

Everything Nice

*A Late-Onset
Coming-of-Age Story*

Lannie Rose

Everything Nice

A Late-Onset
Coming-of-Age Story

by Lannie Rose

-- Published by Lulu --

With love to my Misha, who you'll meet in the last chapter
(and the Forward).

First Lulu edition October 1, 2008

ISBN: 978-1-4357-5377-8

**EVERYTHING NICE: A LATE-ONSET COMING-OF-AGE
STORY.**

Copyright © 2008 by Lannie Rose. All rights reserved. No part of this publication can be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author.

Acknowledgements

Everyone whom I acknowledged in my previous two books, please consider yourselves thanked again. You made a huge, positive impact on my life, which I can only hope to repay by paying it forward. Because this is my life story, I'd like to especially thank my parents, who did an incredibly fine job of raising me and my three rascal siblings on shoestring, when they were just kids themselves. You modeled love, loyalty, and fidelity for me with your more than fifty years of marriage, and while I may not have emulated it, at least I know what it looks like. Finally, my gratitude to my Misha: my friend, lover, supporter, and editor. When it comes to you, words fail me ... maybe I'll be able to write more about you in my next book.

I have been to the dungeons

I have been to the dungeons,
Where corpulent, bare-breasted women are shackled to crosses,
And flogged with whips of leather, horsehair, rope.
The spanking gloves are heavy, the welts are real,
And the screams mix pain and ecstasy.
(My screams, but not my ecstasy.)
Oh, I have been to the dungeons.

I have been to the sex clubs,
Where hollow-eyed men dressed only in towels,
Wander through the rooms, begging for release.
They watch with hunger as others get it on,
And stroke themselves in envious contemplation.
(Contemplation of me!)
Oh, I have been to the sex clubs.

I have been to the gay bars,
Where bare-chested men gyrate crotch-to-ass,
The pounding house beat drowning out the talk.
Pickups for a night or a quick fuck,
The bathrooms full of blow, and being blown.
(Well, just a taste.)
Oh, I have been to the gay bars.

I have been to the raves,
Where young people, stoked on chemicals,
Shiver and shake to throbbing trance music.
Eyes, wide with ecstasy, follow the lasers and whirling light sticks,
And couples, on mats, languorously stroke each other's bodies.
(Please stroke me.)
Oh, I have been to the raves.

I have been to drag clubs,
Where sultry, big-haired vixens ply their craft,
Lip-syncing disco hits and joking lewd.
Cross-dressers with a pass to flirt and dance,
Transsexuals longing to be normal for a night.
(Oh, to be normal.)
Oh, I have been to the drag clubs.

I have been to the furrie cons,
Where life-size cartoon animals frolic,
A slender lizard darts from place to place.
Klingons carouse (they must be lost in space),
And scritchng kitty brings pleasure to us both.
(Here, kitty, kitty!)
Oh, I have been to the furrie cons.

I have been to the goth clubs,
Where heavy-booted dancers all in black,
Stomp out their furious, eccentric dance.
While Satanic music everlasting rumbles,
Perhaps a dungeon in the back, dripping with fire and wax.
(I wore black, too.)
Oh, I have been to the goth clubs.

I have been to the swingers parties,
Where small talk kills the hours before the orgy,
As the participants gather with the quiet confidence
Of knowing they will all get some tonight.
Then, on the mattress, couplings of all kinds.
(And triplings, and more, as I recall.)
Oh, I have been to the swingers parties.

I have been to the women's clubs,
Where leather- and denim-clad dykes shoot pool,
Female couples bop or sway in sweet embrace.
Dancers on platforms in bikinis,
A lone, puzzled dude wonders why he cannot score.
(Why don't you hit on me, you dunce?)
Oh, I have been to the women's clubs.

Oh, many things I've seen, and places, been,
Not just to watch, but to participate.
Yet without one to love, it's just a game,
And therefore, on I search to find my mate.



1955 - Baby Eddy



1983 - A young bachelor in his 20s



1995 - Crossdresser

1999 - You won't be seeing him much longer



2001 - Lannie buys a Mustang



2003 - Santa's Little Helper



2005 - Lannie Rose

Lannie's Everything Nice Life

Contents

Forward	1
Introduction	3
Prologue	5
The Happiest Place on Earth	7
Coast to Coast	9
Go	18
Marine	24
Transitions	29
Hearts	34
Butterfly Effect	49
LTRs	57
Suite: Judy Blue Eyes	59
Marriage	70
Divorce	79
“Yes, ma’am”	86
The Love of My Life	98
R-Drive	104
Busted	108
An Independent Businesswoman	113
Cross-Dressing	121
A Whole New World	123
Deflowered	128
Lannie Rose	136
Trannie Shack	143
Pride	148
Treat Her Like a Lady	161
We’re Trannies!	167
Leather ‘n’ Lace	177
Getting Clocked	188
First Date	192

A New Woman 197

- September 2001 199
- Over the Rainbow 214
- Family Reunions 218
 - Admirer 222
 - Sex Change 232
- Falling Into the Pit 240
- How I Popped My Cherry 261
- Climbing Out of the Pit 273

Dating 291

- Hello, Dali! 293
- Disclosure 310
 - Bad Sex 325
 - Coupling 331
- Sexual Hubris 346
- Something Fishy 357
- Return to craigslist 367
 - Munch 374
- Wham, Bam, Thank You Ma'am, Eh? 395
- Two Dates 413

More Family Reunions 423

- Vaya Con Dios 425
- The Big "C" 438
- A Tale of Two Soldiers 448
 - Truce 453
- Lannie Takes Manhattan 458
- Happily Ever After 478
- Epilogue — Sugar and Spice 481

Everything Nice

Forward

I met Lannie at a dinner party – you know, one of those interminable bore-fests that makes you glad they are having it at a restaurant with a full bar. It was a seat-yourself affair; and I didn't know anyone. Lannie looked cute and affable, so I figured: *nande kuso*. It turned out to be a fortuitous decision; Lannie was a lot of fun and, as it transpired, was an author. I don't write, myself – I can't; I'm just not good at it. My talents lie in another direction.

I am an editor; I do not create, I destroy. I like to think of myself as a sort of literary Shiva – with less dancing. (I can't dance, either. Well, maybe the gavotte – thank you, Mr. Fell.) Normally, as an editor, I feel an almost subconscious sense of irritation when seated next to a writer, or worse – an author. But, oddly, I found Lannie's company delightful. She discovered I was an editor and co-opted a tacit agreement from me to edit her next book – this volume, in fact. (Her sex change memoir, *LANNIE! My Journey from Man to Woman*, had *almost* just hit the bookshelves, a state that persists to this day.)

Besides having complementary literary skills, that night we also discovered a common sharp wit and a certain chemical attraction. I asked Lannie out to dinner, and she said yes. Boy meets girl, blah blah blah... Eventually, we grew to love each other. (When you get to be a certain age, you need to be careful not to *fall* in love—you could break a hip or something.) I did wind up editing this book, and even contributing this Forward.

I wanted to write this Forward simply to tell you this: I've read every word of *Everything Nice*, many of them more than once. I picked at every punctuation mark and made copious continuity charts—basically, the tedium that is the editor's lot in life. But, hav-

Everything Nice

ing done so, I could (and no doubt will) read it all over again, because *Everything Nice* is like spending time with a wonderful friend.

So here I am, and here you are. Spend a little time with my wonderful Lannie. You'll be glad you did.

Misha Ledebur
July 2008

Introduction

My so-called sex change was a journey of self-discovery and growth that started with the glimmer of a realization that my gender might be different than that of almost all the other boys and girls and later men and women I'd ever met. I'd barely passed the first milepost on my journey when I had my sex change surgery — I had miles left to go. My progress can be charted in my books. I wrote the first one, *How To Change Your Sex: A Lighthearted Look at the Hardest Thing You'll Ever Do*, while I was recuperating from my surgery. It's not about me much at all; it's about the gender transition process in general. By my second book, *LANNIE! My Journey from Man to Woman*, I felt enough self-worth that I could tell my personal story — but only the story of Lannie, not of Eddy. My male life still seemed worthless, uninteresting, and somewhat embarrassing. But now, with *Everything Nice*, I've come to appreciate the value of my pre-Lannie life, and I'm ready to share it with you.

Frankly, I still find a lot of my Eddy life to be pretty dull. I was a workaholic and an alcoholic (two good ways to hide from my gender issues), but you won't find much about that in the present book. It's much too boring! What you will find here is my sex life: my relationships and my sadly unimpressive experience between the sheets. I feel that these aspects of my life are important to document because so few novels and memoirs describe them as they really are — not in clinical sterility or pornographic lucidity, but in journalistic veracity. Besides, how many authors can tell you about what sex is like for a man, as well as for a woman? So be forewarned: if you are uncomfortable reading sexually explicit material, this may not be the book for you. For those who stay with me, I hope you find that your own sex life is, by comparison, great! If not, at least you'll know you aren't alone.

A couple of more housekeeping items before we get on with the show. I've tried my best to tell my story honestly and openly — no composite characters here, no made-up scenes. However, many of the names have been changed to provide participants with plausible deniability. (Sorry, family, you're stuck with me; it's in the public record.)

Everything Nice

Finally, please do not call my surgeon, Dr. Cholon, about sex change surgery. As I write this, she is semi-retired and spending her time taking care of her two darling kids. Her colleague Dr. Peter Davis, on the other hand, would love to hear from you.

Thank you, dear readers, for spending this time with me.

Lannie Rose
July 2008

Prologue

I was in Backstreet Atlanta, the only gay dance club for hundreds of miles around, so I was told. But the guys didn't look gay to me. I lived in San Francisco. (Actually San Jose, 40 miles to the south, but I partied in San Francisco.) I thought I knew gay. Sure, these guys were cute, but they didn't wear stylish clothes, or swish, or talk with a gay lisp. *Are they really gay?* I wondered.

On the other hand, none of them were giving me a second glance in my too-short mini-skirt, too-high spike heels, and platinum white bob wig. At 6 foot tall in my stocking feet — though only a skeletal 130 pounds — I was hard to miss. *Yes, they must be gay*, I thought. (Later, a local girl pointed out that looking gay in the Deep South could be downright unhealthy.)

I was dancing solo on a little platform atop a set of stairs at the back of the room. From my high perch, I overlooked the wriggling throng on the big dance floor. At the stroke of midnight, the

Everything Nice

pounding house music got several decibels louder, the flashing laser lights got brighter and more frenetic, and the packed dance floor became even more crowded. Some of this was real, I knew, and some was the effect of the Ecstasy (the drug, not the emotion) rushing in my head. A roar rose from the mass of dancers. Hands flew into the air and shirts disappeared. As I looked down on the mass of naked, buff, sweaty, grinding bodies, I said out loud, "Now this is GAY!" It was like a scene at Babylon, the mythical Cincinnati nightclub in Showtime TV's *Queer as Folk*.

I ran off to find my transsexual girlfriend Jamie Faye Fenton. She was frozen in motion on the stairs, staring with wide, sparkling eyes at the magic laser lights. I took her hand and waded with her into the middle of the dance floor, elbowing and wiggling our way through the sweaty male bodies. The guys didn't mind. They probably took us for a couple of not-very-good-looking drag queens.

As I shook and shimmied in the center of the bacchanallian mob scene, I thought about my mother. Thank God she couldn't see me now! Wasn't this scene her worst nightmare come true? Would any mother want this for her son? But then, I had stopped being her son nine months earlier. I supposed a mother wouldn't want this for a daughter, either. Well, maybe a really cool, understanding, supportive mother would. But those words did not describe my mother.

The Happiest Place on Earth

Coast to Coast

They bought a little house in Saddlebrook, New Jersey: my parents, a handsome Air Force veteran and a pretty secretary, a couple of happy kids in their mid-twenties. Bob started a television repair business using the knowledge he had acquired as a radioman in the Air Force. Dolores — Dee, everyone called her — was a proper 1950s homemaker.

In less than a year, they were blessed by the arrival of their first child. Bob was delighted to see that it was a boy, and he named him Robert Richard after himself and his own father.

Two years later, following their family plan, they tried for a girl. They got me, and thought they had failed. The doctor took one look at my little penis and declared, “It’s a boy!” And so I would be — for the time being, anyway. My parents named me Edward, after my uncle Teddy.

Everything Nice

Two years later, Mary came along, and Bob and Dee's little family was complete: two boys and a girl. Or, more accurately, two girls and a boy — but that would not be known until many years later.

* * *

We three kids were the combative type. Bobby exhibited classic oldest child behavior, jealous of the competition from the new child, and therefore always bullying me. Nothing too severe, actually, but I soon learned to scream and wail the minute he touched me. My parents would punish him, but it didn't deter him one bit. Maybe it would have helped the situation — and my personal growth — if, at some point, my folks had realized punishment was futile and they had forced me to deal with the problem myself. But they were only trying to protect me. After all, they were only kids themselves.

I suppose I exhibited classic middle-child behavior. Sometimes I would join with Bobby to gang up on poor little Mary, while other times I would enlist her as an ally. My parents quickly established that boys were not allowed to hit girls, so the harassment of our sister was mainly verbal, but we could get away with some mean pinching and tickling from time to time. By “get away with it,” I mean we would be punished, but not ultra-mega-punished like we would be if we hit her. The lighter punishments ran to chores, or going to bed early, or no two tiny pieces of candy after dinner, but not the rare and dreaded spanking with the belt.

This pattern of sibling combat lasted until Bobby went into the army, which he did prior to graduating from high school due to some rather serious mischief he'd gotten into.

* * *

When I was a tyke in New Jersey, we would regularly visit an extended family consisting of a Grandma, a Nanny (my maternal grandmother), and crowd of aunts, uncles, and cousins. My paternal Grandma's house was my favorite, because she saved old wind-up clocks for me. When we visited, I would sit on the kitchen floor for hours taking apart the clocks. I could never put them back together, of course, but I loved seeing all the little springs and gears. The other relatives' houses were excruciatingly boring. I dreaded moping around being “seen but not heard” while the adults visited.

When I stayed overnight with my Aunt Peggy, she would darken her apartment and take me to the window. “Do you see that light going around and round, way off in the distance?” she would ask me, pointing to a slowly flashing white dot. “That’s the light on the top of the Empire State Building.”

I got to see the Empire State Building up close when my dad drove us into Manhattan. I stood on the sidewalk and looked up at the towering edifice. It seemed very tall, but perhaps that was just because I was very small. We were in Manhattan to see my Aunt Ellen, who was the Easter Bunny that year at Macy’s. Another time when Aunt Ellen was riding in the car with us, she leaned on the door handle and the door swung open, dumping her out on the pavement. Fortunately the car was moving very slowly, and she wasn’t hurt.

I have home movies of Christmases and birthday parties where I was surrounded by tons of aunts and uncles and cousins. I have only the dimmest memories of any of it, or any of them.

When I was three, everything changed. We packed all of our worldly goods into a U-Haul trailer which was attached with a rented hitch to the bumper of our ’56 Chevy. With Mom in the passenger seat and us kids in the back, Dad proceeded to drive us all the way across the country. I never saw any of my relatives again. We never had big Christmases and birthday parties again. In the California home movies, there are just the five of us; six, when Michael came along.

Bob, me, and Mary had made orderly entrances into the world two years apart, but Michael made his appearance a sloppy six years later. He was a surprise, a result of birth control methods that were acceptable to my mother’s Catholic faith.

To accommodate Michael, my dad built a large, open den onto the back of our little suburban house in the San Fernando Valley, doing most of the work himself. My brother and I moved into the den, sleeping on day-beds and keeping our clothes in the laundry room. Our toys were piled in the corner and shoved under the daybeds. Mary got our old bedroom, and Mary’s room went to the baby. That was the end of any privacy in my young life.

Well, that’s not completely true. I found the privacy I needed by retreating inside my head. I was a great reader. The library became my second home.

Everything Nice

Our abode on Colbath Avenue in Panorama City was four houses from the end of the block. If you walked to the corner and crossed the street, you were at St. Genevieve Catholic High School, adjacent to St. Genevieve Grammar School and the St. Genevieve Catholic church. These institutions were caretakers of my brain and my soul for 12 years.

I found myself at St. Genevieve under the care of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Newark because my mother was a devout Catholic, coming from a large Catholic family. My father's family practiced Christian Science, but my dad identified simply as Protestant, and in fact did not get involved in religion in any way whatsoever. Part of the deal when he married my mother was that she would be allowed to raise the children in the Catholic faith, and so it was off to St. Genevieve for the four of us. Another part of the deal, I would later learn, was that my mother would be a stay-at-home mom.

I accepted the Catholic religion without questioning, just as I accepted the gender I was assigned. I liked the ceremony and certainty of Catholicism. I was such a goody-good, the sin and hell part never bothered me, because I knew I was going to heaven. I went to church every single morning. I was even an altar boy. (Now, I'm an altered boy.) My mother told me I could be anything I wanted when I grew up. I decided I would be the first American pope, and she supported my unlikely ambition.

My favorite thing in the whole world wasn't the Catholic church however, but rather our annual pilgrimage to Disneyland, 50 miles south of us in Anaheim. Disneyland and I were practically twins: Mickey Mouse cut the ribbon for the park's grand opening only three months after I was born. Every summer the trip to "the happiest place on earth" would be planned, and I looked forward to it impatiently for weeks.

When D-day finally arrived, we would pile into the car early in the morning so we could be at the gates of Disneyland when the park opened. On the long, long, one hour drive, we kids would compete to be the first one to spot the tip of the Matterhorn in the distance — which was quite a distance, because in those days, there wasn't much development for miles around Disneyland.

Once inside the park, we would carefully allocate the precious D and E tickets that gave us access to the most popular rides like The Submarine Voyage and the Jungle Cruise. At the end of the day,

we'd squander as many of the crummy A and B tickets as we could with trudges through the Sleeping Beauty Castle and boring excursions down Main Street in the double-decker bus. (One of my dad's dresser drawers always held a small cache of leftover ticket books, stripped bare of all but A and B tickets.) In 1966, the The Deluxe 15 Ticket Book cost a whopping \$4.50 for teenagers, plus the \$1.20 general admission fee.

My favorite attraction, a mere C ticket, was Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, where we would ride in a little buggy crashing merrily through walls and furniture, trees and woodland creatures, and ultimately through the very gates of Hell itself.

My affection for Disney grew even stronger because of my love of toys. For example, one summer I took on a bunch of extra chores — mostly weeding gardens — to earn enough money to buy that wonderful Rube Goldberg-inspired Mousetrap game, which became my very favorite plaything. I loved the way I could set it all up just right so all the pieces interacted in sequence, from cranking the gears to releasing the little metal ball, all the way to causing the diver to do a back-flip into the bucket, releasing the cage to trap the little mouse at the end.

I was so inspired by Mousetrap, I invented an amusement park game that had little gadgets to make the merry-go-round spin, some cars move, and so on. My parents thought it was ingenious (or darling) and sent my sketches off to one of the major toy companies. They wrote back saying that they had tried marketing a similar product, which was a small model of Disneyland, and it had, unfortunately, flopped. In fact, they still had some in inventory, and they would send one to me. I checked the mailbox daily in eager anticipation and a few weeks later a large package arrived. It was a fantastic miniature Disneyland, complete with vacuformed Matterhorn and Sleeping Beauty Castle — the whole deal. I was in heaven playing with it.

* * *

When I was six years old, my parents took the three of us children to get polio vaccinations. I was terribly scared of needles — they hurt so badly! When I was told to get in the car to go for the shots, I began screaming and crying uncontrollably.

Everything Nice

“Stop that crying,” my dad told me. “Be brave like your brother and sister. They’re not crying. Be a man! Mary is a girl, and even she’s not crying.”

“It’s OK, Eddy,” my mom tried to reassure me. “It doesn’t hurt that much, and it will all be over in an instant.”

But I did not stop crying. I was terrified. Finally my dad decided to try another tactic. “If you don’t stop crying,” he warned me, “you won’t get any ice cream afterwards. Only the brave kids get ice cream.”

But I did not stop crying. I made a scene in the car all the way to the school where they were doing the vaccinations, and standing in the long line to get my shot. I screamed hardest of all when the nurse plunged the sharp needle into my flesh. But I survived the ordeal, and after a few minutes, the pain was down to a bearable ache. I was finally able to stop crying.

On the way home, we stopped at a Baskin-Robbins 31 Flavors ice cream store. Bobby got a double scoop of rocky road, and Mary got a double scoop of chocolate. I would have had peppermint, with the crunchy little peppermint candies in it, but instead I got nothing, because I had not been a brave child.

My mom said, “Oh, let him have some ice cream.” But my dad was a man of his word: “No, he doesn’t get any because he wouldn’t stop crying.”

All the way home, I sat glumly in the middle of the back seat, holding my poor aching arm, and watching Bobby and Mary enjoy their ice cream.

* * *

A sharp private detective or psychologist may have uncovered a few early clues that my male gender wasn’t screwed on quite as firmly as it might have been. Perhaps my squeaky high voice, which never really dropped, not even at puberty. Or my lack of an Adam’s apple, which was probably tied in with the high pitch of my voice. Maybe that I had to be taught (taunted, really) into carrying my school books at my side like a boy, instead of clutched to my chest like a girl. But those details may have been insignificant. One that probably meant something more was that, for a short time just before I reached puberty, I made a habit of borrowing my mom’s pantyhose and brassieres from the laundry basket. I would lock myself in the bathroom and try them on, getting a great thrill out of it. When

my pubic hair began coming in, I felt very sad because it meant I couldn't be a girl any more (probably recalling my sister being hairless as well as penis-less when we were bathed together as infants). Perhaps I would have been tempted to cross-dress more if I'd had more privacy.

* * *

I trailed my older brother through St. Genevieve Grammar School, two years behind him. The Sisters were pleasantly surprised to find me a studious, well-behaved child, quite the opposite of Bob. In eighth grade, a teacher (one of the few male instructors we saw in grammar school) sought to discipline my older sibling by saddling him with the nickname "Alice." He hated that.

Bob was not ideal Catholic school material, so he was switched to the public school system for high school. My dad wanted to send me to public school to toughen me up, but my mom talked him out of it. They'd also had a chance to advance me a grade at one point in grammar school, but they decided it would be better for my social development if I stayed with my own age group.

I was a straight-A student and something of a loner. I loved to read and to assemble plastic models of monsters — *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and my favorite, the *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. As I got older, I started building things with wood, and my dad taught me a little bit of electronics. We built a Heathkit tube radio together.

On the first day of high school, I had a terrible shock. We were waiting at our desks in the room where our history class would be taught. Suddenly, the door swung open and in waddled a giant penguin: Sister Mary Grace, my first grade teacher! She had terrorized us with the most severe discipline eight years earlier, and I assumed I'd never see her again. (The discipline really wasn't so tough; I only recall being rapped across the knuckles with a ruler once, and the ruler did not break.) But there she was, in full habit, all the way up to the familiar white wimple framing her stern visage. As the high school years wore on, Sister Mary Grace proved to be a delightful woman and even became something of a friend. She discarded the wimple as soon as the Vatican allowed it. Then, in my junior year, she renounced the sisterhood and married Ruben, one of the school's religion teachers.

I blossomed socially in high school. With the "bad" kids from grammar school weeded out from the mix and dispatched to public

Everything Nice

schools, I found the classroom to be awfully boring. So I became the class cut-up — in a braniac sort of way. I found kindred souls in two kids from Canoga Park, Michael Palladino and John Wade. We became the three musketeers. Michael was a talented classical guitar player and John was a history buff. He knew everything there was to know about ancient Rome, and the civil war, too. He began to fashion a suit of chain-mail by cutting rings from springs he got at the hardware store. Eventually he finished the cap, and kept it in his bedroom on a bust of Julius Caesar.

John told me that when a Roman nobleman wanted to end his life, he would choose one of two methods. The first was the well-known falling-on-his-sword routine. The other technique was to throw a big feast and invite everyone. The host would lay down in a warm bath, cut his wrists, and slowly bleed to death while the assembled crowd celebrated his life and bid him goodbye. This macabre, yet peaceful image stuck with me.

With some more friends, we formed a rock'n'roll band. Michael Palladino played guitar, though he never really got the hang of rocking. Eddie Barber played bass and Tim Robinson, a kid a year older than us, played drums. Tim was an excellent jazz drummer; he had studied under the fellow who played drums on the West Side Story soundtrack. I was on keyboards, though I had no discernable talent whatsoever. We were a very bad band. We got a little better when I kicked Michael out and we brought in a ringer on guitar, but we were still pretty lame.

The band did get two paying gigs. One was in my sophomore year, and it was to play a party at my brother's friend's house. A senior party! With girls and drinking! It was my first opportunity to do some serious imbibing, and that I did. Somebody — maybe it was my brother, I'm not really sure — bought me my own pint of Southern Comfort. I drank the whole thing. I would have died that night choking on my own vomit if a Good Samaritan hadn't kicked me over onto my stomach.

I had a terrible hangover the next day, of course. My parents were quite sympathetic. They did *not* give me a lecture about the dangers of alcohol, even though at least one of my grandfathers and a few of my uncles had drinking problems.

In high school, I noticed that my friends were getting girlfriends, but I was not. I used to tease Michael Palladino that I was

stealing his semi-girl Patti, but there was nothing to it, actually. I just enjoyed teasing him. Michael turned out to be a great womanizer as time went on. The third member of our three-musketeers clique, John, was also a train buff, and he wound up spending his life working on the Southern Pacific Railroad. He got two girls pregnant before I finished college.

As for me, the extent of my sex life in high school was this: One time I took one girl to dinner followed by a dance in the high school auditorium. My only other date was for grad night at Disneyland. Our car was packed and the girls were sitting on the boys' laps. In the pheromone-heavy darkness of that back seat, I was bold enough to slide my hands up and feel my date's boobs, over her clothes of course. Talk about the happiest place on earth! Tim, the drummer, would later marry that girl. I never told Tim about grad night, and I doubt that she did, either.

A short time after the grad night incident, I was my high school class valedictorian. Then I went off to college.

Go

The flat, white stone was balanced on the nail of my index finger, held in place by my third finger. It hovered over the 19-by-19 matrix of the Go board. Everywhere I looked, cunningly-laid traps awaited an errant placement — a Ko fight here, a Sh'cho ladder there, a Seki standoff over in this corner. But they didn't have me particularly worried. It was the traps I didn't see that would surely be my downfall.

If I could spot an opportunity to hurt my enemy — to acquire some of his territory, and claim his black stones — I would gladly take it. But Drew had left no sitting ducks on the field of combat. I would use my move to shore up the weak defenses of one of my pathetic holdings. Here was a spot that might protect and extend a fiefdom that was still in my possession in a corner of the board. I snapped my stone down on the polished wood surface with a satisfying click, placing it slightly offset from the intersection of the grid to

make it more difficult for my opponent to see the patterns. (I'm sure my obfuscation hurt me more than it hurt him.)

I didn't stand a chance. My opponent, Drew, was three years older than I was, and a mathematical genius. Why a senior chose to spend his summer with a couple of freshman, I couldn't say, but we made a merry trio: Drew, a Filipino classmate named Evan, and myself, three footloose college kids out for some fun, and to make a little money in Reno before classes started up again in September.

Drew pried his attention away from his girlfriend, Joni, for a moment to study the board. Joni was behind Drew, her arms around his neck, whispering in his ear and making him smile as we played. Joni's friend, Celeste, bounced around the room and teased me mercilessly. I figured Celeste felt free to flirt with me because she knew I would never do anything — she was Evan's girl. I was a little bit aroused by her flirting, but mostly annoyed. Probably all the more annoyed *because* I was aroused.

