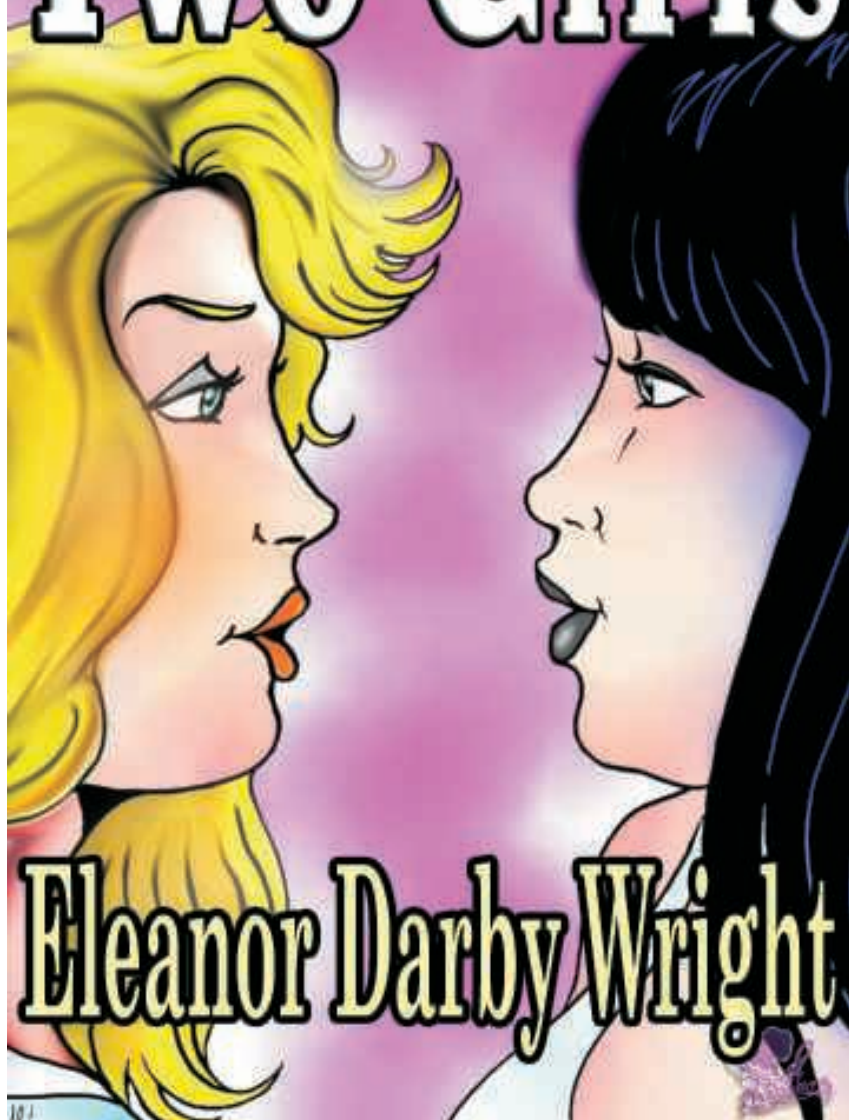


Two Girls



Eleanor Darby Wright



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TWO GIRLS

by Eleanor Darby Wright

The first girl, all blonde hair with red ribbons, put the dollies in the pram and showed the other girl, a brunette with braids, blue ribbons twisted through them, where the mummies had to take their babies. That was what the blonde girl was calling both the little girls as they strutted together in their long dresses down the garden. The babies were her large collection of dolls.

"Thank you so much for bringing Melissa to play with Alice," the smartly dressed, blonde woman beside the pool said to her friend, dark-haired, and darkly clothed. The brunette watched the little girls anxiously as they went out to the gazebo where the blonde wanted to stage a tea party for all of her dollies.

"Melissa," said the dark-haired woman carefully, still watching the bossy, little blonde arrange the dolls, showing Melissa how to place them and how to sit herself, her legs crossed just like her mother beside the

pool. She really did look like the mummy and the dolls like her little girls.

"Melissa is always kind," the dark-haired woman said. "She," she grimaced as she said the word, "has always been the helpful one. When I told her, what three years ago now, how she could help Alice, come over here and play with her and her dolls, she didn't want to, of course, at first, but she is, she is ..."

Kate Allen, Melissa's mother, was stuck for words on how to describe the little girl who smoothed her dress beneath her bare legs and crossed them with a smile as Alice pointed imperiously to her friend's pink skirt.

"Very kind," Melissa's mother murmured finally, aware that Beatrice wasn't paying her any attention at all. Bea's focus was solely upon her own daughter and with very good reason.

"It was such a shock that Susan was gone before I invited Melissa and you over. Her Charlotte wasn't half as nice a girl as Melissa. Susan left without even a word as well," said Beatrice Mainwaring crossly. "Not a word, not even an intimation that she and Jeff were even having any trouble. Just one day she's here and Alice is so happy playing with Charlotte. The next, they're gone and Alice is bereft."

"She was ill again, herself, wasn't she?" asked Kate Allen quietly.

"Yes," said Beatrice. "Brought on, the doctors said, by the stress of her best friend leaving. I asked her if she'd like me to invite William over but you know how she is. She doesn't like boys very much, even now. Never has. Far too rough. Then, we heard why Charlotte was gone. She had the same thing as Alice and had had a relapse. Susan should have told us, you know. We haven't told Alice even now, three years later, that Charlotte will never be coming back."

"She looks pretty well today," said Kate thoughtfully, watching as the blonde girl hugged her girl friend, just as Beatrice had hugged her, as the two girls put the dollies down in the pram and baby cribs, kiss-

ing them as mummies had to do, according to Alice, before their afternoon naps.

"It comes and goes," said Beatrice, watching her daughter like a hawk. "When I told her that there weren't any other little girls her age anywhere on the estate, only boys like William, or the Sebastian twins, she was very quiet. I was at my wit's end when Alice mentioned Melissa, and how nice she had been, that one time when she was over with Charlotte, dressing up in the Halloween costumes with the two of them.

"How the girls giggled! Susan and I didn't know why. Melissa was gone before you came to pick William up. Alice said she wouldn't mind if Melissa came, but not William. But you do live quite a distance away now, don't you, Kate, all the way across the tracks. I hope you don't mind me using that term."

Kate Allen smiled. She didn't mind at all. Where she and Doug lived at present was across the tracks, across the river as well. And a very nice suburb it was, too. Beatrice could have found any of a dozen girls to play with Alice if she had only put her mind to it. But her friend was a bit of a snob, no, she was a lot of a snob, and always had been. Still, she was a generous friend and Kate could use her help.

"So it was Alice who was the one who suggested Melissa come over and visit, not me," Beatrice said with a tight smile. "I hadn't heard of Melissa before, until my daughter told me all about her. I guess when William was over and Charlotte was here, she must have appeared. Alice remembered how nice she was to both of them. She was such a nice mummy, Alice said. Nicer than me, I asked her and she said, much nicer."

The two women laughed at that, studying the girls at play. "That doll house," said Kate Allen. "Isn't that the one ...?"

"That we used to play with for hours?" asked Beatrice, standing up and picking up a tray with a jug of iced lemonade and two glasses. There were also cookies on a plate. "Yes, that's the one. Repainted, of

course. Excuse me, Kate, for a moment or so, while I prove to my daughter that I can be just as nice a mummy as Melissa."

The little girls looked up, the brunette reddening a little as she burped the 'baby' before gently laying it back in its crib. "Ooo, thank you, Mummy!" said Alice excitedly. "Look, Melissa! A picnic! I can't remember the last time I had a real picnic out here. It must be because you're here!"

"I think it's because you have such a nice mummy," said Melissa in her soft, gentle voice. She actually smiled up at Beatrice. "And because you are so well. Fresh air is really good for you."

"That's true, Melissa," said Alice's mother.

"Oh, Mummy," said Alice crossly. "You don't have to praise everything Melissa says. You've been doing that ever since she got here! I know, Melissa, after we finish our cookies, why don't we go in and play dress-up. I've got a stack of new outfits for Halloween and dress-up parties. You must come with me. She can, can't she, Mummy? I'll try, I really will, to get around the Crescent this year. Having Melissa with me will keep me going!"

"That's a very good idea, Alice darling," said Beatrice to her daughter. "Why don't I ask Melissa's mother if she can spend Halloween with you? Maybe she can even sleep over. Would you like that, Melissa? As you can hear, it would be a really great favor for us if you'd do that."

"Oh, Mummy!" snapped Alice as the other girl looked on, twisting one of her braids that had come loose. "Melissa is my friend now. She loves coming over to play. You don't have to ask her if she'd like to come over. She'll adore it!"

"I really don't know," said Kate as the girls disappeared into the house and Beatrice made her proposal to have Melissa over for Halloween, even the Saturday before, for the party she was having in the huge mansion that dominated Spring Hill.

"Melissa's really been so kind to Alice," said Beatrice persuasively. "The two got along so well today, right from your arrival. She looks so pretty in that dirndl dress you let her wear here. You watch. Alice is into very modern makeup and dressing, these days, when she does play dress-up. I bet the girls won't be coming down as Snow White and Cinderella but more like Christina Aguilera and Hanna Montana!"

"I should talk to Doug about ..." began Kate quietly, her voice much like the one Melissa used.

"Oh, he'll never miss Melissa," scoffed Beatrice. "He'll probably be glad that she's out of the house and visiting up here. Now, I'll have them both in bed at regular hours, Kate. Melissa can sleep right in with Alice if you'll let her come. You know Alice doesn't have anything catching." She sighed. "I was actually turned down by two different mothers I phoned yesterday, who didn't care at all about Alice, only about exposing their daughters to her."

Kate Allen grimaced. Such thoughts had entered her mind. And others, such as how Melissa might react to Alice's death. It could happen. Charlotte Sunderland had been in hospital many times with Alice, and always had appeared much rosier and healthier than the wimpy Alice Mainwaring. Kate also knew that Susan had worried a lot about what would happen to Charlotte if something ever happened to Alice. Then, it had all come out the opposite to what Kate would have predicted.

"I'll call you tomorrow," Kate told her friend as pleasantly as she could. No, it wouldn't be what Doug said that allowed another visit. It would be what Melissa said and whether she wanted to come back after this very long day with Alice Mainwaring.

Beatrice knew her daughter well. When the girls at last came downstairs, their long dresses were gone. The girls had makeup on their faces, Kate quite astonished at the vividness of her daughter's eyes and the glossy lipstick worn more stylishly than Alice wore hers.

Alice toted down a child's tape recorder. The two girls sang and mimed to the voice of Miley Cyrus, swinging their long, loose hair over their shoulders as if they were teenaged girls or something. Kate could not believe that Melissa was doing the same things as Alice, swinging her hips and smiling, even dancing with the other girl, both wiggling at exactly the same moments, most suggestively. Their voices were indistinguishable from one another. Clearly Melissa must have been watching more television than Kate had thought she was.

"Ooh, look at your glass, Melissa," said Alice as the girls had tea with their mothers and talked about the things they'd done in the bedroom, the clothes they'd worn and how long they'd had to wait until their nail polish dried.

Melissa frowned and blushed. "It's just like yours," said Melissa, taking a napkin and trying to wipe the lipstick off her glass.

"I gave you the Ravishing Red," said Alice. "It suits you, Melissa. You look so pretty. You should wear it all the time when you come over to play."

"Sure," said Melissa, glancing at her mother and smiling prettily. "Thank you for the compliment, Alice. You're really good in putting makeup on someone else. I looked really pretty in the mirror, thanks to you. And you look so beautiful as well!"

Kate's heart lifted at the way Melissa spoke to the very sick girl beside her, both of them wearing similar miniskirts and sequinned tops like the singer. Alice fairly glowed at being praised by the other.

At cleanup time, Melissa was the one to get the dollies from the gazebo and push them all back in the big pram to the veranda, where Alice was having to use a puffer for a while. Alice was definitely a different girl, thought Kate, so forward in so many ways, as her singing and dressing up had shown, and then seeming years younger with the way she played with her dollies. Kate guessed that the reason she liked Melissa

was that Melissa wasn't going to chide her over her choice of games for the two girls to play.

The girls went off with armfuls of dolls, giggling over the way that they walked like Hanna Montana. Alice showed Melissa how Christina walked, much more femininely and sexily. A laughing Melissa tried to copy her as the pair went over to Alice's bedroom.

The girls hugged and kissed on the cheeks, leaving lipstick bows on each other which made them giggle, like little girls, when it was finally time to go. "It's been such a lovely afternoon, Kate," said Beatrice, smiling broadly as the girls walked arm-in-arm out to Kate's car. They could hear Alice telling Melissa all about the new car, a Caddy, that her mother had just bought.

"We both enjoyed it," said Kate. "You could come to us ..."

"No," said Beatrice quickly with a shake of her stylish blonde hair. "I don't mean to disparage where you're living, Kate. I'm sure it's very nice. But we've everything here if Alice ever has a difficulty. The ambulance can be here in four minutes, if it ever came to that.

"But we'd love to see you both again. Would next Saturday be all right? We might even think of a little trip to Spring Hill Mall. They've a new dress shop there that has the most gorgeous new girl's fashions, which would be perfect for our two little girls." Not really so little, Kate wanted to protest, certainly not with the way Beatrice liked to dress Alice. "They do need new party dresses for the Camerons. Everyone there always dresses up fancily. They tried to get the children dancing last time we were there, but it's going to be a different party this time, with a clown and a show."

"Melissa might enjoy that," said Kate noncommittally. "Oh, what's this?"

"I heard about Doug being laid off," said Beatrice sympathetically. "And you, Kate, with another child on the way. You know me, I can't bake at all! You'd throw out anything I tried to foist onto you! It's just a

little something for you, a belated birthday present, we can call it."

Kate was stunned at the money on the check. "I don't ..."

"Just bring Melissa over soon," said Beatrice cheerily. "That's all the re-payment I'll ever need. To see our girls getting along so well!"

Melissa waved from the front seat all the way down the driveway before she settled back into her booster seat.

"That didn't go so badly, did it?" Kate asked cautiously as they turned onto the roadway that led to Springwater Bridge.

"No, Mummy," said Melissa, her legs in the shiny black shoes and long white socks up to her knees looking pretty. Her little tartan skirt was smoothed down by a hand with red-tipped fingers. Kate would have to stop at the pharmacy and get some nail varnish remover for Melissa. She never wore nail varnish herself, did Kate. Alice had not only put Ravishing Red on her daughter's lips but on her fingernails as well.

"Mrs Mainwaring would like you to go back there next Saturday," said Kate cautiously. "She wants to take Alice shopping for a party dress, and you as well, if you come next week."

"A party dress?" asked Melissa quietly. "For me?"

"With new shoes with heels and stockings," said Kate neutrally, waiting for Melissa to object most strenuously.

"Mrs Mainwaring gave you some money for me coming over today?" asked Melissa carefully, pushing a loose strand of hair behind her ear, a gesture that Hanna Montana made all the time. Melissa did look very pretty with her long hair unbraided and streaming over her little top.

No-one could have told that it was a wig, not with the gestures Melissa had learned from Alice, in the times she'd been over in the last year to meet her delicate friend. Twice, Alice had been bed-ridden. Melissa had been the one to set up Barbie dolls and dress them,

to look like her, just as Alice wanted. Kate wondered whose idea it had been to leave Melissa's hair loose and unbraided. She did look very pretty, feminine, as she sat delicately beside her mother.

"You see everything, don't you?" asked Kate Allen, as they turned the car finally down the hill and joined the stream of traffic to the Bridge, passing the expensive mall Beatrice wanted to go to, with the girls, next time. Kate normally shopped at much less expensive stores. It was a pity Spring Hill wasn't large enough to warrant a Wal-Mart.

"She did say something about re-payment," said Melissa quietly.

"Oh, she'd never ask for the money that she gives me," said Kate Allen. "That's just to help us until Daddy gets his job back. No, the two of you having fun is all the repayment Alice's mummy needs from us."

"I have to come back then, for her to see that," said Melissa thoughtfully.

Kate sighed. "I guess so," she said. "But if you were sick ... they wouldn't even let you onto the estate. Beatrice is deathly afraid of Alice, in her weakened state, catching anything like a cold."

"It could kill her?" Melissa asked as the car crossed the Bridge, and the railway tracks. Yes, they'd definitely entered a world, not as privileged as that of the Mainwarings.

"Possibly," said Kate. "But it's a convenient excuse if you don't want to go back there."

Melissa sighed and sank back in her seat, clearly thinking about it. "Alice only has a few months to live?" she asked again. Kate noticed that the vividness of Melissa's darkly fringed eyes were because she hadn't cleaned her face of makeup as well as she should have.

"That might be true," said Kate, pulling into the pharmacy parking lot. "We need nail polish remover for your nails," she said to Melissa, "and makeup tissue removers. I'll have to teach you how to do that if

you go back. Alice is into tweenie girls' games, growing up much faster than boys do."

"She's into games," Melissa agreed with a sigh. "Well, I suppose it won't hurt to go next weekend. Alice might have some other girl friend, besides me."

"She's taught at home," said Kate. "So she doesn't get much chance to meet girls her own age. I told Bea she ought to be in grade school, or ballet classes with other girls, but Alice's mother's so afraid of germs and stuff. All her instructors come to her home to teach her. Will you come into the shop with me, Melissa?" she asked as she parked, careful to keep her face from showing any sort of feeling, one way or another, about Melissa going in with her. Melissa had had the shakes very badly the first time she'd had to go out in public, with her mother, in her new dress and shoes.

"All right," said Melissa with a confident smile at her mother.

"Good," said Kate. "We'll go on and get some food items I must have as well after I've been to the bank. Come on, poppet. Look out for that door and come and help me."

So, Melissa was a good, little girl and helped her mother. Doug luckily wasn't home when they got back. So the little girl was able to help her mother get the parcels in and get them unpacked before Kate insisted that she get out of the 'good clothes' she was wearing, Melissa's only girl's clothes, and get back into her jeans and tee-shirt.

Kate wouldn't let her child go out until all her makeup was removed and all the nail polish made to vanish. "There," she said at last as her son, William, reappeared after the wig was unpinned and set on its block in Kate's room.

William shook his longish hair and shivered. "Can I go over to Han's?" he asked, picking up his soccer ball and testing it to see that it was hard.

"Sure," said his mother, making sure that there was no vestige of Melissa on her son's skin or hair. It would be awful for him if someone challenged him about

dressing up as a little girl. He'd apparently done it to amuse Charlotte and Alice once before. Unfortunately, Alice had liked 'her' better than she'd ever liked 'him', William Allen. The check in Kate's hand made her feel very guilty, as she thought about what her son had done, to earn it for her.

"You deserve some time with your friends, Will," Kate said hurriedly, trying not to think about what she might be doing to her son's psyche by encouraging him to dress as 'Melissa' to please Alice. But she couldn't just let him think she didn't appreciate what he did. "And thank you for what you did today, son. I know it was pretty strange but it did please one sick little girl and, whatever happens from here on in, you won't have to do this much longer, if, in fact, you even have to do it again, next Saturday."

Alice was standing in the doorway, smiling and waving as Kate and Melissa, sitting so primly in her new, green tartan skirt and new black kitten-heeled shoes, drove into the Mainwarings' long driveway.

"You don't have to do this, William," said Kate to the little girl who sat so composedly beside her.

"Mrs Mainwaring gave you more money last weekend, didn't she?" asked Melissa in the voice she always used now, when she'd taken on what Kate Allen thought of as her 'Melissa persona'. They were visiting Alice almost every weekend since the sick girl's phenomenal revival of late, Beatrice putting it all down to Melissa's influence.

