his dress. "Thanks mom!" he meditated.

When the "class" stage of the audition was over, Reed had completely forgotten about the judges, their scribbling pencils and hushed comments.

He walked out of the studio feeling as if he were walking on air. He had aches in parts of his body he'd never been aware of before. But none of that mattered. While the rest of the boys talked and complained about the class, Reed remained silent.

He secluded himself in the corner of the ladies room and mentally reviewed each of the corrections Didi had made. Every one of them had made sense and to the point. Reed admitted that if he got to study there, he would become much more of feminine.

Even if he didn't make it into S.F.I.F., after this audition, Reed knew he'd never be the same again. The private interview was next.

"I want to go last!" Day said as for the third time in ten minutes his hands lifted his skirt and tugged up his nylons. All the boys were nervously strutting back and forth in front of the mirror that ran the length of the large ladies room adjacent to the studio.

A group clustered around the studio's adjoining wall, trying to hear the questions. Reed didn't want to

listen. All the questions were different anyway.

"It would have been better to put this whole thing off another day," Day continued irritably. "That shop ruined my hair!" he said with a determined shake of his head. Tendrils of dark curls escaped from his upsweep and trailed along the back of his neck.

Reed felt it was like taking bad tasting medicine. Drink it fast and you're done with it.

He'd be happy to get the most nerve racking part of the audition over with as soon as possible. He'd never been good at waiting.

His mother had told him to be sure to smile no matter what happened. She said, "Just smile----forget your hair, make-up and outfit, it's all too late by that time anyway. If you worry about something, you'll call attention to it!"

Reed checked his dress for wrinkles and adjusted his hair for the Nth time. He had re-done his make-up twice already.

While adjusting his hair, he broke a barrette and with only minutes before his own audition he was left with the near hopeless task of getting it all pinned back up securely and neatly. Luckily Shon had a ribbon the color of Reed's dress.

"Here, let me." Shon stepped up behind him and produced a stiff hairbrush out of his purse. With deft firm strokes he smoothed out then teased Reed's hair back up then yanked the ribbon through it, tying it with a pretty bow. "You've got beautiful hair," he said, meeting Reed's eyes in the mirror.

"You've saved my life," Reed mumbled as Shon's skilled hands formed his hair into an even more attractive style than before.

"Anytime," Shon said in his usual pompous tone. Then he spotted a boy across the room having trouble with a run nylon.

"Here, you can have mine," Shon called as he crossed the studio in a couple of long strides. Shon pulled up his skirt and gently slipped out of his nylons and handed them to the terrified boy. Reed couldn't get over the way Shon oozed femininity.

Whenever someone needed help today, Shon was there. In the anxious flurry of pre-audition, a million little disasters had already taken place. Shon had transformed himself into a Red Cross brigade, bailing the other guys out of last minute problems.

Reed had been wrong about Shon. Reed felt a sharp twinge of regret. The past days he'd been downright cold to Shon and he wished he could take that all back.

Shon was beginning to seem like someone he'd like to have as a friend, assuming he got in to S.F.I.F..

As Reed's interview time got closer the butterflies in his stomach were getting out of hand. No matter how many deep breaths he took, he couldn't calm down. Reed's ambition to attend S.F.I.F. had soared but his confidence hadn't.

The door to the studio burst open and one boy walked into the practice room. The tears and makeup streaming down his face told the whole story. He had received the ultimate rejection. Halfway through his interview Didi had stopped him, thanked him, and told him, "Let your hair grow, take the pill and try again next year."

Reed looked around the room. Others were standing white-faced. Day was next. , he hesitated a moment. Shon was handing the crushed boy a tissue.

Donnie leaned arrogantly near the mirror with an "I told you so," look on his face. Reed's stomach clenched and he smoothed his skirt, marched up to Day, and squeezed his hand.

"Go for it, girl! You'll be great," he said trying to bolster Day's confidence.

"Thanks!" Day said, his voice squeaked as he walked out and shut the door behind him.

Reed pressed his ear to the wall. Shon was close behind him grabbing his arm and pulling him into the last stall. "Look," Shon whispered. There was a crack in the wall and they could see inside the studio.

Inside the studio, Didi sat behind a long mahogany table talking to Day. Two other judges sat there making notes. There was a small group of men and women seated about the studio.

Didi made the guideline comment, "You are to answer our questions as a girl your age and respond as femininely as possible to all the questions. Now let us see you walk."

Didi motioned to Day to walk across the room. He stood up and slowly and deliberately crossed the room and turned and smiled.