While Drew studied the board, I got up off the floor and announced, "I'm getting something to eat. Does anyone want anything?"

"I'll have another beer," Drew grunted.

"Me, too!" chirped Celeste. Joni wouldn't want anything because she barely drank and, when she did, she would just sip off Drew's.

I popped the cap off a chocolatey-dark, room-temperature Guinness Stout for Drew and got a Miller out of the fridge for Joni. After handing them off, I looked around the little kitchen of our apartment for something to eat. I was not surprised to see we had very little and decided it would be peanut butter and jelly again. None of the knives were clean, so I pried one off the counter and used it to slather two slices of bread. Living like pigs was certainly not my style, but I was damned if I was going to be housemaid for my roommates. When in Rome, do as the Romans. And secretly, it felt somewhat liberating to throw the rule book out the window for one wild summer.

I took my sandwich and sat back down on the carpet. Drew and Joni were nuzzling each other, so I asked, "Where'd you move?" Drew pointed to a black stone that was bad news for the white team.

Everything Nice

I tried to concentrate on the board, to see if I could salvage at least a little dignity out of my doomed position, but the beer was making it hard to focus on the stones. Celeste leaned over and swirled a finger in my hair, asking coquettishly, “Are you winning?”

“No, I’m losing!” I assured her. Try as I might to focus on the board, out of the corner of my eye I could not avoid seeing a flounce of Celeste’s blonde hair and the curve of her perky, 16-year-old breasts. Or feel her bare legs brush my shoulder. I was finding it very hard to concentrate!

“Come on, I know you can beat him!” she teased, knowing perfectly well that I had never come within a stone’s throw of beating Drew since we’d taken up the game six weeks earlier. Not even when he spotted me an absurdly large seven-stone advantage. I wasn’t kidding about Drew being a mathematical genius; he would be entering Cal Tech’s math doctoral program in the fall. The intricate patterns of the Go board were child’s play for him. Any attack I might prepare, he saw coming from miles away. And when he attacked, my defenses were useless.

I twisted my head and looked up into Celeste’s face, mostly because I just wanted to see her smiling at me with those pouty lips and beautiful blue eyes. Even if she was laughing at me.

“Isn’t Evan going to be here soon?” I asked, implying that she shouldn’t be flirting with me. “Isn’t his shift over at twelve?” Evan washed dishes at one of the casinos on Virginia Street. He was part of an all-Filipino crew. I bussed tables at the restaurant in another casino. Since this was my first time, I was on the graveyard shift, but I had the night off. The only reason I had allowed myself to get so drunk, and for Celeste to flirt with me outrageously all evening, was because I knew Evan would be back shortly after midnight. I didn’t need to worry about fending off Celeste’s advances at the end of the evening.

“Yeah!” she answered. She blew in my ear, laughed, and danced across the room to change the music.

The game continued through its slow, painful end-phase, Drew gradually invading and claiming most of the territory I thought I might have secured. The board turned blacker and blacker. Finally, there was no breathing room left anywhere, and the game was over. We didn’t need to count; the predominance of black stones was obvious even through our fuzzy beer goggles.

“You won again, my master!” I conceded, and fell back onto the carpet to rest my aching back.

Drew snickered and said, “You’ll get there, don’t worry.” But he was clearly wrong. His skills, having started at a much higher level than mine or Evan’s, was growing much faster than ours as well.

Drew and Joni disappeared behind his bedroom door. I noticed that it was 1:30 a.m. but I didn’t notice that Evan had not shown up. I had forgotten all about my Filipino friend.

Celeste took my hand and raised me off the floor. Without a word, she led me to the other bedroom. Without a word, I let her. My defenses were useless.

In my drunken state, I was beyond surprise. I merely observed as the sexy little vixen unbuttoned my shirt and pulled it off me. She unbuckled my belt, unzipped my trousers, and let them drop to my ankles. She gave me a little shove and I fell back onto the rumpled sheets of the perpetually unmade bed.

The next thing I noticed, I was entirely naked, lying in the center of the mattress. Celeste was totally nude as well, on her knees straddling my middle, looking down at me. Her golden hair formed a corona around her face and brushed her shoulders. I couldn’t believe the beauty of her tight little barely-pubescent body.

The next thing I knew, the room was bright and my head hurt like a mother-fucker. *Where was I?* Oh, yes, the apartment, Reno. Oh, yes — uh-oh! — Celeste lying under the sheet beside me. So that was that? *I wasn’t a virgin any more*, I supposed.

Celeste’s breathing snuffled lightly and a little bit of drool was visible at one corner of her mouth, but she was still a gorgeous creature. Nevertheless, my head was pounding and I felt nauseous. She held no interest for me at that moment.

Slowly, oh, so slowly, (not out of courtesy, but only to pamper my aching head.) I eased myself off the mattress. I slipped on my pants and left the bedroom. I considered the bathroom, but I didn’t think I actually needed to vomit, not just yet. So I went into the living room.

Evan was slouched on the room’s lone upholstered chair, in the corner by the door, looking shattered. *Oh, Christ!* I thought.

“Evan ... I was so drunk ... why didn’t you come home?” I burbled.

Everything Nice

“They asked me to work a double shift,” Evan said in a low, hoarse voice. He stared at me. After a moment, he said, “Let’s go for a walk.”

“OK.” I was nervous about what I was in for, but I was ready to take my medicine. I deserved it. I felt badly for Evan.

I slipped on some dirty socks and my loafers, threw a sweater over my head, and followed Evan out into the beautiful Reno morning. The sun was shining and I swear I heard birds chirping. How inappropriate! Why wasn’t it thundering and raining?

We walked in silence, heading into the neighborhood. We took slow, shuffling steps, the way Evan had taught me to “walk like a Filipino.” As we shambled along a chain-link fence corralling a grammar school — vacant, it being Saturday — Evan finally began to talk. He droned in a lifeless monotone.

“When I got home last night, I came into the bedroom. I saw the two of you there, naked on the bed. My heart dropped into my belly, and the stomach acid ate at it.

“My head exploded with anger. The only thought that entered my brain was that I would go into the kitchen, get the butcher knife, and stab you both to death. I really wanted to do it.

“I managed to stop myself, and just froze and stared at you for a minute. My anger turned to hate. Then to hurt, and I began crying. I went into the living room and sat there until you got up. I just sat there. I feel so bad. So hurt. So betrayed.”

I felt horrible, too. I felt like a schnook for doing what I did, and my hangover was murdering me. I wanted nothing more than to go lay down somewhere, get some rest before I had to start my shift in a few hours. But I felt the least I could do was give Evan whatever support I could.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” What else could I say?

We shuffled along some more in silence. Finally Evan spoke again.

“You know what? I don’t blame you. I can’t, really. How could I expect you to resist the temptation?”

“No, no! I shouldn’t have — “

“No, it’s all my own fault. Our relationship simply wasn’t strong. I just wasn’t doing it for her. I guess she was just tired of me. I think I just need to accept it, and find a way to move on.”

“Oh, come on, Evan. It’s not your fault! You’re the victim here!”

“No, it *is* my fault. I have to take responsibility. But that doesn’t mean I don’t hate you! I’m still really, really angry. I’m so angry, I can hardly control myself. But I know that’s just for now. I’ve got to get through it. Maybe we can patch things up. Maybe we can still be friends again, someday.”

“Gosh, Evan, I hope so. You are being so good about this. You are so good! I’ll do anything I can to make it better, I swear I will.”

And I did. Actually, I didn’t do anything special, except to try to be sensitive to Evan’s needs over the next few weeks. Before long, we were back on even footing again.

I don’t know what passed between Evan and Celeste, but they were definitely broken up. Celeste worked hostess at the same restaurant I worked in, but she was on day shift so we only saw each other briefly, if at all. Two weeks after my christening, Celeste moved in with a 40-year-old short-order cook from the restaurant. A few weeks later, the cook began turning yellow. We all had to get tested for jaundice. I hoped Celeste didn’t have any problems.

Drew had a marvelous summer lording it over his two minions and frolicking with his maiden. But nothing in this life is free, and Drew, too, had a price to pay. Soon after the next school year began, Drew got a knock on his dorm-room door. It was Joni, proclaiming her undying love and saying she had decided to move in with him. Finally, someone had clobbered Drew with a sneak attack he hadn’t seen coming.

Marine

“I’m a Marine.”

“You’re a *what?*” How could she be a Marine? She was a petite little blonde thing, pretty and perky. She didn’t read “Marine” to me at all.

“My husband is a Marine, so that makes me one, too. If you marry a Marine, you marry the Corps.”

Husband? Gulp! I certainly wouldn’t have been out on a date with this woman if I knew she was married ... and to a Marine! I envisioned a brute of a fellow pounding me to dust.

“We’re separated. Our divorce should be final next week.” Oh. I guess that made it OK.

We were sitting at a window table in one of the nicest restaurants in Los Gatos, a cute little community in the foothills at the southern end of the Santa Clara Valley, also known as Silicon Valley, south of San Francisco. The upscale eatery was a steak-and-seafood

place called The Charthouse. A fellow named Loren at work had recommended it, but he called it The Slab House, because he said the building used to be a mortuary. Also because their steaks were huge slabs of beef, like the ones that were on each of our plates. I didn't think a little thing like Linda could do much damage to a piece of meat that large, but she surprised me.

It was a blind date. My friends in the apartment next to mine had taken pity on my depressingly single state and set me up with a woman from work.

It was also my first date since college — practically my first date ever, as I'd had exactly one date in college and two in high school — and I was suitably awkward. I should have picked a much more casual restaurant for our first meeting, but I was trying too hard to impress. Actually, though, it was working. Linda was rather chatty at dinner and happy to be in a nicer atmosphere than she was used to.

All through dinner, I let Linda talk and I just listened. She had a lot to get out about her marriage, and the Marines, and her job, and her family, and ... well, a lot. I, on the other hand, didn't have much to say about my dull existence, and I didn't feel much need to say it anyway.

After dinner, as I drove us back toward her apartment, I screwed up my courage and popped the question I had been rehearsing for a week. "So, would you like to come over and see my apartment for bit?" I wanted to say, "... to see my etchings" but it was too corny. Besides, I didn't have any etchings. In fact, I didn't have much of anything in my squalid little apartment. Just the trashy couch, the bed that came with the place, and a beat-up coffee table I had picked up at Frank's U-Save Furniture.

"OK," she said, much to my surprise. I turned the car around and headed in the other direction, toward my place of residence.

I lived in a sprawling, single-story apartment complex positioned directly adjacent to the busy 101 freeway in the northern part of San Jose, the heart of Silicon Valley. My place was one unit removed from the freeway. Fortunately, the building's cinderblock walls had good noise-insulating properties, so if I kept my windows sealed, the roar of the traffic on the freeway was only a dull background drone. (A persistent, unrelenting drone that would eventually come close to driving me crazy.) It was a low-rent apartment, but it was all I could afford with the \$3,000 my parents had staked me

Everything Nice

upon my graduation from U.C. Berkeley. (I'd transferred to Berkeley after my sophomore year at Cal Tech, because that egghead institution was too damn difficult.) Tenants tended to move into the complex, never pay a cent of rent, and squat for the three or four months it took to get them legally evicted. The landlord liked me because I paid my rent.

I never met my neighbors who lived in the unit right next to the freeway, but I knew it was a Mexican guy and a blonde Caucasian woman. Large groups of Mexicans, presumably the guy's family, often hung around the apartment and the street outside the apartment, partying. From time to time in the evening, through the cinderblock wall, I could hear the guy beating the woman.

On the other side were the neighbors who had set me up on the date with Linda. Darlene and Steve were a laid-back, mellow California couple, almost hippies, except they didn't wear long hair and tie-dye. They liked to smoke weed and invited me to join them. I didn't particularly like marijuana, but I craved friendship and so I often accepted their invitations. Steve was wild and struck me as a little bit crazy. I felt closer to Darlene. She played the guitar and sang with a dulcet voice. Sometimes we set up my Wurlitzer electric piano and I would accompany her. We would play simple country western songs, Dolly Parton and Loretta Lynn mostly. One time we even played in the lounge of a local motel for an evening, to an audience of three or four people plus an enthusiastic Steve.

I thought it was awfully nice of them to have set up this date for me. *This is the way it should work*, I thought. *Couples should match up their single friends*.

Now it even looked like I was going to get laid! As far as I was concerned, it would be my first time. I discounted my Reno adventure, other than that it removed the stigma of virginity, because I didn't remember a thing about the actual act. I was pretty excited as we headed toward my apartment.

I parked on the street directly in front of my unit, unlocked the door, and held it open for Linda to enter ahead of me.

"This is it," I announced, sweeping my arm to indicate the living room we were already standing in, the kitchen area that was separated from the living room only by the sofa, and the little hallway that led to the bedroom and bathroom. *How lame this must look!*

I thought, *but maybe it's not so bad compared to the Marine Enlisted Married Quarters.*

"Nice."

"Can I get you a drink?" We'd had cocktails and killed a bottle of wine at dinner, so we were already feeling pretty good. I had been drinking immoderately every single night since I got out of college, so another drink seemed like a really good idea to me.

"Sure." I sat her on the couch and got us a pair of gin-and-tonics.

Handing Linda her drink, I gingerly parked myself next to her on the couch — up real close. We made a little small talk. Soon I put my arm around her and pulled her toward me for a kiss. She responded, and snuggled into my arms. As we kissed, Linda parted her lips and her tongue darted out and brushed my lips. I let my mouth fall open a skosh. Linda's tongue darted out again, entering my mouth and tickling my tongue. *French kissing!* I thought. *How cool is this?*

I experimented with darting my tongue into her mouth, and we played like that for a bit, flicking each others tongues, touching them to our teeth, reaching for the roof of a mouth. I found that I could close my lips around her tongue and suck it more deeply into my mouth. That seemed pretty sexy.

While the French kissing was going on, our hands began exploring each other's bodies. The tiny couch became discomfiting, and Linda suddenly stopped and stood up. "Can we go into the bedroom?" she asked. But it wasn't really a question, because the answer was a foregone conclusion.

We went in to the apartment's only other room, hopped onto the bed, and resumed necking. As our clothes began to come off, Linda asked, "Do you have a condom?"

"Gosh, no," I said. *What would I be doing with a condom?* "Aren't you on the pill?"

"No," she sighed. "I use sponges, but I don't have one with me."

Oh balls, this was serious snag, I thought. "Maybe I could run out to the store."

"No, it's not important. Let's just neck. There's plenty of time for that later."

Everything Nice

So we just necked. She even spent the night, though neither of us ever got completely naked. I drove her back to her apartment in the morning, and said I would call her.

I called that very evening, because I was a call-the-next-day kind of guy. Even if it wasn't really the next day, and sex had not actually transpired. But she wasn't home. The phone just rang. (These were the days before answering machines were widely available.)

The next evening, I called again. Again, she wasn't home. I gave it a rest for a night and tried again the following evening. Linda picked up.

"Hello."

"Hi. This is Eddy. How are you doing?"

"I'm fine. Listen, you've got to stop calling me."

"I'm sorry?"

"Look, I had fun the other night, and you're a really nice guy, but we're not right for each other. You know?"

"Oh, I see." I saw, all right. What did I expect, that a girl would really like me? "Umm, well, thank you for a nice evening, I guess."

"Yeah, it was nice."

"OK. Good-bye."

Click. I never heard from Linda again.

I was always bemused when a guy complained he was "in a dry spell," that he hadn't been laid for a week, or a month, or several months. That was nothing. It would be years before I would be laid again. I was the king of the dry spells. I joked that I didn't go on dates because "no girls asked me," and maybe there was some truth to that statement. Maybe, for some reason, I felt like I should be the one being asked, not the one asking.

Transitions

After I left home, both of my parents underwent significant transitions in their lives. With the kids all grown up and only Michael left in the house, Bob could finally stop working all that overtime and take a little “me” time. He became a biker.

Oh, not a Harley-Davidson, Easy rider, Hell’s Angel type biker. A touring biker. He got himself one of those big Honda touring bikes tricked out with a full fairings, saddlebags — the works. It was like a small car with only two wheels. It even had a driveshaft.

Bob hooked up with a couple of like-minded buddies from work. They would take off on lengthy rides on weekends, often camping somewhere overnight. During the summer they scheduled vacation time together to take even longer trips.

Me, I’d never so much as sat on a motorcycle. Not even one standing still with the engine off. They scared me. You had to lean way over on the turns, and I didn’t understand why the wheels don’t

Everything Nice

slide right out from under. When I rode on the back of somebody's bicycle when I was a kid, I always leaned the wrong way and got yelled at.

Besides, everybody who rides a motorcycle eventually goes down, I thought. It's inevitable.

My dad went down. He was on one of those long weekend rides with his two buddies. They were enjoying a beautiful, sunny summer day riding down a straight stretch of open road in the idyllic countryside — just the conditions my dad loved. Suddenly, a patch of sand covered the asphalt. The wheels went out from under Bob's bike, and he laid it down. His leathers and helmet protected him from "road rash" and a busted skull, but he cracked two ribs. Bob, being Bob, got back up on the bike and road 100 miles home in agonizing pain because he "had no choice."

I happened to be visiting that weekend and was there when he rolled up the driveway. It was the only time I ever saw that man cry — he was truly hurting. He climbed off the bike and asked me if I could hold it. I said, "Yes," but as soon as he let go, I dropped it. Damn, that bike was heavy!

As Bob lay in bed convalescing from his cracked ribs, he lamented to his buddies about how much he missed the freedom of the open road with the wind rushing by. (Right. Encased like a space sausage in leathers and a brain bucket.) His buddies offered to get a fan to blow on him and a handful of bugs to throw in his face.

One of my dad's road trips took him through the San Francisco Bay Area, and he stopped by my little cinderblock apartment next to the freeway for a visit. We sat on the ratty old couch, popped the tops from a couple cans of Coors, and had the only mano-a-mano talk I ever remembered having with him; the last, in fact, I would have for a long time after. I learned some very interesting things.

"Would you tell me about how it was that we moved to California?" I asked.

"It's a long story," he began. "Do you remember the television repair business I had?"

"Of course! I loved playing in your van, the couple times you let me."

"I started that business when I got out of the Air Force. I'd been a radio man so I had some knowledge of electronics. Television was

just becoming popular, so it seemed like a good idea. I got together with a buddy of mine and put it together. We were partners.

“It went pretty well for a few years. But then the business started going bad, and I found out my partner was cheating on me. So I needed to do something.

“That’s terrible!”

“Yeah. I was pretty disappointed. Anyway, just at that time Litton had some people on the East Coast recruiting talent.”

“Litton in southern California, where you worked like forever.”

“Yes. In Woodland Hills in the San Fernando Valley. The aerospace industry was booming — Kennedy wanted to put a man on the moon — and they didn’t have enough manpower in California to staff up. So they sent out recruiting teams. “I went in for an interview and they liked me a lot.”

“I’ll bet they did!”

“They really did. They offered me a position on the spot. I took a few days to think it over and discuss it with your mother. She didn’t want to leave her family; but frankly, getting away from the families was very attractive to me. And neither one of us would miss the snow.”

“We did!”

“You didn’t have to shovel it. Ha! So I accepted the job.”

“I guess you did.”

“Wait, the story’s not over yet. We made all the arrangements to move, put the house up for sale — the whole deal. But then the aerospace industry had a downturn. The fellow from Litton calls me and says, ‘I’m sorry, but the job is gone. We can’t hire you.’”

“My God! That must have been devastating!”

“It was. I was at my wits end. I finally decided we would move anyway. Maybe the job would open up again by the time we got there. Or else I would just look for something else.”

“Holy shit! So you moved your family — you moved us across the country without a job lined up?”

“That’s right. It was scary. When we got to California, I called the fellow at Litton and asked if I could come in and talk with him. He said OK, but he warned me there weren’t any jobs.”

“Crap.”

Everything Nice

“Well, I went in anyway. When I got there, he had lined up three or four managers to see me. I talked to them all and they really liked my background. Finally, one of them said, ‘Isn’t Matt in Guidance and Control looking for a technician?’ So I went over to see Matt, and he gave me the job. You met Matt, didn’t you?”

“I think so. I think we went over to his house one time. Didn’t he help get that old Rambler station wagon for me?”

“That’s right; he did. And all these years, through all the booms and busts in the aerospace industry, Matt always managed to protect me from the layoffs.”

“Wow, what a great boss. What a great story!”

I knew my dad worried about layoffs. When I was growing up, he was always taking night classes in automotive repair, refrigeration, and the like, so he’d have something to fall back on if he got laid off. I guess he had a couple of pretty close calls. He worked lots of overtime to make ends meet; also, I suppose, to build up a nest egg against a possible period of unemployment. I asked him why Mom didn’t work when we were young.

“She wanted to,” he told me. “But I thought it was important for you kids to have your mother at home. We fought about that a lot.”

Oh? I never even knew they fought. I never heard any angry words pass between them — or affectionate ones, either, for that matter. Emotions were not a big part of my upbringing.

The most interesting thing in that conversation was when my dad apologized to me. After we’d talked for a couple of hours and downed several beers, he said, “Eddy, I feel like I owe you an apology.”

“Huh? An apology? Why, Dad?”

“I feel like I let you down.”

“What do you mean? You never let me down.”

“It’s just that I couldn’t reach you. I didn’t know how to be there for you. With your brother, I could play sports, or fix cars, all that kind of thing. But you were different somehow. You weren’t interested in any of that. I didn’t feel I had any way to connect with you.”

“Oh, Dad, don’t feel that way. I don’t. You shared your electronics with me, and helped me build things. I felt you were there for me.” I’m not sure if my words comforted him. I hoped they did.

A little while later, he climbed onto his motorcycle and rode away.

* * *

My mother transitioned, too. She suffered for a year with a terrible case of the shingles on her back. For most of that time she was confined to bed in terrible pain. I never visited her even once during that time, because that's not how we did it in our family. We only received visitors when we were feeling good.

The shingles finally cleared up and, somehow, left my mother a born-again, bible-thumping Christian. I was stunned. After my strict Catholic upbringing, suddenly the Catholics didn't have anything right, according to my mother. Only the Evangelicals did. What's more, religion around our house had consisted only of church on Sundays and Catholic school — we never spoke of God or religion in real life. Now it was “Jesus this” and “Jesus that” in every conversation. And always: “God is good.”

It was OK, though. I supported my mother in her choices and stolidly resisted the urge to debate spiritual positions with her. I was even grateful for her prayers and blessings.

In the meantime, I was getting on with my life, and I could use a little of God's grace.

Hearts

Something brushed my leg and I stiffened. A bug? A mouse? I didn't want to let everybody see me jump like a scared little schoolgirl, but the thought of bugs crawling on me always freaked me out.

I felt the touch on my leg again. This time I could tell what it was. Someone had accidentally kicked me under the table. I glanced around, but no one was looking at me. Everyone seemed to be studying their cards.

The foot was still in contact with my calf. Why didn't they pull it away? They must think I'm a table leg. No, wait, the foot was slowly and deliberately rubbing me. Someone was playing footsie with me!

Was it Cheryl? She was the only female across the table from me, and she was tall enough to easily span the distance. But her boyfriend Shit-head — I mean Bryan — sat right beside her. Surely she wouldn't ...

Leslie was around the side of the table to my left, too far from me, and at the wrong angle. Besides, she was such a shy little thing, I didn't for a moment entertain the idea it might be her. Frank "The Pup," on my immediate left, was also in the wrong position; and he had been spending all his effort for the last few weeks trying to seduce Leslie.

Loren, to my right, might well be fucking with me, I thought. But he seemed to be attempting to shoot the moon at this particular moment, as he had already taken the black lady and several heart tricks. The game held his total concentration.

I glanced back at Cheryl. She, too, was concentrating closely on the fan of cards in her right hand. Too closely, come to think of it, I thought. She usually didn't take the game this seriously. That was it. Cheryl was playing footsie with me! I shot her a smile too small (I hoped) for the others to catch, and she smiled casually at nobody in particular. A small movement of her lips, but her green eyes crinkled and laughed. The tight curls of her straw-colored hair glowed with a golden aura.

Was she just being friendly? Was she teasing me? Perhaps she was bored and simply distracting herself. I didn't know, but I thought I would go along for the ride.

"Your turn!" Loren grunted at me, breaking my reverie.

"Oh, yeah." I hastily tossed a club into the trick. I undercut Loren's club, hoping we could stick him with the trick to ruin his shoot — and hoping the other players had also noticed what Loren was up to.

As Bryan took the trick (one more reason to call him Shit-head), the foot presumably owned by Cheryl disappeared from my calf. But the footsie game was not over yet, for the foot soon returned. I felt it in my crotch! Again, my body stiffened and my eyes opened a little wider. I took a deep breath, forced my body to relax, and dumped the king of hearts into the diamond trick. If anybody noticed my behavior, they probably thought I was reacting to the opportunity to get rid of that liability.

Cheryl's stocking-clad foot fondled me rather intimately throughout the next few tricks and a deal. I wished I had been wearing some thin cotton slacks instead of jeans. I didn't know what was going on, but I was enjoying it.

Everything Nice

Six months prior, Loren had first brought up the idea of forming a hearts club. “It’s a great way to get some guys and girls together,” he told me. “We did this before and it was lots of fun. We’ll meet at a different person’s house each week. They’ll cook dinner for all of us, and then we’ll play hearts.”

Loren had started at Intel a year after me. He already had ten years experience at Fairchild and he was mentoring me in engineering — and in life, too, I suppose. He was the guy who had recommended The Charthouse for my date with the Marine. Loren was a Cal graduate too, so that brought us together right away. When he found out I went to Cal, he had asked me, “How did you like getting tear gassed?”

“Tear gassed?”

“Sure, tear gassed. Everybody got tear gassed at Berkeley.” Loren had been there during the Vietnam war protests of the late 1960s. It was different time when I was there nearly a decade later. “We used to sit in Café Intermezzo,” Loren told me, “and watch the demonstrations. First the hippies would run down Telegraph Avenue being chased by the cops. Then the cops would run by in the other direction, chased by the hippies. After that, we’d start smelling the tear gas. It was very entertaining!”

Loren was an interesting character. He was tall and lanky. His thin (and thinning) shaggy blond hair was parted in the middle; it hung over his ears and brushed his collar in the back. Loren cultivated an intellectual and devil-may-care attitude. An inveterate bachelor, he sat in his cube with his feet up on his desk reading trade magazines and chatting with visitors all day long. Then he toiled late into the night getting his work done, always on schedule, always flawless.

I admired Loren’s self-confidence and worldliness. I immediately signed on to the hearts club because it would give me the chance to spend more time with him. “It sounds like a good idea,” I told him. “Who else do you have in mind to invite?”

“The Pup,” he said without delay. Frank was a kid fresh out of college whose youthful enthusiasm had quickly earned him the soubriquet of “The Pup.” He was also as horny as a puppy dog, always snuffling his little wet nose around the women. Frank’s habit was to introduce himself as being from Chicago, but the truth was that he came from De Kalb, a little corn town an hour west of the big city.

If Loren was my engineering mentor, I was Frank's, even though I was only a couple of years older than him. He was a smart kid and I was happy to take him under my wing. He was outgoing and happy, and I hoped some of that would rub off on me. Maybe he could be my mentor in social skills, especially when it came to girls.