"We don't have medical coverage and she's helping us out," said Kate, with a quick glance at the dark, bewigged girl beside her, waving and smiling back at the other excited girl behind the glass outer door. Undoubtedly, what was causing Alice to be so excited, thought Kate, was the prospect of the party that afternoon and early evening at Shaun Cameron's house.

"And she'll keep helping out, won't she, if I keep coming out here to play with Alice. Isn't that right?"

asked Melissa quietly. Kate shivered. This 'girl' sometimes scared her as she seemed, as William never did, to be able to see right into and read Kate's mind.

Melissa unbuckled herself, unlocked the door and let herself out. Before Kate could help, Melissa was taking out the suitcase with her clothes for the weekend.

"Claire was just thrilled that Alice's friend, Melissa, could come over," Beatrice had gushed on the phone, not letting Kate get in a word. Kate was already stumped by Bea's continual calling for Melissa to come and play with Alice, to shop, to go to the park with the other girl, even to swim in the pool. That had meant buying Melissa a girl's bathing costume, one with a frilly skirt all about it, as well as a girl's swimming cap, one decorated with flowers.

William hadn't liked the packages she'd brought into his bedroom and put into his 'special' drawer. He'd asked and been quiet then for a long time. Now, he said the same thing about the party that he had about swimming. "I suppose I have to do it," he'd said with a sigh. "But there was a match this Saturday."

William wasn't old enough to play for the school but he liked to go and see the older boys. They liked him as well as William and Doug often joined in impromptu soccer games in the local park. "You'll be playing out here in a couple of years," the older boys often said to him.

"My son's going to be a football player," Doug always said. The real game, not this sissy stuff, he'd say to Kate when William was off, chasing a ball that the older boys were too lazy to go after.

"I'll tell Bea you can't go to Shaun Cameron's party on Saturday," Kate said to Melissa after the phone call invitation. "You missed a match for swimming ..."

"Shaun Cameron?" William had asked, a frown on his clean, unlined face. "He's the only boy Alice says she likes at all. She calls all her boy dolls, Shaun, and she's always tucking them up in bed with her Barbie dolls in the house we play with."

"She doesn't mention William?" Kate had asked lightly.

"Never mentions him at all," said William without a flicker of a smile. He sighed. "This'll mean a lot to Alice. I suppose we'll have to go."

"Bea wants a sleepover as well," said Kate to her son. "I can cancel that at least."

William sighed. "Alice was saying I had to stay over if we ever went to a party," he said carefully once more. "She said it's what girl friends do after parties. They lie in bed and tell each other everything that went on, who was nice, who wasn't. You have to tell what happens if you have to do a forfeit outside the closed door, all that sort of stuff. They call it Postman's Knock. Did you go to parties with games like that, Mummy?"

"Not at this age," said Kate with a light, quick laugh. "Alice has a vivid imagination, doesn't she? It will be things like musical chairs and Pictionary, I'm sure, at Shaun's party. He might have a magician or a clown to amuse you all."

"That would be better," said William in relief.

But Kate felt quite apprehensive when she saw the very pretty, party dress Alice was wearing. Bea had bought it for her at Spring Hill Mall, several weekends before, and another, in red, and not black and gold, for Melissa.

"We'll hang it here," Beatrice had said gaily as Kate said that Doug wouldn't like another family buying dresses for Melissa. He'd have a fit, Kate knew, if he heard that Beatrice was buying pretty, girls' dresses, for his son. "Melissa can wear it when she goes to a party with Alice. Won't that be fun, Melissa?"

"Oh, yes," said Melissa guardedly, watching the dress being hung up among all the dresses Alice had. She'd forced a smile, thanked Beatrice for the gift, most prettily, kissing the other woman's cheek. She'd taken her mother's hand to walk to the car in the black kitten heels Bea had also bought her, insisting that Melissa wear them 'to get used to them'. Now, Melissa

was wearing them, the heels clicking like Kate's high heels, as Melissa rolled her suitcase to the front door of the Mainwarings.

"Melissa's here!" squealed Alice as she opened the door to let in mother and daughter. Of course, the little girls hugged and smiled at one another. "Oh, I can't wait to get over to Shaun's house for the party, Melissa. Can you?"

"You smell nice," said Melissa cautiously to her friend.

"Mummy says we can use her new perfume if we use it properly," said Alice, taking Melissa's hand and pulling her in. "Let's get you into your party dress, just like me!"

Alice was wearing stockings with her kitten heel shoes, Kate noticed. Melissa was hugged and made to feel really welcome by the girl who said how awful the last week had been, how lonely she'd been since Melissa couldn't come over earlier.

"Bea!" called Kate as she stood in the hallway, hanging Melissa's coat on the kiddy rack beside Alice's five or six examples of little girl's outer wear.

It took another call up the stairs and finally Beatrice came rushing down, the smile of welcome dimming when she looked at Kate by herself. "You came over alone?" Beatrice gasped. "Alice was so looking ..."

"She's already kidnapped Melissa," said Kate with a smile. "Unless I miss my guess, they've headed off to raid your perfumery, Bea."

"Oh, the little minxes," said Beatrice affectionately. "Alice has been so excited all morning, knowing you and Melissa were coming."

"I don't think she noticed me," said Kate dryly but the remark went right by Bea. "Did I see Alice was wearing stockings today?"

"Of course," said Beatrice, rolling her eyes. "Well, it's a party, isn't it? A girl has to look pretty! She insists on stockings and a garter belt today. Oh, and a party dress, ribbons to match and high heels, as she calls the kitten heels we bought the girls three weeks ago!"

"Melissa ..." began Kate.

"Will wear the same as my little sexpot," laughed Beatrice. Kate frowned and wondered if she should tell her friend again that Melissa wasn't exactly a girl, as pretty as she appeared to be. But Beatrice should know that.

"I should go and help," Kate began.

"No need," said Beatrice complacently. "Let's find a drink, shall we? I think that hubby of mine replenished the gin and vermouth yesterday. Let me make you a martini!"

"But Melissa ..." said Kate, knowing she must confront Beatrice with what they were doing to her 'daughter'.

"Alice laid out all the clothes Melissa is to wear on the bed they're sharing," Bea went on as if Kate hadn't spoken at all. "We had to buy a new one, a queen-size, if you can believe it, for all the dollies Alice likes to sleep with. There's barely enough room for a friend on a sleepover. That's what Alice is really excited about. She's never had a sleepover before!"

"Neither has Melissa," said Kate dryly.

"You watch," said Bea, steering her friend to the drinks area of her beautiful living room. "We'll have quite the fashion show in a few minutes. Both of those girls love dressing up so much. We did, too, I remember, when we were little girls."

"We didn't wear French perfume," Kate said sourly.

"Only because our mothers couldn't afford it," laughed Beatrice, stretching out on a long sofa, cocktail in hand. "The beds we shared, Kate! Can you believe how small they were! The only dollies we had were rag ones, with buttons for eyes!"

"Different colors when one wasn't missing entirely," said Kate, having to smile at the memory.

There was a noise and a swishing in the hallway. Girlish giggles followed before Alice's head appeared around the doorframe. "Are you ready?" she asked,

smiling at the two ladies in the living room. There was a rustling noise behind her.

"Ready for the fashion parade?" asked Bea with a laugh. "Put on the music and begin."

"You put on the music, Mummy," said Alice, laughing, and there were more rustlings and swishings from the hallway.

Bea got up and put on some classical music. Alice entered first, not in her party dress but in one of her mother's dresses, holding up the front like a medieval lady at a dance. Melissa followed, wearing one of Alice's Princess dresses, all in yellow. It was Melissa's petticoats that made all the noise.

She is so pretty, thought Kate with a gasp at the makeup on Melissa's face. The girl pouted as Alice had done, and, hand on hip, strutted and rustled her dress, pirouetting opposite the ladies, showing off the bow over her tush and the pretty, yellow, high heels, Alice's. Kate noticed in surprise that her daughter was wearing stockings, just like Alice. Her eyelids were darker than normal as were her eyelashes. Her mouth, red with lipstick, was more bow-shaped than Kate had ever noticed before.

"You did that yourselves?" asked an admiring Beatrice, clasping her daughter. Melissa came to Kate, who recognized the perfume on her neck and arms as the same one that Alice was wearing. Oh, but Melissa was so soft and girlie as she snuggled up to her mother, lifting her long dress, showing off her stockings and heels.

"Gemma," said Melissa with a smile, "helped us."

"Alice made our upstairs maid do your makeup, Miss Melissa Allen?" Bea asked in delight. "Who helped you into your new clothes?"

"I needed her to help me with my garter belt," said a serious Melissa, deliberately, Kate was sure, not looking at her.

"You look so pretty in that dress, Melissa," Bea enthused. "Your dark hair sets it off beautifully. All right, Alice, you girls can get dressed properly now in

your party dresses. You don't want to be late for Shaun, do you?"

Alice let out a squeal, seized Melissa's hand and the two girls hopped, skipped and danced out of the room, disappearing up the back stairs that the maids used. There was the sound of laughing, female voices.

"They have to show off for the maids," said Beatrice. "And, Kate, you can go, really. I'll call you tonight when I've got the girls to bed. I'm sure they'll have a fine time at Claire's. What can happen with a magician and eating and drinking? There's no time for the hanky-panky my over-sexed daughter thinks happens at every party she goes to."

"And then what did Tom do?" whispered Alice as she cuddled up to her friend, in a nightie the twin of Alice's.

Melissa hesitated, a chill going through her as she remembered Tom's hands on her, so unlike Alice's feeble, soft hands, stroking the silky, puffed sleeves of the nightie Melissa had to wear. Should she really tell her friend what had happened to her when she and Tom had been out in the Postman game, behind the door?

Tom, after all, was so much older than the little girls. He'd known exactly what he was supposed to do. He'd done what Alice would have loved to have done to her. Melissa hadn't been able to move as Tom crushed her arms to her sides and kissed her. She'd tried to turn to stone and pretend it was nothing, even when Tom's tongue slid over her lips. He'd moved her head from side to side and the weirdest of feelings had overwhelmed Melissa. It was as if she really was a girl, as if she liked being kissed forcefully by a strong, muscular boy, Tom.

"Your lipstick was all smeared when you came back," whispered Alice slyly to her friend. "Mrs Cameron noticed! That's why she pulled Tom out of

the game and wouldn't let him come back and play any more with us."

"Oh, that's why," whispered Melissa with a shudder. Just thinking about it made her lips compress as they'd done with Tom kissing her. He'd whispered to her to close her eyes and enjoy herself. When his tongue ran eerily across her lipstick, he crushed her in her swishy dress against him, she really feeling so girlish, especially when his lips moved from side to side and she'd had to do the same.

"Now, wasn't that really nice?" Tom whispered to her. She'd shuddered as she'd nodded to him as he leant over her, making her lift her arms about his neck. He said it would help her enjoy kissing him. Oh, it did. They did it again, with her pressing into him, as a girl should, her heart beating a thousand beats per second as she kissed a boy and liked doing it.

They kept on as Tom wouldn't knock on the door as he was supposed to. Finally, they heard the other boys and girls in the game knocking on the door. When it opened, everyone saw her with her arms about Tom's neck, sitting in his lap on the stairs.

"Next year," Tom whispered in her ear, making her clip-on earring shake so enticingly, "you can be my girl friend at my birthday party, sit in my lap, and make out with me."

Melissa had wanted to ask Tom what he meant by 'making out' with him, trembling as she let him keep his arm about her waist. The knocking had been louder as Tom kissed her again, his hand on her thigh, stroking her, but it was Mrs Cameron who'd intervened, not Shaun's older sister who'd been running the game. "We're going to start musical chairs," she'd said sweetly, helping Melissa untangle herself from Tom's protective arms. She'd kept her arm about Melissa as she'd escorted her into the girls' game, that had begun first.

"Tom did kiss me," Melissa finally confessed in a conspiratorial whisper to her friend who was stroking her hair, demanding to know the truth.

"Show me," said Alice, putting her arms about Melissa's neck. Her nightie slid against Melissa's. Her leg began to slide over the other girl's, between them, and Melissa had a hard time holding the other girl off her.

"It wasn't like that!" she protested in a whisper as Alice slipped her scented face right against Melissa's and kissed her cheek.

Alice giggled. "Show me," she whispered. Slowly, cautiously, Melissa showed her.

"He pinned my arms to my sides," Melissa whispered, feeling so embarrassed as she gave her friend the details Alice seemed desperate to hear.

"So you pretended you couldn't struggle against him," Alice said in a voice only Melissa could have heard in her newly pierced ear. Alice's tongue actually licked the little earring Melissa knew her mother would be furious about. She'd have to tell her that Mrs Cameron's daughter had done that, had done it for all the girls at the party who didn't have pierced ears. She'd put huge danglers and bands into their ears which other girls said was so pretty and so great! Now Melissa had sleepers to keep the holes open so she could wear pretty earrings, again.

"I did tell him not to, and, and I did struggle!" hissed Melissa but her best female friend giggled at the lie and didn't believe her anyway.

"I'll be Tom," Alice said, her arms gripping the girl beside her. "He slid them around you and pulled you against him?" Melissa almost screamed for the other to let her go. She felt as terrified as she had, when Tom did that to her, the first time. Alice kissed her, right on the lips, as Tom had, but she wasn't fierce and hungry, if those were the right words, as Tom. Kissing Alice was like kissing a soft dolly. Melissa had done that many times to please her friend when they'd put their dollies to bed.

"Now, you be Tom," whispered Alice, letting go. Slowly, Melissa put her arms about the other girl's waist, crinkling her soft nightie, her skin so smooth below. Alice immediately threw her arms about Me-

lissa's neck, kissing her mouth as fiercely as Tom had, earlier that afternoon.

Melissa clutched the other girl but Alice's legs were over hers and she was trapped. "There," giggled Alice from the dark. "That's how he did it really, didn't he?" Melissa knew she was blushing as she finally admitted to her friend that she'd lied about how Tom had kissed her.

"I knew because Vanessa," Alice went on with a giggle, "was telling me months ago all about Tom and how he likes kissing girls. How do you like me kissing you, Melissa?"

"B-Better than Tom," said Melissa nervously.

"See, we have to practice with one another," whispered Alice, her long hair mixing with Melissa's on her pillow. Gentle kisses followed. "We girls have to be experts in this and teach the boys how to do it properly. That's what Sherrie, Shaun's sister, was telling us, while you were out, necking with Tom."

"I wasn't!" protested Melissa, trying to wriggle clear of Alice, but the other girl hung onto her, giggling even more.

"You were so and I only have you to practice with," said Alice with a tiny cough which Melissa knew meant that Alice was getting too worked up. She must always slow down what she was doing, Aunt Bea had warned Melissa, if Alice began coughing repeatedly, and call Bea to her daughter's side.

Melissa lay very still as Alice gently stroked her and kissed her again. "You can do this to me, Melissa," said Alice, yawning suddenly. "We're girl friends, you and me, and girl friends help each other, don't they, to be really good girls later on with boy friends. You'll always tell me what the boys like to do to you, won't you, Melissa?"

"They're afraid of touching me. Shaun was. He said he didn't want to be the one who killed me." Alice shivered. "It was nice of him to be so considerate, wasn't it? If only he was a girl like you. Your skin is so soft and smooth and silky like your dresses and you're so

gentle. I really enjoy being all girlish with you, Melissa. You like it when I'm the same with you, don't you?"

Alice was in the doorway, as usual, waving at Kate arriving with her daughter. Even though they'd parked across the driveway as usual, Kate could see that the little girl was in a pink tutu, her hair in ribbons, her legs in pink tights and ballet shoes.

"Good heavens," Kate said nervously, looking at the sweet-looking, fashionably dressed daughter she'd brought to be Alice's companion at some Halloween party. "She surely can't be expecting you, Melissa ..."

But Alice did expect a blushing Melissa to be a ballerina just like herself. She fluffed out the tutu, the ruffles bouncing against her legs as she got up on her toes and did a little pirouette.

"I'll show you how to do this, Melissa," Alice said. "It's really easy! I bet no-one at the party will know that you aren't in dance classes with me!"

"Alice!" snapped Bea Mainwaring, limping down the stairs with a maid to help her. "I've told you, again and again, to come and get me, when we have guests at the house. You aren't the hostess here just yet, my girl!"

Alice looked suitably chastened and stood with her hands behind her back, tears actually forming in her eyes, Kate Allen saw in surprise.

"Gemma," said Bea to the maid. "Would you please take Melissa up to Alice's room, help her to put her clothing away and get into the second set of ballet slippers and tutu? She can come down and I'll do her hair for her. I'll need the rest of the pink ribbons I left on top of the nightie I was putting out for Melissa."

"Oh, Bea," said Kate as Melissa gave her a very strained look but went off docilely with the smiling maid and a very excited Alice. "Melissa doesn't have to stay overnight ..."

"With your Doug coughing his lungs out all night long," said Bea. "No, don't ask how I know, Kate. I don't know how the pair of you stand it, particularly a girl as delicate as Melissa."

Kate Allen's eyes grew larger in surprise at Bea's words. It was as if the other woman had forgotten entirely just who Melissa was when she wasn't at the Mainwarings' mansion.

"Oh, Kate," said Bea earnestly, taking an envelope from her apron pocket. She was actually trembling as she did so. "I hope you won't mind. But I know, with Alice, how much things cost for a child. I can't think what you must be paying for an adult as well as for your new little one. Benjamin is what, three months' old now!"

"Four," murmured Kate, hoping the 'little one' had slept for her husband. Doug had told her she must go over and see Beatrice and Charles Mainwaring to keep in with them. Who knew, they might even think of another charitable donation to a needy family, Doug had said with a cough.

Still Kate hadn't told him about Melissa. She'd bundled William into the car and stopped at a gas station where Melissa's wig had been attached. Melissa had changed into her latest new dress, stockings and undies from the largesse of Bea Mainwaring. By the look in her friend's eyes, Kate guessed that more was coming. She felt terrible as she knew she'd accept it.

"We do have plenty, Charles and I," Bea was going on hastily. "Did you read the business section of the *Gazette* today? No? Well, it had the latest on Charles' new acquisitions. If he can pay twenty millions for a trucking firm and half a dozen ranches, he can definitely afford to help out one of my nearest and dearest friends, and Alice's dearest, most darling friend as well!"

"I can't take this ..." Kate began but Bea opened the envelope for her. Kate blanched at the number in front of so many zeroes on the check.

"No, don't say anything further," said Bea. "Just having Melissa here this year again for Halloween is payment enough. I do have a favor to ask you, later on. We're going away for a holiday ourselves soon, get some sun. We'd love to have Melissa come with us. I know she'd love it as well! Alice is all excited about it but I've asked her not to say anything to Melissa until I've talked to you, Kate!"

"I don't think Melissa will want to be away for that long," said Kate nervously, the check almost burning a hole in her hands as she looked at it again. Yes, it was real. They could pay their medical bills and get that therapist for Doug. And the new bed for Benjamin, new clothes, maybe even the new washer they needed so desperately.

"She won't mind if you ask her, Kate," said Bea Mainwaring with a smile. "She's such a good, little girl, isn't she? She always does what her mother wants her to do. Alice's tutor will be coming, too; so Melissa can get help with any school work she'll be missing. Three weeks of sea and sun! You'll hardly know her when she gets back, Kate!"

Kate didn't know the pretty, laughing schoolgirl who got off the bus with her best friend, Alice. "Melissa," she said tentatively, as the girl was smiling, laughing and blowing kisses to the boys still on the bus just as the blonde, Alice, beside her was doing.

Melissa's smile faded as she looked at her mother. "Mum!" she said, her voice sounding different, more lilting, more girlish, than Kate remembered it. "What, what are you doing here?"