Day put his feet in a perfect model's pose, stopped, smiled and his small body he skimmed across the floor, his short skirt moving sensually about his smooth legs.

"Good going, Day!" Shon congratulated under his breath at he peeped through the crack. "Now pick up that wiggle!"

In less than a second, Shon stiffened! "Oh, no!" he cried out, grabbing Reed's arm. A split second before Day's high heel began to slip on the waxed hard floor and Day fell flat on his behind right in front of the judges.

"Get up!" Shon urged. "Just get up! They over wax em' on purpose!"

Day couldn't hear him, but he waited for a man standing there observing to help him up. His face was red and his lips trembled, "Thank You," to the handsome man. He somehow picked up from where he was and finished his walk. . .with a new "thank you" wiggle "aimed" at the gentleman who helped him up.

"He fell!" was heard outside the stall.

Reed peeked out and saw Donnie at the mirror, where he primped and studied his reflection. Reaching up with one pale pink tipped hand, he preened his long red hair like some exotic jungle bird.

Reed watched him, fascinated. Donnie wanted everyone else to fail. That was his game.

The door flew open and Day practically soared in. He rushed toward Shon and reached out an arm for Reed. "They didn't say throw me out! I even fell," he grimaced and rubbed his girlish bottom comically. "They told me results would be posted Friday." Day wrapped his arms around his bosom and gave himself a happy hug.

He went on, "It's funny, but I don't think falling really mattered."

"Not the way you worked 'it' getting a man to help you up!" Reed said warmly, meeting Shon's eyes. For a moment Reed was so proud of Day, he forgot all about his own nervousness.

"Donnie!" someone called. "You're next."

Shon said what everyone else was thinking. "I'm not even going to wish him good luck."

Reed was tempted to watch Donnie's interview. As much as he had begun to dislike Donnie, he had to be very impressed with his ability.

Since Reed's turn was next, he walked to a mirror and carefully began checking everything out. He ran his hands over the flat front of his skirt, feeling the energizing motion against his new panties.

Reed's mind raced. Reed remembered some "firsts." The first time his mother had said, "That's my girl!" to him. The first time Nancy had dressed him completely in her clothes. The first dress his mother brought home and so nonchalantly hung in his closet. Being a girl without them to giggle with, wasn't as much fun.

"Now look at me!" he muttered, checking his mascara closely. There had been seconds and thirds and so many little milestones all leading up to THIS!

The events of the past few days flashed before his eyes. Everything came into sharp focus. If he did well, there would be no more midnight shifts at the Frosty Freeze serving drunks who want to know if he was a boy or girl. If he did well.. .

Reed gently smoothed a wisp of hair back from his forehead as Shon put his hands down gently on Reed's shoulder. "Reed, I'd love for you to be like my little sister. There's a lot I can teach you. . ."

Reed looked up, his eyes melting.

"Go out there and show those judges what a delightful girl you are." Shon said softly. "Now get going!"

Reed closed off the rest of the world for the next few minutes and prepared himself to be called.

Reed stepped into the studio as if he were a star getting an award. He was conscious of every part of his slender, well proportioned body as he approached the judge's table. Every morsel of his body had been

feminized without restraint. His hair curled, legs shaved, face made-up, wearing the most delightful dress and accessories.

He met Didi's penetrating gaze with a girlish smile. Didi was dressed in an eggshell white suit and he looked incredibly cold and remote. "Are you ready to begin?"

"Yes," Reed replied, smiling at each of the judges. His voice was very steady. Didi made the statement about answering the questions like a girl and Reed nodded.

With an elegant sweep of his hand Didi gestured toward the imaginary runway. Gracefully, Reed stood up and checked his skirt, then walked catlike away, turning to smile then walking back.

For the first few steps Reed's smile felt forced. His mother's "That's my girl!" reverberated in his mind as he imagined he was at home with his mother and Nancy practicing his modeling.

Feeling his slip brush against his panties, something clicked inside him. Reed's mind pictured himself outside his body as he loosened the carriage of his hips, allowing his fingers to brushed the edge of his skirt as he performed an intricate series of turns and poses.

He could see that the judges were surprised by his fluid demeanor. His feminine, soft dress with it's subdued neck line saucily divulged breasts which Reed projected proudly.

Smiling for real, he girlishly giggled. It was sort of funny. . .were these judges going to decide if Reed could be a girl?

Like in slow motion, Reed had never felt so feminine, like a princess just awakened from an enchanted sleep and everyone was watching him. He was feeling lace, nylon, perfume, and his sumptuous dress flowing around his soft, effeminate curves.