I loved to watch The Pup at parties. He would select his prey for the evening and focus all of his attention, laser-like, on her. He fawned on her, clowning around for her, served her. Let her know that he wanted her. No woman could resist such flattery (though Leslie in the hearts club was holding out pretty well). But Frank was kind of a bastard; he left a string of broken hearts in his wake. It was all about the hunt for him. The hunt, and bragging about it to the guys afterwards. We never acted impressed, and that frustrated The Pup more than anything. I hoped to learn the lovin' 'em part from Frank, but I didn't plan to emulate the leavin' 'em part.

"Yeah, The Pup," I agreed with Loren, "but what about women?"

"Hmmm," Loren pondered. "Let's invite Shit-head. His girlfriend can bring some of her friends." Loren was a genius. And so the hearts club was born.

Shit-head, my technician who earned his nickname by messing up every assignment I gave him, came to the game now and then, but his girlfriend Cheryl was a regular. She brought in Leslie, an innocent young dental technician with a fresh-faced cuteness and a bit of baby fat. Incongruously, Leslie's job was to assist at bloody root canal surgeries daily.

The Pup tried to enlist Big-Titted Sharon ("Big Tall Sharon" to her face), a foxy layout designer from work, into the hearts club but he couldn't talk her into it. He couldn't talk Sharon into anything, try as he might. Sharon was his unreachable star. (In more ways than one: Sharon was 6 feet tall and The Pup was at least two inches shorter.) He did, however, get Miss Piggy to join us every now and then. Miss Piggy was a plump little cosmetics saleswoman that lived in The Pup's condo complex.

The hearts club was a great success. Over a period of about six months, the temperature kept rising at our weekly soirées. More wine and beer was being consumed, and the conversation was friskier. In fact, two weeks prior to this night, some of us had gone for a quick skinny-dip in the pool at Loren's apartment in Los Gatos.

Everything Nice

I also knew The Pup had bedded Miss Piggy, and I wondered if he may have bagged Cheryl as well.

Tonight had been Cheryl's turn to host. She'd fed us a delicious dinner of roast chicken and rice and the aroma of home cooking, wine, and beer permeated the little apartment. Cheryl's toddler was asleep in the back bedroom and hadn't made a peep all night. We'd eaten buffet-style, perched on the sofa and chairs in the living room of the little apartment in Sunnyvale, not far from my place. After piling the dishes into the kitchen sink, we'd crowded six chairs around the little dining table and dealt out the cards.

Cheryl continued to footsie me for a few deals. Then I guess she grew bored with that little game and let me be. I finished out the card game feeling light-headed with the pleasure the unexpected under-the-table treat.

We were done playing around 9:30. It didn't take long to say our good-byes and gather our jackets and sweaters, which we didn't bother pulling on because the summer evening was still warm. As we moved en masse toward the front door, Cheryl leaned over from behind me and whispered in my ear, "Stay for minute, would you please?" I stealthily maneuvered my way to the back of the pack and let everybody else find their way out the door before me. Cheryl swung the door closed behind Bryan, with only the two of us still on the good side of it.

We smiled at each other, standing with an arm's length of separation between us.

"Yes?" I inquired.

Cheryl stepped across the gap separating us, went just slightly up on her tip-toes to match my height, and kissed me on the lips. I lifted my arms to encircle her body, but she stepped back and said, "Wait," gesturing toward the door and the departing guests. We stood there quietly for minute, listening to the cars starting up and roaring off down the street. My heart was pounding in my throat.

When the fourth car had left, Cheryl said, "Follow me." Turning her head to keep our eyes locked, she led me around the corner and into her bedroom. It was a small room, barely large enough to accommodate a queen-size bed and a dresser bureau with a large oval mirror over it. The bed had a small, leather-padded headboard and embroidered white spread.

"What's going on?" I asked Cheryl.

“I like you,” she said, coming closer to me and looking deep into my eyes.

“What about Bryan?”

“Don’t worry about him. We’re not really getting along. We’re going to break up.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Shhh shhh shhh” she shushed me. She wrapped her arms around me and kissed me firmly, warmly. This time she allowed me to put my arms around her. I hugged her, and she felt soft and cuddly. She arched her back and relaxed a little, becoming smaller in my arms, more vulnerable. We kissed for a few minutes like that, chastely, lips closed.

Finally, Cheryl pulled her head back and looked deep into my baby blues with her laughing green eyes. A flushed, passionate look flooded her face. She disentangled herself from my arms and took a step backwards. She slipped her feet out of her sandals and dropped onto the bed. Stretching out on her side, she motioned me to join her. I gladly did.

We necked for a little bit. I ran my hands over Cheryl’s body and I felt lucky to be the recipient of her bounty. The curve of her waist and hip felt so nice. Her legs, in nylons, felt smooth and enticing.

Cheryl began unbuttoning my shirt and I thought, *This is it; I’m really getting laid!* She pulled the shirt off my shoulders, down my arms, and tossed it aside. Then she undid my belt and snapped open the button on my jeans. She pulled down the zipper and said, “Stand up a second.” I slid to the foot of the bed and stood up on the floor. Cheryl stood up too. She pushed down my pants and my tighty-whites, and had me step out of them. I was erect — which seemed appropriate at that moment. Without ceremony, Cheryl reached down with arms crossed to opposite sides and grabbed the hem of her dress. In one smooth motion, she lifted it up and over her head.

She was sight in her white brassiere and pantyhose. A sight I’d rarely enjoyed; a sight I’d desired so fervently for so long. I can’t describe the joy that was bursting my heart. The breathtaking vision did not last long. Cheryl reached behind her back, unsnapped her bra, leaned forward, and shrugged out of it. The bra was discarded onto the growing pile of clothes on the floor. Then she seized the top of her pantyhose and wiggled out of them. Oh so matter-of-factly,

Everything Nice

she walked — stark naked — around to the side of the bed and pulled back the bedding, forming an inviting triangle of pale rose-colored sheets. She lay down on the bed, sticking her feet between the sheets, and indicated that I should join her. “Come on!” she encouraged me.

I jumped into bed beside her with great eagerness. The pent-up sexual energies of my gangly 23-year-old body were trembling to be released. We resumed necking as before, but now the contact was flesh-to-flesh. Cheryl’s freckle-bespattered, pale white skin felt cool and smooth to my touch — but burning hot as well. I pressed my body against hers, as much of our lengths matching up as could be. I rubbed her back and dared to slide my hand lower, caressing her perfect derriere.

Cheryl rolled onto her back, and I had the opportunity to caress her front. I stroked her soft belly and wide, womanly thighs. I worked my way up to her breasts. Breasts! How breasts drove me wild! When I was a young teenager, I hadn’t even been sure if breasts were an actual feature of the female anatomy or just a decorative component of their attire. That’s how innocent we were in those days. Nowadays, breasts are everywhere you look in the media and advertising, but not back then. One of my friends had laughed at me and assured me breasts were real, but I don’t think he was certain himself — even though he said he had found one of his dad’s Playboy magazines. I had a job where I carried the afternoon newspaper through the retail district and sold them to a regular route of salespeople. When I went through the Lane Bryant store, I tried to surreptitiously get a peek through the gap at the edge of the dressing room curtains, but the best I ever saw were glimpses of hefty white brassieres. I finally learned the truth about breasts when I was a few years older and went to a strip club that allowed minors because they didn’t serve alcohol. The truth was: breasts were real. And wonderful.

Cheryl’s breasts were very different from the small, pert, adolescent bon-bons of Celeste, the girl who took my virginity in Reno. Cheryl’s were large and round, with big areolas and nipples. I timidly stroked Cheryl’s sides and ribcage, her collar bone, and even between her breasts before I indulged my yearning to grasp the objects of my desire. Finally I moved my two hands up both of Cheryl’s sides, up beside her bosom, and then moved them toward each other, over

and onto the breasts. Oh my God, they felt better than I had ever fantasized! I fondled and squeezed, feeling my own wildly thumping heart grow two sizes in my chest.

Cheryl said, “Wait a minute...” and rolled over toward the nightstand. She opened a drawer and got out a little foil packet which she ripped open. It was a condom, of course. She slipped it onto the head of my erect penis and unrolled it expertly down the shaft. Then she lay back and pulled me over so I was propped up on my arms directly over her body. Her hands disappeared from view, and I felt her guiding my erect penis toward a particular soft spot amongst the blonde curls of her pubic region. I pushed, and I heard her suck in a sharp breath as I penetrated her vagina. Her hands came away and she wrapped her arms around my body, guiding me into an in-and-out motion. This I did, slowly at first, then faster and faster. Cheryl spread her legs so I could thrust deeper. She wrapped them around my waist, and I felt decadent.

I pumped for as long as I could, but my arms started trembling and I couldn’t continue to hold myself up. I dropped down to my elbows but continued to HAVE SEX. I couldn’t remember ever feeling so good. This was the one experience of my life that actually exceeded my hopes and expectations. It was spectacular!

After a while — not so very long, I suppose — we got tired and took a break. I rolled to Cheryl’s side and cuddled her.

“Thank you,” I said. “That was wonderful.”

“I enjoyed it too. I really like you.”

“I really like you, too.”

We lay there for a few minutes. Then Cheryl said, “I need to check on the baby.” She got up and waked in her radiant nakedness out of the room.

She returned a little later, a colorful silk (rayon, probably) robe wrapped around her body.

“You need to go,” she said softly. “I need to get some sleep so I won’t be a zombie tomorrow.”

“OK. When can I see you again?”

“Call me.”

I got dressed and we had a long, affectionate goodnight kiss before I left.

Everything Nice

I called Cheryl the next day, and she asked if I wanted to visit her on Tuesday. "I'll cook dinner," she said, "but I'll be busy with the baby. You can't have my full attention."

"That's fine," I said. "I love the baby!"

My heart was light in the following days, and I wondered if this was love. On Saturday afternoon, I lay in the sun by my apartment's swimming pool. (By this time I had upgraded from the cinderblock palace to a large apartment complex on the other side of the freeway, comfortably distant from the traffic noise.) Absorbing the warm rays of the summer sunshine, I composed poems for Cheryl in a small spiral notebook. I wrote:

*This is my first poem for you.
Is it good? Does it rhyme?
Is it obvious? Sublime?
Does it flow?
Where does it go next?
Should I make the meter neater?
Work some François dans la text?
Am I rambling on and on and on...
Or am I a might terse?
At least I didn't try to say "I love you" in light verse!*

And I wrote:

*The woman who loves babies plants the seed.
The woman who loves children waters the seedling.
The woman who loves friends supports the vine.
The woman who loves lovers brings the flowers into bloom.
Lover of babies,
Lover of children,
Lover of friends,
Lover of lovers,
O woman who is so filled with love,
I love you.*

And several more. I was clever. I was sweet. I was honest. My heart was wide open.

On Tuesday I went to Cheryl's apartment. We had a little dinner and played with the sweet-smelling baby for several hours. We learned more about each other's short life stories. It was cozy. Eventu-

ally, she put the baby down for the night and we had a love-making session very similar to the previous one. It was not quite as frenetic, but still terrific.

I enjoyed the limerence of new love, but I puzzled over what was happening and where it might lead. I toyed with the idea of becoming a family with Cheryl and her baby. I wasn't sure I really wanted that, but I considered the possibility.

I felt powerless. Cheryl had most of the control over the situation, what with the baby and the boyfriend and all. I anxiously waited for the promised breakup of their relationship, but it didn't seem to be forthcoming.

Wednesday was hearts night at my place. Cheryl and I studiously acted as if nothing special was going on between us. Nobody seemed to notice anything. I found a chance to ask Cheryl if she could stay after, but she said she had to get home and relieve the babysitter.

The following Saturday afternoon, I was home watching television. I heard footsteps coming up the outside stairway, and then a knock on my door. No one ever visited me at my apartment, so I was quite surprised. I wondered if it could be the manager of the complex needing to speak with me about something or other.

I answered the door. To my delight, it was Cheryl. "Hi!" she chirped. "I had some free time, so I thought I'd stop by!"

"Come in, come in!" I stood back and let Cheryl enter. As she went by me, her flowery perfume so enticing in my nostrils, she took my hand. She led me straight into my bedroom and pushed me down on the bed. We started kissing.

After a moment, Cheryl stopped and said, "May I ask you something?"

"Of course," I said.

"This is a little delicate. Ummmm, what I was wondering is, why haven't you cum when we made love?"

"Oh, I never cum. Don't worry about it. I had a tremendous time."

"What do you mean you never cum?"

"I don't know. I just don't." I wasn't comfortable talking about sex. Not at all.

"Why?"

"I guess I'm just tense? I don't know."

Everything Nice

“Well, we’re going to fix that!”

And fix it she did. Cheryl pushed me down on the bed so I was lying stretched out on my back. She undid my pants and took my cock out. She got a tube of something — like a toothpaste tube, but it was some kind of lubricating gel — from her purse and squeezed a generous dollop into the palm of her right hand. With that same hand, she grabbed my flaccid cock and began kneading it and gently yanking on it. The rubbing brought my cock to life. I quickly developed a rock-hard erection.

Cheryl continued to stroke my erect penis. She stroked up all the way over the head of my penis, which was quite sensitive, and down all the way to the base of my shaft. As she stroked, she talked to me. “You have such a nice cock. It’s so long and shaped so nice. And so hard! I love it when you have it inside me. You’re so hot.”

She wouldn’t let me say anything. “Shhh--shhh. You just relax and enjoy this. You don’t have to do anything. There you go, just relax. Doesn’t it feel good? Oh, you’re going to cum big time, I can feel it. Oh yeah, oh yeah.”

I relaxed my body and closed my eyes, grooving on the sensation. I opened my eyes to reassure myself that it was real, this was really happening. I watched Cheryl’s lovely, heart-shaped face. Her laughing eyes were watching the expression on my face, and it must have been a remarkable one, because she seemed very happy to be seeing it.

Most of my body relaxed but my hips and groin tensed up and began rocking and slightly spasming. Cheryl increased the speed of her stroking and squeezed even more firmly. My legs tensed up and my back arched. It felt really good. Then it felt really, really good, like I’d never felt before! I knew I was indeed going to cum, but I didn’t know the protocol. Did I need to warn Cheryl? Was it a problem if my cum got all over everything?

“I’m cumming!” I grunted to Cheryl. She smiled and stroked faster, practically shaking my cock like a bottle of nail polish.

“Oh-oh-oh. OH-OH... Huhhhh!” I came. It felt like I came enough to fill buckets, but only a little spurt of jism squirted from the tip of my cock, mostly landing on Cheryl’s hand. Wow, that was great!

“Oh goody!” Cheryl squealed. “See, I knew you could do it!”

So that's how I learned to cum. In the ensuing days I experimented and discovered that I could make myself cum, and it felt pretty darn good. Twenty-three years old, and I had only just learned to masturbate.

Cheryl was out of time and had to leave right after. I was extremely appreciative of what she had done for me, and I let her know it.

The next day I went back out to the pool with my spiral notebook and wrote a couple more poems for Cheryl. I tried to write something dirty and sexy, but those kinds of words just didn't flow in my mind. I was stuck with sweet and sappy.

Cheryl and I made plans that I would come to her apartment the following Saturday afternoon. Early in the week I put the poems I had written for her into an envelope and mailed them to her.

The weather was warm and sunny as usual when I got to Cheryl's apartment on Saturday. Cheryl suggested that we sit outside on her stoop and talk. I noticed that she had the poems clutched in one hand.

"These are lovely," she said, gesturing with the poems. "No one has ever written poetry for me before. I feel so honored. Thank you!" She leaned over and gave me a little kiss.

"I'm glad you like them."

"Yes, I like them very much. But listen, there's something I've got to tell you. You're a really sweet guy, and I like you a lot. But you know, we're just not right for each other. You don't need a mother and a baby in your life right now. You deserve better."

"That's for me to decide, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, but I just know it. And I have to decide what's right for me and Kyle. What I'm trying to say is, we need to stop seeing each other. It was lots of fun, but I'm afraid it's over now."

"Oh, I see." I did see. It had been too good to be true. I knew I didn't deserve a girlfriend. No, that wasn't quite right. It wasn't a matter of *deserving*. I was a wonderful guy. A girl would be lucky to have me for a boyfriend. But it just wasn't going to be. For some reason, it just wasn't in the cards for me to have a girlfriend.

The tone of my voice was not happy. "I'm sorry," Cheryl said, "but that's the way it's got to be. I'm sorry. You're going to find a wonderful girlfriend one day, I know it. Just be patient. It will happen."

Everything Nice

“Yeah, I suppose you’re right,” I said, but I didn’t believe it. I’d been hearing that platitude from my mother for years, but “one day” simply never came. Not for me it didn’t. “I guess I’ll be going then. Anyway, thank you for what we had. It really meant a lot to me, obviously. If there’s anything I can ever do for you, please don’t hesitate to ask.”

I left. I’d been kicked in the stomach, and I found it hard to breathe. Just like that, and it was over? The abruptness of it took my breath away. As I drove mindlessly, numbly home, a Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers song on the radio penetrated my stunned consciousness:

*I was talking with a friend of mine,
Said a woman had hurt his pride.
Told him that she loved him so and
Turned around and let him go.
Then he said, you better watch your step,
Or you’re gonna get hurt yourself.
Someone’s gonna tell you lies,
Hurt you down inside.*

*Don’t do me like that.
Don’t do me like that.
What if I love you baby?
Don’t do me like that.*

Don’t Do Me Like That was in heavy rotation at the time, and it felt like a personal, sympathetic, pathetic message right into my soul every time I heard it. For many years after, it continued to draw me in and make me cringe.

I felt a lot of pain and emptiness for several weeks. I wrote Cheryl one last poem, a parting gift, a sonnet, and sent it to her:

*Be calm, my heart, those footsteps are not hers.
She will not show up at your door again.
Expected not, but always welcome when
A break in lonely nighttime may occur.
Twitch not, my nose, you don’t detect her odor,
‘Tis only flowers’ perfume on the wind.
The one you call, not lover now, but friend,
Bears fragrance surely not so sweet as this, sir.*

*Be cool, my blood, a chemical imbalance,
Is cause of your confusion, so it seems.
Just rest, my mind, and thoughts of love or malice,
Will dissipate, as if within a dream.
Another time and place will find your talents,
More suited to the situation's scheme.*

However, I knew that Cheryl was right. We weren't a very good match. I was a couple notches above her socially and intellectually — oh, that sounds so arrogant! It was simply a matter of taste. She liked more earthy things, and my head was more in the clouds. No judgments. I wasn't better than her, just in a different place.

Cheryl eventually did break up with Bryan, though it was several months later. Within a year after that, she had married a cop.

The hearts club fizzled out along with the nice weather at the end of summer. Maybe the weather was the reason, or maybe because the group had been running on a sexual energy that was finally drained. We all remained friends.

* * *

The hearts club was a resounding success, so I was receptive when Loren approached me with another proposal the following year.

"We could live like princes," he observed, "if we combined our two engineering salaries and bought a place together." I was now working at Tandem Computers, and the stock options Intel had given me when I was hired had vested, along with additional options I had received as incentive bonuses. I cashed out everything I could, raising enough money for my half of the down payment on a lovely two-story condominium in an eight-unit development in Loren's town, Los Gatos. I was amused to live on Roberts Road, since my father's name was Robert Rhodes.

A year after we moved in together, Loren and I got to reminiscing about the hearts club — the adventures we'd had and the people we'd played with. Cheryl's name came up.

"Yeah," Loren said, "she was a frisky one. Great in bed, wasn't she?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Cheryl was great in bed, wasn't she?"

Everything Nice

“Ummmm, how would I know? More to the point, how would you know?”

“Oh, didn’t you know? I thought everybody knew. Cheryl bedded every one of us. She and The Pup were in a sort of competition. The Pup bedded every one of the girls and Cheryl bedded every one of the guys.”

No, I hadn’t known. Stupid me. Stupid, ignorant me.

I knew The Pup had finally bagged Leslie because she was all giddy one particular week. The following week, and for some weeks thereafter, she was heartbroken. I knew The Pup had done his thing to poor little Leslie’s detriment, but I hadn’t known Cheryl had made the rounds. I had believed she really liked me. Well, I’m sure she really did, as far as it went. Sex just wasn’t a very significant thing to her. I guess it only was to inexperienced innocents like Leslie and me.

I saw Cheryl one more time in my life. It was several years later, and I was still working at Tandem. Four or five of my colleagues and I were eating lunch in the food court downstairs at Vallco Shopping Mall, adjacent to Tandem, when who should walk up to our table but Cheryl!

“Hello,” she called out to me, with a smile.

The old pain resurrected like bile in my stomach and a blockage in my heart. *Don’t Do Me Like That!* “Hello,” I said dully.

“How are you doing?”

“Fine.” Followed by silence.

“Well, bye then.” Looking puzzled and a little hurt, she walked away.

I had snubbed her but good. I was cold, and I didn’t introduce her to any of my friends. I treated her like dirt. I really showed her!

I deeply regret that I was such a bastard to the first woman I ever loved.

Butterfly Effect

Although Loren and I were undeniably bachelors in our Roberts Road estate, I wouldn't exactly call our condominium a bachelor pad. We did not have the requisite stream of women passing through to warrant that description. Loren was a great guy, smart, funny, tall and handsome, and he certainly liked the ladies, but for some reason he had no more luck with them than I did. (Whatever that reason was, I'm sure it was not the same thing to which I would eventually trace my difficulties.)

We lived pretty high on the hog at Robert's Road. We alternated nights cooking dinner and we were both pretty good cooks. Roasts of beef, steaks, briskets, pork chops, and a few Asian dishes like Ma Po Bean Curd and Broccoli Beef were common fare at our table. Spaghetti was considered a cop-out, unless it accompanied a veal scaloppini entrée. A house rule was "No leftovers" — the ingredients for dinner had to be purchased fresh from the Safeway in town every

Everything Nice

evening, and we never left the table hungry. On one occasion, we put the leftover roast beef onto a plate in our little backyard as a treat for the neighborhood cats, but the big black Labrador Retriever that lived behind us smelled the yummy meat and dug his way under the fence to get to the it. After gobbling down the feast, she was too fat to fit back under the fence! Or maybe she had just lost her motivation. In any case, we were surprised to have a four-legged visitor in our yard when we got up the next morning.

We complemented our food with cocktails before dinner — scotch or martinis — and a decent bottle of wine with the meal. Loren taught me to smoke a pipe with our brandy afterwards. Life was good.

Our condo had two floors. The downstairs was an open plan comprising the small living room with a gas fireplace and cement log, a generous dining area, and the kitchen. Upstairs was a master bedroom suite and two smaller bedrooms. Loren and I took the smaller spaces and turned the master into a recreation room, where the recreation was primarily watching television.

In the privacy of my own bedroom, the recreation was primarily my new-found skill of masturbation. I loved to look at the girls in Playboy magazines and sometimes Hustler, but I avoided the really skanky stuff. I also discovered I had a fetish for pantyhose. I mustered up the courage to slip a white plastic L'Eggs egg into my shopping cart at the grocery store and the sheer hose brought me hours of enjoyment once I got it home. I loved the feel of the nylon on my skin. I got so carried away, I would put one pair of pantyhose on over my legs the normal way, and another pair over my arms, with my head stuck through the cut-out crotch. Complete encased in nylon, I was Pantyhose Man! However, I quickly learned to leave my right hand unsheathed because of chafing issues.

* * *

The summer was warm and delightful, with hot afternoons and long, comfortable evenings. One Friday night, Loren made an extraordinary suggestion.

“Why don’t we go over to the Los Gatos Lodge? They’ve got a live band and dancing.”

I was fast approaching 30 years of age. I had long since given up on the idea of “picking up chicks” at bars or parties. I had failed at that task so often that I didn’t even try anymore. But it sounded

like a fun evening's distraction. And who knows? As The Pup was fond of saying, "Even a blind squirrel finds a nut now and then." So I agreed to the outing.

The Los Gatos Lodge was a venerable landmark immediately adjacent to the Los Gatos off-ramp of Highway 17 at Highway 9 (also known as Los Gatos-Saratoga Road), where the hills of East Los Gatos begin to rise. The Lodge had been there forever — since 1958 — and never changed a whit. It was not a happening place where young people gathered; those were the bars and clubs on Santa Cruz Avenue, in town. The lounge at The Lodge attracted an older crowd, not quite blue collar, but certainly far from upscale. It was comfortable.

Loren and I showed our IDs to the bouncer at the door and elbowed our way into the lounge. I could smell the alcohol and a little bit of cigarette smoke, even though smoking had not been permitted in the room for years. I supposed it was a combination of ancient nicotine saturated in the walls and furniture, along with residue clinging to the clothes and mouths of folks who had stepped outside to the patio area for their nicotine fixes. I was glad that neither Loren nor I smoked cigarettes; just our pipes from time to time.

A five-piece band was belting out a disco hit that had gone out of style several years earlier and the floor was filled with jiggling couples. We waded through the throng and found a tiny, unoccupied table in the far corner of the room, to the side of the bandstand and past the end of the long bar. We claimed it as our own and waited patiently for the cocktail waitress to come around.

In the din of the disco music and crowd noise, it was difficult to be heard even shouting into the ear of the listener. Loren and I mostly watched the goings-on around us, occasionally raising our voices to share an observation or make a joke.

I studied the throng, looking for pretty ladies in approachable situations. I was quite shy, so the situation had to be ideal before I would dare to make a move. It was unthinkable for me to walk up and introduce myself to a woman who was with a group, or even a girlfriend. But if I could catch someone alone, looking forlorn, I might just try something.

I noticed an attractive Chinese lady sitting by herself on the other side of the dance floor. She wasn't young, or thin; not a China doll, but a real woman. *Probably a businesswoman*, I thought. I found

Everything Nice

her attractive. I watched her for a while. She was alone. I do believe she was even forlorn!

I decided to give it try. As I sensed a song was approaching its ending, I made my way through the crowd toward the table where my prey sat. I moved casually, so as not to attract attention from anyone, and most definitely not from her. I prayed that the band would not choose this moment to take a break. They didn't. As the next song started up — and not a slow song, thank goodness, I approached the woman's table.

"Dance?" I asked and gesticulated, so my meaning would be clear.

She looked up at me, mildly startled. She took in the bright smile on my eager face, my tall, thin, neatly-dressed frame, and my offered hand. Her face brightened, and she mouthed, "Yes!" and rose from her seat.

We danced, enjoying each others' company and the fact that we were finally part of the action instead of stuck on the sidelines. When the song ended, I invited her to join me at my table. Much to my surprise, she agreed.

"I'm Ed, by the way," I told her.

"Vivian," she said.

I led her to our table in the far corner and introduced her Loren. We couldn't talk very well over the din of the music, but we had drinks, sat together, and eventually shared another dance. After a little time, Vivian announced that she needed to leave. I gallantly and enthusiastically offered to walk her to her car.

I was relieved to get out of the crowded bar and into the cool, fresh night air. Finally, I was able to talk to Vivian without shouting. As we chatted, our walk took us through the Lodge grounds, past the pool area, and around to the back of the building, where Val had found parking.

"Thank you for dancing with me," I began.

"Thank you for asking me!"

"It's Vivian, right? I'm Ed."

"Hi Ed. Yes, I managed to hear that inside. Isn't it loud in there?"

"Yeah, it's ridiculous. I'm glad you were here tonight. Do you live around here?"

"Yes, I'm just over in Campbell."

“I’m right here in Los Gatos. Are you sure your car is around here?”