"I've come to see you," said Kate, looking at this girl in her short, green, tartan skirt, sweater and girl's blouse. Her long legs were in skin-toned stockings or tights just like those of the girl beside her, who was staring open-mouthed at Kate. "I think it might be time, young lady, for you to come home. You might want to get to know your baby brother. And your fa-

ther, for that matter. He's so much better, you know. He's started work at Fast-Gro this month."

"That's one of my father's companies," the blonde girl said to the lovely, ash-blonde girl beside her. Melissa's hair was thick and swirled about her neck. It was all her own hair, thought Kate with a pang of distress, pink barettes holding it away from her ears and the gold rings in each ear.

"So, D-Daddy's not home d-during the d-day?" stammered Melissa, putting the girl's purse she'd been carrying into the briefcase with her computer. Her heels, about three inches' high, Kate could see, clicked on the sidewalk as the girls began to walk, arm-in-arm, along the crescent to the Mainwaring house.

"No, he isn't," said Kate. "In fact, he's away on some project. It'll be quite safe for you at home."

It hadn't been safe when Doug had found Melissa all dressed up, a perfect Hanna Montana, to go to a party with Alice, Shaun and Tom Cameron. "It's a fancy dress party!" Kate had tried to tell her husband. "Alice Mainwaring wanted William ..."

"No son of mine is going to a party dressed like a girl!" Doug had roared. He'd tried to grab Melissa but she'd danced behind her mother, biting at the lipstick on her bottom lip. Doug's effort had only brought on a violent, coughing fit that had left him with his head in the sink as Kate had called a cab which arrived very quickly. She'd sent her daughter off on her date with Tom Cameron.

Oh, the rows with Doug that followed, as Kate had reminded him of all the things that the Mainwarings had paid for about the house, how the medicines he was taking and the doctors he was seeing, came about because William was such a close friend of Alice Mainwaring.

"She likes our son dressed up like a girl?" Doug had sneered.

"Yes," Kate had said, shivering as she said it. "William doesn't like to do it, but he does it, out of love, Doug, for you!"

"Then he can stop!" Doug had cried hoarsely as Benjamin began to cry at all the shouting in the house.

"You'll die," Kate had said simply. "And while you slowly waste away, the three of us will get thinner and thinner, and the house will be foreclosed upon. We won't have enough money to bury you."

"Unless William dresses up like a girl," Doug had said with a grimace.

"He'll never do it in front of you," Kate had promised, crossing her fingers. "You wouldn't have seen him today if you'd stayed at the bar with your friends as you said you were going to do."

Doug swore. "You help him with his makeup," he said, looking as if he was one step from the grave. "He wasn't just a boy in girl's clothes, was he? He was a girl. You've turned my son into a real girl! What kind of mother are you?"

"One who's trying to keep her family from the gutter," said Kate Allen, her whole body trembling. "One who's very proud of both the sons she's raising on her own."

Doug hadn't argued again, not after she'd showed him the next check she'd received from Beatrice, the bills she'd received from the clinic, and how she was using one to pay the other.

"William's going to Alice's," Kate would say now. Doug would look angry but he'd stay in his room as mother and daughter left. Melissa often carried or played with Ben, in his car seat, until they arrived at the Mainwarings. Off she'd go with Alice, to ballet classes, together, to parties, to horseback riding with other girls from the upper crust of Spring Hill, shopping, of course, and eventually, holidays with the Mainwaring family.

Melissa had been away a month, her letters and photos from Bea arriving faithfully. 'Her own hair!' Bea had written just before they started back. Kate had

shuddered at that picture, not so much because of the short, thick hair the girl wore like so many girls did, nor because of the earrings and lipstick on her mouth. No, it was the bikini Melissa wore, just like the one Alice was wearing, both girls clearly padded. Yet they sat there, so girlishly pleased with themselves, while a couple of young, foreign boys smiled over their shoulders, each with a hand around the posing girls' waists.

Doug hadn't objected when Kate told him William wasn't coming home for a while. She'd lied and said Alice had had a relapse while the Mainwarings had been away. William had been a godsend, Beatrice had written her, in keeping Alice on her meds and exercises.

Melissa had only stayed at the mansion a week, Kate not even meeting her to talk to her about her holiday when Beatrice had had another bright idea. It involved Melissa staying with Alice on the luxurious Mainwaring estate. It hadn't taken any time for Bea to beg for Melissa to be allowed to accompany Alice, doing so much better with a girl friend like Melissa, to her new private school, where the Mainwarings wanted to see if Alice could possibly survive school, after all. Of course, Melissa would be attend the school as a girl. Bea would enter her as Alice's cousin.

"You both seem very healthy," Kate said to the schoolgirls as she strolled up the Crescent to her car in the long driveway of the palatial Mainwaring house. "But I could give you girls a lift up to Bea's front door."

"Why not?" asked Alice, smiling at Melissa and squeezing her friend's arm. She drew Melissa after her, onto the back seat of the Allen's minivan. "You should've brought Benjamin with you, Aunt Kate. Melissa and I would've loved babysitting him while you and your husband went out for a night on the town."

"We don't do that very often," said Kate, glancing at her quiet daughter, sitting, her legs crossed, in the back seat. It was amazing how feminine she was. She had painted fingernails and smooth hairless arms like her legs. Her waist was definitely much thinner than

her hips. There was a suggestion of shaping about her chest as well. Kate smiled grimly to herself as the girls got out and ran to the front door. Melissa's blouse was rather silky and thin and the reason for her shape was obvious. She was clearly wearing a bra that showed through her blouse.

"You're coming in to see, to see, um, Aunt Bea?" Melissa called to her mother.

"What do you normally call her?" asked Kate thickly.

Melissa looked as if she was in pain. "I've been living here a long time," she said slowly. "I, I share a, a room with Alice. I've been Melissa three months in a row since I was Melissa six weeks over the summer, and, there were the holidays, the month in Cancun and Florida. I'm really like a second daughter to, to Aunt Bea."

"So, what does Bea make you to call her?" Kate asked angrily, looking at the girl who was undulating so femininely, on her heels and in her dress, beside her, towards the house. Melissa even flicked her hair back as any girl would, carrying her briefcase in front of her with two hands as Kate had carried her books when she came home from school.

"She likes me to call her Mama," said Melissa, flushing.

"And she introduces you as her daughter when you and Alice go out," Kate said hotly. She must cut off this silly connection with the Mainwarings, right now! It wasn't worth the price she was paying and definitely not the price William was. She couldn't see anything of him in this elegant, girlish figure who led her gracefully into a newly decorated living room where she'd watched the much littler Melissa play dolls with a wan, sickly Alice.

"I asked her not to," Melissa said. "She was going to talk to you about adopting me. I told Mama I'd leave here then. We had an argument. Alice was really sick over it for a week. She couldn't go to school and

missed Shaun's birthday party which made her even sicker."

Melissa didn't mention that she'd missed going out with Tom Cameron, who really did seem to think she was his girl friend. He liked taking the girls home in a taxi, charged to his parents. He and Adam, his friend, could have intense kissing and necking sessions with the girls, who tidied up before they went into the Mainwaring house. Mama wasn't aware what her daughters were up to in the back seats of the taxi, always driven by Mike, outrageously tipped by Tom Cameron.

And yes, kissing Tom Cameron was much more intense and much more pleasurable than kissing Alice, as Melissa did so often. The girls always kissed when they went to bed, often cuddling together. When they were in their baby dolls, it was so pleasant and their kisses were sometimes intense, "just like kissing one of the boys," Alice said dreamily, when they really got into it. Melissa trembled as she agreed.

"So, what does she introduce you as?" Kate asked, hearing the sound of girlish voices headed towards them. Alice must have found her mother.

"I'm Alice's cousin," said Melissa, sitting in the armchair with her elbows in, her long nails on her stocking knee which was crossed over the other. With her shapely, smooth thigh in her stockings and her high heels, she was a picture of a perfect young lady, as Kate had sarcastically called her son. Melissa was padding her bra, too, as her mother had done before her, in her day.

"Kate!" gushed Beatrice Mainwaring, sweeping into the room, Alice beside her. "Why didn't you call that you were coming? I don't have anything prepared!"

"I didn't come here for money," Kate cut in curtly. That stopped Bea from going on with whatever she was going to say. Alice sidled over to Melissa right away and sat on the side of her chair, trying to make Melissa leave the older women together, while the two

young girls went off to whatever it was that young girls did in a house like this.

"Alice wants to get Melissa to the telephone," said Bea, smiling at Kate. "You wouldn't believe the hours the girls can spend texting and talking on the phones, both of them doing it, to half the boys in their school!"

"Mother!" said Alice in aggrieved fashion. "We aren't interested in more than a half dozen boys at our school. Shaun and Tom don't go to Parkhurst, and neither do Adam or Malcolm!"

"That's only four boys you've named so far," said Bea. "Now, Melissa, how did your day go at school? Did you audition with Alice for the show?"

"Yes, she did, Mama!" said Alice enthusiastically. "Miss Black was really impressed with the way Melissa danced. She might get to dance a lead! It isn't fair, is it?" Alice pouted but it was all fake and she was laughing. "I've been dancing for years and I'm in the chorus while Melissa's only been dancing this year, for real, and will be partnering Sandy and Alex all the time."

"What's the show you're doing?" Kate asked as she studied the pretty girl whom she called her daughter. Her plucked eyebrows were a thin line, shaped like a girl's. She was wearing makeup as well, Kate decided, subtle shading that made her face seem prettier. Kate couldn't help thinking of her as a girl, this daughter who was really her son.

"*Grease*," said Bea with a smile. "They recruit enough actors and actresses for two casts when they put it on. What's the part you'll be playing, Melissa? Are you our new Olivia Newton John?"

"No," said Melissa, shaking her long, thick hair but Alice was nodding her blonde hair, styled much like Melissa's. Now they were inside, Kate could see that the blonde streaks she'd seen weren't just sunlight. Melissa had highlights in her long, lovely hair as well as lightening streaks.

"Just no?" asked Bea.

"No, Mama," said Melissa, blushing as she looked to Kate.

"Melissa, why don't you and Alice go and practice your singing?" asked Bea as Kate glowered at her. "I want to talk to Kate for a moment."

"Sing?" Kate asked as her daughter rose so gracefully and sashayed out of the room with her 'sister', as Alice had called Melissa, several times.

"Yes," said Bea. "Your daughter has a lovely voice. I was called about her being one of the leads in the show last week. Melissa, of course, won't do anything unless Alice does it as well. Alice doesn't sing or dance as femininely as Melissa.

"It's just like with boys. Melissa won't go to a party without Alice, without a boy for her sister. And the boys are always calling for Melissa. Your daughter's going to be a real heart-breaker when she's older, Kate."

"No," said Kate snappishly. "I think this thing we've done, with Melissa, has gone far enough, Bea ..."

"Not far enough," protested Bea. "We really would like to adopt her, Kate." Kate stared at her friend, stunned out of her mind. "Charles and I love that girl and what she's done for Alice. We thought Alice would be dead by now. But you've seen her, haven't you? We have to find the sun again this winter, Acapulco, or maybe Cabo. Charles thinks you and your family should come with us. We'd have the girls as babysitters for your Benjamin. If anyone needs a holiday in the sun, it's you and Doug."

"I can't give Melissa over to you for adoption," Kate said thickly.

"I told Charles you wouldn't agree," said Bea with a smile. "She told me off as well, you know. She already has a Mummy, she said."

"Now that Alice is well ..." Kate began.

"Who said Alice is well?" asked Bea sharply. "No, if we adopted Melissa, Kate, it's because in two years, maximum, we'd have just one daughter, Melissa. Yes,

Kate, that's what the doctors say. This bloom on the rose Melissa brings about in Alice is going to fade, but not for two years.

"Puberty's going to be the killer for both of our girls anyway." There was a genuine catch in her voice then that stunned Kate. "We'll lose both when that ravages them. We're really trying to hold Alice back from developing as girls in her class are. And Melissa, well, puberty will be rough on her, won't it? We're trying to keep us all happy for the short time we have left, with both our girls."

"But you're stuffing your bra, anyway," Melissa said to her 'sister' as they got ready for the movies. Aunt Bea didn't really get it that the girls were going to meet boys in the foyer of the movie house. Alice had arranged the date with a couple of guys, Carl and Dave, whom Melissa had never met.

"It isn't going to happen in one day but have you seen that fricking Joanne Turner?" asked Alice miserably. "She's got bazookas out to here!" Her gesture wasn't true. Joanne was developing well but she certainly wasn't a bombshell, not yet.

"But using that stuff because you want to be among the first girls in our class to bloom?" asked Melissa, squinting at the familiar reflection in the mirror. Yes, it was probably time for a new hair style, or maybe something pierced. All the girls were doing it as boys liked girls brave enough to do that. What if she got a little tattoo, she wondered, or pierced her tongue and went all Goth like *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*?

Yes, that would be one way to get out of here, thought Melissa, taking the pink nail polish that had recently been banned at school and starting to put it on to her long, pointed nails. Mama would kick her back to Mummy. Daddy would be pleased, wouldn't he, that she wasn't Melissa any more. Idly, she wondered how much she could get for all the dresses she had. Thousands, Melissa was sure, if you included all the

high heels which she hardly ever wore. Oh, but it would be so dire, wouldn't it, if she couldn't wear her lovely dresses and shoes again.

"Look, Melissa," said Alice, a shaky note in her voice. "You know why I'm not as developed here as all the girls in my class are, those two years behind us as well," she slapped her padded tush, just like Melissa's, "here?" She squeezed the foamy inserts that both girls wore to present a female shape to the outer world. Alice insisted guys would never go out with them, not even to the movies, if they didn't have prominent female appendages.

"I'm not developing," said Alice as Melissa shook her lovely hair and pursed her lips to try out her new, pink lipstick, "because of the drugs I take. I've been reading the side-effects data on the Internet. I'm being prevented from developing my bust and hips. Puberty is being delayed in me."

"Talk to your doctors," Melissa began, finishing her makeup with a touch-up of the vivid eyes she and Alice had struggled to do. Now, Melissa could do her makeup. Mama would have been amazed that, in half an hour, tops, she and Alice, in the right skirt, underwear and tapings, could look like any girl hooker on the street, the fashionable look that year.

"They'll cut back on some drugs," Melissa reassured her friend.

"They won't," said Alice. "It's not fair. You know that Joanne has done It with Marty Hemmings, don't you?"

Melissa didn't like where the conversation was heading. "Gossip," she said nervously, standing to look at her stockings. She undid the garters from her garter belt, doing them again as she looked at how shapely and feminine her legs were in the mirror. It always gave Melissa a thrill to see her smooth, bare legs when she was in high heels, or when she crossed them. She felt so feminine, a feeling she knew, in reality, wouldn't last, as puberty was going to strike her as well. Oh, it was going to be so awful to be William



again. Daddy would be so mean to her. Maybe she should persuade Mummy to let her stay with Alice and her new Mama.

"Before I die," Alice went on, her voice quavering, playing the death card, as Melissa thought of it, "I want to have made it with a guy. I want to have gone all the way with a guy. Then, I'll die happy!"

Melissa had heard it before. "So you'll take some pills to block the ones your doctors give you?" she asked with a shudder. "Seems like you want to make their predictions, about how long you'll live, come true."

Melissa watched as Alice took a large number of tablets in her hand and raised them to her mouth, swallowing quickly. Then, she reached over to Melissa and opened her soft, femmy hand. "You take these," she said.

"What?" asked Melissa with a shiver.

"They keep puberty at bay," Alice said with a wide smile. "I shouldn't give them to . You could be the one and only guy for me, couldn't you?"

Melissa felt the blood rush to her head as she stared at the girl she'd kissed and snuggled with, caressed many times, and generally teased and loved every night. They never mentioned that she was William as well as she was Melissa. Alice always let Melissa keep her bikini bottom on as well, even when they showered together, each as flat-chested as the other.

"You could go all the way with me, Melissa," said Alice seriously. "But, you don't want that, do you? You're a girl like me, aren't you? You take these pills, Melissa, and we can go a couple of years more, as girl friends, which I love as much as you. You'll stay as you are while I'll go into puberty.

"We'll both be girls until I blissfully slip away, after Shaun Cameron screwing me, even though he'd rather do you. You can stop and become William again, if that's what you want. Or talk to Mama. She won't mind if you have the operation and become a real girl, really like me, Melissa!"

Melissa gasped as she straightened her skirt, the other girl staring at the legs and panties that Melissa had exposed. "I can't ..." she began, shuddering as an attack of boyishness swept over her. Alice pushed the pills and tablets she'd been offering into the other girl's mouth, gave her a taste of water, held her nose and so Melissa took pills. She had no idea what they might do to her.

The pills she took every night, that Alice had been supposed to take, certainly had an effect on Melissa. Or maybe it was all the frank talk about puberty, Alice showing that she knew a lot more than Melissa had thought a girl like her would. That talk of making it, going all the way, with a guy, made Melissa shudder the worst. It seemed to be in the front of Alice's mind as she minced into the foyer of the theater with her arm through her girl friend's.

Similar moods seemed to be infecting both girls these days. They were both giggly with the guys, two years older, whom they'd dated together for six months. Both guys were tall, looking down on the well madeup girls in their shapely, revealing dresses.

It had been two weeks since they'd last met and gone for a drive in Carl's daddy's car. Dave and Alice really got it on in the back seat, Alice still slapping her boy friend's hand away, however, when it slid inside her dress. Carl made Dave promise to drive next time, so he'd have more time with Melissa. He'd hinted darkly that he'd get much further with his girl than Dave was getting with Alice.

Melissa knew why Carl had invited them to the theater again and the inevitable back row seats. The pills she'd taken were now making her shiver. She seemed to see Carl in a golden light. Alice seemed as flirty as Melissa felt and was equally well charmed by Dave. They got the back row of the theater and didn't see much of the movie, either of the girls.

Melissa had never been so forward with a boy before, demanding that Carl kiss her and touch her exactly as she pleased. And she was pleased quite a lot with the boy she taught how to put his tongue into her mouth and how to caress her legs up to her panties just as Alice was having Dave do as well. But it was when Carl slipped his hand inside her bra that she got the biggest thrill of all. She was quivering under his thrilling touch, thinking he'd ignored the pad she was wearing when Carl whispered to her, "Why do you need to wear the pad? Your breast is small but I love it like that!"

Carl had lowered his head and kissed her aroused nipple and, ohmigod, her breast as well! She'd seen Alice staring at her then and pouting. Alice had guided Dave to her developing breasts as well, the two of them fondling and caressing one another more intensely and frequently. Which, naturally, meant that Melissa had to let Carl do the same.

"Mummy thinks I'm a slut," whispered Melissa as she cuddled up to her girl friend in bed, her smooth leg sliding over the other girl's slinky nightie.

"You are," murmured Alice, kissing her friend passionately on the lips, the buds on her chest pressed so firmly against Melissa.

"Mummy and Daddy saw me with Carl in the theater," said Melissa miserably. She'd been adjusting her dress and her bra, flouncing down the steps to leave the theater. There'd been her mother, Kate Allen, looking up at her angrily. Daddy had looked up as well, frowning, not understanding at all what and who he was seeing.

Melissa shook with distress. Her own father didn't know her! He even smiled at her, his arm about her mother as they were leaving the movie house. Melissa expected her mother to be waiting for her as she skittered out, her dress floating about her but her mother hadn't waited. Melissa had seen the old mini-van

swerving out of the parking lot then, just as Carl lifted her up, swung her around, she telling him not to, but he'd slid her down right onto his mouth, devouring her.

"Idiot!" Melissa told him, pushing down her dress as Carl whirled her around. Her parents' car didn't stop.