He smiled and strutted, his panty-clad hips moving more freely than ever before. Then he dropped into a classical curtsy in front of the judge's table before taking his seat to answer questions.

He had never felt so much like a girl in his entire life! He finally dared to look up into Didi's eyes. They

didn't tell a thing.

Questions were asked and answered.

The first, "Tell us about your self."

Reed smiled and said, "I'm five foot, six, one hundred, fifteen pounds, single. I like pastel colors, sexy lingerie, and rock music. I love yogurt but I'm watching my figure."

There were the simple knowledge questions about birth control, ovulation and female cycles. There were questions about who the current "hunks" were on television.

Reed thanked Nancy for teaching him how to drool over rock stars. Nancy would do his hair, brushing it forward over his face and then putting it up in curls while speculating which way some "hunk" would like it most.

There was one more request to walk about the room. Reed was clad in the most sumptuous, flowing, and fitted dress he'd ever worn. His breasts swelled outward from his neckline and the skirt rustled with each sweep across his legs. Reed asked himself, "WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU DOING HERE?"

That night at the stroke of eleven, Reed was called to the phone. No one in the boarding house was asleep yet. Everyone was too up from their audition. With their adrenaline still flowing, none of them wanted to sleep.

Reed hurried down the stairs clutching his robe tightly over his silky nightgown. "Hello," he said.

"Hi! It's me."

Reed leaned back against the wall. Pulling out a clip holding up his hair, Reed let his long hair cascade about his shoulders. "Nancy?"

"Gosh, what have they been doing to you there. . sucking out your brains? You don't remember my voice?" Reed knew instantly his old friend but was just trying to be funny.

Everything really was all right now. Hearing her voice, Reed realized now how much he'd been missing her. Nancy had never called him first after an argument before.

"I'm so glad you called. I've missed you!" Reed melted and wound a strand of his hair around his finger.

"So how are you?" he asked, picturing Nancy in a nightgown and robe just like the ones he was wearing.

"Fine!" Nancy began. "Well, that's not quite true." Her voice made it obvious that she was bursting with news. "I tried out for. . .you're never going to believe this"

"Come on, Nancy, the suspense is killing me." Reed bounced up and down on his toes and giggled. Nancy's voice dropped to a whisper on the other end of the phone.

Nancy always did this when there was news. Reed had to drag it out of her even though she was dying to tell. "I don't want my dad to know yet. He'll kill me. I tried out for cheerleaders!"

Reed was too shocked to respond.

"And I made it! All those modeling lessons finally paid off. OH! You'll love the uniforms! Really short, pleated skirts with sexy sweaters. . ." then with a whisper, she said, "I'll let you wear them anytime?"

"I don't believe this!" Reed finally gasped. So much had happened to Nancy in the last two weeks.

"And one more thing."

From the ecstatic tone in Nancy's voice, Reed knew exactly what was coming. Nancy announced, "Bill Harkness asked me out! He's the quarterback!"

Reed and Nancy laughed as they hadn't laughed in



weeks. A girlish closeness that Reed had sorely missed.

After giggling about school, boys and the small town, Nancy sounded a little uneasy. "I actually called to wish you luck. I'm sorry about our fight. I still want to be your best friend," she added. "I want to be with you as you as much as I can. How's my girl doing?"

Reed grew serious. "The audition was over for me today."

"What happened?" Nancy asked breathlessly.

"Oh, Nancy." Reed slid his back down the wall and sank down to the floor. He twirled his blond hair in his fingers and shook his head. "A lot of ups and downs! A couple times I almost ran down and got a crew cut!" Thinking over the complex events that had taken place over the last week. "They are serious here," Reed continued in a whisper. He told Nancy about the boy-girls he'd met, about Shon, Day, and the others. "If I get the spot, I'll never be a boy again!"

He bit his lip and waited for Nancy's answer.

"WOW!" Nancy chuckled into the phone. "So shall I see if Bill has a friend?" Then her voice grew more serious. "I know you pretty good, eh? I don't think you have a chance of being a boy again anyway."

"And anyway, I want you to help me with my cheers----you'll probably look better in the skirt!"

Reed let out a loud giggle.

"Reed?" she said softly. "You were right. If you get in, I'll have to make new friends here, but I'll never have another friend like you."

"Yeah," Reed giggled, "Bill Harkness would look terrible wearing one of your dresses!"

"So when do I see you?" Nancy asked.

"I'll be home Friday night."

"I'll be at the bus! With, of course, your mom."