“It’s right over there. The blue one.”

“The Mercedes? Nice!”

“It’s an old one. I like buying old Mercedes.”

“That’s pretty smart.”

“I’ve had good luck with it. Well, I guess this is goodnight then.”

“I guess so. Listen, would you like to have dinner some time next week?”

“Why yes! That would be great. Let’s see ... how about Thursday?”

“Thursday is good. Let’s do it. Give me your phone number. I’ll call you and set up a time.”

And so there it was, the one and only time I ever picked up a girl in a bar.

Vivian and I began dating. I cleverly got her into bed by taking her on an overnight trip to the Napa wine country, northeast of San Francisco. After that, I began spending a lot of nights on the mattress where she slept on the floor of her efficient little studio apartment.

Whenever I brought up the subject of how old Vivian was, she changed the subject. My curiosity was roused. So once while she was in the shower, I went into her purse and took a peek at her driver’s license. She was 45 years old, 15 years older than me. It didn’t bother me, and I couldn’t understand why she hadn’t wanted me to know. Of course, I never let her know that I knew.

Vivian was an Hawaiian-born Chinese, so she was quite American culturally. After we had been dating for a few months, she told me she had a trip scheduled to visit her family on the Big Island for a couple of weeks.

“By the way,” she added, “would you be able to give me a ride to the airport?”

“I’d be happy to,” I agreed.

I packed Vivian off to Hawaii. My life became pretty empty when she was gone, because I had gotten used to seeing her once or twice a week. However, I was also starting to feel bored and trapped by the relationship. The sex had become very routine, not very exciting, and I hated using condoms. The latex rubber thingies were just so artificial and unromantic, and they decreased the sensation for me

Everything Nice

so much. At least, I thought they did. But what did I know? I had never had sex without wearing one.

While Vivian was with her family in Hawaii, I thought long and hard about our relationship and what I wanted out of it. I had also met another girl who liked me, and I actually felt I had choices — better choices than simply to stick with it or be very lonely. I decided I would break up with Vivian soon after she returned to the mainland.

In the meantime, I happened to be out shopping and I found a beautiful stained glass butterfly, a three-dimensional sculpture that could hang in a garden window to catch the sun. Vivian was crazy about butterflies, so I thought it would make a nice gift for her. I would have gotten it for her anyway, but under the circumstances, it looked like it would be a going away present. A lovely parting gift, as they say on the game shows.

I felt terrible about the prospect of breaking up with Vivian. I knew I wanted it, but I would miss her company. What was worse, I was afraid it would break her heart. It seemed like a mean thing to do to her.

After two long weeks, Vivian came home. I picked her up at the San Francisco airport and took her to her apartment. We brought in her bags and got her settled a bit. Then Vivian said, “I need to talk to you about something.”

“I need to talk to you about something too,” I replied.

The sun was shining on a beautiful, warm day, so we went out and sat on the step at the top of the stairs leading up to her second-story apartment. I seemed to be making a habit of having break-up talks sitting on steps outside of my girlfriends’ front doors.

“You go first,” I graciously offered.

Vivian got a serious look on her face and said, “It’s just this. I’ve been thinking about us while I’ve been away, and I’ve decided this relationship is over for me. You’re a really nice guy, but it’s just gotten so, I don’t know, boring. We just don’t seem to have a spark anymore.”

Whee! My heart did cartwheels of joy. I wouldn’t have to break up with Vivian, because she was breaking up with me!

I put a sad, concerned look on my face. “Oh, I see. I guess I see your point. Well, if that’s the way you want it...”

“Yes, I’m afraid that’s the way it’s got to be. I’m sorry.”

“OK. Then I guess it’s settled.”

“Yes, I’m afraid so. Now, what did you want to tell me?”

“Oh! Ummm, it’s just ... well, I got this present for you. I still want you to have it.” I gave her the butterfly. She loved it. I could see her heart melt a little bit. Nevertheless, we had a gentle goodbye kiss, and that was the last time I ever saw my Hawaiian beauty.

One thing continued to bother me whenever I thought about my fling with Vivian. I couldn’t help wondering whether she had stayed with me as long as she did only because she needed a ride to the airport.

LTRs

Suite: Judy Blue Eyes

I was actually relieved that Vivian and I were over, because I had already met another woman. I felt like quite the stud. I worried over the ethical implications of dating two women at the same time, while secretly reveling in having to confront a dilemma that I suppose was common in other people's lives. But it turned out Vivian and I were already over — all except the actual break-up — when I met Erin.

Ah, Erin, my future wife! The sequence of events that led to me meeting Erin began back in my days at Intel. The lab that supported my work there had two technicians. The one who did jobs for me was Shit-head, the fellow who participated in the hearts club. I should really call him Bryan, because he was a very nice guy, a kind-hearted soul, and I called him a friend. But he did screw up everything he worked on, there was no denying. If only I'd had the services of the other tech in the lab, Craig. Craig was very good at his work. He was

Everything Nice

also very nice, except for a penchant for practical jokes, often involving the lab's electrical equipment and sparks or smoke.

Craig's greatest invention was the Mylar tube blow-gun. We designed the actual layout of integrated circuits — the wires and transistors — by drawing with colored pencils on large plastic sheets, squares of Mylar four feet on a side. Craig would roll up a Mylar sheet into a four-foot long tube. He created darts by making little Mylar cones tipped with tacks or sharp wires. Taking a deep breath and huffing down the Mylar tube, the darts would be accelerated to such a speed that the tips would penetrate hard wood, or soft cubicle walls. It was a potentially lethal weapon, but fortunately no injuries were sustained.

My primary circle of friends while I was at Intel consisted of Craig, his wife Jill, her friend Kathy, Kathy's boyfriend Jerry, and Charles. Jill and Kathy worked together in payroll at AMD. Charles was an accountant with semiconductor equipment manufacturer Applied Materials. I don't know how he came into the group. He was just always there.

The six of us got together for dinners, movie nights, hot-tub parties, and various events. I always felt like a third wheel. Maybe Charles and I should have been a couple, but that never occurred to me because, at that time, I had no sexual interest in men. Charles was a happy, gentle, strange little guy. He seemed to be interested in girls, but it wouldn't surprise me if he eventually realized he was gay.

This group continued to be my gang after I left Intel and moved on to Tandem. Jill and I became close friends. We had heart-to-heart talks and shared our woes. We even flirted with the idea of having an affair, but we never did.

When Tandem had a huge, company-wide Halloween party (which turned out to be the last one they would ever throw, because the company was growing so large), Jill took me shopping to buy a teddy. Not a teddy bear, but lingerie. My costume was as a flasher, the sex-offender kind. I dressed in a long green pea coat, with cut-up denim jeans covering only my lower legs. When I flashed, instead of being naked, I was in the teddy. Jill giggled at how embarrassed I was when we were in the lingerie department at Mervyn's picking out the frilly dainty. Needless to say, I did not try it on in the store.

The ominous year of 1984 arrived, but Big Brother did not show up on schedule. When the holiday season arrived, our little group planned to repeat an adventure we had done a couple of times before. We would travel 100 miles up the coast to spend the weekend at a rented house in Sea Ranch on the beautiful, rugged northern California coast. Leaving work early on Friday afternoon, we would make the three and a half hour drive north, arriving after dark. Saturday would be spent enjoying the wild, windswept ocean bluffs of Sea Ranch, or we might drive another 60 miles farther north to the charming little tourist town of Mendocino. On Sunday morning we would pack up and head back home. The most fun, however, was eating, drinking, and hot-tubbing under the incredible, infinite canopy of stars on Friday and Saturday night.

Craig called to invite me as they hatched their plan.

“Hey Ed! How are you doing? We’re going to go to Sea Ranch next weekend. Wanna come?”

“Sure! Great! Who’s going?”

“Me and Jill. Kathy and Jerry. I don’t think Charles can go. Oh, and Kathy wants to bring her little sister. Is that all right?”

“How little?”

“I think she’s about 22.” *Hmmm, seven years younger than me, the same age as my little brother*, I thought.

“Cool! Yeah. Why not?”

As our plans firmed up over the next couple of days, I began to have hopeful little fantasies about Kathy’s little sister, of whom I knew absolutely nothing. It turned out to be a set-up. I got another planning phone call from Craig.

“We were trying to figure out what cars to take. We could probably squeeze into two cars, but it would be pretty crowded with all the supplies. What do you think?”

“I don’t mind driving up. It’ll be fun in the RX7.” I loved my little brown two-seater Mazda sports car, which was built with the unique Wankel rotary engine. I had only recently traded in my Volvo to get it.

“OK, that’ll be good. What do you think of taking Kathy’s sister in your car?”

“Ummm, gee, sure. If she wants to.”

“We’ll ask her.”

Everything Nice

Meanwhile, Kathy was playing the same game with Erin. It was set. We would get to know each other by being locked up together in a little sports car for four hours.

I didn't meet Erin until we took off for Sea Ranch on Friday afternoon. I liked what I saw. She was tall and thin, almost as tall as me. Her bright, brown eyes shown out of a long, oval face framed with straight, fiery red hair parted in the middle and hanging just below her ears. She had a fresh-faced, freckled beauty, eschewing cosmetics. Her denim coveralls and flannel shirt almost caricatured the Modesto farm girl she in fact was, except that the clothes were clean and crisp, not work-worn. I loathed coveralls, but I was willing to let that slide in this case.

"Hi," I said, "I'm Ed."

"I'm Erin."

"So I guess we're driving together."

"Yeah."

"It'll be fun!"

"Yeah!"

We got to know each other pretty well during the long drive north.

"You live in Modesto, don't you, Erin?"

"Yes. I'm going to Modesto junior college."

"Oh! What are you studying?"

"Sign language."

"Sign language? That's great! Are you going to do something with that for a career?"

"I'd like to. I think I'd like to work with deaf kids. I've got a deaf cousin, and I enjoy signing with him. It's like deaf people live in a whole different world, and I get to visit it."

"I never thought of that. I guess it's true. Would you sign something for me?"

"Sure." Her fingers flashed.

"Cool. What was that?"

"That's your name. See? E-D-W-A-R-D. I can teach you the alphabet if you want. It's pretty easy."

"I'd like that. And we've got plenty of time. Let's do that in a little while."

"OK."

"Did you and Kathy grow up in Modesto?"

“Oh no. We lived in Ceres, right next to Modesto. We grew up on my dad’s almond orchard.”

“Gosh, that’s so opposite of me. I’ve always been a big-city person. Suburbs, actually.”

“I can’t believe how crowded it is when I visit Kathy in San Jose. Ceres is just a small town. I know practically everyone in it.”

“I can’t imagine what that would be like.”

“It’s nice, I think.”

“That little Ford Escort I saw when I picked you up — that’s yours, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, that’s my little car. I love it.”

“You have a personalized license plate, don’t you? I noticed, but I didn’t see what it said.”

“Oh, it says ‘Me and my JB.’ For Jackson Browne. He’s my favorite. I’ve seen him at least a dozen times.”

“I like Jackson Browne. He’s good, even if his voice is kind of whiny.”

“No it’s not! He’s got a wonderful voice!”

“It’s nice, yeah. I just think it’s a little whiny sometimes.”

“Hmph!”

“So the license plate. What is it exactly? I didn’t see ‘Me and my JB.’”

“It’s M-E-N-M-Y-J-B.”

“OK... let’s see... I guess so. Oh! Ummm, it seems like it might look like something else?”

“Yeah. Lot’s of times people think it says ‘Men my job.’ God! How could they?”

I stifled a laugh. “Oh, yeah. That’s kind of rude, isn’t it? And on an ‘Escort,’ too.”

“Yeah. I put apostrophes around the N to make it more obvious.”

“That’s a good idea.”

“Who’s your favorite band?”

“Grateful Dead, I guess.”

“Yuck! You don’t look like a Deadhead.”

“I’m not. I just listened to them a lot in college.”

“Oh. OK. What did you study in college?”

“Electrical engineering.”

“So you’re an engineer?”

Everything Nice

“That’s right.”

“I don’t really know what that is.”

“Basically, I design computers.”

“Wow. You must be really smart.”

“Maybe too smart for my own good.”

“What do you mean?”

“Sometimes people tell me they think I’m talking down to them, making them feel stupid.”

“I don’t feel stupid.”

“Good. Don’t. I really don’t try to make people feel stupid. I guess I just use big words sometimes. I try to watch out and not do that, but I can’t always help it.”

“Just ‘cause I don’t know something, that doesn’t make me stupid.”

“That’s right. I like your attitude. I just learned a lot of stuff in college, and it comes out when I talk.”

“I think it’s great that you’re smart,” she said, causing me laugh. “What’s so funny?”

“Don’t you know,” I asked her, “that you’re supposed to hate engineers?”

“Why would I hate engineers?” I laughed again.

“I’m glad you don’t. It’s just that all the girls I meet in Silicon Valley seem to think engineers are boring. I mean, they don’t really hate us. They just don’t want to date us.”

“Well then I think they’re stupid.”

“Thank you!” I was surprised and relieved. Here was a nice girl who actually liked the fact that I was an engineer.

“Speaking of girls, don’t you have another sister?”

“Yes. Michelle. She’s the middle. Kathy is oldest, and I’m youngest.”

“What’s Michelle like?”

“She looks a lot like me. Sometimes people ask if we’re twins.”

“Is she in Modesto or what?”

“No, she’s in San Jose, where you are. She’s a typesetter.”

“A typesetter? Like for a newspaper?”

“She works for a small printing house.”

“Oh, I see. Is she married?”

“Sort of.”

“Sort of? Isn’t that either yes or no?”

“Well, she’s a lesbian. She and Bonnie have been together a long time, so it’s like they’re married.”

“Oh. Well, that’s nice.”

“I think it’s cool.”

“Is she out? Does everybody know?”

“All of her friends know. But not in Ceres. She hasn’t told our parents. We don’t think my father will accept it.”

“That’s too bad. That must be very difficult.”

“I think it’s funny. Michelle always brings Bonnie along when she visits. Bea is there for all the holidays and they sleep in the same bedroom. You’d think my parents would figure it out. But they’re totally clueless.”

“That does seem weird. I guess they don’t want to know.”

“I’m sure they don’t. I’ll bet my mom knows in the back of her mind, but they just don’t want to face it.”

“I’ll bet that’s it.”

And so our conversation flowed. Erin even taught me the alphabet in sign language, and I learned to sign my name.

The last 45 minutes of the drive took us along twisty roads clinging to the rugged cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean. It was bad enough in the daylight; in the dark it could be scary and stomach-churning. I pulled over a couple of times for Erin’s comfort, but she didn’t actually blow.

We got to Sea Ranch and located our house. It was a beautiful, rustic vacation home on the open, windswept bluffs.

Sea Ranch was a community of vacation homes that was built beginning in the 1960s along 10 miles of wild, unspoiled coastline. The buildings were designed to blend in with the landscape, with wood exteriors and shapes following the contours of the land. You might drive through Sea Ranch on Highway 1 and hardly notice any of the buildings. The land to the west of Highway 1 is open bluff, with fields of wildflowers and brambles, crisscrossed with dirt pedestrian hiking trails. To the east of the highway, the forested coastal mountain range begins a speedy rise and the houses are nestled in amongst the trees like leprechaun dwellings, dwarfed by the tall coastal redwoods. Critters abound. Birds and deer are hard to miss; squirrels, rabbits, and a few snakes can be spotted if you look for them.

Everything Nice

Stepping through the front door of our home for the weekend, the house opened into a good-sized sunken living room with a high ceiling two stories above. To the right, I saw the small, fully equipped kitchen. To the left was a little hallway with doors to a bathroom and a couple of small bedrooms. Above that, an upstairs loft, open to the living room, held a queen-sized bed.

At the edges of the sunken living room, comfy couches formed a conversation pit around a wood-burning stove. Behind the couches on the left, the wall was lined with waist-high shelves holding an eclectic collection of old books. An ancient stereo with an 8-track tape player sat atop the bookshelves, with a couple boxes of tapes below it.

Behind the black potbelly stove, large picture windows and sliding glass doors led out to an expansive redwood deck featuring a recessed wooden hot tub with steam curling off the water's surface. The deck was edged with a slender railing so the view across the open meadow was virtually unobstructed. We appeared to have the meadow all to ourselves because the houses were positioned out of each others' sight lines. Only a few twinkling lights in the distance proved we shared the bluff with other people.

Erin and I were the last to arrive at the house, lagging the rest of the gang by a few minutes. The two couples had already claimed the downstairs bedrooms, so we dropped our things on the floor beside the door and made ourselves at home. Kathy and Jill were in the kitchen busily unloading groceries and storing them away, while simultaneously starting to put together a light meal for the group. Craig was stuffing newspapers and kindling into the wood stove, and the stink of sulfur from his matches soon joined the more pleasant scent of sautéing garlic already filling the space. Jerry was setting up a blender and the liquor. "Margaritas?" he called out. "Hooray!" we all replied.

Erin joined her sister in the kitchen. I fiddled with the stereo and looked through the 8-track tapes. When I found a tape I liked, I called out, "Van Morrison?" and people yelled back, "Yay! That's a good one." Or I cried, "The Lovin' Spoonful?" and they hollered back, "Boo!"

I put on Loggins and Messina, the *Best of Friends*. Since it was an 8-track tape, it played continuously, over and over, until someone

noted, “Haven’t we heard *Vahevala* like five times already?” and I changed the tape to *Tea for the Tillerman* by Cat Stevens.

Soon we were all sipping frozen drinks around a roaring fire, except for Kathy who was putting the finishing touches on the meal. We sat at the table in the dining area between the kitchen counter and the living room pit to enjoy some pasta, salad, and of course, wine.

The dinner conversation was convivial and hilarious. Craig and I told stories about the Mylar blowgun and other practical jokes we used to play at Intel. Kathy recounted the time she was working payroll at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center and she was assigned a work-furlough prisoner as an assistant. Much to her surprise, the big, tough-looking African-American fellow who reported for work was Eldridge Cleaver, the *Soul on Ice* author and Black Panther. Kathy assigned him to handle the complaints window, and the volume of complaints soon dropped off to a trickle.

Dinner ended. After a quick kitchen clean-up, we began slipping into our bathing suits and heading out to the redwood hot tub on the deck. Us guys quickly pulled on our trunks and got into the tub, another round of cocktails in hand. Jill was the first lady to arrive, long black hair pinned up in a bun, generous bosom and healthy hips displayed in a one-piece swimsuit. Kathy was next, tall and over-skinny in a teeny bikini. A few minutes later Erin came out, even taller but not quite so skinny as her older sister. She dropped her towel and stepped into the hot water, sitting next to me.

The six of us filled the little hot tub quite cozily. We had turned off all the lights in the house and closed the curtains, so only a dim glow from the fire radiated onto the deck. Lights in the bottom of the hot tub emitted just enough illumination through the heavy, wet steam for us to make out each others’ faces. But our faces were all turned upward, looking at the glorious stars filling the clear night sky. We were city dwellers and it was a real treat to see the splendor of the universe spread out above us.

“There’s the Big Dipper,” Jerry said, pointing.

“No, the Big Dipper is over there,” Craig insisted. “Its handle points north, right?”

“No! The North Star is at the end of the Little Dipper’s handle. The Big Dipper’s bowl points north. See?”

“Oh.”

Everything Nice

I couldn't see what they were talking about. The star field was so dense, I couldn't make out anything specific. Besides, my attention was taken up by my left thigh, which was touching Erin's right thigh, and my left shoulder, which kept brushing Erin's.

We mellowed out, relaxing and exchanging occasional small talk — mostly of the “Ahhhh, doesn't this feel good?” variety. Jerry ran another round of cocktails out for us. Then the hour was getting late and we were starting to prune from the hot water. I saw Kathy whisper in Jerry's ear.

“We're getting tired,” Jerry announced. “I think we'll go in.”

Craig conferred quickly with Jill and chimed in, “Yeah, I guess we will too.”

They climbed out of the tub, grunting and squealing from the cold, and hastily wrapped towels around their soaking bodies. A few more “Goodnights!” were exchanged and they disappeared into the house.

Erin and I were alone in the hot tub, under the terribly romantic winter sky. We counted falling stars while the sounds from inside the house fell silent. The numerous cocktails and wines had most definitely demolished our inhibitions. I moved my hand onto her thigh under the water, and she did not push it away. I moved my hand up over tummy and around her waist, and gave her a little hug. She relaxed into it and seemed to like it. So I turned toward her and moved in for a kiss. She turned her head to meet me, and our lips touched lightly for a delicious, chaste buss.

We started to make out. The buoyancy of the hot water lent an ethereal quality to our cuddling, but ultimately became awkward. After a couple of near-drowning incidents, Erin asked me, “Do you want to go inside?”

“Good idea.” We got out of the tub, draped our towels over our shoulders, and hurried inside. Craig (most likely) had stoked the fire on his way to bed, so it was still roaring. The 8-track was playing the eponymous Crosby, Stills, & Nash album: the “Doooo-do, do-do-d'do-do-do” part at the end of *Suite: Judy Blue Eyes*.

“Should I change the music?” I whispered, so as not to disturb the others behind the closed doors of their bedrooms.

“No, that's good. Should we go up to the loft?”

“OK.”

We grabbed our bags from where we had dropped them on our way in and carefully carried them up the steps — almost a ladder — to the loft. I nearly fell off because my head was spinning from the booze, not to mention the temperature change from the hot water to the cold outside air to the fire-warmed inside air.

I unpacked a few things, mainly to get to the condoms — I knew by now to always be prepared. We climbed into the bed and our petting quickly became much heavier than it had been in the hot tub. I heard *Marrakesh Express*. I heard *Wooden Ships*. *Suite: Judy Blue Eyes*, in particular, seemed to play many, many times over.

I woke the next morning with a woozy head, badly hung over. It took a few moments to get my bearings. *Strange bed ... oh yes, came to Sea Ranch ... no wall on one side of the bedroom ... ah, the loft! What's this? Erin beside me. Oh yes, that too!* The smells and clatter of breakfast preparation arose from downstairs. *Ah, well, I thought, there would be no hiding what transpired between Erin and me. No problem, we're all adults here.*

Erin was still sleeping soundly. I eased myself out of bed and slipped on some jeans and a tee shirt. I noticed a few opened condom wrappers lying around the room; things had been a bit wild. I splashed some water on my face in the half-bathroom by the loft and made my way down the stairs-ladder to greet the gang and the morning. I became aware of another sound: “Dooooo-do, do-do-d'do-do-do, dooooo-do, do-do-d'do...”

I had a big grin on my face, one of those grins you only get the morning after you've been laid. My house mates were grinning too.

“Did you have a nice time last night?” Jill asked.

“I think he did!” Craig responded on my behalf.

“Yes, I did,” I said meekly. “Thank you very much.” The truth was, they were all very happy for me. They knew I was lonely and not having any luck finding girlfriends; this whole thing had, in fact, been something of a set-up. It had succeeded even better than they had dared hope.

And Erin and I had “our song” — *Suite: Judy Blue Eyes*.

Marriage

On the long drive home from Sea Ranch, Erin and I found ourselves liking each other more and more. After that fateful weekend, we began seeing each other regularly. Pretty soon my Friday routine became one of getting off work as early as I could and driving out to Modesto to spend the weekend with Erin. She had a little apartment a couple blocks from Modesto Junior College, where she was taking classes.

One Saturday we went to a rock concert in the college gymnasium. The band was billed as Soft White Underbelly, but it was, in fact, the famous goth-metal band Blue Öyster Cult. Soft White Underbelly had been the band's name before they hit the big time and they used it as an alias when they didn't want to attract huge crowds. Erin told me most of the guys in the band had attended Modesto JC, so that's why they were playing that small venue. (Later I did some research and found the story to be false. The guys were from

New York.) The band was incredibly loud. They played *Godzilla*, *Don't Fear the Reaper*, and other Öyster tunes, but they didn't sound a lot like the records to me. Maybe it was because the acoustics were pretty bad in the gym, or maybe they didn't have their main singer with them for that performance.

Erin owned a Siamese cat named Zarkov. She loved that animal, and it loved Erin. Zarkov and I tolerated each other. When Erin came to San Jose to visit me for a couple of nights, or if we went out of town together, she asked a neighbor across the way in her apartment building to take care of Zarkov. The neighbor was a pretty, young blonde woman named Lannie (pronounced Lan-ee with a short "a", not Lahn-ee.) She was cute but she seemed a bit ditsy. *A stereotypical blonde*, I thought.

One Sunday afternoon we returned to the apartment after a weekend away and Erin was perturbed to find her bed, which was actually a fold-out couch hide-a-bed, in disarray. She marched across the courtyard to discuss the situation with Lannie. She returned with steam coming out of her ears.

"I can't believe that Lannie!" Erin fumed. "She and her boyfriend screwed in my bed and they didn't even clean up afterwards!" It didn't seem such a horrible offense to me, just inconsiderate, but it raised Erin's ire.

I certainly had no fear of commitment. Before two months had gone by, I brought up the idea of living together. "Erin," I said. "I was thinking. This traveling back and forth every weekend is ridiculous. What if you just moved in with me here in Los Gatos?"

Erin's face lit up, but then she frowned. "You mean like living together? You're not talking about marriage, are you."

"Marriage?" That thought hadn't really entered my mind. "No, I don't think I'm ready for marriage. It would be much easier just to live together."

Erin wasn't too hot on the notion at first. Her fantasy of her future had always been marriage. But she warmed up to the idea of living together before long and we decided to do it in a few weeks.

The next week, I brought up the subject again.

"You know, Erin, I've been thinking about what we talked about. I really do love you and I think I am ready for marriage. Should we go ahead and get married?"

Everything Nice

“Oh! Well, I was thinking about what you said, and I think you were right. It’s better if we just live together at first.”

“Uh, OK. We’ll stick to the original plan then.”

The following week she had flipped back to the side of getting married, and I was agin’ it. Then it was my turn again. But this time I was loaded for bear. I had a ring in my pocket. I had picked out a blue topaz stone surrounded by seven little diamond chips. People said it looked like Princess Dianna’s engagement ring, as the royal wedding a few years earlier was still large in the public consciousness. At \$1,500, the ring had seemed pretty expensive to me at the time.

Erin came to San Jose that weekend. On Saturday afternoon we were out at a small lunch shop across Steven’s Creek Boulevard from Tandem. We sat across from each other on wooden benches at a wooden table in a wooden booth. (The shop had a rustic wood décor.) We finished a couple of cheeseburgers and were sipping our milkshakes through straws from big paper cups.

“Erin, I’ve been thinking some more about what we were talking about. You know, about marriage.”

“Here we go again.”

“Yes, I guess so.” I pulled out a neatly wrapped little package that had an obvious and familiar size and shape. “I think we should do it. I really do. I really love you, and I want to spend the rest of my life with you.” I came around the side of the table and went down on one knee next to her bench. Extending in the package to her, I asked the classic question.

“Will you marry me?”

I guess it was the ring that did it, or doing the whole deal with the kneeling and all, because a tear formed in the corner of Erin’s left eye and she said, “Yes.” We kissed and began to make our plans.

Once we made the decision to get married, we wanted to move quickly and with a minimum of fuss. We weren’t teenagers, and neither of us wanted a big, traditional wedding. We picked a date in April, just six weeks away, and thought we would elope in Nevada at Lake Tahoe.

Our families and friends were thrilled to hear our news. We were such a cute couple, nobody counseled us that we were moving too fast. Maybe they thought we were both so hopeless in the romance department that we’d best grab for a good thing while we could.