"I'm no idiot," said a grinning Carl. "And I can prove it!"

"How?" asked a smiling Alice, holding on to Dave, encouraging him to do the same to her that Carl was doing to Melissa.

"I'm the guy making out with the prettiest girl in the whole of Spring Hill," Carl said, kissing Melissa again, making her whole body shake as he pressed her body to his. "How can I be the idiot?"

"Idiot," repeated a trembling Melissa. "I'm not the prettiest girl in Spring Hill. I'm not even ..."

"The second-best!" cut in Alice quickly. "What a terrible thing to say, Carl! You must be an idiot. Every guy says the girl he's with is the prettiest girl in the world. He wouldn't bonk her if he didn't think so!"

"Bonk her?" asked Carl, his eyes gleaming.

Melissa saw the sly smile on Alice's face. "This has gone far too far," she said with a shudder. "Enough, Alice! Look, there's a taxi!" She waved and the driver brought his yellow car to them immediately. Melissa fought off Carl's hands and slipped in quickly onto the back seat.

"Aw, Melissa!" Carl yelled. "You can't leave me like this!"

Dave and Alice kissed while Carl yelled and swore until the cabbie told him to quit or he'd call a cop. Alice slipped into the cab's back seat. The last they saw of the guys was them pushing on one another and berating each other for an opportunity missed.

"What was the matter?" asked Alice anxiously. "It wasn't ..." She made a gesture that was like a caress around her little, developing breast.

Melissa shuddered and couldn't tell Alice anything about that not with the cabbie looking back at them. "M-my m-mother was in the theater!" she hissed at her girl friend. "She drove past just as Carl w-was lifting me up, my dress in the air, dancing me around before he kissed me. She must think that I'm such an awful slut. She must!"

There were tears in Melissa's eyes. She had to go into her purse for a tissue and to check her makeup in her compact mirror. Her eyes weren't smudged as she'd feared. Her lips were nice but needed more lipstick which she had to apply.

"We're going to be home early," said Alice, with an impish smile.

"Better than being so late we're locked out," said Melissa.

That had happened after the party they'd been to with Tom and Alex. There'd been a little bit of a panic until they'd woken Gemma. She'd laughed at them and the way their makeup and hair was mussed but let them in with a promise not to tell Mama how late her daughters had gotten home.

The next day, Melissa called her mother at home, at the number she rarely used. They didn't have much to talk about these days, save for Benjamin getting into everything and Dad doing so much better.

"She won't answer me," Melissa said when Alice asked who she was calling. "My mother thinks I'm a slut, the way I was behaving with Carl."

"Guess what she'd think of me?" laughed Alice, caressing her little breasts which were definitely visible beneath her nightie. She reached over and touched Melissa's chest, cupping what was there, just as Carl had done to Melissa in the theater.

"You're getting boobies as well!" said Alice, snuggling up to the 'other girl', and sliding over her so that the mounds on their chests merged as Alice kissed her sister's mouth.

"H-How?" began Melissa as Alice sat astride her and kissed her face, Alice's long hair mingling with

Melissa's. "It's the pills I'm taking!" Alice covered Melissa's mouth with her own, making it hard for Melissa to ask what she wanted. while Alice sat astride her. She had to be very careful in moving Alice back to her side of the enormous bed, their smooth legs entwined, their nighties sliding so daintily over each others' legs and bodies.

"The pills I'm not taking," said Alice, resisting being pushed back. She always loved being on top in the kissing and necking sessions she insisted on having with Melissa in the large bed.

"They're having an effect on me!" insisted Melissa. "Look at me, Alice! I've got breasts like you!"

Alice slid the front of the other girl's nightie down and palped Melissa's breasts with her soft fingers. "You don't have breasts like me," she whispered. "You have bigger breasts than me, Melissa. We should ask Mama for training bras for each of us. What did Carl say? You shouldn't be wearing padding in your bra, wasn't that it?"

Melissa was mortified as she pushed the giggling girl from her, sliding across the bed to lie by herself, her back turned on the pale girl with whom she shared a bed.

"I'm sorry," came a shaky whisper from out of the dark. "D-Don't be m-mad with me, Melissa. I, I don't mind at all that you're much more of a girl than me. Please, Melissa, I'm sorry I teased you. I won't do it again."

Melissa turned slightly. She knew that wasn't true. Alice would tease her again about everything the two girls did. She always had. She didn't seem to know that the way she stroked Melissa's hips while she was straightening her stockings were a tease, mocking Melissa's femininity and her attempts to be girlish for the 'escapade' Alice had drawn her in on.

"I'm not going out with Carl again," Melissa said to her sister, letting the other girl sidle up to her. Alice began to caress Melissa's nightie and soft-skinned body again. Melissa eased the hand that slipped onto her

tush and upper thighs back around her waist as Alice's thin leg caressed hers. "He's too dangerous."

"He wants to go all the way with you," murmured Alice. "Dave's warned me about that for some time. He promised he'd protect you, Missy, if the worst happens."

"If the worst happens!" burst out Melissa. "When the worst happens, you mean, Alice! And you never told me about the pills you keep giving me, either. What are they, really? I'm not taking any more of them, you hear."

"G-Gemma's been sneaking them to me," Alice whispered to the girl she really wanted to be her sister. "I, I flush the real blockers, Missy, so that's why I'm slowly developing. Gemma says the others helped her but, but I had, I had to know that they worked." She began to cry, a horrified Melissa feeling the wetness of the girl's cheeks on hers. Alice began to cough. Melissa took her in her arms and massaged her back until, slowly, Alice got herself under control again.

"I, I'm so, s-sorry, Melissa," whispered a weepy Alice. "I, I didn't think you'd m-mind."

"Didn't think I'd mind!?" asked a distraught Melissa. "You're giving me female hormones, aren't you? You're changing me into a real girl! My voice hasn't broken and I'm nearly sixteen! I'm growing breasts and my hips are spreading! I haven't worn any padding in my panties for months!"

"Oh, goodie!" breathed Alice between hiccups and sobs. "That's what I want them to do to me. I need to have a figure like yours, Melissa. You've got real curves. The boys say you've the sexiest walk of all the girls in school, you know."

Melissa paled with shock as she lay beside her trembling sister who absently brushed Melissa's long curls back over her shoulders, pressing slightly on the straps that held Melissa's nightie and bra in place. Melissa tried desperately to ignore the feelings that swept over her when her sister did that. Alice didn't seem to understand that Melissa didn't desire to be touched

and caressed as if she was a woman. Alice didn't seem to understand that Melissa regarded her endearments and caresses as ways of belittling Melissa and keeping her in her place, beneath the sickly sister.

"The boys don't say that," whispered Melissa. "You just made that up!"

"I, I intercepted a note from Sandy to Alex," said Alice. "The guys were passing it around. It was asking which of us girls had the nicest legs, sexiest walk, bounciest tits, prettiest face and who the boy would like to fuck more than any other girl in school. It had only gone past eleven boys when I got it. You were leading in all but one category, tits. It was a perfect score on the fuck question. Think about it, Melissa! All the guys in our class want to do you, not me, or Janie or Carrie. They like your legs, your sexy walk, your pretty face and they don't care that your boobs aren't the biggest. Oh, how I wish I was you!"

A stunned Melissa lay with her sister as the other snuggled up to her, whispering how sorry she was for what she'd done and promising to stop and never to do it again.

"Thank you," said Melissa, easing Alice's hand free from her breast which the other girl didn't seem to know she was caressing. "Just don't do it any more. I won't tell Mama what you're doing to me."

"I wish that we could stay here forever," said Beatrice Mainwaring to her husband as she lay back in the shade. It was another cloudless, blue sky day on the Mexican beach. "Alice so enjoys the sun and the new doctor she has, Chas. She's really blooming as a girl, isn't she, with the new treatments she's getting?"

"Both of them are blooming," said Charles, Chas to his wife when they were alone. He smiled lecherously at his wife. "Have you looked carefully at Melissa lately, Bea? If she wears a black bikini one more time to the beach and walks down the way she does, I'm not going to be responsible for my actions. So, no, Bea, we

can't stay another week. We've got to get back to where that girl has to wear clothes. I'm surprised one of the help hasn't tried to get into her panties, I really am!"

"Chas!" objected his wife. "That's really, really crude." She watched, aghast, as Melissa arose from the long white sand towel she was lying on, a hundred yards away from the veranda where Bea stayed in the shade. Melissa, lithe and feminine in her bikini, made Bea's platinum blonde daughter turn over. She splashed Alice with sun tan oil and smoothed it over her sister's body and legs.

Two of the resort's male servants stopped as Melissa paused for a moment, startled. She smiled, a flash of white teeth from her dark pink mouth, and shook her windswept hair, clearly declining the offers to help her oil herself. Alice looked up and laughed, taking off the top of her bra and pointing to where Melissa should oil her next. It was also clear that she wanted Melissa to join her in being bare-breasted. The Mexican guys were smiling and obviously thought it a good idea as well.

"The little scamps!" said Beatrice, getting to her feet, her leg still bothering her from the fall she'd taken, running after Alice, who hadn't been hurt at all by her fall into the pool back in Spring Hill. "Go and tell her to put her bra back on, Chas! I bet it's Melissa taking hers off that's got Alice acting sluttishly. I must have a talk with Melissa about the way she's dressing." And, she said to herself, I must talk to her about this figure she's developing. How could a girl like her have the cleavage she had? She was so feminine even at the distance she was from Bea.

Melissa listened to Chas talk to his daughter. She smiled uncertainly up at him. Chas was sweet-talking her, an outraged Bea saw. Maybe he was doing it deliberately as he knew Bea was watching him. Chas certainly seemed to be charming Melissa. She was trembling girlishly, a fixed, feminine smile on her face as she swished sexily, Chas's arm about her, back to the

shaded area by the swimming pool. Every man's eyes, as far as Bea could see, were following the pretty, femininely developing, teenaged girl as she came daintily up the steps to talk to 'Mama'.

"You and I have a lot to talk about, girl," said Bea deliberately to the gorgeous girl beside her.

Alice, all sticky and shiny, bounded up the steps, Chas trailing her. "You're not going to blame Missy because I took my bra off, are you, Mama?" Alice complained. "It's a nude beach, for chrisake, and I want an all-over tan! The girls are going to tease us, back home, if we have bra lines all over. They'll know I was too chicken to sunbathe properly!"

"Melissa will have them, too," said Bea as Kate's daughter sat against the railing, adding little to the conversation as was often the case with her. "And don't blaspheme, Alice. Besides, Melissa has more common sense than you, darling. She wouldn't do that, not with two servants, standing right there, offering to massage her."

"Oh, Muth-er!" said Alice, turning on a heel. "Melissa is not my other muth-er, even though you're making her be!" She stalked off, past her father, Chas raising his eyebrows to his wife, who indicated for him to follow his real daughter.

"Melissa," said Bea, coming straight to the point. "Your breasts, girl. I think that when I saw you in profile, laughing with Alice, that you've developed remarkably in a very short time. Are you a C cup now, darling?"

Melissa was startled by the remark. "N-No, Mama!" she gasped, flushing as her arm flew up to protect her pretty, female-appearing cleavage. "I, I don't know ... that is, I don't measure myself. It, it's this bra, I think. It sort of pushes me forward and upward ..."

"So it's supposed to," said Bea dryly. "It's supposed to do the same for Alice but she looks like a stick beside you. Now don't tell me those pretty legs, those wide hips and that narrow waist have just come about

naturally. I've been taking it for granted, Melissa, that you were developing as the young girl you are. But then it occurred to me that it must be hormones, mustn't it, that are making you change so quickly?"

Melissa stared, dumbfounded, at this woman who'd never mentioned, ever, that Melissa wasn't the girl she appeared to be. Melissa had become convinced that Mama had totally forgotten she wasn't the 'she' that she was supposed to be.

"I, I'm not on hormones now," Melissa said after a pause that was caused by the fact that she didn't know what to say.

"So, you were once," snorted Bea. "I was only saying to Chas this morning," she went on, spinning a lie that the girl would never be able to call her on, "that you must be on something, something strong. Look at you, Melissa. You were a stick like Alice just a few months ago. Now, you're falling out of that bra and that bikini bottom doesn't hide how rounded and fleshy your pretty backside is, does it?"

"With that slim waist and long, blonde hair, you're quite the dish, aren't you? Is what you're aiming for, before Alice is gone, to be the next Britney or Lindsay, my poor Alice left to cry herself to sleep at night, all alone, because you're changing yourself into, into a proper, little starlet!"

"I'm not!" gasped Melissa, coming to her feet, looking so girlish if she did but know it.

"Come on, Melissa," snapped Bea. "We all saw you as Olivia Newton-John in the show, kissing Alex Hemmings so passionately in every performance. How do you think Alice feels, seeing you develop so far ahead of her, like all the other girls? You're a young woman now and she's not, is she? She knows she should be the one with the most girlish figure but we can't let her enter puberty just yet, can we?"

"We thought you'd be the same as her, Melissa, but you are really a comely girl now, aren't you? The boys have noticed what I'm talking about, haven't they?" Bea smiled at how much the girl was blushing at her.

My, how well the girl used makeup now, her eye-lashes so thick and dark with mascara, her eyebrows so thin and that lipstick, making her lips look like rose-buds. "How are you getting what you're taking? I do want you to stop now and be like Alice. That's what we thought you'd be when you became her sister!"

"I, I do want to help Alice, Mama!" said Melissa, tears welling up in her eyes. "Only, I can't stop what's happening to me! I thought it would, when, when, I wasn't taking Alice's blocker pills any more but I can't have flushed them from my system yet. I just keep on getting bigger and bigger here!"

Melissa flushed as she brushed her bra. There was a slight jiggly motion where she'd touched. It didn't take Bea long then, calling Alice back to join them, to figure out what was going on. "You silly, silly girl!" she screamed at her daughter, looking back mulishly at her. Chas, of course, had slipped away, leaving the girls and their mother together. "How are you getting hormones into Melissa now if she isn't taking your supposed blocker pills any more?"

Melissa began to intervene but Bea stopped her. "We crush them up and put them into her food," said Alice rebelliously. "She thinks her tits are from what she was taking before but they aren't. Melissa looks so lovely, Mama, doesn't she, like she is? I'm going to look like her before I die. If you fire Gemma for helping me, I'll get someone else to take her place. You know I will."

Melissa was the one to squeal then. "You, you're doctoring my food!" she screamed. She grabbed the girl next to her and shook her. "I can't kick a football ten yards any more! Kids years younger than me are running rings around me and telling me not to play as I'm a girl! How could you do this to me, Alice?"

Alice reeled back. "You're my sister, Melissa," she gasped, "my prettier sister. I'm going to be just like you, with all the boys swooning over me. I just need a proper figure and I can die happy!"

Now it was Bea's turn to let loose a great sob. The girls turned to her, one so much shapelier than the other. "You'll be back in school on Monday, Alice, Melissa," she said bitterly. "The doctors will see you both. From now on, you'll only get prescribed drugs, Miss Alice, Miss Melissa. You will not be treating yourselves in the future. Is that clear?"

"How could you do this to me?" Melissa asked in her lilting, gentle voice as the girls moved to a shady table. Bea was talking animatedly to Chas. Seeing him looking at her, made Melissa squirm as she did so often lately. He seemed to be undressing her whenever he glanced at her. His obvious manliness was such a challenge to her as well as she thought sometimes he was looking at her and trying to see the William in her. It made her shiver so much. It was even worse when he put his hand or arm on her and treated her as if she was a pretty girl.

"It was Gemma's idea," said Alice lightly, which Melissa knew was the tone she used when she was lying. "Oh, Melissa, I'm so lucky to have a sister like you. Now I know exactly what I have to take to be a girl like you. You've been leading the way, darling Melissa. I'm going to be a real girl, just like you. Shaun is going to want to fuck me some day just as Tom Cameron will be fucking you as well, my darling sister."

"My eighteenth birthday, Prom, and I haven't been screwed by a boy yet," said Alice tragically to her sister as they swished around their bedroom, the air replete with French perfume, each girl so pretty with the day they'd spent primping themselves, having their makeup and hair done, each knowing that their dates were going to be tongue-tied when they saw the women, not the girls, they were taking to the prom.

Each girl wore a strapless gown. Each had a feminine figure that deserved to be shown off in such a gown.

"I haven't either," murmured Melissa, wanting to shrug but that was a boyish gesture. No, she had to pout. She did as Alice smiled mischievously back at her.

"I thought Tom Cameron had sex with you on your eighteenth downstairs," said Alice. "Fiona said you did. The guys think he did!"

Melissa blushed. Trust Alice to ferret out what she, Melissa, didn't want known. "I think Fiona makes things up," she said gently to her sister. "She tries to make you jealous of me and vice versa."

"I bet you had sex with him," said Alice. "It's lucky he isn't allowed to be at tonight's dance. I'd follow you and find out who was telling the truth!"

"You didn't talk to Tom about sex, did you?" asked a blushing Melissa, knowing that Tom would never keep his mouth shut.

"Shaun told me what Tom told him," said Alice. "I batted my eyes at Shaun and asked him if he'd do to me what his brother did to you. He's promised me he will, tonight! He's taken a hotel room and so has Alex!"

Melissa went cold inside. Alex Hemmings was her date for Prom. If Alice went running off to some hotel with a boy, she'd have to go as well. She must come up with some way of diverting Alice from what the other girl intended to do, lose her virginity, that night.

"Tom may say he had sex from me," said Melissa carefully, not wanting to agitate her sister too much. Alice had been living vicariously through Melissa and her exploits with guys lately. Alice had had a major relapse six months before and was only now recovering from it. "He was in such a state on my birthday; he begged me to go down on him when I wouldn't let him inside me. I did try to reward him for this necklace and earrings he gave me. But he came the moment I touched his thingie, anyway. I didn't even have to kiss it. So, I didn't have sex with him.

"He hasn't been near me since. He tells everyone he did me, he was such a mess, when I didn't, save for a

little kissing and letting him play with my boobies as we all do. I thought he still liked me. But you know what it is, Alice. It's just men!"

"Is oral sex really sex?" asked Alice, who'd clearly read more into what Melissa said, than Melissa intended her to. "If that's what you call sex, I guess I've had sex with ten, fifteen guys!"

"Alice!" gasped Melissa, having just made up the 'clean' story about Tom to keep Alice happy and not questioning her deeply any more. After all, how could Melissa admit that Tom's version of events was close to the truth. They'd both had too much to drink. She'd wrestled enthusiastically on the sofa with Tom who'd opened her bra as she'd only let him do once or twice before.

This time Tom had kissed her bare breasts, suckling on her nipples. Melissa had been so aroused. She'd clung to him, kissing him ferociously, loving his hands beneath her dress, caressing her legs, her stockings and her garter belt. Ooo, she'd felt him, against her panties, thrusting his manhood against her.

In a panic, she'd tried to stroke him, ignoring the pain from her own groin, fighting off his hands that tried to get inside her panties. Tom was so firm that she'd screamed she didn't want to be raped and that had stopped him, barely.

"Oh, Melissa," Tom Cameron had said. "You can't rouse me like this, like, like Alice, your prickteaser sister. You're nicer than her, Melissa. You can't arouse a man like you've just done and then leave him, frustrated, and as aroused as you are." He'd nibbled on her nipples again, kissing her breasts while the pain was unbelievable. "You've got to take care of me," Tom had gone on, thrusting against her panties with his male erection out of his pants. "You know how girls do it when they don't want to get pregnant."

Melissa tried to kiss his mouth and hold him off. Girls like Fiona and Della had talked about blow jobs and condoms. Many girls had joined in, showing knowledge of such things. Melissa had been struck



dumb as she realized what a randy group of girls attended the same high school as Alice and she.