"But what if I don't get in."

Nancy burst out laughing. "Then I'll have to start my own finishing school for boys right here!"

Reed joined in his friend's laughter and couldn't stop. He was still laughing when he hung up, and he could hardly wait to see his old friend again.

THE RESULTS...

"I'm in! I'm in!" Day screamed at the top of his lungs and jumped up and down. The commotion in the front hall was incredible. Guys were crying, hugging each other, shrieking for joy. Others slunk off to hide their disappointment from the world.

The list of the new S.F.I.F. students had just been posted. Day looked around for Reed. Their eyes met and the smile faded from Day's face. Reed was pale and his bottom lip trembled. "If I made it, I know you did," he practically shouted into Reed's ear. He shook Reed's shoulder. "It's just not possible that you didn't," he said, sounding a little hysterical.

Reed couldn't say a word. A sob rose to his throat. He tapped the neatly typed list with his finger.

Looking over at Day he tried to smile. "I'm glad for you."

Someone grabbed his arm from behind and whirled Reed around. Shon was standing there shaking his head in disgust. "Having blonde hair is getting to you!" He put his hands on either side of Reed's head and forced him to face the bulletin board. "Look!"

"I looked, Shon!" Reed cried, pulling loose from his grasp, but not before he saw the reason Shon was smiling. Out of alphabetical order and at the bottom of the list were two more names. He read them aloud. It was Reed and Donnie! Next to each name was an asterisk.

He and Donnie were to be in the studio in a half an hour.

Reed's hopes soared into the stratosphere for an instant, then abruptly crashed. "What does this mean?" he whispered.

Shon toyed with the large silver pendant dangling around his neck. "I don't know," he said slowly. "I've been here two years and I've never seen anything like this before. But I don't think it's bad news. You're on the list, you know. That means you're in!"

Reed wasn't so sure of that. His name was on the list, but so was Donnie's. Right there at the bottom. But

the asterisk and note made acceptance sound so tentative.

"Good luck!" Shon and Day cried out in unison as Reed rushed to fix his make-up.

Donnie walked into the ladies room next to the studio a few minutes after Reed. They glanced at each other in the mirror without saying a word. Donnie strutted to the farthest end of the room and began to paint his lips. The haughty expression on his beautiful face didn't conceal his fear.

Reed forced his eyes to stay on the mirror, checking every girlish detail. At the stroke of two Reed walked into the studio.

Yesterday Reed had managed to enter the audition room with tremendous confidence. Today he could barely keep his nyloned knees from shaking.

Halfway across the room Reed stopped and looked up at the table. Didi was there along with Bandy, and a couple of other people she'd never seen before. They all sat behind the long mahogany table like some kind of grand jury.

"Let me see you walk, Reed," Didi commanded.

Reed obeyed.

Reed's face colored. Reed lifted his weight off his hips onto his heels and imagined he was lighter than air. He walked like he was going to walk when he got off the bus and saw Nancy and his mother.

"Walk over here, please," Didi barked, "slowly!"

Reed pressed his thighs together and walked. He wondered, "What was this all about? If they didn't want him, why didn't they just come out and say so."

He approached the table with hips movement that glared at the director. Didi didn't seem to notice. He regarded Reed coolly, looking him up and down as if he were a dress he was thinking of buying.

"What's your family situation?" Bandy asked him. His voice was kind and encouraging.

Reed returned his smile weakly. "I live with my mother. My father died when I was little," he said in an unsteady voice. The question surprised him and took him off guard.

"Can your mother afford to send you to the Acad-

emy?" Didi inquired.

Reed frowned. "Yes. I think she can," he replied, adding, "She's very supportive."

One of the men behind Didi, who Reed recognized as the man who helped Day, spoke up. Reed decided he was very handsome. "Did she buy all your dresses?"

"Most," he said, "But I had a job too."

He wondered who the man was. Reed was very aware of how he stared at him. Reed smiled back.

For a moment no one said anything. Reed couldn't stand the suspense one minute longer. "Can't you tell me why I'm here?" he suddenly cried, gently adjusting the hem of his skirt. "Did I get in?"

Reed's eyes pleaded with Didi to say something. Didi gave Reed a puzzled look. "Get in?" Didi repeated. "My dear GIRL! Of course you got in!"

Reed felt faint and his mouth fell open. "Then what am I doing here?"

Reed's heart was racing. He was really going to be trained with Shon and Day. His eyes sparkled as he looked from Didi to the handsome man and the other men at the table.

"Oh, thank you!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands together and forcing back tears of joy that threatened to spill from his eyes while pressing his knees together!