When we disclosed our plan to elope to Lake Tahoe, everybody asked whether they couldn't come up and join us. My heart was warmed by the love, though I suspected their love of gambling and a beautiful Tahoe vacation was as much the attraction as the wedding. So when we got married outdoors at lakeside in Incline Village, about 30 of our family and friends were in attendance.

We were married on April 13. Erin wore a flower garland in her hair and a lovely, ankle-length periwinkle gown. (It may have been the only time I saw her in a dress; she favored jeans and flannel shirts.) I wore a navy blue suit and a rep stripe tie. I joked that I had failed to achieve my life goal of being married by the time I was 30, having missed it by two days.

After we returned from our honeymoon in Hawaii, Erin's parents threw us a big wedding reception in Modesto. We had a great time. At the end of the evening, I grinned idiotically into the video camera held by the best man and drunkenly proclaimed, "Erin has made me the happiest man on earth!"

* * *

"I'm gonna do another line. Want one?"

"I don't think that's a good idea, Erin. You need to get some sleep."

"I know. But I'm gonna do one more line. Just one more. I promise."

"You promised that last time. And the time before that. Look what you're doing to yourself! You're a mess. You've been up for two days. You've got to get some sleep, and eat something."

"You never want me to have any fun anymore."

"Hon, you've been having fun for two days. I don't think you're having fun anymore. Look at how you're shaking! Look how tense you are!"

"I know, I know. But I can't stop now. I need another line."

"It's your choice. You're an adult; you can make your own decisions. I can only tell you what I think, and I don't think it's a good idea. Rest up for a couple days. Then you can do some more. You'll feel a lot better about yourself."

We were doing the crank, the crystal meth, the speed. It was our drug of choice, because it made us happy and gave us lots of energy. Erin liked it when I did it with her, because of the company, and because I became chatty instead of my usual quiet, sullen self. I

Everything Nice

liked it because it made me feel good and allowed me to drink prodigious amounts of alcohol without destroying myself. Drinking was a big part of my life.

Erin couldn't wait for me to get off work on Friday so we could do our first line. She would urge me to take off early, but I rarely did because I was working long, hard hours at a tiny start-up company in Mountain View, two towns north of San Jose on the Peninsula.

At Quickturn Design Systems, we were inventing the first commercial hardware simulator for prototyping integrated circuits. We were cramming dozens of high-density Xilinx programmable gate arrays into a box and writing fancy software to configure them to match any given schematic. Quickturn systems would soon become an industry standard that all the major processor vendors would use to design their latest and greatest products. I was responsible for designing the instrumentation and control board for the system. My boss, Kevin Sampson, was doing the mammoth board that held all the Xilinx chips.

I knew Kevin from my Intel days, where we had nicknamed him Mr. Excitement because of his incredibly soft voice and low-key manner. (Young men delight in irony.) We were friends; in fact, we had even taken a three-week vacation together to see Europe one summer. Kevin had recruited me out of Tandem when he and his partner got Quickturn going. I liked to joke that I didn't get in on the ground floor, because the day I joined, the company was moving into a second-floor space in a small building next to the 101 freeway.

On a typical Friday afternoon, I worked until 7 or 8, an 11 or 12 hour day. I usually took Saturday off and was back at work on Sunday, because our company president insisted that we work weekends, no matter how many hours we put in during the week. Perhaps the plan would be to meet Erin, her sister Michelle and her girlfriend Bea (Bonnie), and Erin's crank connection, Ronnie, at St. James Infirmary, a downscale yuppie bar not far from Quickturn.

I found a parking space on the street some distance past the bar and hiked back to it. The bouncer checked my ID and I waded into the early Friday evening crowd. The jeans and cotton polo shirt I had worn to work fit in just fine with this Silicon Valley blue collar crowd. I walked around the right side of the bar that divided the room and examined the drinkers perched on stools at the tall bar

tables. My people weren't there. I continued my circuit around the back of the bar, past the restrooms and the little kitchen that served hamburgers and fries. Along the way, I glanced at the amusing bric-a-brac that completely covered the walls and ceiling — an old, rusty tuba; the bottom half of a mannequin; a large plastic dolphin; some old, tattered movie posters.

The other half of the room was dominated by a small dance floor. It was surrounded by booths on a raised wooden platform separated from the dance floor by a wood railing. I spotted my women in a booth across the room, and pushed and shoved my way over to them.

"Hi Erin!" I shouted in her ear above the pounding rock 'n' roll music. I gave her a peck on the cheek. "Hi everyone!" I nodded to the rest. I could see that all the girls' eyes were sparkling, their pupils dilated wide, and I knew what they had been doing to get the evening started.

"We'll be back in a minute," Erin yelled to the group. She took my hand and led me outside. Once we emerged into the cool, quiet night air, she said, "Hi Ed! I'm so glad to see you. I was afraid you'd work late."

"I told you I'd be here at eight," I said, smiling but slightly peeved. When would Erin understand that I was always very prompt and kept my word?

"C'mon." Erin took my hand and we hurried up the road to where I had parked my battered Chevy S-10 pickup. I'd gotten rid of the RX7 because of three speeding tickets, which was three too many for me. I decided to buy a used pickup truck because I thought it would help me fit in better with my farming in-laws.

We got into the front seat and looked around. It was a dark street, with little traffic and no pedestrians going by. I had made sure of that when I picked the parking space. Erin reached into the pocket of her jeans and pulled out the "bullet." The bullet was a small glass vial with a rounded, conical plastic top, creating the overall shape of a large piece of handgun ammunition. The vial was filled with white powder — crank, as we called it then. Erin turned the bullet over and tapped it, working some crank into the hole in the top of the bullet. Then she twisted a little lever at the side of the cap to arm the bullet, and it handed to me. "Here you go," she said brightly.

Everything Nice

Cupping the bullet in my right hand to conceal it from prying eyes, I shoved the conical end into my right nostril. I closed off my left nostril by pressing the side of my nose with my index finger, and I inhaled deeply. *Whew!* The crank burned as it hit the inside of my nose and made its way toward my lungs. A little got into my sinuses and made my eyes water. A sharp, metallic-tasting drip formed at the back of my throat and I gulped, swallowing it, hating the taste, but kind of liking it, too, because it meant that a good time was on its way to me. I turned the bullet over and tamped another hit into the end. I snorted this hit in my other nostril.

“Thanks!” I said. “That’s good stuff.” I handed the bullet back to Erin.

“Yes,” she said, taking a hit in each nostril herself. “Ronnie always gets the best. Want another?”

“No, I’m fine for now. Let’s go back.”

We went back to bar, my feet feeling much lighter and my attitude suddenly much more sociable. We whiled away the next few hours drinking, eating some French fries, examining the ever-more fascinating artifacts on the walls and ceiling, and dancing a little bit. Erin didn’t like dancing much, but Ronnie did, so I danced with her. In fact, I was very attracted to Ronnie. Maybe it was just that name, but she seemed exotic to me, with her jet black, curly mane and plump, curvaceous body — quite the contrast to Erin’s short, red hair and thin, straight body. But I was a good boy and a faithful husband, and I never got the opportunity to explore Ronnie’s body.

Although time passed quickly for our speeding minds and bodies, we left a half hour before the bar shut down for the night. We knew that the police would be watching the area at closing time, and we didn’t want any of their attention focused on us.

We got into our separate vehicles, Erin in her Escort and me in my truck, Michelle and Bea together, and Ronnie by herself, and reassembled at the suburban house in south San Jose where Erin and I had moved soon after our wedding. Michelle and Bea were familiar with the house, having helped us paint the interior before we moved in. That whole experience had been an eye-opener for me. Out of the blue one day Erin had announced, “My family is coming over to help us paint.”

“We’re painting?” I asked.

“Of course we are. It will be a lot easier to paint before we move all the furniture in.”

“Oh. I thought we could move in and then paint one room at a time, at our leisure.” Truthfully, it had not occurred to me to paint at all. Yes, the house we bought had a garish ‘60s color scheme, with no two rooms the same: one bedroom was blue, another green, and another yellow. But my mind didn’t move along the lines of changing my environment. I simply adapted.

What surprised me even more, however, was the concept of family coming over to help us. I was an independent, do-it-myself type. Wouldn’t this be a horrible burden to place on others, especially in-laws, some of whom I hardly knew?

“It’s OK,” Erin reassured me. “That’s what families do for each other.” Oh? Not my family! But I acquiesced. Kathy, Jerry, Michelle, and Bea came over for three weekends running, and we painted that place from top to bottom. All beige. It was actually pretty fun. Maybe there was more to family than I knew about.

The crank party resumed back at the house, and the fun continued. Ronnie poured a little pile of powder onto a mirror and cut it into lines with a razor blade. I rolled up a twenty-dollar bill to use as a straw, and we all snorted big lines — half the line into one nostril, the other half into the other. Erin put some Jackson Browne music on the stereo and I broke out the booze. Then we gathered around the dining room table with some decks of cards and played a crazy game of “Nertz,” a sort of speed solitaire. “Speed” not just because of the crank, but because it was played very, very fast. Each person played solitaire with their own deck, but everyone played on piles in the center of the table, which started from aces and built to kings. Thus everyone rushed to slap their cards down in the middle of the table, and things could get pretty tumultuous and fierce. All in good fun, though. We played all night long, until the sun started brightening the Saturday morning and hurting our eyes.

The sun cued our guests to decide it was time to go home, so goodbyes were said and they were sent on their ways. Finally alone, just the two of us, Erin said, “Do you want to do another line?”

“No thanks. I’m going to try to get some sleep.” I went back to the master bedroom, took a quick shower, and got into bed. I lay there for hours, tense and shaky, chewing on my tongue and the insides of my cheeks, and watching little hallucinations behind my

Everything Nice

closed eyelids. I really didn't enjoy that part of the crank experience at all. Eventually I drifted off into a light sleep for a few hours.

When I got up, it was late afternoon. Erin was still up, watching something on television. I heated up a can of soup and offered some to Erin, but she only ate a spoonful or two. We watched TV for the rest of the evening, and I went to bed early. When I went to work late Sunday morning, Erin was in the living room listening to some soft Jackson Browne music and looking through photo albums.

I got back from work Sunday afternoon to find Erin puttering around the kitchen, cleaning counters and straightening things in the refrigerator. She looked very wan and gaunt, but she smiled when she saw me.

"Welcome home!" she said, speaking very quickly. "How was work? Do you want to do a line?"

That's when I got worried about her, and tried to talk her down. Finally, I convinced her.

"OK. I guess you're right. Maybe I am overdoing it. I'll go try to get some sleep." She retired to the bedroom, but I heard her tossing and turning for many hours.

Divorce

Let's face it; the marriage was doomed from the start. It wasn't the drugs and alcohol, although they certainly didn't help matters. The real problem was that we were young and immature. I didn't have a clue how to communicate or relate to other people. Heck, I didn't even know my own authentic self. I thought I was a man.

Erin and I had our very first fight while we were on our honeymoon. It was probably a bad omen when they lost our luggage flying over. Our first morning on the Big Island, I went down to breakfast in shorts, a Hawaiian shirt, and black dress shoes. I quickly changed the Oxfords for a pair of sandals, and our luggage showed up at the hotel a few hours later, so it was not a disaster.

The honeymoon was the first time either of us had been to Hawaii, so we decided to island hop. We spent a few days seeing Waikiki, adjusting to five-dollar Mai Tais, dining at the Pink Palace hotel, and taking in Diamond Head and the Al Harrington show.

Everything Nice

Then it was over to the Kona coast of the Big Island for a few days, bunking in our own grass hut in a luxury pseudo-Hawaiian village. I met the king of Tonga at a luau — we happened to be in the bathroom at the same time, and he was using the urinal next to mine. No, I didn't look.

That left Maui and Kauai to finish our tour.

We hopped over to Maui and rented a car for the drive across the island. Erin wanted a Jeep, which seemed silly and uncomfortable to me, but we got a Jeep. Before long, we were settled in our high-rise condo in Kaanapali.

The next day, we drove the Jeep out to the rugged north coast, a few miles north of our condo, for a nice picnic. The view was spectacular. I threw a blanket out on the rocks and sand, and we pulled some sandwiches out of our picnic basket. But a few bugs started buzzing around, and Erin freaked out. We packed up our lunch and left. I recalled how Erin had also freaked out the time some fascinating, tiny crabs emerged from the sand when we were relaxing on a beautiful, deserted white-sand beach on the Big Island. And by the cute little green lizard that had climbed up the wall of the restaurant next to our table the very first night we were in Hawaii. I'd called the waiter over and pointed at the creature. The waiter said, "Yes, sir. That's a gecko. It's good luck." For a farm girl, Erin certainly was uncomfortable around small beasties.

On our third morning in Maui, we drove down to the charming little tourist town of Lahaina for breakfast. Erin wanted to see if we could go on a whale-watching boat trip for our day's main activity. For my part, I thought that if God wanted us to see whales in the middle of the ocean, he wouldn't have created Sea World; but I went along with what Erin wanted. Eventually we would make it onto a whale-watching voyage, and Erin would be terribly sea-sick and refuse to come out from below deck. But that would be later.

We breakfasted on the outdoor wooden balcony of a second-floor restaurant overlooking Lahaina's main square. The weather was perfect, warm and moist, and not a cloud in the sky. It was paradise; but I was in a snit. I was sullen and quiet in my nasty way and Erin could see I had a problem.

"Is something bothering you?" she asked me.

"Yes," I grunted.

"What is it?"

“Let’s talk about it after breakfast.”

“OK.”

We gobbled our breakfast in silence while I stewed in my own juices. Then we walked down to the foot of the plaza and sat on a bench under the giant, historic Banyan Tree with its gnarled limbs that spread out over two-thirds of an acre. With this 125-year-old sage for a backdrop, Erin and I had our first fight.

“Now, what’s eating you?” Erin asked.

“It’s just this,” I said, struggling to express my feelings. “We’re always doing what you want to do, and never what I want. It’s all about you. What about me?”

“What do you mean? I’m stunned to hear you say that. When have I ever refused to do something you wanted?”

“It’s not that you refused. It’s that you never even asked. You don’t seem to care what I want.”

“Well how am I supposed to know if you don’t speak up? What do you want to do, anyway?”

“I don’t know. I mean, it’s not that I want to do something in particular. I would just like to relax a little bit. We’re always doing, doing, doing.”

“Who knows when we’ll ever get back to Hawaii again? I just want to get the most out of being here.”

“And I just need some time to relax!” The truth was, my idea of relaxing was sitting around drinking. Maybe that wouldn’t have made for such a great honeymoon either.

We agreed that I would make an effort to speak up better about what I wanted, and Erin would make an effort to accommodate my desires. But this fight set the stage for behaviors that would characterize and doom our relationship: Erin, outgoing and somewhat self-absorbed, and me, introverted and resentful. Even there under the Banyan Tree, I had been incapable of discussing what was really bugging me, the fact that Erin was so sensitive and freaked out by the bugs and geckos and any little thing that didn’t go her way.

Dusk was falling when we got to our condo on the garden island of Kauai and we were greeted by a welcoming committee of the cutest little green frogs jumping across the lawn. Erin freaked out.

* * *

Erin got a job working as a typesetter at the printing business where her sister Michelle worked. It was an unfortunate career

Everything Nice

choice, because the age of desktop publishing was just then dawning. It was also a poor work environment for a staunch young feminist, because the press monkeys were very sexist and rude.

When Erin grew weary of working, I encouraged her to go back to college. I hoped she would pursue her interest in sign language and I was happy to support her in such an endeavor. But she was too insecure to put her sign-language talents to work and instead put her energy into rock'n'roll class. I thought rock music was entertainment, but apparently it had become sociology when I wasn't paying attention.

We went to a bunch of Jackson Browne concerts, of course, and we also saw Erin's second-favorite band, Triumph. I marveled at the fact that the lyrics of Triumph songs were the longest strings of clichés I had ever encountered: "The days grow shorter and the nights are getting long; Feels like we're running out of time; Every day it seems much harder tellin' right from wrong; You got to read between the lines."

After Erin grew bored with school, her baby alarm began sounding. Ding, ding, ding! By that time she was approaching the ripe old age of 30, so she was right on schedule.

"You said we would talk about starting a family after a while. Isn't it about time?" she asked me.

"I still don't feel ready," I told her. I simply could not envision myself being a father.

* * *

It should come as no surprise to hear that we were seeing a marriage therapist before our second wedding anniversary arrived. What is surprising is that we stayed together for five years. We didn't know any better.

I learned a lot from our couples counseling, and from some individual therapy as well. We explored expectations, feelings, and styles of communication. I learned active listening skills that I would try to practice in my future relationships. I was diagnosed with clinical depression and went on Prozac for a short time. I wasn't allowed to drink while I was taking the anti-depressant, however, so I made sure I got happy quickly, enabling me to stop the pills and resume the bottle.

Besides our communications problems, expectations, and boundary issues, our sex life was also in sad shape. We were appro-

privately active at the beginning of our relationship, of course, but by the time our first anniversary rolled around, we were down to about once a month, and it was not something either of us particularly looked forward to.

I must have been a lousy lover. I didn't understand about a woman's need for foreplay and I didn't like having to be the initiator for sex. I didn't find out what a clitoris was until many years later, when I began looking into sex change surgery. I probably didn't know what a female orgasm was, either, because I don't remember Erin having any, and that's something I would have noticed, isn't it?

I must say, when our sex life was hot at first, I found it exhilarating. Sex continued to be the only experience in life that was better in reality than in my wildest imagination. I don't know if it was the physical sensation or the intimacy and sharing that I liked more, but it was wonderful.

Our sex was not very adventurous, however; missionary position, spooning, and sometimes female-dominant, and that's about it. I performed oral sex on Erin a few times, and I loved it. I loved getting lost in her moist, pungent pussy, but she only allowed me a few minutes, and didn't want it very often. She never performed oral sex on me. I suggested that we try a few more exotic practices.

"Let's get slick with baby oil all over our bodies," I said.

"It will muss the sheets," Erin responded.

"We can do it in the shower," I pressed, thinking of the large Roman-style shower in our master bathroom.

"Forget it," she said.

I wanted to try anal sex. For a while, I felt drawn to it very powerfully. But Erin firmly nixed it. One time I accidentally popped her in the wrong hole — I swear it was an accident; they're pretty close to each other, after all. Erin howled in pain and didn't forgive me for a long time. Many years later, I would try inserting an object into my own anus, and I finally appreciated why Erin howled.

So sex was pretty repetitive and boring. I lost my sex drive, and our love life dwindled. I sublimated by working hard — or maybe it was the other way around: I was a workaholic and didn't have the energy for sex. Either way, the result was a crummy sex life.

* * *

Eventually D-Day arrived, and the D was not for Disneyland, but for Divorce. I was sitting at the dining room table reading a book

Everything Nice

when Erin stormed in and pouted, “Why are you ignoring me? You must really hate me.”

For once I eschewed my usual response of, “I don’t hate you. I’m just enjoying a little private time.” Instead, I put down my book, looked Erin in the eye, and said quietly, “Erin, maybe we should just end this once and for all.”

Instantly, Erin’s eyes teared up. “Do you mean divorce?”

“Well, yeah. We’re fighting all the time. Both of us seem to be miserable. Don’t you think we might be better off if we split up?”

“I- I- I- g-g-guess so,” she stammered. And so it was.

As the days went by we worked out the details of the separation.

“Who gets the house?” Erin asked.

“You’re welcome to it,” I said cruelly, “if you can find a bank willing to give you a mortgage.”

“Oh — I’d have to pay for it?”

“Well, yeah!”

So Erin found a little apartment. Moving day arrived on a Saturday. I went into work and sat in a stall in the bathroom and wept. I was glad the relationship had ended, but I was crushed. I felt like my life was a total failure.

Meanwhile, Erin and her friends cleaned out the house. I told her to take anything she wanted, and she did a pretty good job. She was fair, though. Her friends encouraged her to totally wipe me out, but she only took what she felt she could use. Including, I discovered when I began tidying up, the vacuum cleaner. I visited Erin once in her new apartment and I was amused to see that it was so stuffed full of furniture and whatnot, there was hardly room to move around. Zarkov seemed to like it, though.

Erin had entered the marriage with an old Ford Escort, \$2,000 of debt, and a nasty Siamese cat. She left five years later with a new Mazda 424, fully paid for; half a household of furniture; and \$40,000 cash. Plus Zarkov. Not too shabby, huh?

For me, divorce marked the beginning of another epic dry spell. No dates and no sex would enter my life for a year, a year when I would futilely attempt to smother my loneliness in work and booze. My mother consoled me, saying, “Just be patient, Eddy. The right woman will come along for you one day.”

As a final hangover from my marriage, I would forever after find myself profoundly annoyed whenever I heard the “Doooo-do, do-do-d’do-do-do” of *Suite: Judy Blue Eyes*.

“Yes, ma’am”

I picked up the ringing telephone. “Hello?”

“Hi. Would you be interested in...?” *Another sales call*, I moaned to myself. I got lots of them in the days before the “Do Not Call” list.

“I’m not interested in anything, thank you.”

“Yes ma’am, but can I just tell you about how much money you can save — ”

“In the first place, I’m not a ‘ma’am,’ I’m a ‘sir.’ And in the second place, good-bye!”

Sales calls were annoying enough, but for me they almost always added insult to injury by reminding me of my funny, high-pitched voice. All my life I’d gotten “Ma’am’d” on the telephone. Apparently my normal speaking voice sounded totally feminine, but a little hoarse like I had a bad cold. Half of the time I didn’t even bother to

correct them, because what was the point? What did it matter if they thought I was a woman? I was hanging up on them anyway.

Actually, it was funny that I would be annoyed at being mistaken for a woman on the telephone, because since the divorce, I had begun to explore my latent interest in wearing women’s clothes. I confess, I had tried on a couple of Erin’s things when we were married, but her taste in clothing wasn’t feminine enough to excite me. For example, one time I bought Erin a couple of tube tops, but I got the notion to try them on myself before I gave them to her. They didn’t flatter my figure — to say the least. Erin thanked me flatly and never wore them.

In my doldrums following the divorce, I began to revive my fetish for nylons by picking up a couple of those white plastic L’Eggs in the grocery store. The stockings felt nice, but I was starting to eye the foundation garments in the Macy’s advertisements in the newspaper. I could only imagine how nice they might feel. And those slinky dresses, too. *Why shouldn’t I find out?* I finally thought one day. I wouldn’t be hurting anybody. In fact, nobody would even know about it, except me. It wasn’t like I had anything else going on in my life at the time. All I ever did was go to work during the day, and drink and watch television in the evening.

My first purchase was a full coverage body briefer, a spandex garment that stretched from a brassiere-like top down to a panty bottom. I had some vague idea that when I wiggled into it, my body would be compacted into womanly curves, like those of the model in the newspaper advertisement.

Purchasing the body briefer was an ordeal. I decided it would be safer to go to a Sears store rather than a more upscale place like Macy’s. The salespeople wouldn’t be so attentive and there wouldn’t be as many classy women in the lingerie department.

I got in my blue Buick LeSabre (I’d traded in the pickup truck when a herniated L5-S1 disk in my back started causing me trouble), drove to the Sears store in the local mall, and went inside. Casually strolling past the lingerie department, I spotted the foundation garments in the back. Only a couple of women were shopping nearby, which was ideal, because they could occupy any salesladies who might happen to be in the area. I circled wide around the escalators and the jewelry section, came back to the lingerie department, and headed in.

Everything Nice

All the lovely brassieres and panties cried out for my attention, but I studiously ignored them as I made my way straight back to the foundation garments. Most of the enticing items were sealed in rectangular plastic packages stacked into a set of shelves. I saw panty girdles, long-line bras, garments that crept far up over the ribs, some that covered the thighs, and some that even extended all the way down to the ankles. But I had my mind set on the panty-to-bra-straps body briefer. It took a few minutes, but I located them. I checked out their sizes: S, M, L, and XL. I obviously wouldn't be a small. At six feet, I was taller than most of the women I had ever met, so I would have to be in the large or extra-large sizes. I decided extra-large was probably for fatties, so I thought I should select the large.

I looked around stealthily, checking for any customers that might be nearby, and locating the cash registers. And I couldn't do it. I was trembling slightly with fear and embarrassment, and I couldn't bring myself to physically touch the package that held the size L body briefer.

I walked out of the lingerie department empty-handed and dejected. I went home and poured myself a stiff bourbon. And another. And another.

For the next two weeks, the image of the slinky body briefer haunted my mind. I thought about it often and chided myself for being such a coward. How stupid it was for me to be scared! It was just a scrap of cloth, for God's sake! I challenged myself to go get that damn rag, no longer for the sexual fetish, but just to prove I could overcome my irrational fear.

I went back to the same Sears store, and this time I picked up the package and took it to the counter, a hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach. I waited for a couple of minutes, oh so casually glancing around, while the one woman in front of me completed her transaction. Then I handed my selection to the grandmotherly woman at the register. She barely glanced at me as she took my cash and deposited my treasure in a Sears shopping bag.

"Have a nice day!" she said brightly.

"Thank you. I will," I replied.

There now, that wasn't so difficult, was it? I asked myself. No, it hadn't been. I wondered what it was that I had been so fearful about.

I took my prize home and poured myself a victory martini. Relaxing on the couch for the sweet moment, I sipped my drink and basked in my personal triumph. I had done it! And now, now I would find out what it felt like to wear that supremely feminine garment.

The time was only noon, and I had nothing planned for the rest of that Saturday, so I milked the experience for all it was worth. I took a long, hot shower my Roman-style master bath. With the hot water pouring down, I lathered up my legs with shaving cream and scraped them smooth with a BIC disposable razor, as I had done on several occasions in the past. I nicked myself only a couple of times.

I dried off and sat down on the big California-king bed with my precious body briefers and my stash of pantyhose. I chose a new pair of jet black hose, because black hose were just sooo sexy. I bunched up the right stocking leg on my thumbs and inserted my toe in the end. Gently, I worked the hose up my leg all the way to the top of my thigh, being careful not to poke a finger through the nylon weave. I repeated the operation for the left leg. Dammit! The right leg was rotated half-way around, causing an uncomfortable twist when I pulled up the left leg. Sighing, I re-did the right leg, turning it 180 degrees when I stuck my toe in.

Gently but firmly, I pulled the hose up my thighs as far as they would go. Even queen size hose left a gap between their crotch and mine, because my legs were so long. Then I pulled the panty part of the hose up over my midsection, where it stretched all the way to the bottom of my man-breasts, as high as some of the foundation garments I had seen at Sears. I stood up and did a couple of half squats with my knees spread wide apart to work the crotch of the hose up as high as possible.

I looked at myself in the full-length mirrors that formed the closet doors. I had nice legs, I had to admit. A bit on the skinny side, but better than too fat.

I grabbed a small pair of scissors from the drawer below the sink and sat back down on the bed to open the body briefers package. I cut a slit across the top and slid the garment out of the plastic. The smooth, shiny material was white and clean, and wrapped around a piece of cardboard. I shook the cardboard loose and looked at my trophy. It looked just like the ones in the newspaper ads, except it

Everything Nice

seemed awfully small. I hoped it would stretch enough for me to get into it.

I stood up and stepped into the leg holes of the body briefier. I pulled it up my body just like I had done with the pantyhose, and finally looped the straps over my shoulder. It was a stretch, but they made it. A bit tight in the north-south direction, but it fit.