Tom guided her down onto his manhood. She tasted a man for the first time. Tom propelled his manhood in and out of her mouth. She'd kissed and licked it as he'd told her to, all the while her heart beating a million beats to the second. He'd clasped her so firmly as he'd come, she throwing up on him.

Alice might want to say oral sex wasn't real sex but, to Melissa, it was. And it was awful. She had felt so terrible as, once Tom cleaned himself, he wanted her to do it to him again. Luckily, he didn't have much left in him but the taste of burnt cinnamon was likely going to stay with her forever and always make her gag, at the least.

Tom had wanted to kiss her beneath her panties as well but Melissa managed to pull free of him, explain about her pad and why girls wore them at such times of the month.

"How can you be this aroused, Melissa," Tom had asked with a smile, "if you're bleeding? You're a great girl to do what you did with all your hormones telling you not to. You should've told me you'd the red rag on! I'd have understood!"

Tom had let a shivering, distressed Melissa re-fasten her stockings, not helping her by the way he fondled and stroked her, interfering all the time with her bra as she scrambled to get that on, under her dress. She'd barely done it, fending off Tom's kisses when Fiona and Martin Rogers, another university student, had come into the family room, looking for them.

When Melissa had kissed Tom for the last time, later that night, he'd whispered that he'd mark his calendar. Next time he was home, he'd come looking for Melissa, knowing she'd be ready to take him, inside her.

But Tom hadn't come near Melissa in six months. Stories circulated about her, Alice now avid to know what had been going on with Melissa while she'd been so sick. Tom hadn't come near Melissa but other guys

had. She was never without a weekend date, any more, as Alice made sure there was a date for her as well.

Gemma tapped on the door, opening it herself, smiling at the lovely girls she saw, ready for the Prom. "Your dates are here, Miss Alice, Miss Melissa," she said with knowing smile.

"How do we look?" asked Alice, twirling in her white dress for the maid.

"You both look very, very beautiful, young miss," said Gemma. "I'll bet you never thought this day would come, you, the belles of the ball, did you?"

Alice beamed at Gemma while Melissa quaked inside as she looked again at her image in the mirror. No, she'd never imagined in her wildest dreams that she'd be going to the Prom in a strapless gown with breasts pushed out and wobbly in front of her. Her hair was now blonde, not platinum like Alice's, but honey blonde, Bea had called it. It was curled up and held in place with pins galore and strands of pearls that matched the longest, dangling earrings Melissa had ever worn, Tom's gift to her.

Her necklace still made her shiver as Melissa looked at her rounded, soft-skinned shoulders and her ample cleavage. Melissa must not, as Alice did, pull up her strapless gown. O gosh, her waist was so thin. It made her breasts and hips seem much bigger than they really were. Like Alice, she was in stockings and a frilly garter belt that matched her panties. Her dress flared out, the skirts flowing about her as she minced in her high heels.

Yes, Alice had, and Bea agreed, that the girls must be really feminine and pretty for the Prom. The whole day had been spent in preparing for it. What had Mama called her once, a dish, thought a trembling Melissa, swishing after her sister. Oh, I am, I am. I am a beautiful, lovely dish, just waiting for someone to eat me. Thank goodness, it's Alex who's my date. He's nice and won't be all over me like Shaun's brother was.

Melissa stood for a moment at the top of the stairs so that a ravishing Alice could go down all alone and receive all the 'oohs' and 'aahs' from her parents, her date for the Prom, their parents, and the servants who worked in the big house. There were flashes of camera lights again and again. Melissa could hear the cheering of Mama and Chas as their daughter was laughing. Shaun, she supposed, was trying to pin a corsage on her.

"Your turn now," whispered Gemma, pushing the suddenly reluctant girl to the stop of the stairs. Melissa wobbled and had to reach for the banister of the rounded set of stairs. A bright light from the professional photographer flashed as 'she' descended, flushing she knew, greeted by an awed, equally flushing Alex Hemmings, his parents, who told her how lovely she was, the Camerons, who must know she'd been Tom's girl friend off and on for a while, and Mama and Chas.

The look on Chas's face once more made Melissa feel so weird inside. She was glad that the excited Alice wanted to hug her. She was able to feign a similar excitement and hug her sister gently as well.

"Now you girls bring the boys back here from the Aftergrad party," said Mama with a smile, holding Melissa's arm as Alex positioned the pink roses on her wrist, a match for the flowers and barettes Melissa had in her hair. "They deserve to see what pretty girls look like after they've shed their lovely dresses and hair styles and are back to being normal, with morning hair and no makeup!"

"Muth-err!" squealed Alice as everyone laughed, toasting the girls, before Gemma announced that the limo had arrived.

The girls entered the car as if they were brides, the boys their grooms.

"You, you're coming on with me to Aftergrad, Melissa?" asked Alex nervously, her hand in his as she crossed her nyloned legs in the seat they shared in the limo.

"Of course," said Melissa with a smile. "Unless you don't want me to?"

Alex smiled in relief. "I want you all the time, Melissa," he said. "Oh, I mean, that I want you to be my date for all of tonight. I mean that ..."

Melissa patted him gently on his arm. "It's all right, Alex," she said. "I know what you mean."

"It was just that Shaun said his brother, Tom, was here," Alex babbled on. "And he's your real boy friend. You'd want to be with him ..."

"I haven't seen Tom in a very long time," said Melissa, cutting him off, but feeling a lurch in her stomach. "He's at university now, with new girl friends and such. I doubt he'll want to come to a High School Prom. Even if he did, he'll be out of luck. I have a date for Prom, don't I, and for Aftergrad, and," she smiled impishly as Alice did all the time. It seemed to work on Alex as it did on Alice's boy friends, "for breakfast," Melissa murmured at last.

Alex's grip tightened on her at once. Melissa snuggled up to him and tried not to think of Tom Cameron and his mouth on hers, his hands under her dress and caressing her thighs, her garters and her panties. Alex looked down at her and so she lightly kissed him on the lips, getting an instant reprimand from Alice in the back seat. Alex, though, looked delighted, almost like the day he had when they'd tentatively kissed in the rehearsal of their parts in *Grease*.

Of course, in the course of the evening, they had to show videos of the show. "Oh, gosh, did I really look like that when I was dancing?" asked Melissa as she stood with Alex's arms around her waist possessively.

"Yes, you did," said a voice behind Melissa and there was Tom, to watch her flouncing her skirts as she danced, ending the routine with a passionate kiss for Alex, whose arm tightened about her again. "Having a good time with my girl friend?" Tom sneered at Alex.

"If I'm anyone's girl friend tonight," said Melissa, as Tom breathed on her as he put his arm about her as well, "I'd be Alex's girl friend, Tom, not yours!"

"Tom!" said a female voice then and his mother was there beside the three of them. Several kids around them noticed what was going on. Melissa felt all hot and bothered. Alice got up from Shaun's lap and came over with a sunny smile.

"Hi, Tom," she said cheerfully as Claire Cameron was staring stonily at her son. "I have to steal Melissa away from you guys for a while." She seized Melissa's hand and danced her away to the girls' bathroom which was filled with girls redoing makeup, ribbons, and adjusting underwear, their lilting, excited voices filling the air.

"How long do we have to hide in here?" asked Melissa as Alice seemed to be re-doing her makeup for the second time.

"Until Tom's Mama and Papa manage to get him out of here," said Alice. "Shaun's so mad with Tom that we're going to cut out of here to Aftergrad. Do you want to come with us? If we get Alex, we'll all cut out. Some kids have gone already. The band there is certainly more lively than the old fogies here!"

Melissa had liked dancing waltzes and quicksteps with Alex but, if Tom started to make a scene over her, well, her mind quaked at the thought. She'd seen several fights before over girls and thought that she was lucky it would never happen over 'her'. It couldn't, could it, she'd thought, chills running through her. And look, it was sort of happening of her, anyway.

"All right," said Melissa.

An enlivened Alice went off, right away, to set it up. Melissa waited and heard all about the argument between Tom and his parents from several different girls. She was really hot and bothered when Alice came back for her, looking so excited to be part of all that was going on with the Camerons.

The fire exit brought the girls out to the limo with Shaun and Alex waiting. The first thing Alex did was to kiss Melissa with every bit of passion they'd learned to fake in the stage show, only this time, Melissa quaked as she realized Alex was not faking at all.

"Shaun's going to show me his room," said Alice as soon as they arrived at the Merrymount Hotel, site of the Aftergrad. She smiled mischievously at Melissa. "Why don't you get Alex to show you his?" Alice asked coquettishly before taking off in an empty elevator and leaving an inwardly fuming Melissa with her Prom date.

Alex squeezed Melissa's waist and led her to the next elevator, where a drunken man and a frowsy woman, came staggering into their ride, getting out several floors before them.

"Don't do anything I wouldn't do," said the half-drunken man.

"He can't do anything tonight," said the woman with a laugh. "You girls are on a Prom date? Oh, I remember my first time, though that wasn't on Prom Night, but it was with the same guy! Enjoy yourself, my darling!"

The woman blew a kiss to the frozen Melissa who couldn't move as the car took off. Alex wanted to kiss her again. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Don't let a woman like that put you off, Melissa. Look, I got the Honeymoon Suite for us."

"No, Alex," said Melissa, bile in her throat. She couldn't look at him or let him touch her. Not when her father was in the same hotel, making out with the woman who had told her to enjoy herself with Alex.

"What's wrong?" asked a somber Alex. "Did I...?"

"No, it's not you," whispered Melissa, memories of her mother, Kate, filling her mind. Why the heck was Dad out by himself and with such a blousy woman, as he was? Did her mother know? Did she not care? Melissa was overwhelmed with homesickness for the house across the tracks as her mother had always called it so cheerfully. She shuddered. Her brother, Benjamin, must be through elementary school by now. She wouldn't recognize him, she thought in agony. He would definitely not recognize 'her'. Her father hadn't.

Alex's arm went gently about her again as he guided her into the suite, decorated so femininely and frivolously as a Honeymoon Suite should be. Alex started some music, soft and smooth, and turned to her expectantly.

"Oh, Alex," Melissa murmured with a shiver. "I'm so sorry."

"It's Tom Cameron, isn't it?" asked Alex soberly, swinging her around to face him. "You'd rather be with him, wouldn't you?"

Melissa shuddered, thinking of the way Tom had looked at her. The smirk on his face confirmed, she was sure, to the girls at the Prom that she, Melissa, had done the 'dirty' with Tom, as he'd told everyone she had.

"No!" she said firmly. "He's the last man in the world I'd want to be with tonight."

"Good," murmured Alex, kissing her. They'd been partners in the school production of *Grease*. She felt as if she was still on the set with him. They'd been nervous about the kissing scenes. Miss Delaney had finally taken them to one side and had them run through and practice the scenes together, the other boys and girls smirking and watching them.

"No, no, no," Miss Delaney had said as they touched lips and hastily broke apart. "Passion, the pair of you, I want you to show us more passion. Look, I don't care if you like one another or hate one another, you have to kiss with passion as if you are in love!"

They'd tried as some of the other boys and girls had tittered at them from where they were 'taking five' as Miss Delaney worked with Melissa and Alex on the kissing scenes.

"Close your eyes," said Miss Delaney. "Think of a girl you wish you were kissing, Alex, and Melissa, for goodness's sake, think of a boy you'd rather be kissing. Now, kiss, the pair of you!" And Melissa had found herself catapulted into Alex. His mouth had closed on hers as he'd held her as if he'd never let her go. She'd been too terrified to break away and have the

teacher yell at her again. All the other girls would laugh at her. So, she closed her eyes and held onto Alex, his mouth devouring hers.

"Much better!" Miss Delaney said. "You can stop now, Melissa, Alex. Let's run through that scene again!"

Alex held her, as he had before, swirling her so that her lovely dress rustled about her. He was grinning as she jerked her eyes open, swishing in the much longer dress, on her tiptoes, as Alex sang to her as he had in *Grease*.

"I loved doing that scene with you, Melissa," Alex said. She had to lift her dress skirts so he could twirl her as he had when they had danced together. "It was always you I was thinking of as I tried to kiss you passionately. But you were faking it, weren't you? You'd spin away and dance while I was so wrecked after you kissed me that I couldn't move. You were just putting your lips against me, weren't you, faking all the passion. But I didn't care because everyone was so jealous of me. They were all sure you were really in love with me for a while there, you cuddling me so convincingly, even when we came out and took our bows, well, curtseys, in your case."

"Oh Alex," murmured a shaken Melissa. "It was supposed to be acting." Miss Delaney had asked her if she was getting a crush on Alex. Melissa's genuine surprise must have reassured the teacher as she hadn't said anything again to Melissa. Once or twice, though. She'd said something to Alex, making the boy blush, Melissa remembered. She also recalled she was always extra nice to Alex when she thought he'd been criticized by Delaney. The woman had a tongue like the sting of a wasp.

Alex twirled her into his arms, her dress floating all about them. "This isn't acting, Melissa," he said, kissing her lips, his hand pressing on her bare back. He wouldn't relax or let her go. His mouth was alive and vibrant, his tongue over her lips as she shivered, her breasts tensed as he pushed against her. It was inevita-

ble that he should gently lower her onto the silk covered bed and follow her down onto the covers.

She closed her eyes and the kiss was twice as nice as no-one, not Tom, had kissed Melissa quite like it. She felt Alex's fingers on the zip of her dress and was half out of it, even as she wiggled away from him, but Alex followed her hungrily. His tie disappeared, his leg was over her. She was trapped. Boys were now so much stronger than her. She almost wept as her dress exposed her uplift bra. Alex held her easily, despite her whimpered protests, his head buried between her fragrant breasts.

"Oh, Alex, we can't do this!" she protested as his mouth rose across her neck and lovely necklace, her earrings tormenting her ears as she was rocked from side to side by the ardent boy, nothing like the Alex she had previously known. "Despite what he says, I never did it with Tom and I'm not going doing it with anyone until I'm married! Stop, Alex! Or I'm going to be screaming 'Rape!'"

"Oh, Melissa," said the boy, not letting go of her at all. "I'd never do that to you! Never! But don't you feel anything for me at all? We kissed each other every night, for six weeks, if you count rehearsals. I touched you all over when we were dancing. I know how a brush against your breasts really disturbed you! But this is what I've wanted to do with you, what I was longing to do, all the time. I want to make love to you, Melissa!"

Her bra opened and her breasts popped free, her nipples enormous and hard, delighting Alex as he slipped her dress down her smooth feminized body. He caressed Melissa's thighs and her garter belt. His shirt was off, his pants undone. He rolled right on her and pushed her legs apart as her dress seemed to disintegrate beneath her. His manhood was exposed, huge, bigger than Tom's, and definitely bigger than the one she occasionally saw in her bathroom.

Alex pressed feverishly against her panties, a wetness there immediately. Her writhing to free herself,

Melissa realized, was only arousing her Prom date more and more. Trembling, she relaxed and went like a board as Alex caressed her breasts with his hands. He realized what she'd done, and slowed as if to question her. She summoned all the pitiful feminine strength she had and pushed him off her. He held onto her hand as she slid off the bed in a tangle of her clothing, her breasts free and bobbing about just like her earrings.

"I'll have to call rape," Melissa hissed at her date, his face contorted in agony. She'd never seen a boy's face contorted like that before.

"I, I ...!" answered the red-faced, squirming Alex. "I, I couldn't ... not with where your knee caught me, Melissa."

It was a shock when he let her go. He groaned on the bed while she fell onto the remains of her dress. Melissa had to giggle then as she lifted her head. Alex was writhing across the bed, trying to get water onto his private parts to ease his pain.

"You should have called 'Rape'," moaned Alex. "It wouldn't have been half as painful as this!"

"I used to play soccer when I was ..." Melissa began, meaning to say 'when I was a boy' but was able to stop in time. "When I was little," she finished lamely.

"Could," asked the groaning man on the bed, "could you help me, Melissa? I promise I won't call 'Rape' whatever you do to me."

Melissa stood, letting the last of her dress fall away from her. She still had her high heels strapped to her feet. She felt so weird, strolling around the bed in just her panties, garter belt and stockings, her hair half undone, her necklace and earrings still in place. Her breasts were so aroused, firm and not bouncing very much. Alex kept his eyes on her as she sauntered around the huge bed and sat beside him.

"Poor boy," Melissa purred, not knowing why she felt such an urge to tease the wounded, naked boy in front of her.

"I didn't know you'd be so cruel!" Alex said, trying to laugh through his groans. She realized he wasn't much threat to her after all and eased onto the bed beside him. His hands sent thrills through her as Melissa slid against another boy and deliberately kissed him. She felt so female and sexy as their legs touched and his hands rose to caress her breasts making her feel warm, wonderful and so female.

Melissa opened her mouth to Alex, the boy she'd hurt, and his tongue was instantly inside her. He hugged her smooth body against his as her lips raged over his. He seemed to like a girl kissing him forcefully. "I'm not going to let you inside me, Alex," she whispered to him. "I can't do that. I don't want to be pregnant, and you don't want to be a father at eighteen, do you?"

Alex's eyes were like golf balls as her fingers gently caressed his manhood which was recovering firmly in the right direction, especially with her help. She kissed his chest and smiled at him, lowering her head, her moist mouth on his nipples making him squirm and gasp. Well, she'd dared to do it once with Tom, and so, why not Alex, who was so much nicer and definitely more deserving, after the way she'd kneed him.

Her mouth had barely touched his shaft and he was coming. Talk about premature ejaculation, thought a giggly Melissa, as she circled Alex's stiff manhood with her tongue and he was like a fountain. This was going to be over in seconds! That thought was very disappointing as she held Alex's throbbing staff as he tried to sit up.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" Alex cried. He pulled her mostly naked body down on stickiness and wetness.

Alex was the one trembling as he held Melissa, kissing and kissing her. She stretched out luxuriously and let him run his hands over her tush and down her stockinged legs, slapping at his hands when he tried to take her garter belt away or to caress her panties.

"I, I always come so fast," blurted out Alex, "especially the first time. The next time will be so much better, Melissa. It really will."

"A second time?" asked a surprised Melissa. "Didn't you hear, Alex? I'm not letting you in me."

"Not even in here," babbled Alex, between frenzied kisses. He caressed her tush lovingly and she jerked at the femmy feelings running through her. "All the girls are doing it this way, a lot, aren't you? You don't have to take your panties off, all the way!"

Melissa was shocked as Alex climbed right back on her, as he had at the start of their 'lovemaking'. She was in a panic as he kissed her ferociously. No amount of wriggling or bucking could get him off her. This is going to be rape and I'm not going to be the only one who's sorry, she thought desperately. But Alex was lifting her legs! She his wet maleness all over her soft tush. She squealed desperately as he tugged on her panties. He was so strong, thrusting into her, she tensing all over.

"R-Relax, if, if you can, M-Melissa," grunted Alex. She shuddered and tried. He seemed to slide right inside her tush and started bucking with her on the bed. She had a man inside her (!), doing what men did to girls all the time. Alex was fucking her! His hands caressed her breasts as she bounced against him, ooo, loving it, what he was doing and helping him in every way to have 'her'!

She was rolled up, her hands desperately holding the front of her panties as Alex contorted to kiss her thighs as they were joined together so tightly. He kissed her breasts and told her what a wonderful girl she was. He enjoyed it this way, too. She was so beautiful, so kind and he loved her so much.

Melissa wriggled in strange pleasure as she felt him inside her. Ooo, she was so feminine, so female. Alice so much wanted to experience this! Melissa hoped she was. It was so, so incredibly feminine to be fucked by a man, as if she was a girl! A quiver ran all through her. She knew just what it was. She was going to climax in-

side her panties and padding. Her femmy shaking was setting Alex off. He was climaxing as well, inside her, caressing, kissing and fondling her, his mouth suckling her as she felt herself pass over the top, loving everything about being a girl.