Didi said, "I apologize if you were worried. I should have told you first. I just wanted these members of our board of directors to see you."

Didi leaned back in his chair and looked directly at Reed. "You are very gifted, Reed."

Reed's heart soared. He was surprised to find his high heels were still on the ground.

"You are one of the best we've seen. It's obvious girl things come easy to you that are hard for other boys. But you must work even harder to do what other boys find impossible. Do you understand?"

"I think so." Reed gulped. At the moment he wanted to sing and dance for joy. Instead, he clasped his manicured hands together tightly and sat very still.

"With your potential, we will work you harder than some of the other boys."

Reed's eyes met Didi's. Didi flashed a warm smile.

He was dismissed.

He moistened his pink lips and whispered, "Thank you very much." He didn't think he'd ever meant anything quite as sincerely.

Reed turned around and forced himself not to race out of the room. He knew they'd be watching his bottom.

"Oh, I almost forgot," the man called after him. "Now and then we give a small scholarship. I was called here to decide if any applicant should get it. It's not based on need. It's an award for a boy of unusual talent. You'll have one now, too. It will help with the board and keep you in nylons," he added with a twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, thank you," Reed cried and did something so girlish it even surprised Reed. He stretched up and kissed the man on the cheek.

"You can do better than that!" the man said, pulling Reed into a big bear hug. Reed surprised himself by throwing his arms around the tall man's thick neck and hugging him back.

RELIEVED...

Reed ran into the uninhabited ladies room. He took the first stall and pulled up his skirt, yanked down his nylons and panties, sat down and relieved himself. It was like he hadn't had time for essentials.

It was all so exciting. Right now all he cared about was finding his new friends and announcing his news to the world. Leaving the stall, Reed stopped and grinned at his feminine reflection in the mirror.

He had only been here a couple of days, but what days they had been. Each one had been packed with enough crazy emotions to last him a lifetime.

There was no greater burden than a great potential. Reed had a feeling that all of his days for the next three years at S.F.I.F. were going to be just as difficult, just as crazy, and just as wonderful.

Best of all, he had made at least two wonderful friends to share them with.

He stood up straight and primly tucked his hair back up into a chignon. Reed faced the mirror and

turned slightly to look at his skirted bottom. "You," he whispered to his reflection, "really did it---all by yourself! With no mom or Nancy to help."

All his embarrassment and hard work had paid off. Reed had one high heel planted on the ladder leading upward to his dreams.

As he left the ladies room, Reed ran into Donnie going in. "I was never a bit concerned," Donnie boasted with a flip of his long hair.

"Me either!" Reed said, "See ya in a couple weeks."

Shon and Day were waiting, just as he knew they would be.

Reed's face was all smiles as he grabbed Shon and Day into a group hug! "I made it!" he cried.

"I told you so!" Shon said smugly, his dark eyes glowing.

Day announced, "And I've got even better news. We're all rooming together at the same house!"

Reed said, "This is the happiest day of my life, and I've got two wonderful new friends to share it with."

"Me too!" Day said with a catch in his lilting voice. "And I hope we stay friends forever!"

Shon's full lips turned up into a lovely smile. "Girls forever!" he repeated, stretching his arms out to the other girls in a wide expansive gesture.

All three hugged for a long time and for no reason at all started laughing.

EPILOGUE

"Oh honey," Reed's mother cried as she ran towards the door to give Reed a hug when he got off the bus. "You look different. Let me see you!"

Nancy was close behind. Reed felt so triumphant, as he promenaded in his short, knit dress that clung to his hips. Things were different. He immediately felt different being back in his small town and even the modest town folk now seemed odd.

Here, developing the skills of a female seemed so unimportant. Reed would be here less than two weeks before he had to be back at the Academy. He hugged his mother and Nancy.

"You do look so different," Nancy confirmed.

"I've been through so much...so many changes! I can't tell you how I missed you two and being here where it's comfortable."

Nancy and Reed's mother smiled at one another. "Things change here too!" Nancy announced with that insidious gleam in her eye.

"What's going on," Reed demanded.

His mother took a good look at Reed and announced, "Nancy and I cleaned up your room."

"Yeah!" Nancy flaunted, "I went through my clothes and brought a bunch of pretty stuff to your house." Then with a devilish grin, added, "We had to get rid of a few things. Actually we threw out everything you own that's for a boy!"

Reed moaned.

"It's okay honey. You won't need them where you're going."

THE END

**If you'd like to read more about Reed
and his training, write to me:**

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