I examined myself in the mirror. The image was a mixed pleasure. The garment was satiny and lustrous, quite unlike anything I'd ever worn before. But it did not sculpt my body into a feminine form. No, my big belly was still there, bordering on a pot-gut. My sides went straight up, not pulled in at the waist at all. And my chest was as flat as day-old beer. The empty brassiere pockets of the body briefier hung there morosely, longing for a plump set of fleshy breasts to fill them.

It was OK, though. I didn't really expect the garment to change my figure substantially. The laws of physics told me it would take steel or whalebone to do that. I ran my hands up and down my torso. It felt really nice. I was a little turned on. I tried stuffing a pair of socks into the breast cups, but it wasn't much of an improvement.

Once I had broken through the immense psychological barrier that had inhibited me from buying an item of feminine attire at a store, things progressed pretty quickly for me. I got a panty-girdle and a slip. I went to a Goodwill thrift store and started to purchase dresses — fancy ball gowns, anything satiny and frilly or slick and clingy, and many things suitable only for a high school prom. Ross Dress For Less was also a place where I felt safe browsing for dresses, and the prices were in my comfort zone.

The limits of my courage were stretched again when I located a wig shop. I examined the wigs in the window from outside the store and zeroed in on the one I wanted. It was shoulder-length blonde hair, of course. I whisked into the store, told the girl at the counter, "I'd like that one," and threw my money at her. I barely heard her saying, "Don't you want to try it on?" as I scampered out the door.

I was still pretty nervous about shopping in the women's sections and confronting check-out people. I even had a cover story in my back pocket, just in case anyone ever asked me, "Is this for you?"

"Oh no," I was going to say. "It's for my wife. She's disabled and can't get out to do her own shopping, so I pick up things for her."

Fortunately, no one ever challenged me, so I never attempted to put over this awkward bluff. The closest I came to being outed was when a salesgirl said, “Whoever you’re buying this for is going to be really pleased!” Smiling, I had to agree.

As my cross-dressing picked up in frequency and intensity, I soon made a remarkable discovery. It seemed that I could order all manner of feminine clothing by mail! Suddenly, I was no longer constrained by my nervousness at approaching live salesladies, and my wardrobe began expanding at an alarming rate. I bought dresses and skirts and tops. I got tons of bras and panty-girdles. I didn’t like panties much, however, because they didn’t fit right. The problem wasn’t just my extra equipment; it was my budding pot belly, too. Panty-girdles addressed both issues.

My favorite thing in the whole world at this time was when the One Hanes Place mail-order catalog periodically ran grab-bag sales. For ridiculously low prices, I could order close-out items from the grab bag. For example, I could get bras for a dollar and a half each, in size 36-C, in an underwire style, but I couldn’t specify an exact model or color. So I’d order six bras, four panties, a few dresses, some skirts, and some shoes, all for about fifty dollars. A couple weeks later, a big parcel would arrive on my doorstep and it was like Christmas! I’d pour myself a big drink and sit on the floor, pulling items one by one out of the box, delighted at the variety and the styles and textures of everything. Half of the booty wouldn’t fit, but it was so cheap, I didn’t care. Some of my grab-bag items became my very favorites, often things that I never would have thought to order specifically myself. I learned one of the basic rules of shopping: You just don’t know until you try it on.

My lack of breasts quickly became an issue that I needed to remedy. Silicon breast forms at upwards of a hundred dollars a pair were way above the budget I was willing to invest in my little hobby, so I looked for less expensive alternatives. For a while, I used partially-filled water balloons, and they worked quite nicely. They filled out my brassieres and felt nice and squishy. But then I found a hint on a Web site, and learned the secret to the cheap person’s ultimate breast forms: fistfuls of birdseed packed into the toes of an old pair of nylons. They matched the weight and firmness of actual breasts quite well — as if I’d know, with my limited experience with the real thing. At least, it seemed like what actual breasts would feel

Everything Nice

like. (None of my sexual conquests had been much endowed in that area.) I double-bagged my birdseed breasts, using two thicknesses of nylon toes for each breast, to prevent leakage. I never had any embarrassing incidents.

Over a period of six months, my wardrobe grew, and I got better at my makeup and dress to the point where I thought I made quite an attractive woman. Like many a cross-dresser, I said to myself, "I've become the woman I always wanted to meet."

It was an extraordinary transformation, really. My routine was like this: I took a nice bath, sipping a refreshing cocktail. (The ice made my bourbon or gin into a cocktail, as opposed to just boozing.) Then I shaved, all over, and put on a bra and panty-girdle before doing my makeup. But it wasn't until I slipped the wig onto my head that the woman magically appeared in the mirror.

Once dressed, I usually took pictures, using the Polaroid camera I bought specifically for this purpose. I took snapshots wearing several outfits — my favorites, and anything new I had recently acquired. Then I watched a movie on television, or spent some time on the computer.

America Online (AOL) had arrived on the scene, and I got an account. I used a 14.4kbaud modem on a dial-up line, and it was often murder just trying to make a connection. At one point, the system got so overloaded that connecting was practically impossible for a few months. But I was persistent. I had found some newsgroups where I could download pictures of cross-dressers, and wow, did they ever turn me on! I couldn't believe some of them were actually men, but they were. I didn't imagine I could ever look so good. Occasionally I came across pictures of transsexual women, but they were so plain and boring, they didn't interest me. Besides, they were just women, right? Where was the fun in that? I like the short-skirted, high-heeled, big-haired, heavily made-up beauties!

There was one incredibly intriguing thing about the transsexual women, however: Often they were photographed in public places, like in hotels or on the beach. Imagine that, to go out in public, dressed as a woman! My favorite picture was a gal standing at the observation point on the Marin side of the Golden Gate Bridge. Wow.

In my typical routine, I eventually became tired of the computer or TV, or too drunk to understand any of it, or it just got late

and I needed to get to bed. The fun would have to come to an end. Usually I masturbated, often to pictures of naked women in a Playboy magazine. A few times I experimented with inserting something in my rectum. I tried the necks of bottles, and vegetables (too soft), but when I got to candles, they were just right. I found anal play incredibly stimulating, but I was scared I might be injuring myself, so I didn’t do it much.

Once I had my orgasm, I immediately lost the will to be cross-dressed. I didn’t feel guilty, exactly; it was just a chemical thing — the same reason, I suppose, that men roll over and go to sleep after sex. Nevertheless, I always felt sad taking off the clothes and makeup, and putting “her” away until next time.

* * *

Then I got that fateful phone call, the one where the salesman called me “Ma’am.” It had happened to me a hundred times before, but this time, something went click in my head. *Hey*, I thought, *if I already sound like a woman, maybe it wouldn’t be that hard for me to actually pass as a woman.*

For the first time, it occurred to me that it might be feasible for me to attempt to present myself as a woman in public. Just thinking about it set my heart thumping with fear and exhilaration. Could I possibly do it? Why not? What was the worst that could happen? I could get laughed at, mocked? I supposed I could be arrested under certain circumstances, but that didn’t seem very likely. I didn’t worry about getting beat up, because I couldn’t believe that sort of thing could happen in broad daylight in a public place in the suburbs.

I began to plan my first outing. Where would I go? What would I wear? An objective became fixed in my mind: I would use a public women’s restroom. The idea excited me. How forbidden! Dare I? Of course I could; I wouldn’t let fear be an impediment. I had purchased the body-briefer, hadn’t I?

I scouted the terrain in boy mode. I decided my target would be Macy’s in the mall. On D-Day (dressing up day), I bathed, shaved, and did my makeup oh so carefully. Thick foundation to cover any vestige of beard shadow. Dark circles of eye-liner to really bring out my eyes. False eyelashes, too. Bright red lipstick and red Lee press-on fingernails. No one would possibly mistake me for a guy!

By this time, I had acquired a wig of below-the-shoulder straight black hair. When I put it on, I saw my sister in the mirror. I

Everything Nice

wore it parted on one side and let the sides cascade forward over my face. This style left just a little window for me to peer out of, because I thought my face looked too masculine if I pulled the hair back. I assumed a permanent scowl, because my smile didn't look right to me.

I chose a black cotton dress that I felt sexy in. The top was stretchy and clung to my bosomy, birdseedy torso, while the skirt flared out. The hemline was short, half-way up my thigh, to show off my beautiful gams. Black pumps with three-and-a-half inch heels and sexy black stockings finished off my bottom half.

Every detail had to be right! I put a cheap drugstore wristwatch on my left wrist, and some gold bangles on my right. Plenty of rings adorned my fingers. I clipped small gold circles to my earlobes. A purple glass pendant on a thin gold chain went around my neck.

I was ready to meet world.

It was early Saturday afternoon when I went out to the garage and slid into my car. Already I was scared to death. What if one of my neighbors saw me? Throwing caution to the wind, I pushed the clicker to raise the garage door. As quickly as I could, I backed out of the driveway and headed down the street. I didn't see any neighbors outside. Phew!

Simply driving down the street was a thrill. People could see me! When I stopped at traffic lights, they could study me! I wondered what they saw. Did they notice something terribly wrong? I kept my eyes focused straight ahead, because I didn't want to raise any suspicions by looking furtively around. Granted, my sphere of vision was limited, but I didn't notice any commotion. I seemed to be pulling it off.

I got to the mall and found a space in the far reaches of the parking lot, making certain no one was close by. I checked my makeup in the mirror on the back of the sun visor and touched up my scarlet lipstick. Was I really going to do this? Yes, I was. *OK, here I go!*

I didn't go. It was too scary. I sat there while my mind worried over the possible horrible outcomes one more time. No, there was no logical reason why I should have any trouble with this. I could do it.

I launched myself out of the car, making sure the doors were locked, then tossing the keys into my mostly empty black vinyl purse. Once again focusing straight ahead, I marched through the

parking lot up to the front door of Macy’s. My heart was pounding like the waves crashing on the rocks at Sea Ranch, and the palms of my hands were clammy like the meadow grass covered with morning dew. I passed a middle-aged couple heading for their car. They didn’t give me so much as a glance, thank goodness.

My objective firmly in mind, I entered Macy’s and aimed straight for the escalator. I caught my reflection in the tall, thin mirrors mounted on the store’s support columns, and I was reassured by my totally passable appearance. I would be fine, I was certain. No one was paying any attention to me at all.

I relaxed a little as I rode the escalator up to the second floor. I stepped off at the top, being careful not to catch a heel in the grate where the steps ceaselessly disappeared.

I made my way to the wall where I knew the women’s restroom lay. My confidence was growing by the second.

An alcove held a drinking fountain and some telephones. The doors to the two restrooms were at the two ends of the alcove. I went in and turned right, to the women’s side.

Oh no! Two young teenage girls were leaning against the wall in the corridor of the alcove, chatting away. I sucked in a breadth for courage. It would be OK. I looked fine.

I swept past the girls, but as I opened the door to the restroom, one of the girls’ voices rose in volume. “Why do they let men in here?” I heard her say, in a peeved voice clearly meant for me to overhear.

Yikes! I was busted! Oh my god, what would I do? I couldn’t just turn around and run away. There were no other women (or men) in the restroom, thank God. I hastily ducked into a stall.

I would just do my business and get out, I decided. But I was terrified. What if they called the manger? How embarrassing would that be? And now, now I wondered, *Can I get arrested for this? Is it actually against the law for a man to be in a women’s room?*

I finished my business quickly, pulled up my pantyhose and panty-girdle, and smoothed down my dress. Moving quickly, I rinsed my hands, dried them, and checked my makeup in the mirror. I looked as good as ever, which, apparently, was not nearly good enough. However, I now noticed that my dress was rather ridiculously short, and my heels awfully high for a six foot tall woman.

Everything Nice

It also dawned on me that I hadn't seen another shopper wearing a dress of any kind. I began to feel foolish about my appearance.

I left the restroom, moving somewhat faster than when I had entered it. The two girls were still there, but I hurried past without giving them a look. I made a beeline for the escalator, downstairs, out the front door, across the parking lot, and into the relative safety of my car. Made it! Oh my God, how horrible was that? And yet, how wonderful, too. I drove home, poured myself a tumbler of bourbon, and went to my computer to research whether it was, in fact, illegal for a man to use a women's restroom in California. (It was not illegal.)

* * *

I had crossed another major threshold in my cross-dressing development and there was simply no going back. Having been clocked — identified as a dude in a dress — on my first outing, I was doubly shy as I continued to venture out. I walked around the outside of a shopping mall, afraid to even go in. I tried to stay at least 20 feet away from the nearest person. I dressed somewhat more conservatively, although I still wore things that made me feel sexy. Otherwise, what would be the point?

I had my little triumphs. One afternoon I took a walk around a few blocks of my neighborhood, wearing a terribly short mini-skirt and heels. A young man washing his car across the street yelled over to me, "Nice legs!" I just blushed and walked on. Other times, people clearly looked at me, but didn't have any reaction. Slowly, oh so slowly, my self-confidence began to grow.

As my confidence increased, I got bolder. I went out to matinees at the movies — two minutes of terror buying my ticket, followed by two hours of calm satisfaction sitting alone in the dark. I began to go inside shopping malls, walking from one end to the other before my courage was exhausted and I fled home. People simply didn't pay any attention to me, and so I actually started passing as a woman most of the time.

I often overheard giggles and whispers when I walked past people in the aisles of the shopping malls. I couldn't help but to assume they were laughing at me, try as I might to convince myself I was just being paranoid. Sometimes I could make out a few words: "That's a man!" "No! Is it?" But no one ever confronted me or tried to talk directly to me.

I soon learned that teenage girls were absolutely the most deadly at clocking me. I thought it was because they’re so conscious about their own bodies at that age, they closely examine the other women they see to compare. (I did the same thing.) Little children were also trouble. They saw right through my clothes. I walked past a mother and her five year old son and heard the kid say, “Mommy, why is that man wearing a dress?” I don’t believe the mother had noticed anything.

I was super cautious about using restrooms after my scary initial incident. It was thrilling to be in a women’s room, but usually I found one off the beaten track, where no women were likely to be inside at the time.

Brave as I was, I didn’t have the courage to actually go into the stores where salesladies might try to help me, and I certainly wasn’t brave enough to purchase feminine articles while in my femme presentation. Being around a tiger was one thing, but pulling the tiger’s tail was quite another.

The Love of My Life

One day at an 8 a.m. staff meeting, the love of my life walked into the conference room. She was tall and pretty, dressed in a smart skirt, jacket, and pumps. Her wavy, out-of-control black hair framed a beautiful face with big brown eyes, a small nose that was just slightly long and pointy, and a strong chin. Her face was set with a serious, all-business look.

Five male heads swiveled to track her movements as she followed Simon, our British expatriate CEO, around to the head of the table. The one other female head in the room, which belonged to our document control manager, observed the five male managers with amusement.

Acting as if it were the most natural thing in the world, Simon announced, "This is my new assistant, Janice."

“Hi Janice,” we sung out; and “Welcome to R-Drive.” That sneak! We hadn’t a clue that he was even interviewing for an assistant.

Janice sat quietly throughout the meeting, earnestly taking notes — especially when Simon asked her to “Be sure I do that” or “Take care of that, would you?”

I was transfixed. Who brought this porcelain-skinned beauty into my world? Oh, well, it was Simon of course, but anyway ... I checked her fingers for rings, something I rarely thought to do. No rings. That was a good sign. Perhaps she was single. Perhaps she was *available*.

After the meeting was over, I decided I was not going to let this opportunity pass me by. It took me about an hour to work up my courage — my fear of rejection ran as strong as it had when I was a high school kid. Finally I was ready. I waited for a moment when no one else was near Janice’s cubicle, and I casually strolled over.

“Hi Janice! Welcome to R-Drive. I’m Ed.”

“Hi.”

“So how do you like us so far?”

“Everyone seems very nice.”

“Yes, they are. Especially your boss. I think you’ll really like working for him.”

“That’s good to hear.”

“Say, can I take you to lunch today?”

“Oh! Ummm, sure. That would be nice.”

“Do you like Italian? I know a good little Italian place not far from here.”

“Italian would be great.”

“OK then. Let’s get together about noon.”

“Great!”

I felt like Joe Cool. Very suave, very nicely done. I retreated to my cube, a couple of aisles over. Our company consisted of 27 people in a small building, so we would have no trouble finding each other.

Come noon, I held the door open to let Janice climb into my Buick, and off we went to the Italian restaurant next to a Safeway grocery store a few miles from work.

We were seated at a table next to the wall in the rapidly filling dining room. “Everything I’ve tried here has been very good,” I com-

Everything Nice

mented as we looked at our menus. I ordered chicken scaloppini and a glass of white wine. Janice ordered stuffed rigatoni and iced tea.

We made the usual get-acquainted small talk over lunch.

“So what brings you to R-Drive?” I asked.

“I got laid off at my last job. I’m glad I found this so fast.”

“What did you do before?”

“I was an executive assistant there, too.”

“Oh. I suppose I should have guessed that.” We both laughed.

“Where are you commuting from?”

“I have a condominium in San Mateo.”

“Oh, dear. That’s pretty far. That’s going to be a nasty commute.”

“It’s not too bad. About a half hour.”

“I guess that’s not too bad. I live in south San Jose and it takes me about that, sometimes longer, depending on traffic.”

“Do you live in an apartment?”

“No. I have a house in Blossom Valley. Down by the big IBM plant where they make disk drives. Everybody else in my neighborhood works for IBM, so they don’t talk to me,” I said with a smile.

“Do you have kids?”

“No. I’m single. How about you?”

“I’m single too.”

“Really? Were you ever married?”

“No, never.” I was surprised. I guessed that Janice was about the same age as me. How did a beautiful girl like her manage to stay single her whole life?

“Were you?” she asked me.

“Yes. I was married for five years. That ended about a year ago.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Oh no. It’s OK. It needed to be over.”

We went on like this through lunch, the conversation flowing easily for both of us. Soon we looked at our watches and said, “I guess we’d better be getting back to the office.”

When we arrived at our building and I deposited Janice safely in her cubical, I decided to strike while the iron was hot. I really liked Janice, and I didn’t want to let her get away, either from timidity or because one of our many other single men stepped in.

“I had a great time at lunch,” I said.

“Me too,” Janice agreed with an inviting smile. “Thank you very much.”

“Oh, you’re welcome. Say, I hope this isn’t too forward, but would you like to have dinner with me some time soon?”

Janice’s smile turned to a frown. Uh-oh. “What’s wrong?” I asked, worried. Was I out of line? Did Janice have some unfortunate baggage I had inadvertently mishandled?

“Here I thought you were just welcoming a new employee!” she wailed.

“Oh, no!” I chuckled. “It’s more than that!”

Janice smiled, realizing she was being silly. “Well, I’m flattered. But I’m afraid I have to say no. I don’t date people I work with.”

“That’s a very wise policy. Break it for me! I’m a really nice guy.”

“No. I don’t think so. Sorry.”

“OK. You think about it.” You know how it is with guys: yes means yes, no means maybe.

The next day I dropped by Janice’s cubicle to chat. After some small talk, I persisted in pressing my suit.

“Have you thought about going out with me?”

“Actually, I have. I think I’d like that.”

“Really?” I was stunned. Things were breaking my way for once in my life. “That’s great. Let’s see, it’s Tuesday. Are you available Thursday?”

“Work nights are kind of hard for me. I have to get up so early.”

“Yeah. I know. Hey, would you like to do lunch on Saturday? We could drive out to Half Moon Bay. I know a really nice restaurant there.”

“That sounds fun. Why don’t we do that?”

And that’s just what we did. The week dragged on forever, but it was brightened by the opportunity to chat with Janice several times a day. The Saturday weather was bright and balmy as we drove over highway 92 to Half Moon Bay, a beautiful flat coastal area just south of San Francisco.

We ate at the Sandpiper, an upscale American-style restaurant at the tiny Half Moon Bay marina. I overtipped the helpful waiter and asked Janice if she’d like to go for a walk. I didn’t want the date

Everything Nice

to end at that point, and apparently neither did Janice, because she said, "Let's!"

We walked hand-in-hand and talked heart-to-heart. After we explored the small marina from one end to the other, we found a shady spot next to the water and sat on a patch of grass to talk some more. Janice told me, "I never met anyone who was so open about their feelings." I felt good about that. I didn't realize I was doing all the talking, and all about me, in the typical male/female dating dynamic.

When we finally drove back over hills to San Mateo, Janice invited me up to her condo. It was bright, clean, and nicely decorated with a feminine touch, but not cluttered. I liked it.

We spent the rest of the afternoon together, and Janice improvised a light dinner for us — light fare, because we were still full from the big lunch.

"Gosh, we used up the whole day!" Janice said.

"Where did the time go? I've enjoyed every minute."

"Me too."

"I don't want it to end," I said greedily. "Do you want to go to a movie or something?"

"Maybe. Let's see what's playing. Ummm, you know what? I think it's too late for that. I'm already starting to get tired."

"You're right. Maybe we can just talk a little more."

We made ourselves comfortable on a window seat in the living room, but we didn't talk a whole lot. We necked.

Things progressed, as necking tends to do. After a while I reached to unbutton Janice's white silk blouse. She took my hand.

"Let's not." She said gently. "I'd love to, but it's too late. Let's wait until we have enough time and we don't have to rush it."

"Yes. You're right. That would be best."

I drove 30 minutes home to south San Jose feeling marvelous. What a terrific day! What a spectacular woman! What a wonderful world! My life was changed.

The following Saturday, we had a date in San Jose and ended up at my place. In my bedroom, to be specific. When Janice shyly stepped out of her skirt and slipped her blouse and brassiere off, I gasped. "You're like a Playboy model!" I exclaimed. And I meant it. She was tall, statuesque, and had a real hour-glass figure, curving in nicely at the waist and out at the hips. Her breasts were round and

full. Oh, they may have sagged slightly, and maybe she had a little bit of a belly, but that didn't bother me at all. She was gorgeous. I felt like I had won the lottery.

Janice was embarrassed and deflected the compliment. "Oh, you're joking! I do not."

"You do! I really mean it!" Janice obviously did not realize how beautiful she was.

We were a match made in heaven. After four months Janice sold her condominium and moved in with me. A short while later, we bought a two-story executive home together in north San Jose, just a couple of miles from R-Drive. We got along wonderfully. We didn't have a single fight. *So this is what a good relationship is like!* I marveled. *It doesn't have to be hard!*

Janice didn't even flinch when I told her I cross-dress. I made sure to disclose my little peccadillo before she moved in with me. It was a brief discussion.

"It's OK with me if you don't want anything to do with it," I reassured her. "It's just something I like doing." I guess she didn't want anything to do with it, because the subject never came up again. Not for six years, anyway.

R-Drive

All the while Janice and I were courting, the 27 of us at R-Drive were busting our humps creating the world's first 3.5 inch form-factor DDS computer tape drive. It was going to be the fastest as well as the least expensive drive in the industry. Our competition was HP, the electronics industry giant that actually invented the DDS technology. We weren't scared of them, though. We were small and nimble; we thought we could move faster than them.

Starting from scratch, we developed a mechanism, some application-specific integrated circuits (ASICs), and a slew of software. I flew to Tokyo to get head drums from Sony, and accompanied Jack, the mechanical engineering manager, to Singapore to get machined parts. We fired some of the founders. One of them sued us for improper dismissal, but I told the arbiter how the fellow had embarrassed us by getting drunk and telling filthy jokes to our Chinese business partners at a dinner in Singapore.

The FBI raided our shop because one of our mechanical engineers had stolen trade secrets from a previous employer — not anything we were using in our product, fortunately. The FBI also let us know that this guy was contracting out some of our overflow work to one of our own designers, and taking a kickback from it. Lovely. The young designer cried when we let him go.

We had a small sexual harassment tizzy when one of the guys got a birthday cake shaped like a woman's torso, complete with big round cupcake boobs. It was a laugh at first, but they kept it on display in the company fridge for simply too long. In addition to the boob cake, a fellow kept Playboy pictures pinned all over his cubicle walls. The cake was removed and the photography buff was told he could only hang his picture inside his cube, out of sight.

Remarkably, we got our little tape drive together and working. It was an extremely challenging project. I spent one week out of every six in Kobe, Japan (where the famous Kobe beef comes from) working to transfer the design to a Japanese manufacturing partner. At one point, my software manager and I had a free day in Japan so we went to see Peace Park in Hiroshima, where the first atomic bomb was dropped.

“If anyone asks,” I told Daniel, “we're Canadian.”

“Funny thing about that,” Daniel replied. “My father was actually a mathematician who worked on the Manhattan Project.” Not “ha-ha” funny.

The DDS technology, which worked with tapes that were only 4 millimeters wide, was very difficult, and our drive wasn't as solid as it needed to be. We worked long hours and sweated bullets solving various problems. Tension was high. The building was filled with stress and whirring, clicking tape drives.

Gradually, painfully, we improved the drive and got it into pilot production, shipping a few hundred units. But by this time we were six months behind schedule, and therefore late coming to market. HP and two other companies had brought out similar drives, and second-generation models would be along soon. It turned out HP could be pretty nimble, too.

By the time we got the drive into pilot production, the venture capitalists who funded our company owned most of it. We had been forced to sell it off to raise several rounds of financing. The VCs de-

Everything Nice

ecided to cut bait and execute an exit strategy. They began searching for a big company that would like to buy our little company.

The CEO of a major disk drive company joined our board of directors. As a matter of fact, our founders had spun R-Drive out of the same company in the first place. This industry titan's presence was a feather in our corporate cap. He advised Simon, "Cash is more important than your mother." He also said, "The problem with living in a mansion is that you put down your drink and you can never find it again."

We later discovered that the disk drive company had been considering acquiring R-Drive. Once they decided to pass, the CEO promptly resigned his board seat. At our entreaty, he generously agreed to stay on the board as a silent member while we completed our search for a buyer.

Eventually, another tape drive company bought us. The venture capitalists got their investments back, breaking essentially even, so they were content. A substantial amount of bonus money and stock was granted to R-Drive's employees to incentivize them to stay on the team. The board wanted to allocate the booty to management and key staff only, but Simon insisted that every one of our now 100 or so employees get a taste. It was an admirably fair thing to do — very old Silicon Valley. I was Director of Engineering by this time, and I pocketed \$100,000 — not enough for a house, but plenty for a nice car, as we evaluated these things. Actually, I banked the cash.

Life under the new regime was grueling. Half of their staff, including the vice president of engineering, considered our technology to be the enemy. They put obstacles in our path at every turn. I was at an executive staff meeting at company headquarters in Colorado when the VP pulled the rug out from under me so thoroughly that I walked out into the snowy parking lot and vomited between two parked cars. I began to think it was simply not worth it anymore. Back in San Jose a few days later, Simon, now a director at the new company, called me into his office.

"You know that big raise I promised you?" he asked. Of course I did. Six weeks earlier he'd told me, "You've really been doing a vice president's job for some time, even if you haven't had the title. Now that we have some money, I'm raising your salary up to where it ought to be." I was going to go from \$105,000 to \$145,000. Or so I thought. But now he said, "I'm afraid headquarters has nixed it."

“Oh, OK,” I said calmly. “Would you like me to work two more weeks, or can I clean out my office today? All my work is well documented and delegated to my managers. There is really nothing I need to do here.”

Simon understood completely. “You can leave now,” he said. “Good luck, and stay in touch.”

Within a year, he was gone as well, and all of the California operations had been pulled back into the headquarters campus in Colorado. Within a couple more years, all the R-Drive products were canceled. In short, it was a fairly typical Silicon Valley start-up company story. We can't all be Apple Computer.