Melissa clung to Alex as he came, so proud of himself, holding her legs so high as he stroked and kissed. She was the one writhing in agony as Alex filled her, his woman.

Gasping, minutes later, their riotous clinging and fondling one another tapering off, Alex eased himself from inside her though Melissa wouldn't have minded keeping him there for much longer.

"Gosh, I've drenched you," said Alex thickly as there was a sudden pounding on the door. It seemed like half the senior year flooded in, through the outer doors, most peeking in at the inner door and a naked Alex wrapped around a stricken Melissa, her legs over his back. What they had been doing was so obvious to everyone.

"Gosh, they're doing it everywhere," said Fiona to her friend. "Hey, Melissa, why didn't you lock the door if you were going to let Alex fuck you? He invited us to share fun and games with you!"

"You did?" murmured Melissa, quivering as she pulled a bedsheet over the pair of them.

"For later!" groaned Alex. "I'm so sorry, Melissa. But, but," he whispered, "you won't be getting pregnant from me fucking you! I do love you, Melissa. I really do!"

Kate stared at the young woman across the table from her. She'd flowed into the tea house so naturally, so gracefully, so prettily, that every head in the place had turned and smiled as she went by.

"It's so nice to see you, Mummy," said the girl who'd finally contacted Kate and asked to meet with her.

Kate had deliberately not answered and deleted the messages the girl left to call her back. The lilting, female voice wasn't William's, she'd thought sourly. It couldn't be. Just as this shapely, long-haired, lovely girl couldn't be William, either. No, Kate decided, she'd lost her first son just as certainly as she'd lost her husband. There was no getting either one back.

"I'm using Kate Whitmore now," said Kate to the fragrant girl whose earrings and hair swayed over her face. The girl was determined to kiss Kate before she smoothed her lovely dress skirts beneath her and sat. Melissa was certainly the prettiest girl in the room as all the attention showed. But Melissa's heavily madeup eyes weren't on that. They were on the woman beside her.

"You can call me Kate," said Kate Allen. "Or Ms Whitmore, whichever you prefer. But please, young lady, don't call me 'Mummy'."

"But ..." the girl began, aghast.

"Not Mummy, ever," said Kate. "It's so girlish, and I don't have daughters as you should know. I only had sons with my last husband."

"Your, your divorce isn't final yet, Mummy," said the honey blonde girl, her large blue eyes filling with tears.

"If you call me Mummy again," said Kate firmly to the lovely girl, even her nails looked like they'd just been manicured, "I shall get up and walk out of this tearoom. I won't listen to any of your calls again, begging to talk to me."

"You, you did get all my calls then?" whispered the girl, flicking her hair and the stray tear from her face.

Kate could have kicked herself for letting that slip. She'd meant to say that she hadn't, that the girl's phone was defective or she was dialling the wrong number. Kate would change hers soon, anyway.

"So what did you want to see me about?" asked Kate brusquely.

"I want to come home," Melissa whispered to her mother. "I, I want to be me again."

Kate looked at the girl beside her. A lengthy pause grew between them. "I think you are at home," said Kate grimly. "And, Melissa, you are definitely you. Anyone can see that."

Kate didn't have to drop her eyes to the girl's perky breasts to make the point. Melissa's pretty hands tightened on the napkin she held. Kate thought that the girl beside her, was a girl now. Kate was sure she wasn't an impersonator, a drag queen or anything like that.

"I ordered tea," Kate said. "Let me be mother for once and pour." She smiled at the girl, wincing beside her.

Melissa refused sugar or milk, lifting the cup to her cherry-red lips with both hands most femininely. She sipped on the dark tea and watched her mother. Well, Kate supposed that she was that. Melissa's face and posture signalled some inner distress afflicting her.

"I thought that you were beginning university very soon," said Kate levelly.

Melissa shook her lovely hair. "No," she whispered, her eyes downcast, showing off beautifully-worked eye shadow about her eyes. "Al-, Alice won't be able to go, not this year."

"You have to stay home and babysit her still?" asked Kate, not able to keep the sneer out of her voice. The girl shuddered visibly.

"She, she's not ill," Melissa went on, not raising her voice or confronting Kate with her eyes any more. "At least, not yet."

Kate frowned. "So, what's the matter ...?"

"She, she's pregnant," whispered Melissa, her mouth quivering as she looked up at her mother.

Kate stared at the girl, completely taken by surprise. "Alice?" she asked. "Beatrice always said she'd never be able to do that!" She stared at the girl who looked miserably at her. "It's not yours, is it? You didn't impregnate Alice, did you?"

Melissa shook her lovely hair in distress. "I could wish I did," she said in a low, bitter voice. "Mama treats me as if I did, as if it's my fault Alice got preg-

nant. I didn't know she'd come off her birth control pills deliberately. I can't tell Mama that, either, as Alice doesn't want her to know."

"Well, I'm surprised," said Kate. "But, at the same time, I'm not, now I think about it. The way you two girls were carrying on with those boys at the theater when Doug and I were there. Well, I guessed that something like this would happen. Funny, but I half expected it to be you in trouble with boys. Anyone I talk to, who knows about that private girls' school you went to, tells me how the boys chase Alice's sister. I heard you had a boy friend, a boy at university."

"T-Tom Cameron," said Melissa with another shudder, making Kate look at her with interest as it was clear the girl was distressed. "He, he's been chasing me since, since one of the Halloween parties at his house. He, he tells everyone I'm his girl friend, when I'm not. He says I've done things with him, you know, things girls do with boys, when I haven't!"

Melissa's fair skin was definitely pink, despite the foundation and powder she'd used on her face. "Everyone thinks," she went on as her mother stared at her, saying nothing, "he's had me like a girl but, but," she shuddered, "horrible stories would be going around about me if I'd ever let him do more than kiss me."

"I saw a picture of your school's prom in the *Gazette*, didn't I?" asked Kate. "Wasn't that you in a strapless prom dress, hanging on to another boy, the one you kissed, danced, and sang with in that show you were in?"

"You saw *Grease*?" asked Melissa, shivering, thinking about the video she'd seen. She'd been 'in character' as she kissed Alex with such passion. She felt cold chills pass over as she recalled Prom Night at the Merrymount and how she'd had sex with Alex. Everyone had seen her. Everyone knew about it, even Alice, especially Alice.

Alice had thought Melissa was brilliant to have got Alex to make love to her, as he did. She wouldn't be-

lieve it was Alex's idea to do it like that. "He doesn't know he didn't make love to a girl," she'd laughed with and at Melissa.

The trouble was that Alex wanted to date Melissa all the time after Prom; and Alice kept arranging dates for her 'sister', allowing Alex to get 'her' alone, trying to get her into bed with him, again.

Melissa refused him every time, even when Alex promised not to do more than he'd done on Prom Night. "You know you enjoyed it," he'd complained to her. "I know you did. I felt you when I came. You had an orgasm, too, didn't you? I felt it. You were so loving then. You'd have let me go all the way if we'd done it again. But Fiona and the gang came in and spoiled it."

Melissa shivered all through the litany of what she'd done as a girl with Alex. She knew he was right. She didn't remind Alex he'd said he loved her. If he'd said that, kissed her gently, and said that having sex wasn't that important, just loving and kissing were, he'd have been rewarded, she knew, with the same type of sex they'd had before. She'd been dreaming romantically of Alex, thinking how he'd loved her, how gentle he'd been, in contrast to the way Tom treated her.

Alex made it clear, each time he was out with her now, that he was only interested in one thing, having sex with her. Melissa wasn't surprised, only relieved, when Fiona 'stole' him away from her. Melissa didn't doubt, by the looks on Fiona's face, and the way she and Alex hung on to each other, that they were going all the way. She wished them well of it. It was Alice who was annoyed at the 'slight' her sister had suffered.

"Tom's home from university," said Alice on the last weekend of the summer. "Why don't you go out with him and keep him busy for Shaun and me? I did what you did with Alex, and Tom, with Shaun last weekend and he couldn't get enough of it! That's why he wants to see me again, so much, this weekend. But

there's no party we can use to make sure a friend of his pries you loose from me!"

Melissa hadn't contradicted Alice. Melissa didn't have problems with boys attaching themselves to her, not after Prom Night. The stories of how she'd been found with Alex hadn't lost anything in the telling. All the players, as she thought of the boys whom she knew were sexually active, seemed to want to try her out since Fiona has 'stolen' Alex. It wasn't a challenge to get her boy friends so drunk that, as she pointed out to them so prettily, they'd be pretty useless even if she did go to bed with them.

"Mrs Cameron won't let Tom get anywhere near me," Melissa told her sister.

"Who's going to tell her?" asked Alice, having a glorious night with Shaun while Melissa had to fight off a raging drunk Tom who couldn't get his manhood to work even when she tried to help him. He was furious when he realized, even in his drunken haze, that she'd challenged him to finish game shooters, several times over, until he couldn't do what his brother was doing to Alice. He'd soon passed out, in mid-kiss, on the sofa in the basement of the Cameron house.

"Bea must have been furious when she found out Alice was pregnant," said Kate steadily, eyeing her daughter, yes, she should acknowledge her as that, she thought grudgingly, she feeling as weird, as Melissa told her she'd felt, when she dressed up for boy and girl parties. She'd been to them anyway, at such an early age, with Alice.

"We thought she was having a new sickness," said Melissa unhappily. "She was throwing up all the time in the mornings but was happy and lively in the afternoons. It was Dr Gardner," the new female doctor who'd joined Alice's team, "who tested her and told Mama what had happened."

"Why was she blaming you?" asked Kate, her interest piqued.

"I'm supposed to protect her from boys like Shaun Cameron," murmured Melissa. "I'm s-supposed to be

her big s-sister, Mama said. I should have known Alice wasn't taking her birth control pills. After all, I'm taking them as well, among all the other pills I have to take."

The last was said in such a low voice that Kate barely heard Melissa. "Ah, I knew Bea had you on something," she said. "Just look at the girl you are, Melissa. You like being Melissa as well. I couldn't bear to see you after the theater. I knew I'd lost William and Doug as well."

"I'm not taking pills any more," said Melissa. "I haven't taken any the last two months. I pretend to, when Mama gives them to me, but I get rid of them. I throw up later if I have to swallow them. I'm going to become William again, Mummy, if I can. Only, I'll have to leave Mama's, the Mainwarings, and, and, Alice, but I'm going to do it. It, it won't cause Mrs Mainwaring to do nasty things to you and Benjamin, will it? She's so awful when things aren't going right for Alice."

Kate looked at Melissa and couldn't see William in 'her' at all. But the way she spoke, thinking of Kate and how Melissa's leaving the Mainwarings would affect her mother, was so like William that Kate felt her heart lurch. She put out a hand without really thinking about it and touched the girl's, so soft and feminine, unlike hers, roughened by the cleaning work she did.

"I don't think you can become William again, Melissa," Kate said, a lump in her throat.

"Oh, I will, Mummy," said Melissa earnestly. "Anything that's been done to me can be reversed, just by stopping the pills. Oh, it would feel so good to play soccer again. Does Benjamin like soccer, or does he call it football, as Daddy and I used to? I'm really not very good any more. I kick and run like a girl, the boys tell me, and won't let me play. But girls play soccer all the time now, don't they? Not that I'll be able to play with other girls in a year or so."

"So, you're not going to university. You're not going to be a girl in a year or so," said Kate unsteadily,

squeezing the girlish hand in hers. "What will you do in the meantime? How are you going to make a living?"

Melissa shivered. "Well, I have a little money," she said defensively. "I may have to get a job as Melissa for a while. I can finance myself for a couple of years, though rooming with another girl may be tough, especially if the changes in me come on pretty quickly. Gosh, I might go through puberty, my voice might break, stuff like that. I might even get hair on my chest."

The way Melissa looked down as she said that and bit at her lip was so reminiscent of William. He'd looked like that when he tried to crack a joke. It almost made Kate sob as she touched the girl's hand again and knew she was touching her son.

"We can do something about accommodations," Kate said firmly. "Your money will last you longer if you come home and live with Benjamin and me."

Beatrice's diatribe on the phone was like music to Kate's ear. She'd been wanting over the years to tell the other woman, her childhood friend, just what she thought of her, but, in the end, she couldn't do it, not when Bea broke down and cried, begging Kate to ask Melissa to return to the lovely room she shared with Alice. She was pining away at this most climactic time of her life.

"I doubt that," said Kate at last. "I talked to William." She stressed the name and Bea gasped down the phone. "He," she said, raising her tone to emphasize the pronouns she was using, "said he'd talked it over with Alice. She wanted him to leave and come back to me, Beatrice."

"In the house I paid for ten times over," said Beatrice Mainwaring savagely.

"Yes," said Kate levelly. "An exaggeration but I wouldn't be here without your support, Bea, and I'm most grateful. Now, I have to tell you what William

told me. Alice wants her baby, Bea. You're not listening to her. She got herself pregnant deliberately as she believes she isn't going to around for much longer.

"Yes, William could stay on with her, but what would you have Melissa become if everything goes well, which it should, Bea. Melissa would become nursemaid and yes, a mother, to Alice's child, if anything awful happened. Well, it won't, Bea, because you have the best doctors and medicines money can buy. William will take a while to slough off Melissa. So, we might still come over to visit you and Alice, if you like, just as we did when we started all this funny business with Melissa. It's the best offer William and I can make."

There was a long silence on the phone. Suddenly, it went dead. Beatrice Mainwaring had hung up on her friend. Kate put down the phone, feeling as if a huge weight had been lifted from her.

She went up the stairs and heard voices, Melissa's lovely lilting laughter and a shriek that could only be Benjamin's, home from school, in his sister's bedroom, as he always was, pestering her. Benjamin had only just heard about his sister, Melissa, neither Kate or her daughter, able to think of a way to explain that it was William who'd really returned to the Allen household.

"That's not the way you head a ball," Melissa laughed at her younger brother. "Catch it there and you'll be staggering off the field, leaking brain cells all over the place. Soccer players become like boxers, from heading the ball like you did. Let's go to the park. I can throw the ball to you and you can do it right!"

Kate held onto the door frame for a moment, shivering at a lecture she'd once heard Doug giving to another little boy, in that very room. It had once been the main bedroom until they'd had the extension built to accommodate Doug's illnesses, thanks to the charity of Bea and Chas Mainwaring.

"You can't come to the park," chortled Benjamin as Kate heard the old bed creak. "Look at your shoes, Melissa. They've all got high heels! You can't play soccer

in high heels! And you don't have any pants or jeans, do you? It'll be just like last night if we go to the school park. All the guys we saw last night didn't come to play, really! They came to check out my sister!"

"So, young man," said Kate, stepping into the room, "you don't want your sister to share all she learned about football when she was just your size and a fanatic, like you, about playing?"

Seeing Kate had made Benjamin scoot off the bed. Melissa looked over to her mother and continued to put her clothing into the correct drawers in her room. Benjamin was absolutely correct. Melissa didn't have anything resembling anything athletic wear. Even her blouses and tops wouldn't pass for shirts or sweaters, not with the colors they were, or with the frills most were decorated with.

"I do need to go shopping, Mummy," said Melissa with a lovely smile. "I must buy jeans and running shoes, and a shirt or two, for sure. Ben has a game on Saturday. I must dress as a soccer sister should, right, Ben?"

"I bet you'll buy pink shoes," said Ben gloomily. "Half your dresses are pink and so are your barettes and hair ribbons."

Melissa picked up a perfume bottle to place it properly on her dressing room table. She looked at her mother and smiled, shifting the dress she was about to remove from its wrappings to her new closet. She raised the perfume but Ben took off, screwing up his face.

"I don't want to smell like a girl!" he yelled over his shoulder as they heard him running down the stairs before there was a slam of the outside door.

"Was I like that at his age?" asked Melissa, smiling at her mother, who whistled in admiration at the dresses and shoes her daughter had in her closet.

"Yes," said Kate regretfully. "But you know what happened. Going over to see Alice changed you. I should never have let it happen."

Melissa paused in arranging the long, stylish, designer dress on its hanger. She shuddered as she went ahead and placed the dress, still in its protective, transparent covering, in her already crowded closet.

"It's all water under the bridge, Mummy," she said nervously. "Alice is doing fine now; she really is. I've never seen her look so healthy. Having a baby really agrees with her. She says her doctors are really pleased with her. If only Mama ..." Using that word for Bea made Melissa flush as she looked at her real mother. "If, if only Aunt Bea would hear what the doctors are telling her ..."

"Wouldn't you like to see Alice?" asked Kate.

Melissa felt a cold chill go through her. "When you'd say that, when I was a little, I used to dread it," she said to her surprised mother. "It always meant that ..."

"You would have to dress up like a little girl," said Melissa's mother, crossing the room to take her daughter in her arms. Oh, but Melissa was so fragrantly feminine. Her skin was so soft and creamy, her lightly madeup eyes so expressive and beautiful and when Kate hugged her, she felt so womanly as mother's and daughter's breasts gently met one another's

"Oh, darling," murmured Kate. "You know that you don't have to do all this for me, don't you?"

"For you?" asked Melissa, bewildered.

"Yes," said Kate. "You don't have to go through all this, changing back into William, just to prove to me how wrong that I was so many years ago ..."

"B-But I'm not, Mummy!" gasped the girl, swaying in Kate's arms, her dress swishing against Kate's legs. "This, this is all for me! I just can't go on being Alice's sister. I can't! She wants me to do whatever she does as if we really were bosom friends and had everything to share. She wants me to share everything I do with her, particularly when she's ill. This pregnancy is the first thing she's done, well, nearly the first thing, that I haven't had to do, before her.

"I, I'm losing myself, Mummy," Melissa went on in distress, tears coming to her eyes. "I'm Melissa so much of the time, I'm even beginning to think I'm her! I forget I was ever William."

Should she tell Mummy about Chas and the last time they'd met on the stairwell, Alice not allowed to stray from Mama's side. Melissa had been despatched to Mama's bedroom to bring her needlepoint back to her.

Chas, she'd called him that from the start, was several years younger than Mama. Sometimes he seemed more like an older brother to Alice than her father. Often he played with both girls and hugged and kissed their cheeks equally. When he kissed Alice goodnight, she insisted always that Melissa had to be kissed, just the same, her arms about Chas's neck, her lips lightly pressed on his.

Melissa had always thought it wrong but Alice insisted that her sister be treated as she was. It was just that, sometimes, Chas moved his lips, his eyes looking deeply into hers. She'd been so afraid. When he turned back and followed Melissa into the bedroom to search for the needlepoint, she felt the hairs on her neck, if she had any, rise up in fear and yet, at first, Chas had done nothing.

She'd reached the door to leave before Chas made his move. He'd pushed it shut, pushed her, Melissa against the door, his mouth seeking hers. She'd tried to fight but he'd seized her arms and put them about his neck just as she'd had to do in imitation of Alice.

It seemed as if he kissed Melissa for hours. His hands had slipped down her body to caress her tush while he pressed and gyrated against her body. Yes, he was feeling her breasts against him. He was so intensely male that Melissa was terrified. His mouth demanded more from her than Tom or Alex ever had. She'd even felt herself responding to Alice's father as he lifted her leg about his and caressed her soft, stocking thigh. He stroked her garter belt, touching her soft

skin while she shifted as if touched by an electric charge.

Chas liked that and kissed her gently, inducing another charge from her as he cupped and fondled her breast, through her dress and bra. His tongue flickered into her mouth, making her jolt him again, which he smiled at, in his kiss, as if it was funny that she should be so aroused, and so afraid of him.