Busted

After I left R-Drive, I decided to take some time off for rest and recuperation — a full year, as it turned out. Just then, O. J. Simpson was arrested for slashing his ex-wife's throat, and I had my entertainment for the year. I watched the trial gavel-to-gavel, drank heavily, and cross-dressed a lot when Janice wasn't around. It was pretty pathetic. It couldn't have been good for Janice, either. Our sex life suffered, following a similar pattern as in my marriage — including no orgasms for poor Janice and no oral sex (on either end) for poor me.

After R-Drive was taken apart, Janice found another job with a company that produced computerized weather maps. A crisis arose! Some critical documents absolutely had to be in Tokyo by the next day. They had to be hand-carried. Janice volunteered for the mission. She would fly 15 hours to Tokyo, hand off the documents, stay overnight in a hotel at Narita airport, and then fly 13 hours home

the next day. To me, that meant two nights and a day free and clear for cross-dressing.

Janice left Wednesday afternoon and I started dressing. My perennial problem was “All dressed up and nowhere to go” — and, no one to go with. I didn’t know about the clubs and bars where transgender people gather, and I had no friends who knew about my cross-dressing. In fact, I simply had no friends, period.

Early that evening, I decided to drop into a local hotel for just one drink. Maybe somebody would be there for happy hour and talk to me — or even hit on me. Maybe an out-of-town businessman, like in the movies.

The hotel bar had a special: Turn your drink into a double for just a buck more. It was such a good bargain, I had another. I guess that turned into another . . . I don’t really know, because I went into a blackout. I came to, sitting on a couch in the hotel lobby, feeling like crap, and presumably looking like I felt. It was 3 o’clock in the morning. The desk clerk told me I had to get a room because they couldn’t let me drive. I said “Fine” and continued to sit there.

After a while, the concierge came over and handed me my credit card. “Someone found this in the ladies room,” he said. I had no idea how it got there, but wasn’t it nice that it had found its way back to me?

After a while I decided I was fine, so I got up and walked unsteadily out the hotel door. But I wasn’t humiliated enough yet. Oh, no. Next, I couldn’t find my car. I had to have a security man drive me around in his little golf cart until we found it.

The next morning I had a doozy of a hangover. But feeling head-achy and nauseous wasn’t the reason I called in sick to the doomed optical disk company where I had taken a job. (I’d been hired by a former R-Drive founder — one of the few we hadn’t fired.) My real reason was that Janice was sleeping in a hotel room at Narita airport at the moment, and I didn’t want to waste a day of freedom. So I dressed en femme and went out to an afternoon matinee at the local movie theatre.

When I returned home from the show, I clicked open the garage door so I could pull my car in. To my horror, what I saw was Janice’s car! It was impossible, because Janice was in Tokyo, but there it was. And me, all dressed in female attire! My first instinct was to

Everything Nice

flee. But where would I go? And when could I return without Janice seeing me?

I swallowed hard and decided: Fuck it! It was time to come out to Janice. After all, I had told her about my cross-dressing already, before we'd moved in together. I wasn't keeping it secret because I was ashamed of it; I was merely respecting Janice's wishes not to be involved in it. But hell, I shouldn't have to sneak around in my own house! Besides, a little voice inside my head sometimes dared to suggest that it might not be too much to ask that my love, my life partner, had maybe ought to be at least little bit supportive of this need of mine.

And so it was that I pulled into the garage, parked, got my purse, and marched boldly into my home.

Janice was sitting at the little round kitchen table in our dining nook. She stared straight at me as I sashayed through the door. Flustered, I made a lame attempt to set a light tone: "Ain't I pretty?" I asked in a sing-song voice, turning to show off my sundress.

"No," Janice said coldly. Uh-oh.

"Ummm, gee, I told you that I cross-dressed, didn't I?"

"Yes, I guess so. But I put it out of my mind. I guess I didn't want to believe it."

"Well, it's true." Stony silence. "What are you doing home?"

"Aiko met me at the airport and took the documents off my hands. I was able to turn right around and get back on the plane. I didn't even need to go through customs."

"Oh. You weren't supposed to see this, right? You weren't supposed to be back until tomorrow."

"How often do you do this?"

"A lot." I moaned. This was not going to be a good conversation, and my head was still killing me from the hangover. I lay down on the couch as we talked.

"Are you gay?"

"No, it's not like that. I'm not gay. I don't want to have sex with men."

"Then I don't understand."

"I don't know. It just feels good."

"Is it because I don't excite you anymore?"

"No, I don't think that's it. I'm sorry that our sex life isn't better, but I don't see that it's related to this."

“WOULD YOU PLEASE TAKE OFF THOSE CLOTHES!”

Her disgust wounded me like a knife in my guts. I slunk up-stairs and changed.

When I came back down, Janice asked, “Will you go to therapy with me?”

I groaned. “I don’t want to, but I will if you want me to. I did a lot of therapy when my marriage broke up and it really didn’t seem very helpful.” I didn’t relish starting down that long and winding road again.

“Don’t do me any favors,” Janice huffed.

She met with a therapist exactly once. Heck, I would have been happy to go along if I’d known it would only be one time!

Janice never said a word to me about what transpired at that session, but I could imagine:

Janice: “My boyfriend cross-dresses.”

Therapist: “It’s perfectly natural and nothing to worry about.”

Janice: “Oh. Thank you.”

Janice decided to leave me. I begged and pleaded for her to stay. I purged my femme wardrobe and swore I would never cross-dress again. But she stuck to her guns. It was a painful, six-month process, but she walked out of my life and I never saw her again, except for a single visit to her new apartment. It was stuffed to the rafters with half a household worth of furniture. It reminded me of Erin’s apartment after the divorce. Once again, I’d left a woman with an empty life and an overstuffed apartment. At least I assumed that Janice’s life was empty, because mine certainly felt that way.

Janice said two interesting things to me when she left me. The first was, “You’re never going to marry me anyway.” This comment floored me, because we had discussed the subject a few times and she always said she didn’t want to get married. I guess she was just saying that to avoid conflict, because I’d said I didn’t want to get married. My position had been that marriage was unnecessary unless children were in the picture, and neither one of us wanted children. When she said, “You’re never going to marry me anyway,” I told her that I was ready to consider marriage if that was what she wanted, but it was too late for that.

Janice’s other parting comment was very important, but I wasn’t ready to hear it. She said, “I’m not going to stay around and watch you drink yourself to death.” It was probably more the drinking than

Everything Nice

the cross-dressing that caused Janice to leave me. But I couldn't hear it. My drinking wasn't a problem, as far as I was concerned. It was my solution. It made my deeply unhappy life bearable.

I only heard from Janice one more time. It was an e-mail message a year later, letting me know that the cocker spaniel we adopted together from the animal shelter had died.

Before the last of Janice's boxes were out of the house, I had already begun acquiring my new femme wardrobe. Now I could hang it in the closet instead of hiding it in some cardboard storage boxes in the guest bedroom. I was the classic transgender dumpee cliché: "Boo-hoo, she left me! My life is so empty. But at least now I can dress whenever I want to!" My mascara often ran with tears. I didn't know they made waterproof mascara.

An Independent Businesswoman

I had one more conventional heterosexual long-term relationship, albeit a short one, before going over the rainbow, transgender-wise. As with Janice, this relationship came to me by way of my job.

After Janice left me, I changed jobs twice. At the doomed optical disk company, investors pulled the plug before we got the first product into production. The next little company I landed at got acquired and moved to the east coast. I moved on to Norand Corporation, a company headquartered in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. They happened to have a little research and development shop one mile from my house, and it happened to be run by an old buddy I had worked with at Quickturn and Tandem.

When I joined Norand, I actually got paychecks from four different employers during my first six months, and I never left the same chair. I started as a contract worker; the contract firm got ac-

quired; and then I went “permanent” onto Norand’s payroll. (That’s a laugh — as if any positions were really permanent anymore, given the constant layoffs that seemed to be happening everywhere.) Finally, Norand got acquired by Intermec Technologies, a company based in Seattle, located down the road past the giant Boeing headquarters. Four employers in six months — whew! It makes your head spin, doesn’t it? That was the go-go economy of the late 1990s and the dot-com bubble.

Happily, I’d managed my career back down to the low-stress individual contributor role. I thanked God they’d never promoted me to vice president at R-Drive, or I’d probably have been condemned to be an executive for the rest of my life.

I had a modest dry spell after Janice left me — a mere six months of no dates and no sex. I could do that short of a dry spell standing on my head. As before, my mother advised me to be patient, Eddy, and the right woman would come along for me eventually.

A woman came along for me, anyway, and who knew if it would be the right woman? What happened was that my obsequiously cheerful little Greek (“I’m from the islands!”) technician Nikos and his girlfriend Laurie introduced me to Natalie.

“She’s an independent businesswoman,” they told me. *All right!* I thought. I’d always wondered whether these high-powered female business executives I always heard about were only mythical creatures. I hoped not, because they seemed to be exactly the type of woman I needed in my life. A female version of myself, if you would.

We exchanged photos. Natalie carried a few extra pounds — maybe 20 — but that didn’t bother me. She had a bright, pretty face surrounded by medium-length brunette hair curling up around her ears. I could go for that.

Nikos and Laurie invited Natalie and I — separately — to a softball game. It was a blatant set-up, a sort of blind date. Natalie and I met. Sparks didn’t exactly fly, but we liked each other. Perhaps we were mostly relieved to find another decent single person in our early-40s age group. Besides, Sam — Natalie’s German Shepherd Dog — liked me.

Natalie did not turn out to be quite the independent businesswoman I’d envisioned. She was a sales representative for a large dental supply company. But that was OK with me too. She was bright,

energetic, and upbeat, a top salesperson in her company. We began dating.

* * *

I took Natalie out quite a few times before I made my move. I was still shy about sex, and intimidated about asking for what I wanted. But when I finally made my move, it was quite a smooth move, if I do say so myself.

On this particular evening, the evening of the smooth move, I arrived at Natalie's place to take her out to dinner, punctually as always. When she opened the door, I handed her a beautiful bouquet of yellow roses. Natalie's face lit up! She told me no one had ever given her flowers before, poor thing.

I had chosen yellow roses, yes, but also one red rose. I wondered if that would pique Natalie's curiosity.

Squealing with glee, Natalie rushed me in the door and thanked me profusely for the flowers. She gave me a quick peck on the cheek and took the flowers to the kitchen to trim them and put them in a crystal vase. Even Sam caught the buzz, and his tail thumped the floor excitedly.

As we stepped back to admire the lovely, romantic bouquet, I asked Natalie, rhetorically, "Do you know why I brought exactly seven roses?"

"Why?"

Touching one of the yellow roses, I said, "This one is for the first time we met, at the softball game. I knew Sam liked me right away, but I wasn't sure about you."

Touching another yellow rose, I continued, "This one is for the second time we got together, for dinner at Laurie's apartment. I was so glad that when I asked you out for a real date, you said, 'Yes!'"

The next yellow rose, I went on, was for our first real date, a long dinner at a fancy restaurant where we talked and talked. Another yellow rose was for when we went to our first movie together. Another was for the Sunday afternoon we spent in the park letting Sam run wild. The sixth, and final, yellow rose was for just last week, when we spent the evening in Natalie's den watching the Oscars on TV. I had rosily recalled every single time we had been together.

That left just the red rose. "And this one," I said, "is for tonight."

Everything Nice

Natalie was watching me silently, wide-eyed, perhaps holding back a tear. I was time for my *piece de resistance*, time for my smooth move.

“Do you know why this one is red?” I asked, prolonging the moment. Natalie shook her head. “This one is red,” I said softly, my voice quavering slightly, “because I hope tonight I can make love with you.”

Natalie simply took my hand and led me down the hallway to her bedroom.

* * *

We began dating earnestly. We went to more dinners, and more movies, and more to bed. We took Sam for long walks in the cemetery next to Natalie’s apartment building.

Unfortunately, Natalie’s luck in the sales game took a turn for the worse, and her finances became strained. She sold some of her beautiful clothes at consignment stores. She took a roommate into the second bedroom of her little apartment. But she could not make ends meet in the high cost-of-living Silicon Valley.

Four months into our relationship, I took Natalie on a day trip to beautiful Monterey. First, we visited the famous aquarium run by Janice Packard, the daughter of David Packard (the “P” of HP, my old rival). Then we found a nice restaurant overlooking the ocean for lunch. Over Mimosas and crab salads, I looked Natalie in the eye and said, “I brought you down here today because I have something important to talk to you about.”

Natalie’s face contorted in a grimace.

“What the matter?” I asked, concerned.

“You’re breaking up with me, aren’t you?” Natalie wailed, fighting back tears.

“No!” I laughed. “Nothing of the sort! I wouldn’t take you out to a nice lunch to break up with you.”

“Oh!” Natalie regained her composure. “What is it then?”

“It’s just this. We’ve only known each other a short time, and it’s really too soon for this.”

“For what?”

“Hold on, I’m getting to it.”

“OK.”

“I really like you. I’m sure you know that.”

“Of course.” *Although a moment ago she thought I was about to break up with her.* “And I like you, too. You’re my man in the moon.”

“Yes I am. Now, I know you are having severe money problems. So, even though it’s too soon, I want to ask you to move into my house with me.”

“Move in? Really?”

“Yes, really.”

“Oh, no, I couldn’t do that!” Natalie had never been married or even lived with a boyfriend. In fact, she’d barely dated before. I never really figured out why. I think it may simply have been that she had high standards, and good guys were not easy to find.

“Why couldn’t you?”

“I’ve always taken care of myself. I just can’t accept that from you.”

“Come on! Think about it, at least. It makes lots of sense. We’re spending all our time together anyway. I’d really like it if you would.”

“Really? You’re sure you want this?”

“Yes, I’m sure. I’ve been thinking about it a lot. I wouldn’t offer if I didn’t really want it.”

“Well ... maybe it would be OK.”

“Now, before you say yes, there is one more thing I need to tell you about.”

“What’s that?” Puzzlement. Concern. I knew it was something she’d never have imagined.

“It’s kind of a delicate matter. It’s a personal thing.”

“OK, go ahead. I’m listening.”

“Here it is. The thing is, I have this little hobby, this little peccadillo. I like wearing women’s clothes. I’m a cross-dresser.”

“Oh! My!” She was startled, but she didn’t seem to be disgusted.

“I’m not gay or anything,” I hastened to add, heading that one off at the pass. “It’s just something I like to do for some reason. I don’t really understand why. You don’t have to have anything to do with it if you don’t want to. I just want to be honest with you about what’s going on, in case you should happen to come across some of my clothes sometime.”

Everything Nice

“Oh. OK. Well, I don’t see that as a problem. It’s all right with me.”

“Really? Great!”

So Natalie moved into my house and into my bed. She never did bring up cross-dressing again, and neither did I. Once again I was sneaking around my own house, cross-dressing on the sly when Natalie wasn’t around.

* * *

As it turned out, I had chosen the wrong secret to reveal to Natalie. After living together for just a few weeks, it was Natalie’s turn to say, “We need to talk about something important.”

Uh-oh. We retired to a neutral corner — the Baja Fresh Mexican lunch place across the street from the house. Over fish tacos, sitting at a little outdoor table, a big umbrella shielding us from the hot California sunshine, the next big issue came out.

“I don’t think you know this,” Natalie started, “but I’m the child of alcoholic parents. I didn’t realize how much you drink, and it’s a problem for me.”

“I see.” I had never tried to hide my drinking from Natalie, but I was always sober when I picked her up for dates. I never had more than one or two drinks when we were together because I didn’t like driving drunk. Besides, I didn’t *need* to drink on dates. I was happy when I was out with Natalie. But I always slammed down a drink or two when I got home from a date, that’s for sure. Once we were living together, Natalie got to see my normal drinking pattern, which was to have a few hefty drinks “to unwind” as soon as I got home from work every day.

“I’ve dealt with this my whole life,” Natalie continued. “I know it’s my problem, not yours. I know I can’t ask you not to drink. But I just needed you to know that it’s a problem for me.”

“Ummm, OK then. So what happens next?”

“I really don’t know. I don’t know if I’ll be able to cope with it or not. It brings up a lot of stuff for me, about seeing my mom so drunk all the time when I was little. We’ll just have to see how it goes.”

It was never the same again, of course. I moderated my drinking somewhat, especially around Natalie, but it was still too much. It never occurred to me to stop drinking altogether, or that I might have a problem. Natalie even discussed my drinking routine with her older brother Richard, who I had met a couple of times. Richard

was himself a recovering alcoholic, and his opinion was that I did *not* seem to be an alcoholic. When Natalie told me that, it strongly reinforced my feeling that I did not have a drinking problem.

Business continued to go badly for Natalie. I tried to practice my compassionate listening skills, being on her side, not being a problem solver, echoing back what I heard. But no matter how hard I tried, Natalie would not accept me as a confidant. To my frustration, she always ran off to vent with her girlfriends. It had been the same way with Janice. I formed a theory that women don't want their boyfriends to do that kind of listening; they need the boyfriend to be a sort of designated scapegoat, to fill in for the boss or coworker or store clerk that they do not feel free to confront. I took Sam for long walks among nearby deserted business parks in the evenings and on weekends, just to get out of the house where tensions were rising. Our sex life went to hell.

After a few months, I couldn't take it anymore. I had a sort of break-up with Natalie. I told her I couldn't stand the way things were between us, but allowed that I hoped we would find a way to fix it. In the meantime, I invited her to continue to live in the house, but I asked her to move into the guest bedroom. What a rude, devastating blow that must have been for poor Natalie! But I didn't realize that at the time.

Things did not get better, and a few months later Natalie and Sam moved out. We had lived together for exactly one year.

I took Sam for a last long walk while Natalie and her girlfriend moved her belongings to a small apartment she had found. Then I brought Sam over to his new home. The little studio apartment was overloaded with boxes and furniture, a now familiar sight. I said goodbye to Natalie and Sam. Sam looked so sad and puzzled. I never saw either of them again. I cried all the way home as the haunting strains of Sinead O'Conner's *Nothing Compares to You* played on the car radio:

*It's been so lonely without you here
Like a bird without a song
Nothing can stop these lonely tears from falling
Tell me baby where did I go wrong?*

This time my dry spell would last two years. But the next time I has sex, it would be with a man.

Cross-Dressing

A Whole New World

I sat in my car in the parking lot of the Great Mall of Milpitas, which Janice had at one time dubbed Le Grand Mal. My heart was racing; the pulse was pounding in my head. I wanted to open the car door, walk across the parking lot, and enter the shopping center. But I could not — I was frozen in place. I was scared to death.

What's the big deal? I asked myself. *You've been out dressed as a woman a thousand times before. This is just one more time.*

But it wasn't just one more time. Oh, I was dressed as a woman all right, in a conservative, below-the-knee skirt and a shapeless knit top. My makeup was relatively natural, given the heavy pancake covering up my beard shadow, and my heels were low. My penis was tucked neatly between my butt cheeks and my testicles were pushed up into the hollow of my groin, so my skirt showed no unsightly bulge. It wasn't my appearance that was the problem. The problem

Everything Nice

was the gang of young people loitering at the mall entrance. How could I run that intimidating gauntlet? It was impossible!

Le Grand Mal was my Everest, my Waterloo, my unreachable star. I'd flitted through plenty of upscale malls before, but this rather more downscale mall with the loitering gangs of toughs at the entrances terrified me. In fact, I'd done the other malls so often, I'd gotten bored with the whole thing. For several months I hardly dressed at all. It had become a matter of "Been there, done that," and "All dressed up and nowhere to go." But somehow, the previous night the thought popped into my head that it was time to face challenge of Le Grand Mal — to face my fears and prove that I could go anywhere en femme. I'd felt rather brave about it last night. Now, sober and in the cold light of day, I didn't feel so courageous. Quite the opposite: I felt scared.

I'd circled the mall several times, reconnoitering the entrances. I'd selected the one with the least intimidating group of loitering hooligans, and parked in a distant corner of the parking lot so no one would see me begin my journey. And yet, I could not take the first step.

I checked myself in the mirror on the back of the sun visor. I looked *good*. I told myself no one would be looking for a "trannie" — a transgender woman or a cross-dresser — at Le Grand Mal in the middle of the day (or ever). I knew I would surely pass just fine. Besides, what was the worst that could happen? I could get laughed at, taunted. So what? I could brazen it out, or turn tail and hurry back to my car. It would all be over one way or another in about one minute. I did not feel there was any chance I would be physically assaulted — not in broad daylight at a crowded mall — but even if I was attacked, it wouldn't be the end of the world.

I finally took a deep breath and a firm grip on my purse, and cracked open the door. I swung it wide and reached out with a nicely shaped, stocking-clad leg. My pump hit the asphalt and the other one followed. I stepped into the sunlight, pushed down the door lock, and swung the door shut. It went *clunk!* like the door of a prison cell — but I was being locked out of its protective custody, not in.

Shivering slightly in the hot sunshine, I made my way across the parking lot. I glanced furtively left and right, not moving my head but just my eyes; nobody else was nearby.

My heart pounded intensely as I approached the mall entrance. Three young men and a girl were leaning on the cement crash barriers, yakking lackadaisically amongst themselves. To tell you the truth, they didn't look like ruffians at all, just nice Mexican high school kids.

I didn't see them give me so much as a glance as I passed within ten feet of them. Maybe they looked after I'd gone by. Maybe not. In any case, no commotion was raised. It was no problem whatsoever.

Safely inside the mall, I breathed a sigh of relief. I had confronted my monster and it was a pussycat! I laughed at myself. Hadn't I observed time and again that people simply didn't pay any attention to me? They were so wrapped up in their own little worlds. Didn't I know that I was invisible to young people because I'm an old person, and not a part of their universe? I guess I'd thought it would be different because, if it had been me loitering outside the mall entrance, I would be people-watching. But it wasn't like that. Not at all.

Peace and joy flooded my heart as I sauntered around the mile-long loop of the single-story shopping mall. I window-shopped a little, but mostly I just people-watched and thought. I was so happy that it didn't even faze me when I heard whispering and giggling from time to time as I passed people.

I finished the loop, arriving back at my starting point. I walked confidently out the entrance that no longer held any terror for me. I was so energized driving home that I decided I didn't want to let my adventure end. So I continued on to the more upscale Vallco Mall, one of my familiar haunts.

In Vallco, I went into Macy's and headed for women's clothes. Right at the edge of one of the ladies clothes departments, a rack of black leather pants caught my eye. *Ooh*, I thought, *sexy!* I examined the garments and thought a size 6 would probably fit me. By a stroke of luck, a set of changing rooms was right at hand — and there was nobody around. No customers, no salespeople. Did I dare? I was an old hand at using women's restrooms, but changing rooms were a new frontier for me. I was feeling empowered by my triumph at Le Grand Mal, so I thought, *What the heck!* I took a size 6 from the rack and carried it into the changing room.

How exciting! I felt vulnerable as I stepped out of my pumps and skirt, undressing in such a public place. I stepped into the pants. The leather felt great but the garment wasn't a good fit for my male

Everything Nice

physique; and besides, they were much too short. No problem — I really didn't want to spend \$300 on them anyway. I put my own clothes back on and returned the pants to the rack. Whew! What a rush!

As I walked down to the J. C. Penny store, I realized a whole new world had just opened up for me. A whole new world of shopping! Now, any pretty dress or skirt I saw, I could actually try on! I was a princess and the big department stores were my closets.

I went to the section of Penny's that had the beautiful evening gowns. My mouth watered. All those delicious gowns! Wasn't it a bit odd, likely to attract attention, trying on fancy gowns? Tough! *I am woman, hear me roar!*

I selected a hot pink prom dress with lots of crinolines and a slinky black number with a peek-a-boo net bodice. I gulped, screwed up my courage, and carried them to the changing area. Uh-oh, a lot of other women were using the dressing rooms. Would they shriek and have me thrown out? And what's this? A dowdy little woman sat behind a dowdy little podium at the entrance to the changing area.

"How many?" she asked in a bored tone.

How many what? I wondered. I was a deer caught in the headlights.

"Two?" she continued. "Here." She handed me a plastic tag with a big number 2 on it. *I see, it's a security thing. It's how many garments I'm taking into the dressing room.* She was passing me in!

I walked to the second row of changing stalls and into one that had vacant neighboring stalls. I slid the bolt shut on the door and felt safe, although I realized the room could be "monitored for security."

I stripped down to my dainties, wondering if the unseen monitors would notice the small bags of birdseed that filled out the cups of my brassiere. Or if they would think it peculiar that I wore a panty-girdle instead of panties. (The panty-girdle wasn't for my tummy; it was for my tuck — to conceal my penis.)

I stepped into the prom dress and drew it up my body. My arms slid through the armholes and I shrugged into the dress. The changing room had two mirrors on facing walls, so I didn't have to step outside to examine myself.

A thrill ran through my body. The hot pink dress was gorgeous! I was gorgeous in it! It felt wonderful, hugging my body as it did. I

twirled and the petticoats rose, exposing my shapely thighs and the tops of my thigh-high stockings. How fabulous!

I loved the dress, but I would not purchase it. It was hardly age-appropriate, and besides, where in the world would I ever wear it?

Reluctantly, I wiggled out of the prom dress and put it back on its hanger. It was time to try on the slinky black gown.

I removed the dress from its hanger and gave it an appraising look. *How would it fit me?* I wondered.

It didn't take long to find out. I had to pull it on over my head, and I did this very carefully because I didn't want to lose my wig or get any of my heavy pancake makeup on the fabric. I wrestled the garment over my head and shoulders, pulled it down over my waist, and shook it so it dropped down to my toes. I stepped back into my pumps and looked at the image in the mirror.

Oh, my God! Who was that striking, elegant woman? Could it really be me? I cocked a hip. The lady in the mirror cocked her other hip. It was me! I couldn't believe how sophisticated and lovely I looked. Hot! I looked hot!

The dress hugged my slender body and actually made it look like I had a figure. (The birdseed bags helped, of course.) My collar bone and chest skin exposed behind the black netting was simply alluring. It was an extraordinary gown.

Still, I had no where to wear such a gown, and \$120 seemed like a lot of money. I would have to think about it. I didn't buy it, but I later regretted that decision.

I tried the hot pink prom dress on one more time before I left the dressing room. As I handed my number two chip back to the dowdy lady, I noticed a rack of clothing in disarray behind her. I realized I should just hand my unwanted garments over to her rather than re-rack them myself, so that's what I did.

I had one more breakthrough that day. I found a pretty skirt I liked and I was brave enough to face the checkout lady and purchase it. For cash, of course, since my credit card screamed "Edward!"

A whole new world had indeed opened up for me.

Deflowered

The world of shopping had opened up for me. I became a total shop-a-holic. I developed a routine. Every Friday night I would get home from work and fix myself a cocktail — bourbon rocks or a gin martini — and a hot bubble-bath. I would unwind from the tensions of the week in the bath. I would shave my legs, arms, and chest if they needed it. After my bath, I would put on my makeup and clothes and became Elaine, a name I began to call myself when I was dressed as a woman. I'd have a few more drinks, some dinner, and watch some television. Finally, I might masturbate and then take off my clothes and clean my face. The urge to be Elaine still disappeared as soon as I ejaculated, but sometimes I would sleep in Elaine mode anyway, in my bra and panties and maybe a slip, without removing my makeup.