Thank goodness Gemma saved her before Chas got her onto Mama's bed. What would he have said if he'd found what was inside Melissa's panties. He'd walked off, through the bathroom connecting his room to Mama's, locking the door as he went away, quickly and quietly.

Gemma was sure Melissa had been into Mama's perfumes and dresses and had scolded her all the way downstairs before saying, "She couldn't find the portrait of Alice, you were doing, Mrs Mainwaring. It must have fallen and rolled under the window sofa in your room, ma'am."

"Thank you, Gemma," said Mama gratefully. "You haven't seen any sign of my husband, have you? Go and wake him, there's a dear, Gemma. And watch out for him. He's always pretty randy in the morning. We don't want anyone else getting themselves pregnant, do we?"

"Oh, Mrs Mainwaring," said Gemma with a sudden, beaming smile as she looked at Melissa's reddened face. "With you here, you don't think your husband would want anything to do with old crones like me!"

Gemma's knowing smile had sent spasms of fear through Melissa. She'd sat dutifully beside her 'mother', had sewed when Mama had told her to, and learned how to be more of a lady. Gemma didn't tell Mama what she might have, but she did tell Melissa, with a smirk, to call for a maid to go upstairs with her, whenever Master Charles was at home.

No, Melissa couldn't tell Mummy about the most pressing reason she had to get away from the

Mainwarings, nor about the way Chas's manly fondling of her legs had made her feel. No, she could never tell Mummy that. Just as she could never have told Mama about her husband.

"Well, we'll see how things go," Kate said lightly, kissing her daughter's soft cheek, loving the scents that assaulted her nostrils. It wouldn't be so bad to have a daughter with her, would it, she thought, as the girl, she was thinking of Melissa as that, clung to her 'Mummy'. Kate felt so protective of her each time she said it so naturally.

"We should go shopping," said Kate. "There's a sale at Monique's I've been promising myself to look in on. Now, with you here, Melissa, I feel the urge to go there. I need to get myself a new dress to keep up with my new, lovely daughter."

Melissa looked up at her mother in surprise. There was a guilty look on her face. "Oh, Mummy," she gasped. "I meant I had to go shopping for boy's clothes. I have to get ready for the changes that'll start in me. Ben is right as well. I am far too girlie to play football with him. I hadn't thought of pink training shoes. Do they even make such things? I should buy some, shouldn't I, just because he teased me about them and a pair of jeans or slacks. Oh, I haven't had anything like that bought for me in ten years! It will be so wonderful to get back into a pair of pants!"

It wasn't as easy as Melissa had thought that it was going to be, however. Kate had actually laughed at her and asked if she'd looked in the mirror lately.

"Melissa," said Kate, steered her daughter away from the manly jeans section of the store and into the female section. "With hips and a waist like yours, you need fitted ladies' jeans. Oh look at those on the mannequin over there. Gosh, in those, you'll be showing off legs, hips, and tush to perfection. We'll have to beat the boys off with a stick if you wear jeans like those!"

Melissa's face was a picture of dismay as she checked out the jeans her mother thought she could wear. Mummy seemed to be in seventh heaven as she

steered Melissa to a rack of lovely dresses, picking one out for Kate to try on herself.

Mummy even took Melissa back into the dressing room with her to help her put the dress on, not at all self-conscious of showing herself off in her underwear to her daughter. She really did seem to be enjoying the whole experience of having a daughter to shop with while Melissa had to fight down urges to try on some of the other lovely dresses that were at Monique's in just her size.

It was so bizarre to walk in running shoes and not high heels. Melissa almost had to learn to walk all over again, unable to keep the sway out of her walk, which Mummy didn't tell her not to do. She would have chosen the white tennis shoes but Mummy insisted that she have them with pink uppers and laces, "for Benjamin's sake".

"I can just see him when you go out to play a little football with him," laughed Kate. "You must put pink ribbons in your pony tail, Melissa, and then you should kick the tar out of the little chauvinist I've been raising. He thinks girls can't do anything, you know, just like his father."

"But, but I'm not ..." began a troubled Melissa.

"He doesn't know that," said Kate, arm-in-arm with her daughter, each loaded with carrier bags of women's clothing, even the skinny jeans she'd persuaded her daughter to buy. "He's not going to know for a while. This is a long process you've started, Melissa. I'm proud of you for doing what you're doing. Only, while you're still so much a girl, and you are, darling, let me enjoy having a daughter for a while. You know, don't you, that I'll never have one now, and I always hoped ... Well, let's not burden you with that as I did with helping out Bea and Alice. Let's just enjoy the next few months as mother and daughter and let nature take its course."

Melissa felt the alarm rising in her as her mother spoke to her. Be a daughter to Mummy for a while? She shivered in despair as Mummy stopped and spoke

to a woman who employed Mummy's cleaning service. Melissa was introduced as Mummy's daughter. The woman was complimentary about the lovely girl with Mummy, suggesting that she introduce Melissa to her son when he was on leave from the Navy.

"I bet Roger already has a girl in every port he's ever been in," her mother confided as they left the woman. Mummy confirmed two days of work in the woman's home for the crew who worked for her. "He used to flirt with me, years ago, when he was in school! I was there in my oldest aprons and head scarf, no makeup on at all!"

"He doesn't sound very nice," said Melissa unsteadily. Mummy looked at her in sympathy.

"He wasn't and I'm not being nice to you at all, am I?" she asked. "If I was, I would let you sit in the café in the garden they have. That nice boy who's been following us around the mall might finally get up the courage to talk to you."

"Oh, Mummy, no," gasped Melissa, who had noticed the boy. "Let's just get out of here. We, we did promise Ben we wouldn't be away all afternoon."

The dark-haired boy smiled and actually waved his hand slightly as Melissa got into the car with her mother. He was there, most unexpectedly, later, in the park when she and Benjamin came back to her bag for a drink of water.

"Hi, Buck!" said Benjamin. "What are you doing here? I thought you said soccer was for sissies and girls!"

Buck laughed easily, his eyes straying to Melissa and her heaving breasts and her feminine figure in her new, tight-fitting jeans and pink-laced running shoes. She was so out of shape, fitness that is, she knew. She could barely catch up with her little brother when he dashed for her goal, marked by her pink sweater. At least, teaching him again to head the ball properly, so that he didn't hurt himself, had enabled her to get her breath back. Now, it looked like a game was forming

with some other slightly older kids. Benjamin was eager to be in it.

"I did say that," Buck admitted. "But I've been known to change my mind a time or two, as Melissa knows."

"I know you?" Melissa said doubtfully.

"Ouch," said Buck cheerfully, pulling a mock grimace at her. "I thought I made more of an impression on the prettiest girl in school than that, in my one year at Sinclair Prep!"

"One year?" repeated Melissa, looking at the boy's eyes. There was something familiar about the set of the eyes, the way he was laughing at her. But there had been so many boys at Sinclair, all laughing at her, trying to impress her, boys in upper classes who'd gone to other schools before she'd graduated.

"My real name's Simon Davies," said the smiling boy. "But you don't remember that, do you? That's why I didn't mind Ben there," Ben was out on the field, negotiating with other boys about setting up a game of soccer, "calling me by my old nickname. I usually beat up anyone smaller than me these days, who does that."

"Buck?" said Melissa quizzically, sitting on the bench but keeping her bag strategically between them. A vague image of long tables and trays of food came to mind. "In the school cafeteria?"

"You do remember me!" laughed the tall, good-looking boy. "I remember you, of course, since you're the only person in that whole stinking school who was nice to me, me and my buck teeth, remember? But it's marvellous what braces and orthodontics can do, isn't it? No-one is cringing in horror or kicking me off the cool guys' and girls' table as they used to do until you stopped them, Melissa. You even got that sister of yours, she wasn't your real sister, was she, that Alice, to back you up."

"I don't really remember you," Melissa had to admit. "Simon," she added belatedly.

The boy smiled broadly, showing off a mouthful of straight, white teeth. "That's the first time you've ever said my name," he said with a smile, waving a hand at Ben that meant that they were not going to join Ben in his game. "Everyone called me Buck because I was so bucktoothed! I just went along with it. You thought they were calling me Book because I had one with me all the time. You asked me what I was reading so avidly."

"*Lord of the Rings*," said Melissa, a memory of a strange, bespectacled, awkward boy, sitting beside her, coming to mind. Oh, the teeth! Straight forward, the front two, like daggers pointed at you, and others going off in other directions.

"Lots of people were reading it," said Simon. "The film hadn't come out then."

"But you were reading it for the sixth, seventh time," Melissa said. A strange feeling came over her as Simon picked up her bag, moved over beside her on the bench, putting her bag on the other side of him. Instinctively, she crossed her legs girlishly, her arms crossed and tight to her body as a new boy tried to charm her.

"You're the only one who ever asked me that," said Simon with a grin. "When I saw you with Mrs Allen, I couldn't believe it was you. Don't you live in some massive mansion with a swimming pool up in Spring Hill?"

"Oh, I'm not there any more," said Melissa quickly and could have kicked herself. She shouldn't say anything about who she was or why she was there. She couldn't possibly tell him she was living with her real mother now. Mummy's closest friends knew that she'd had two sons and no daughters. They would have to be careful, Mummy had said.

"Ben is sure happy to have his sister home," said Simon with another of his charming smiles. Melissa felt a chill inside her. She didn't know what to say. She was most definitely not going to react to a boy as she used

to. Alice would've been very cross with her for not drawing a good-looking boy into their circle.

"You were really good with him," Simon went on as she sat and said nothing. She watched Benjamin put a move on one of the older boys and make a pass, just as she used to do, to another boy who scored easily. She was on her feet, not even thinking of it, clapping her hands girlishly for him. Ben looked over to her and smiled.

"You know a lot about soccer," said Simon, standing close beside her, her bag and purse over his shoulder. "But, watch, in about five minutes these guys will switch to real football, tackle as they call it. Get ready for a bloody nose or a bump or two."

It was quicker than that. The goalie who'd been scored upon, bent down by the post, picked up a football and began to run down the field with it. Benjamin went down in a dog pile. As Simon had suggested, Ben came limping towards Melissa, his nose bleeding.

"A lot of big guys in that game," sympathized Simon as Melissa found herself doing the girlie things, wiping her brother's nose, hugging him, aware of her breasts against Ben. She kissed his head before sending him back into the wild, running and tackling game that other kids were laughing about.

"Let's play properly," one of the older boys cried as he picked up the ball and ran off with it. There was a call then from a back garden nearby. The game broke up as some boys had to go. Ben had a long run to collect his soccer ball before coming back to put his hand in Melissa's to walk home.

"I can take my purse," said Melissa anxiously to Simon, who began to walk with them.

"I like carrying things for you," said Simon with a smile, taking her other hand, sending shivers through Melissa as he squeezed her hand as well. "I never got the chance at Sinclair. Sandy or Morgan would have beaten me up if I had ever had the nerve to try this. Besides, you always looked so cute when you'd walk along so primly with your books clutched in front of

you. You've such a devastating, feminine walk, Melissa. We guys could always pick you out in any group of girls we saw. I was sure it was you when you came sashaying along with Mrs Allen."

"Stop!" hissed Melissa, shuddering. "You, you cannot talk to me like that, Simon!"

Simon Davies slowed and stared at her, Ben looking up with interest. "You have a boy friend already," said Simon, shaking his head. "Sorry, Melissa, I should've known there'd be another guy."

"Yes," said Melissa, shivering again. There, let him think that and give her a wide berth in the future.

"But you don't," piped up Benjamin. "She told Mum, Buck, she'd dumped all the guys who wanted to go out with her. She wasn't going out with boys any more, never again. Why don't you tell him, Melissa?"

Simon laughed as Melissa flushed. "Little brothers with big ears," he said, his hand tightening about hers once more, sending another chill through her. "And, Ben, if you don't want to be beaten up by me again, my name is Simon or Cy to you, got it?"

Of course, Benjamin tempted fate on the way home, got caught, tickled and turned upside down until he promised to say 'Simon' in future. But, once free and on the tree-shaded street where the Allens' house was situated, Ben was off, running, renegeing on his promise and calling "Buck's here" as he fled for the safety of his mother's arms.

"Please, may I have me my tote bag?" asked a blushing Melissa as her mother smiled at her along the street and waited for her. Simon made a little show of presenting it to her as he let go her hand finally. Melissa was sure her mother had noticed.

"Simon Davies," said Kate Allen as the boy stayed with Melissa as she walked stiffly up the driveway. "You're a fast worker, aren't you?" she said with a smile. "Melissa's only been here one day and you've moved in on her, already?"

Simon laughed. "Nice to see you again, Mrs Allen," he said easily. "Um, sorry to hear about your husband

and all that. But it's great you're still living here and didn't have to move away."

"Because then you wouldn't have met my lovely daughter," said Kate Allen, admiring how pretty Melissa looked when she flushed, her long hair, no longer in a pony tail, swaying around her neck.

"Oh, we knew each other before," said Simon. He related things about Sinclair that Melissa had forgotten. Had she really told off the biggest jocks in the school, telling them to 'Be nice' when they'd tried to shove Simon off the end of the last empty table for lunch. Had she been the only one to smile at him, sit beside him several times, and make it a lot easier for him to get through his scholarship year at Sinclair.

"You're at State now, a university man," said Kate Allen with a smile as Melissa fidgeted. "Second year?"

"Third," Simon said with a smile, glancing at Melissa to see if she was impressed, Kate noticed. Melissa did look at the boy in surprise but said nothing.

"They've jumped you a few times," said Kate.

"Yeah, and a lot of spring and summer school," said Simon cheerfully. "Always been a geek, haven't I?"

"You, a geek, Simon Davies?" laughed Kate Allen. "Some geek, hey, Melissa?" Again the girl flushed and said nothing. "It was nice to see you again, Simon. Say hello to your mother for me."

"Sure thing, Mrs Allen," said Simon. "Really great to see you again, Melissa, and marvellous to know you don't have a boy friend."

"Was that what I think it was?" asked Kate as she got her daughter to help her carry cleaning supplies into the house. Simon was striding away most jauntily down the street.

"What was what?" asked Melissa carefully.

"An indication of boyish interest in you," said Kate Allen. "And a declaration that Simon is going to call you for a date very soon. How did he find out you don't have a boy friend?"

"Ben contradicted me when I told him I did," said Melissa bitterly while Kate's eyes went up in surprise,

which easily changed to laughter. "So, any time he calls me, if he does, I'm babysitting my bratty brother."

"Yes, dear," said Kate with a smile. "And, by the way, Melissa, those jeans on you look so cute. I told you the skinny ones were best for you. Now, don't look at me like that, young woman. And you are a young woman for now and my daughter, in whom I am very pleased."

"Mummy," whispered Melissa. "I'm William, your son. You told me you didn't have a daughter. I wasn't to say anything, I didn't but Ben told Simon I was his sister!"

"Good," said Kate with a smile. "You've been away at private school thanks to the rich relative I have, an aunt, who's been helping us out. Now, I've been thinking, Melissa. You do have to have a social life as."

"So, I've been telling everyone I met today that my daughter is home at last, which has astonished a lot of people. They wondered why I kept you secret for so long. I just said the subject never come up. Mrs Welsh, where I was today, asked me if I'd had to keep you away from Doug's wandering hands. I denied it but I won't be surprised if that story doesn't get around. I hope you'll deny it. Doug doesn't deserve a reputation like that."

"I will," said Melissa vehemently. "And you'll tell Simon that my boy friend and me are getting back together, won't you? Please, Mummy!"

"Simon's a terrific guy," said Kate seriously. "Every mother with a daughter in the neighborhood has been pushed them at Simon. He's really kind to them all, mothers and daughters, but he's never taken up with anyone. You're the only one, I think, he's ever approached first!"

"Babysitting or boy friend, if he calls," said Melissa anxiously as she finished stocking the supplies in the cupboard used for Kate's cleaning business. "Please, Mummy!"

"Sure," said Kate Allen, knowing full well it was a promise she wasn't going to keep. Her beautiful daughter needed to have some fun out of life, more than just shopping and watching television with her mother.

"No, she's not doing anything tonight," Melissa heard her mother saying on the phone. "I'm sure she'll be delighted to go out dancing, Simon. Here she is! No, Simon, she doesn't have to babysit, nor does she have to stay in to wash her hair."

"Mummy, what are you saying?" gasped Melissa as she took the phone pushed at her. "Hello?"

"Eight o'clock, a birthday party in Melton, the Athenian, a Greek restaurant and night club," said Simon. "I have to wear a suit. It's that kind of place. But you can wear what you like, Melissa. You look good in anything."

"Simon, I ..." Melissa began frantically, trying to think of a reason for saying 'No' to him, after what her mother had said.

"I'll pick you up at eight!" said Simon cheerfully.

He was at the Allen house at seven-thirty, playing foosball with Ben in the basement until Melissa finally had her makeup done and came clicking down the stairs in her high heels to say she was ready to go out with another man.

Simon looked up and stood there, transfixed, staring at her, her blood chilling again as she saw a man looking at her, in a way that was very familiar.

Clunk! The ball went home to score the winning goal. "I win!" screamed Benjamin.

Simon looked down at the game, and gave a deep sigh. "I think we both did," he murmured lightly. "That's all for tonight, though. I'll want a rematch next time I'm here."

You aren't coming here again, thought Melissa unsteadily. This is your one and only time with me, Simon. Mummy may have had the time of her life get-

ting a daughter ready for a big date with a boy she thinks is really handsome, and a gentleman. but I'm not going out with boys any more. I am going to become William again, I am.

"That is a stunning dress," said Simon as he took her hands, admiring her freshly painted, dark pink fingernails.

It wasn't the one Melissa had wanted to wear. It covered up nothing at all. But Mummy had insisted that her daughter humor her. The spaghetti-strapped, silver-sequinned, white cocktail dress had had to be worn. Mummy had picked out all Melissa's underwear as well, insisting on garter belt and stockings as they always made her feel so womanly. Melissa knew the feeling. She felt that way as well.

Simon liked everything about her, the way she had brushed and pinned back her hair, her long earrings, her thin necklace and bracelets, her perfume, *Intime*, a gift from Alice, and her makeup which he promised not to spoil as he hugged her, kissing Melissa lightly on the cheek. Her mother had to do that to her as well and, surprisingly, so did Benjamin, complaining then that she smelled like a girl, which she had to laugh at with the others. Not for long, Ben, Melissa said, promising herself as she went out on her date with the handsomest boy in the neighborhood.

The car was a limo, Melissa saw in surprise. "I'll be drinking tonight," said Simon as he held her arm in his and assisted her into the back seat. "Gareth is turning twenty-one but the club is private. No-one minds if either of us has champagne tonight."

Melissa shivered in the wrap her mother had brought for her with her purse. "I won't," she whispered. "I don't want to be arrested for drinking underage." That would be a surprise for you, Simon, she thought, if that was the way you found out your date is not exactly the woman you think she is.

Melissa had been prepared to not enjoy herself but the party was too lively for that, the partygoers really friendly. All the boys wanted to dance with her, in

turn, but they danced with all the girls, of all shapes and sizes, smiling and complimenting them just as much as they did her.

So she did sip champagne in the birthday toast and went outside, Simon's arm about her, to admire Gareth's new car, which his parents had delivered, along with chauffeur, to the club. Cameras flashed.

"I have to get me a real babe," Gareth laughed. "One like your new girl friend, Simon, cute, blonde, and lots of fun!"

It was so embarrassing to be toasted by everyone as Simon squeezed her to him. "Not Melissa," Simon told his friend. "I've had a crush on her since seventh grade and only just got her to come out with me. She's the girl I've been telling you about, Gareth, since you asked me about girls I liked."

"You're a lucky man," said Gareth, going off to party with others while Simon led her back to the dance floor. He held her tightly in a waltz, kissing her hair and forehead as she felt her body shuddering as her breasts pressed against her. She knew he was going to kiss her on her lipsticked mouth. She'd been kissed by boys before and knew she wouldn't enjoy it. She was a boy. She wouldn't enjoy kissing another boy, ever again.

Oh, but the brush of his lips on hers and she was in seventh heaven all over her feminized body. She felt his gentle hands on her bra at her back, hugging her to him. She pressed her lips to his, eyes closed. His tongue touched hers. He was crushing her and she loved it. Every bit of her body seemed to plead with her to join with him as she had joined with Alex, become the woman she was.

Other girls had their arms about their boy friends' necks and were enjoying them immensely. Melissa slipped her arms about Simon's neck and was lost totally for several minutes as the waltz became slower, dreamier, more romantic. Simon's hands gently caressed her back and waist. She couldn't get enough of him, her mouth clinging to his. She'd only be a woman



for a little while, she'd told her mother. Let him entice her to kiss him back, enjoy herself, as a woman, her mother had exhorted her. She deserved it and her mother was proud of her lovely daughter.

The ride home in the car was beyond a dream as she let Simon put his hands on her dress, on her legs, as she kissed him. Was it her mother's words? Melissa had never felt so womanly. She didn't have to fight Simon off. He was so gentle. She was the one to let him know that it was all right to kiss her upper chest, her breasts so aroused.

It was so wonderful to be a woman, as Mummy had said that it was. Her boy friend was so nice. It wouldn't hurt to kiss him all the way home, would it? And if he caressed her breasts from the outside of her dress and touched her panties, well, that gave her such intense pleasure. Simon was such a nice guy. He went only as far as she wanted him to go, raising her to heights of passion and desire that she hadn't thought possible for her.

Melissa cuddled against her boy friend against the closed door and promised to go out with him again. It was only when Simon had kissed Melissa so forcefully, his hands stroking her aroused nipples as she stroked his hands as well, his passion for her so clear that he'd mumbled, "I'd better go, Melissa, before I go too far. I mean, I want to go too far with you, and maybe we will, soon. But it will only be when you let me, my darling. I can't wait to see you again, tomorrow night."

"Oh, but ..." she'd tried to say, meaning to tell him that she couldn't see him again. That wasn't part of Melissa's plan.

But she was warm and shivering all over as Mummy came down to see her, hug her and assure her that, enjoying everything that Simon had done to her was part of the pleasure of being a daughter.

"Sweet dreams, my darling daughter," Mummy had wished her. "And yes, you have to go out with Si-

mon tomorrow night, darling Melissa. A girl like you deserves a little pleasure out of life."

"I can't just go on, lying to him all the time!" Melissa wept to her mother. It had been a whole season of kissing Simon every night. There had been reunions with his returns from school. Now he was coming home for Christmas. But Mrs Davies had told Mummy Simon had used all the money he'd saved for grad school on buying a ring.

"I hope she likes it," Mrs Davies had said to a stunned Kate Allen. "They do get along so well, don't they? And what a striking pair they make. Melissa will make such a lovely bride. Can she hold out until after grad school to marry my Simon? I hope she will. Grad school is going to be so much tougher than regular school and he doesn't need immense distractions that a wedding and setting up house will bring."

"She's far too young!" Kate Allen had exclaimed.

"I was younger when I married," Grace Davies had said to Kate. "And you must have seen them together as I have. She's in love with Simon. I can see it in every body movement she makes when she's with him, near him. And he's the same. He's besotted with your Melissa. He only comes alive when he's talking to her on the phone or is going out to meet her. If she were to say, No, to him ..." The other woman had shuddered then. "Melissa couldn't be that cruel, could she?"

"N-No," Kate had gasped. "She's the kindest girl I know. But, but there's Alice Mainwaring, her sister in so many ways. They've grown up together. Alice is so ill and so pregnant. Melissa might not be here over Christmas if Alice needs her! She's far too young, Grace. She's never really had a boy friend before!"

"Not what I hear from Claire Cameron," huffed Grace Davies. "Yes, I know about her living with the Mainwarings and their daughter getting pregnant when she shouldn't. Melissa's had other boy friends. She chased after her Tom, Claire says, until she caught him, ditching him for some other boy at her Prom. It was all over school that she was caught in the Honey-

moon Suite at the Merrymount on Prom Night, naked and making love to that boy on stage with her!

"That doesn't bother me, though, Kate. I just don't want her to hurt my boy. I did a lot of things when I was a teenager that I don't talk about. I do know Melissa and Simon haven't done it yet. I asked him. Simon said he hasn't because she won't let him. Melissa gets very excited, he says, but won't go the last step, she's told him, not until she meets someone she wants to marry."

"Did you say that to him?" Kate asked her daughter as she stroked Melissa, touching the straps of her bra and watching her daughter's lovely breasts rise and fall in distress. Oh, she was so beautiful, Melissa, her daughter, even when she was sobbing, her eyes red with anger and tears.

"I was just chatting with Margaret and Kelly, at Tim's party," Melissa said with a shudder. "They were getting pretty stoned and I was trying to warn them. Then, I discovered Simon, standing right behind me. He didn't say anything then and I haven't raised it with him, either."

"But you're necking and petting with him all the time he's here," said Kate gently.

Melissa quickly glanced at her mother. She looked so guilty. "I'm not a man of my word, am I, Mummy?" she asked which shook Kate considerably.

"You still think you're a man?" she asked her daughter incredulously. Kate had watched her daughter with Simon and been delighted by the girl who, as Grace said, came alive with her boy friend. They constantly touched and hugged one another as if meant for one another. Seeing them kiss one another so hungrily, she clutched to Simon as if she was joined to him, reminded Kate of how much she'd loved Doug. Kate was certain, as Grace was, that her daughter was in love. She'd encouraged her, thinking how wonderful it had been for her, Kate, and how wonderful it seemed to be for Melissa now.

"I am," said Melissa in the smallest of whispers. "I know I am, Mummy, but, sometimes, when Simon kisses me, I, I forget. You were so right about him, Mummy. He's, he's so kind, and s-so gentle with me. If, if I really was a girl, I'd fall in love with him. But ..."

"But, darling Melissa," said Kate as gently as she could, "I think you already have." Melissa stopped her shaking, turning wooden, staring at her mother, her face a picture of astonishment. "You've fallen in love with Simon, Melissa. You can't un-fall in love with him. We have to work out what to do about it. You could just go on as ..."

"I can't!" shrieked Melissa. "It's too unfair to Simon. I'll have to break it off!"

"He's buying you a ring ..." Kate went on. What an unholy mess this was turning out to be!

"I'll call him in res and tell him not to do it," wept Melissa.

"You have his number?" asked Kate in surprise. Her daughter blushed as she nodded her lovely hair. They agonized over what Melissa might do for a while.

"He might just accept a break-up," said Melissa hopefully. "I, I might not have to tell him the truth."

"He might," agreed Kate. "Why don't you phone him now while you are thinking of it? You don't want him doing something that will really hurt him to undo, like telling his friends he's setting off with an engagement ring and going back to with no girl friend any more. Boys suffer more than girls do, sometimes, from rejection."

"Yes," agreed Melissa, not noticing the way Kate had framed that to include her with girls and not boys. "May I use your phone, Mummy? Ben has mine, setting up some game with his friends."

"Hi!" said a delighted Simon as he heard Melissa's lilting voice. "I was just thinking about you and here you are. Don't tell me that you've bought a new dress and can't wait to drive me wild when you wear ..."

"This is much more serious than a new dress," said Melissa. She couldn't keep the distress creeping into her voice. An alarmed Simon questioned her for a while about whether she was ill or if something had happened in her family.

"Simon," Melissa finally managed to say directly to him. "Your mother was talking to mine. We have a problem."

"A problem?" asked Simon warily down the phone. "Melissa, my mother loves you! There's no ..."

"She told my mother what you're planning for Christmas, about the ring and stuff," Melissa went on shakily. "Tell me it's untrue."

Simon was deliberately obtuse. "I wanted it to be a surprise," he finally blurted out. "I'm taking you to the Athenian, where we had our first date. I'll go down on one knee and ask you to marry me ..."

"No, Simon," Melissa insisted right away, weeping inside. "You absolutely mustn't do that. You mustn't buy a ring. Don't tell anyone what you were going to do!"

"Too late!" laughed Simon down the phone again.

"We can't get engaged," said Melissa, trying to hold back the tears that threatened to engulf her. "There's so much you don't know about me, Simon ..."

"If you mean about Prom Night and other boy friends, I don't care," said Simon quickly. "Look, I haven't said it yet, Melissa, but I love you ..."

"Don't say that!" screamed Melissa down the phone. "It's not true! It can't be! I'm not, not ..."

"It's totally true!" interrupted Simon. "I love you, Melissa, and you love me. Look, let's talk this over. Darling Melissa, will you marry me, be my wife and ..."

"Aren't you hearing me, Simon?" cried Melissa. "I can't marry you, ever."

"Give me one good reason why not," said Simon obstinately.

There was silence between them.

"My, my name isn't Melissa," whispered Melissa as Simon began to say, "There isn't, is there?"

"Why does that matter?" asked Simon. "Who cares if your parents called you Gladys or Mabel ...?"

"There are worse names," whispered Melissa down the phone. "My real name is William."

There was an inarticulate gargling down the phone.

"Goodbye, Simon," Melissa whispered for a final time. She could hear Simon calling, "Wait", as she hung up. She set her mother's phone on the desk in the office she'd used for the call. She left it on as she wobbled out of the door. Her mother was there, her face full of sympathy for Melissa's plight. Melissa burst into tears and fell into her mother's arms.

"I have to get away for a while, Mummy," Melissa finally said to her mother.

"Yes," said Kate. "And you know who wants you with her now. Yes, Alice. At least, Beatrice says she does. Pack your bag, Melissa, like old times. I'm taking you up to Alice's to be her girl friend for a while."

"She wants me?" asked Melissa with a frown. "But she didn't say anything last week ..."

"Bea says she's pining for you," said Kate, rolling her eyes. "You need time away.. Don't worry about Ben. He sort of understands about Alice. He won't want to come, not to a house full of women. I'll let you know about Simon. He'll call, I'm sure. As for what happens then, a lot will depend on how nice he really is, won't it?"

It was with some dread that Melissa returned to the Mainwaring mansion. The squeal and hug from a waddling Alice at least enabled her to smile to her mother and thank her for letting her spend time with her friend.

"It's so good to see a friendly face," said Bea to Kate as the girls went off to the patio to catch up on the latest in each of their lives. "The ladies of Spring Hill," Bea's face was a picture of disgust, "have done nothing but complain and keep their daughters away from Alice. It's as if pregnancy is catching!"

"Is she having the child naturally or by caesarean?" asked Kate, surprised by how bloated Alice had seemed. She was a small girl, Melissa not much taller.

"I want caesarean," said Bea crossly, "but my daughter doesn't listen to me these days, which is why I asked you to spare me Melissa, Kate. She's able to get Alice to do what's best for her. I hope she will this time. Then, there's the matter of her will."

"Alice's will?" asked Kate in puzzlement.

"I told her she can't do it," said Bea bitterly, "but she insists. If she dies, she wants Melissa, as her sister, to be mother to her child. Can you believe that, Kate? After all I've done for my daughter, she wants to give away her child! I'm sure she's talking about it with Melissa now. She's loading herself with drugs so she can breastfeed the baby which seems to be normal, by the way, so far."

"... you have to start on these lactose pills as well, Melissa," Alice was saying, gasping for air, really worrying the girl who'd grown up with her and shared her bed for so many years. "Even if I get through this, Maybelline," her pet name for the baby, "is going to be breast-fed and you have such lovely breasts, Melissa. We have to make them useful for something!"

"I can't be a wet nurse!" said Melissa, aghast. Of all the things she'd expected of Alice, asking her 'sister' to be a mother to 'Maybelline', both emotionally and physically, was too much to take in. "I can't produce true mother's milk!"

"You'll be surprised what modern medicine can do," said Alice dryly, taking Melissa's lovely hand and squeezing it. "Oh, I need you here, Missy, I really do. Mama is right about that. My nails wouldn't be such a mess if you were here.

"I need you to promise to be Maybelline's mama, Missy. Can you imagine my child, whatever it is, being brought up by my mother? The poor kid would be suffocated as I was before you brought life and love into my life."

"But you know I'm going to be my, myself, again soon," said Melissa with a shiver. "I can't do it, Alice. I really can't!"

Alice just looked at her and smiled. She kept on smiling as Melissa asked her why she was looking at her like that.

"Look at the way you're sitting," said Alice, "and how much leg and stocking you're showing, Missy. Are you wearing a bra today?"

"Of course," said Melissa indignantly.

"... because I can see your nipples through that lovely dress you're wearing," giggled Alice. "If that's what you call returning to being a boy, Melissa, my darling girl, you've a lot to learn about the differences between boys and girls!"

"I do know," said Melissa hotly. "It's you, Alice, who doesn't know ..."

"Excuse me, Miss Alice, Miss Melissa," said Gemma, knocking on the door. "There's a young man at the door who insists on talking to Miss Melissa."

"Who is it?" asked Alice, a wide smile on her pale, tired face. "We haven't had a boy come calling for months."

"It's no-one!" said Melissa, her nerves fraying as she guessed who it was and why he was there. "I'll send him away. Stay put, Alice."

"How can you send no-one away?" asked Alice with an even bigger smile, clearly enjoying the shaking and nervous display her 'sister' was making. "Bring the young man through the garden, Gemma, and don't tell Mama we've a visitor, if she doesn't already know. I haven't talked to a man who wasn't a doctor or a chauffeur in months!"

Gemma smiled and disappeared.

"Alice," whispered Melissa. "Don't get in the middle of this. It'll make you ill. Simon's just coming here to berate me and make a terrible fuss ..."

Alice thought that was a marvellous idea and even more when Simon, his face set like stone, swept in through the outside door. "Do I know you?" Alice

asked cheerily, gasping a little to breathe. "I'm Alice Mainwaring. That's my sister, Melissa, trying to be invisible. Who are you?"

"Simon Davies," said Simon, stepping forward, taking the hand that Alice raised to him. His glance took in her condition. She didn't look well and didn't try to get up. Alice coughed but waved Gemma back to whatever she was about in the house.

"I was at Sinclair Prep for a year when you and Melissa were there," said Simon evenly. "Would you mind, Alice, if I had a private talk with Melissa? I've come a long way to talk to her!"

"We'll go into the garden," said a trembling, panicked Melissa.

"No, stay here," Alice said, pouting. "You'll only tell me it all, word for word, later, Melissa. Let me here what this man says to you. Looks to me like he wants to ask you to marry him!"

As Melissa gasped at her frivolity, Simon just smiled at Alice. "I did, last night," he said. "She turned me down."

Alice gasped in her turn, looking at Melissa as the 'other' girl flushed and moved around the room, keeping furniture between herself and Simon. "For the most frivolous of reasons, I may add," Simon went on, moving to cut Melissa off.

"Let's go outside. You can yell at me there," whimpered Melissa as his hands touched hers. Simon tried to draw her into an embrace.

"No, stay here. Yell at her in here!" said Alice, coughing a little more.

Melissa turned to her in alarm. "Alice, I have to get Mama and your wheelchair," she said. "You know the rule about your coughing!"

"That wasn't a cough!" gurgled Alice. "I was just laughing at you, Missy. Why don't you start yelling, you guys? I love laughing at lovers' tiffs?"

"You guys?" quoted Simon sarcastically. "So you know all about Melissa's quaint secret, Alice?"

Alice's mouth fell open in stunned surprise. "You guys," she said weakly.

Melissa tried to tell her that she'd leave right away. Alice shouldn't have to listen to Simon's harangue but Simon grabbed her. He did more than that. He kissed her. He kissed her more forcefully than he'd ever kissed her before and pressed her body against his.

Melissa struggled and tried to break free, her breathing coming in severe short gasps. Simon's mouth was firm on hers and he lifted her arms about his neck as he loved to do, to feel her breasts against him, Melissa knew. Her own mouth wiggled against his as he pressed her more firmly to him, causing such urgent feelings of delight and femininity to surge through her as his hands stroked her bra, her waist and her tush, right in front of Alice.

"Go on, Melissa," laughed a croaky Alice. "Kiss him back. You know you've been wanting to since Gemma said he was here. Go up to our bedroom and share it with Simon! I'll keep Mama away!"

But Mama didn't stay away. Beatrice and Kate came charging into the atrium, as Bea called it, to rescue Melissa, only to find that Melissa didn't need any rescuing at all.

"What's going on?" asked Bea in shock as Melissa tried to break free of Simon but he wouldn't let her go or stop kissing her ardently, either. Ooo, and her breasts were as firm and on fire as her lips.

"Melissa's been asked to marry Simon," said Alice with another gargling giggle. "He won't take 'No' for an answer, no matter what she has in her panties!"

"Alice!!" shouted both mothers in distress.

Simon finally let Melissa's mouth rest. "Alice is exactly right, Mrs Allen, Mrs Mainwaring," he said, hugging a quaking, joyous Melissa to him. "I won't take 'No' for an answer, no matter what Melissa has in her panties!"



Benjamin looked super in his bow tie, white shirt and morning coat, just like the groom and ushers wore. He said he wouldn't but he did give a smile as his sister, in her white bridal gown, put her arm about him, smiling beautifully as well, allowing him to escort her to the car. Chas Mainwaring waited there to act as Melissa's father and give her away to Simon Davies, newly graduated, already employed in Mainwaring Developments as a project manager, and also taking his masters' program as well.

All the ladies looked so beautiful in their fashionable designer suits, including Alice, her baby girl asleep in a crib with nurses in attendance. Alice insisted on walking down the aisle as matron of honour since "I never did it as a little girl and I always wanted to, remember?"

Melissa trembled as all brides do and looked radiant when Simon at last was allowed to lift her veil and kiss her, in front of every one, Melissa's secret known only to a very select group of women and one very lucky man.

The lucky man had first thought, when the shock had died away, that Melissa was a transsexual, a man who knew he was a woman and would change her sex to become the woman she thought she was inside. He'd quickly learned that Melissa didn't think of herself that way. It took quite a bit of persuasion to get her to understand that Simon didn't care what she thought she was, he only wanted to love her as if she was a woman.

"We don't have to stop," he'd murmured to her as he held her against the doorpost and on the sofa in her front room. "I know what I'm going to find inside your panties, Melissa, so don't stop loving me. I want you to be my girl, all the way, and we don't need to wait till we're married."

Melissa had shuddered as he said that and led him to her bedroom where it was more private. She could let Simon unclothe her and caress her breasts, her tush

and her legs with his hands and his mouth to his heart's content. She knew that Simon would want to be inside her as if she was a woman. Ooo, gods and goddesses, it was everything she'd hoped for as Simon made her his woman completely.

Yes, Melissa bounced on a man's penis inside her with compete abandon as Simon told her how much he loved her and loved what she did to make his manhood rise to the heights of desire and ecstasy.

"Don't change," Simon said to her as he sated himself on her, her legs so high about him as she squealed in pleasure as he bucked and bucked himself in her, her body exploding in spasms of joy and delight. "Yes, we'll adopt Alice's children as she wants us to, if that is what it comes to. We'll adopt others as well. You can suckle them together with your sister, as she wants you to do. But never change, Melissa, please! I love you! I can't believe how intense our lovemaking is! I want this to go on forever like this! The two of us together make one man and one woman."

"And I'm the woman," whispered Melissa girlishly. And she was always, always, the woman.

*****end*****