When I woke up on Saturday morning, I would get right into Elaine mode, taking my time and working very carefully. At 10 or 11

o'clock I would head out to a mall for some shopping. I would try on a lot of clothes and maybe purchase a few things. After an hour of shopping, I would start to lose interest and begin to feel conspicuous, so I would head home and drink for the rest of the day.

Sunday might be a repeat of the Saturday routine, or it might be taken up with "Edward" chores, or just be occupied with nursing the hangover that had pretty much become my daily companion.

This routing went on for about a year when something changed. I was out shopping as usual, when a guy hit on me!

* * *

A brunette with eye-catching good looks — tall and thin like a model — walked quickly down the aisle of a large suburban shopping mall. She was wearing a short black skirt, matching jacket with faux-leopard trim at the hems, black stockings, and black pumps with low heels — could she be a Macy's saleslady hurrying back from a break? An observer might notice the woman furtively glancing at her own reflection in the glass of the storefront windows, as if uncertain about her appearance. Closer inspection would reveal a surprise. The woman's face had masculine features and the brunette bob was a cheap wig. Why, she wasn't a woman at all, she was a man, baby! She was, in fact, a middle-aged man cross-dressed as a woman. I know this because she was me, Elaine the cross-dresser.

That particular Saturday, I went to a mall I had never been to before. It was in Fremont, a bit of a distance from my usual stomping grounds. The midday crowd at the mall was surprisingly thin. I tried on a few things in one store, but didn't find anything I liked. I headed toward the other end of the mall, periodically catching my reflection in storefront windows to enjoy how cute I looked, and to check surreptitiously whether I was attracting any unwanted attention.

I should have been looking straight ahead, because a fellow walked right up and started talking to me. He was almost as tall as me, lanky, and appeared to be in his mid-thirties. He wore his curly, blond hair rather short and had apparently not bothered to comb it when he skipped shaving that morning. He was clad in jeans and a T-shirt, your basic Saturday casual attire. A weak chin and a very nervous attitude detracted from his otherwise good looks.

"Excuse me, do you know where I can find a decent restaurant?" he asked, without making direct eye contact.

Everything Nice

“No!” I snapped as I tried to make my way briskly past him.

“So are you just out shopping?” he persisted.

“Yes.”

“Would you like to have lunch or maybe a drink?”

“No.”

“So I guess you just want to be left alone?”

“Yes!” While he stood there a little bit stunned by the bluntness of my reply, I managed to get past him and flee into the sanctuary of a nearby Sears store.

Using the oldest dodge in the book, I located the women’s restroom and went in. I stayed a little longer than necessary. As I left the restroom area, I carefully scouted my environs. The pesky guy was nowhere to be seen. To further obscure my trail, I took the escalator down to the ground floor where I conveniently found myself in the women’s clothing department. I looked around and saw neither the guy, nor any clothes that appealed to me.

As I headed back out into the mall, I was startled to find the guy suddenly walking in lockstep next to me. He had cleverly staked out the women’s clothing department, figuring I would wind up there.

“Oh, here’s my stalker again!” I said brightly to him.

The comment seemed to take him aback, as he apparently hadn’t realized he was stalking me. After a moment he regained what little composure he had ever had. In a low, confidential voice, he nervously recited a line he had obviously rehearsed carefully. It turned out to be exactly the right thing to say: “I’m sorry if I’m bothering you, and I’ll go away if you want. But I just wanted to tell you that I like cross-dressing too.”

His admission took me by surprise. However, after a moment’s consideration, I decided to run with it. After all, I had been cross-dressing alone for a long time, and I had started to feel a strong desire to share the experience with another person. Besides, I had fantasized about being with a man. Who knew where this might lead? It was important to me, too, that I now knew he was aware that I was a cross-dresser, so there would be no awkward and possibly dangerous “Crying Game” moment. (As the movie “The Crying Game” showed, men sometimes turn violent if they discover a girl’s secret in an intimate moment.)

“Walk with me!” I commanded and set off down the mall. He froze for a startled second, then quickly caught up and walked beside me. I began firing incisive questions at him, starting with, “So, do you think I’m cute?”

“If I didn’t,” he replied, “I never would have approached you!”

After a short interrogation, I was satisfied that he probably wasn’t a psycho. In retrospect, I guess asking him, “Are you a psycho?” and getting “No” for an answer probably wasn’t a very reliable test, but it worked for me at the time. I decided to let him buy me a drink.

The still nameless fellow said there was a nice restaurant with a good bar in the mall, so we went there. It was a Red Robin hamburger joint, proving the fellow’s standards weren’t particularly high. So much for his thinking I was cute!

The bar was wide open, not the dim-lights-and-private-booths kind of place I was hoping for, but I figured, “In for a dime, in for a dollar.” I gamely hoisted my tight little butt onto a tall bar stool at a tiny, round table, crossed my long legs, and checked that my slip wasn’t showing beyond the leopard-trimmed hem of my short skirt. My date ordered us a couple of gin and tonics, and he paid. Whee! Boy buys Elaine a drink, a VLE (virgin life experience) for me!

We talked. Actually, for the most part, I asked and he answered. I got his name, Dave, and his story. He was in town from Sacramento for Cisco administrator training, computer stuff. He was stuck here over the weekend and had decided to go shopping to kill time. His own cross-dressing, he told me, was limited to pantyhose and stockings — nothing, really, as far as I was concerned. Transgender girls (T-girls) excited him, even though his sexual preference was basically straight. He was not married, nor had he ever been. He had trolled gay and transvestite bars trying to pick up T-girls, but without positive results. The girls usually turned out to be pros, and he was not into prostitutes.

He couldn’t believe his good luck in spotting a T-girl, all alone and loose in the world on that lonely Saturday morning in that sterile mall. No matter how painful it was — and I could tell it was very painful indeed — he simply had to force himself to overcome his shyness and introduce himself to me.

Everything Nice

“Why don’t we buy a bottle and continue the party at my hotel room?” he finally asked, displaying an otherwise unrevealed boldness.

I looked him in the eye and asked, “Dave, do you have any weapons in your hotel room?”

“Of course not!” he said, startled.

“I just want to make sure you’re not a psycho,” I explained. “OK, let’s do it.”

As we entered the mall parking lot, he asked me where my car was. “You’re driving me!” I announced, and we headed for his car. More VLEs: Boy opens car door for Elaine; Elaine rides in boy’s car! I liked it.

As soon as we sat down on the car’s front seat, Dave put his hand on my knee. I asked him, “Dave, if I was a GG (a genetic girl, not transgender that is), would you be so forward?” Sheepishly he shook his head and removed his hand.

We stopped at a liquor store. Dave ran in and bought a bottle. Then we headed to a nearby Embassy Suites where he was staying. His “suite” was a smallish hotel room with a kitchenette and a couch. I quickly scanned the room. No weapons in sight. Books, briefcase, even a nametag revealing his full name and address lay in plain site. *This will be OK*, I reassured myself.

It was more than OK. I tortured poor Dave by making him chat with me for two hours. We discussed all sorts of transgender issues that were weighing heavily on both our minds. The quality of the conversation crept steadily downward along with the level of gin in the bottle. Several times poor Dave made advances, trying to peep down my bosom and the like, but I cautioned him to treat me like a lady. “Don’t go psycho on me, Dave!” I kept warning him.

I did allow Dave to slowly make some progress. This was fun! Eventually I let him get to first base, which was breast fondling over the clothes, as I learned the bases.

“Does that feel good?” he asked.

“It doesn’t feel like anything,” I told him, “because they’re fake.” Not too bright, my dear Dave!

Finally I screwed up my courage and decided it was time to put up or shut up. I handed Dave my glass and asked him to mix me another. In the powder room, I disposed of a good deal of the gin and tonics I’d been drinking and fixed my makeup.

When I returned to the main room, I eagerly accepted the drink Dave handed me. Then I gently pushed him down on the couch and sauntered across the room, strutting my long, shapely legs, and wiggling my sexy ass. "Is this what you want to see, Dave?" I teased. Slowly I unbuttoned my jacket and took it off.

There was really not much to see because I was wearing a full-coverage, long-line bra, but Dave seemed appreciative. I slipped off my short black skirt. Again not much to see, just a black rayon half-slip, but Dave was in heaven.

I walked over to Dave, leaned over, and gave him a gentle kiss on the lips. He wanted tongue, but I was too refined for that! Not too refined, however, to kneel on the floor in front of him, reach up, stroke his face, and give him more kisses. I massaged his neck and chest, unbuttoned his shirt, and removed it. I caressed his chest and kissed his little man-nipples. Dave was as happy as a kid on Christmas morning.

I worked my way down, stroking his inner thighs, and firmly touched his crotch area. Oh, yes, proof positive, Dave was really enjoying himself!

At that point I got up and walked away. "Are you having a good time, Dave?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, this is my fantasy come true!" he assured me.

I sashayed back and forth across the room a couple of times. "Dave," I said, "I need you to tell me how cute I look."

"Oh, you look fantastic!" he exclaimed. "I can't believe how beautiful and feminine you look. I never imagined I could meet a T-girl as beautiful as you. I am so-o-o-o lucky!" I knew the right time to fish for compliments!

I returned to my former position kneeling between Dave's legs. I rubbed his naked, hairy chest and then his crotch. I undid his belt buckle and unbuttoned his jeans, but when I started to pull them off, his shoes presented a problem. Rookie mistake! I removed his shoes and socks, and then the jeans, and finally the tighty whiteys.

That's when I first laid eyes on the beast. There it lay, halfway engorged. It was, maybe, an inch longer than my own and twice as fat. I suddenly realized how generous my old girlfriends had been when commenting on my equipment!

I touched the thing with both of my hands. I cradled and caressed it like I would a small, furry animal. It responded in a friendly

Everything Nice

way and began growing. It liked my gentle kisses. Now it was just between me and the little beast. Dave was irrelevant.

I was there. The beast was rearing its ugly head in attack position. It was time.

I kissed the little critter. I sucked just the tip between my lips. It was soft and spongy. I sucked it quickly, like trying to pull a milkshake through a soda straw. I let it pop back out of my mouth. *I was now literally a cocksucker*, I mused.

I took it into my mouth again, and this time I sucked deep down the shaft until the head hit the back of my mouth. I gagged a little; all right, I had found my limit. I sucked harder, in and out, like I'd seen in porn videos. Except this time, it was me, Elaine, doing the dirty work! Good girl!

I worked it in and out, in and out, adding some kisses from time to time, caressing the ball sac, and stroking the inner thighs. I even blew gently on it, because this was, after all, a blow job. The beast was a happy little fellow. The meat-puppet attached to it, Dave, was moaning. *I could get to like this*, I thought. *In fact, I do like it!* I didn't, however, particularly like the salty taste of the pre-cum that was now present at the tip of the glans.

After ten minutes, I put my head in Dave's lap and took a break. He asked me, "So, do you like that?"

"Yes," I replied, "but when the hell are you going to cum?" However, the liquor had worked its bad mojo, and it was not going to happen. In fact, we had killed the entire quart of gin.

"Maybe later," Dave said. "I've got an idea. Why don't I go get us another bottle and we can party some more?"

I was suddenly hit by the realization that Dave was very drunk. He had been gulping down a couple of drinks to my one all afternoon.

"No," I declared, "I think it's time to end this party."

Dave started to go a little bit psycho. "Let me suck you now!" "Let me get another bottle!" "Stay the night with me!" On and on ... the more bright ideas he got, the more insistent I was about leaving.

"You're becoming psycho, Dave!" I warned him a few times. He finally got the message and agreed to take me back to where my car waited in the mall parking lot. After he dropped me off and I

began to drive away, I saw him heading back toward the liquor store.
Bad idea, Dave!

Before I left the suite, I had written down my phone number. Dave said he would call me. Of course, being a typical guy, he never called. Boy doesn't call — another VLE for me.

Lannie Rose

What a rush! I was so excited about sharing Elaine with another human being, I immediately got onto the new-fangled Internet to find some friends for her — uh, me.

But first, I decided I needed a new name. Elaine sounded so formal and stuffy to me. I wanted something more fun.

I racked my brain. I wanted to keep to a name that started with E so my initials would stay the same and I could do things like buy plane tickets under E. Rhodes, without disclosing my gender. I considered Edith, Edna, Edie, Eleanor, Emily, Emma, Ethel, Evelyn ... none of them appealed to me. (If I had thought of Elizabeth, you'd probably be reading Liz Rose's memoir right now.) Suddenly, my ex-wife's nemesis from her apartment building in Modesto popped into my head — that ditsy blonde, Lannie. Wasn't that a fun name? It occurred to me that Lannie could be a diminutive for Elaine. That was it! I would remain Elaine, but I would ask my new friends to call me

Lannie. When I began using my name on the Internet, I morphed Rhodes into Rose and thus was Lannie Rose born.

When I got onto the Internet, what I found was a whole community of transgender people. What a wonderful surprise! Jesus Christ, how had I missed that all these years? I suppose the truth was that I unconsciously avoided it because I wasn't ready. I was used to the safety and comfort of my lonely closet.

I put up a rudimentary Web site with too many pictures that all looked the same, and more biographical information than anyone needed to know. But the way I actually started meeting people was through an online personals site for transgender people called urnotalone.com (pronounced "you are not alone").

My ad hadn't been up on urnotalone for a day when I got my first hit. It was from a charming cross-dresser named Rianna Silk — so named, of course, because she loved the look and feel of silk material. Rianna always kept an eye out for new arrivals on urnotalone, because she liked to help new girls find their ways out of their closets. God bless her! And that's exactly what she did for me.

Rianna offered to come down from her home in Berkeley to visit me in San Jose. I agreed and said I would cook dinner.

When Rianna arrived at my front door, it wasn't actually Rianna at all. It was a small, grey-haired, pony-tailed, guy who introduced himself as "Jim... uhhh, Rianna... uh, Jim!" Though 60 years old, Jim was a youthful, high-energy, masculine, strong, in-your-face fellow. He always spoke his mind without fear or apology, with a rapid-fire, endless torrent of words, but he was good-hearted and made friends instantly wherever he went. His personality (and his voice) changed not a whit when he was Rianna. He was a classic, life-long, heterosexual cross-dresser — just as, I would soon learn, his father and his grandfather had been as well! But not his son, whom Jim was terrified to come out to.

Jim-Rianna arrived at my door that first Saturday with two large black plastic garbage bags filled with the marvelous clothes he had scavenged over the years from Goodwill stores and thrift shops around the Bay Area and beyond. After quick introductions, and me mixing a pair of strong gin-and-tonics, Jim said, "Do you mind if I transform into Rianna now?"

"Go right ahead. Let's go upstairs. You can use the guest bedroom."

Everything Nice

I led him up the carpeted stairs to the loft area overlooking the living room, and on into the guest bedroom.

“What a beautiful house,” Jim said. “This will be great!”

He upended his garbage bags and piles of pink and periwinkle and fuchsia silk, satin, lace, and crinoline tumbled out onto the bed. I slid aside one of the full-length mirrors that covered one side of the room, revealing a small, empty clothes closet.

“You can hang stuff in here.”

“Great.”

My eyes sparkled in anticipation as Jim adorned my wire hangers with his splendid, glittering wardrobe. I hoped I would have the opportunity to try on some of those wondrous gowns, skirts, and jackets.

And shoes, oh, my God, did he ever have shoes! Mostly high-heeled, strappy sandals — very sexy!

“What shoe size are you?” I asked hopefully.

“Twelve.”

“Oh, goody! We can share shoes!”

Once Jim has his clothing in some semblance of order, he stopped and gave me an odd look.

“Listen, I’ve got something to ask you. I don’t know what you’ll think of this, but don’t worry. It’s OK either way.”

“What’s that?” I inquired curiously.

“Have you ever done Ecstasy?”

“No, but I’ve heard of it. To tell you the truth, I’ve been interested in trying it.”

“Oh? Good! Because I brought some. Have you ever done anything hallucinogenic? Acid? Mushrooms?”

I simply pointed down. I was standing next to a pile of old albums — the things music came on before there were CDs. At the front of the stack was *American Beauty*, and more Grateful Dead albums were visible behind it.

Jim smiled. “OK. You know what it’s about.” Grateful Dead concerts were renowned for rampant use of LSD, and I had indulged in my younger days. “We ought to wait until after dinner to drop the E, because we won’t want to eat. In fact, let’s take them right before dinner, and they ought to be kicking in about the time we’re done eating.”

“Sounds like fun!”

Jim proceeded to transform himself into Rianna, chattering all the while. He unabashedly stripped down to his birthday suit and began picking out an outfit. I was taken aback to see his dong hanging out in plain view — wasn't he embarrassed? I surely would have been. In fact, I was embarrassed just seeing it. I also felt it was kind of gay, and my ingrained homophobia stirred. It wasn't that I hated gay people; only that I hated the idea that I might be gay — or that someone might think I was gay.

Soon Jim was gone for the evening and I now had as my guest a lovely, older blonde woman in a short, tight black dress, black nylons, and strappy sandals with big chunky heels. Not a particularly attractive woman, I'm afraid to say; in fact, many would look at her and think she was a man in a dress. But sexy in a way, because she was dressed sexy and trying hard. And she obviously thought she was sexy herself.

We went back downstairs. I finished preparing dinner, which was my favorite: pork chops, rice and cabbage cooked together in a dutch oven.

"That looks good," Rianna told me. "Next time let me cook. I'm a great cook. I used to own two restaurants in San Francisco."

"Wow! Really?"

"Yeah. They were extremely successful. I sold them off for big bucks."

"That's something! It's hard to be successful in the restaurant business, isn't it?"

"I guess it is for most people. It's easy for me. I know what people want and I know how to hire really good chefs. My restaurants were very trendy. They were the hottest thing in town. I had more money than I knew what do with. I had nice houses, expensive cars, the whole deal. It was fun while it lasted, but I don't miss it. I don't need money to be happy."

"That's a good attitude. What happened? Why did you get out of the business?"

"I just got tired of it. It was a lot of work, and I had to be on top of things 24-7. It just got to be too much."

"So what do you do now?"

"I paint houses. It's great. I'm my own boss. I can work whenever I want, and take off whenever I want. I've got two or three people working for me. Sometimes it's hard to find good help, but I

Everything Nice

can be pretty forceful and get people to do what I need when I need to.”

Rianna was only about five foot six inches tall, but tough as leather, both physically and in her personality. I was glad I was on her good side. I hoped I never got on her bad side.

We swallowed our Ecstasy pills and ate our dinner. As I was quickly washing up the dishes, I began to feel a little dizzy.

“Do you feel something?” Rianna asked.

“Yes. I do.”

“We better go sit down. The E is coming on.”

We sat on the couch in the den and things began to get interesting. Rianna’s chatter got faster and faster and I became totally engrossed in the conversation. I felt a little dizzier, and I noticed Rianna was looking more and more beautiful. I had to get up and look in the mirror. I was getting more beautiful, too. I felt like I was turning into a real girl!

“Let’s go change outfits!” Rianna suggested.

“Oh, yes! Let’s!” I agreed.

We went quickly but carefully up the stairs, hanging onto the oak railing for safety. We went into the guest bedroom to scrutinize Rianna’s wardrobe.

I was strongly attracted to a sparkling pink chiffon prom gown, rather like the dress Glinda the good witch wore in *The Wizard of Oz*. “Can I try this on?” I asked.

“Oh sure, that’ll look great on you.”

Rianna helped me out of my skimpy leopard-print dress. I felt a little vulnerable and embarrassed about being in my bra and panties with Rianna, but I was so excited, I didn’t care. If this was gay, I was OK with it.

Rianna helped me into the pink gown and zipped me up in back.

“Fits perfectly!” she crowed. “Wow, you look great. You’re keeping this.”

“What do you mean, I’m keeping this?”

“I mean it’s yours. It looks so great on you, you have to have it.”

“Oh! Thank you! But I can’t accept that.”

“Sure you can. Don’t worry about it. I’ve got more stuff than I can fit into my closet anyway.”

“OK. Thanks!” I said effusively.

“Here, try these on,” Rianna said, handing me a pair of pink, strappy sandals with high, chunky heels.

They fit perfectly, and they matched the dress just right. I felt like a real princess.

Rianna changed from her little black dress into a red, flouncy gown, and I zipped her up. We giggled and tumbled back down the stairs. I twirled in front of the mirror over the wet bar, and fixed us a couple more gin-and-tonics. We sat back down on the couch and talked some more, faster than ever before.

From that point on, time pretty much lost its meaning. My consciousness flashed from scene to scene like a clip show on television. It seemed as if every five minutes Rianna would say, “What do you want to do now?” and I would answer, “Let’s change outfits!” I tried on the red, flouncy gown. I dressed in little black dresses, and long black dresses. I wore some things that looked ridiculous, and a lot more that looked incredible. Rianna said, “You’re keeping that,” “That one’s for you,” and “That looks so much better on you, you have to have it.” My wardrobe expanded considerably that night.

We went into my big walk-in closet and I showed off some of my cute little skirts and dresses, though I didn’t have anything as spectacular as what Rianna had brought along. None of my stuff would fit Rianna, however, because her barrel chest was considerably wider around than mine. Nevertheless, Rianna had as much fun as I did.

At one point, I floated into consciousness and we were sitting on the floor next to the couch in the den. Rianna’s head was in my lap, and she was sucking on my penis. Oh, my! Now this was most certainly gay! But then again, we were two gals in beautiful dresses. If it was anything, it was lesbian. I didn’t try too hard to figure it out. I just went with the moment.

After a bit Rianna came up for air.

“Now you do me,” she suggested.

“I don’t think so,” I demurred. I wasn’t ready to take that step, even though I had already taken it a couple months earlier with Dave.

“OK. No problem,” Rianna said. “There’s plenty of time for that.”

Everything Nice

Rianna was right. Over the next couple of months, she came down to visit me every weekend for a series of drug- and alcohol-fueled parties. I was soon performing oral sex and more. We ended up our evenings in bed together, and real sexual activity ensued. At Rianna's age, 60, she didn't have the stamina to actually penetrate me anally — and I wasn't sure I wanted that anyway — but we did almost everything else we could think of. Under Rianna's tutelage, and the influence of the magic love drug Ecstasy, I learned that I could enjoy having sex with somebody who was endowed with his or her own penis.

Trannie Shack

Rianna told me about a club in San Francisco called Trannie Shack. It materialized every Tuesday night at The Stud, a gay bar located in the seedy South of Market Street area. An outrageous drag queen named Heklina was hostess, and her partner Miss Chocolate was the greeter. According to Rianna, Trannie Shack was *the* place for transgenders of all types to meet and hang out — drag queens, cross-dressers, transsexuals, and everything in between. It sounded terribly decadent and dangerous to me, but I let Rianna talk me into meeting her there one week.

Come the appointed day, I put on a demure little sweater and a knee-length brown skirt, and arrived at Trannie Shack promptly at 9 o'clock, our agreed-upon time. I was scared to death walking across 9th Street and Harrison Street in the dark (actually the street lights were quite bright) and entering The Stud alone. I looked around. The place was practically empty — and particularly empty of Rianna.

Everything Nice

I was nervous and a bit mad at Rianna for stranding me there alone, but I was a big girl and I'd been in bars before — albeit, not gay bars, and certainly not dressed as a woman. I got a rum and Coke from the bartender and sat on a tall stool next to a wall by the pool table and waited for Rianna.

A very pretty blonde woman in a fancy, sequined dress came in alone and repeated my performance, looking anxiously around, getting a drink from the bar, and perching on a stool a couple seats down from me. Observing her, I hopped off my stool and walked over. I couldn't tell whether she was trans or a genetic girl (GG), but I didn't care.

"Hi!" I said brightly.

She looked up at me and a smile formed on her luscious red lips. "Hi!" she said back to me.

"You look like you're waiting for somebody, like I am, too."

"Yes. They were supposed to meet me here, but they're not here yet."

"Same with me! My friend hasn't shown up yet. She was supposed to be here at nine. I'm Lannie, by the way."

"Hi Lannie. I'm Shelly."

"Hi Shelly. Cute name!"

"Thanks."

"So, have you been here before?"

"No, it's my first time."

"Me too! I'm surprised it's so empty."

"Oh, it probably doesn't get going till eleven or twelve. We wanted to meet early so we could talk before it gets too noisy. And then she doesn't show up. Hmph!"

"Don't worry; I'm sure she'll get here soon."

"Yes, I'm sure you're right."

"Shelly," I ventured to say boldly, "I just have to tell you, you are beautiful! Such a pretty face, and I love your sparkly dress."

"Oh thank you!"

"No, really. You could be a movie star."

"Ha! Actually, I do appear in movies."

"No! Really?"

"Oh yes. About once a month I fly down to L.A., to the San Fernando Valley, and shoot some movies. It pays pretty well."

"Oh. Umm, do you mean ... ummm, that kind of movies?"

“Porn, yeah. Trannie-porn.”

“Oh. Cool!” I found it quite fascinating. I’d never seen any trannie porn. In fact, I didn’t know it existed. “So is that how you make your living?”

“Oh no. That’s just for some extra money. I work at the cosmetics counter at Macy’s in Pacifica. You should come by sometime. I could give you a makeover.”

“Would you? That would be great. I could really use some makeup tips.”

“Let me look at you. You’ve got a really pretty face. We ought to bring out your eyes more, and plump up your lips. Contour your cheekbones. Oh yes, you can be quite a stunner.”

Wow, what an exotic world I suddenly found myself in! I couldn’t believe that a T-girl could have a regular job in the real world. And such a glamorous one, at a cosmetics counter. Just like my mother, when she was a young woman, before she met my dad! Besides that, Shelly’s makeup was so well done, and she was a porn star. My, my, how my little world was expanding.

Trannie Shack became a regular haunt for me over the ensuing months. I made it to the club every other week or so. Now and then I ran into Shelly again, and she always recognized me and said “Hi.” However, it turned out she was hardly a typical Trannie Shack denizen; I never met another girl quite as glamorous as her.

Shelly must have been amused to see the changes in me! I quickly learned that anything goes at Trannie Shack, as I saw the most outrageous and sexy drag queens and T-girls in every manner of dress. I began dressing more and more wildly, seeing if I could get a reaction or find out where the edge was. I raided Goodwill Stores all over the area so I could show up at Trannie Shack in LBDs (little black dresses), ball gowns, prom dresses, sequined disco mini-dresses, and incredibly short skirts and tight tops. (I never wore a wedding dress — too overdone.)

And shoes! I shopped Pierre Silber for patent leather boots, sandals with ankle straps, and CFMs (come-fuck-me pumps with 5-inch spike heels). Wigs! My hair was long and black, curly and blonde, a platinum bob, an auburn pageboy. Also the lingerie, usually visible to some degree: pantyhose, thigh-highs, black stockings, fishnets, garter belts; and bustiers, camisoles, cheap corsets, slips, teddies, merry widows. But nothing I wore ever raised an eyebrow at

Everything Nice

Trannie Shack. I did, however, garner a lot of compliments, which I gobbled up like sweet bonbons.

After I had been going to the weekly trannie fest for some months, I spied a woman who was nearly as beautiful and glamorous as my friend Shelly. This gal swept into Trannie Shack in a white *My Fair Lady* gown and big floppy hat. I felt I just had to meet her, so I introduced myself. She was happy to have someone to talk to.

“Hi! I’m Lannie. You are so beautiful!” That line never failed to please.

“Thank you! I’m Miss Eda Bagel.”

“Did you just step out of *My Fair Lady*?”

“No, from Cincinnati, actually. I’m performing tonight.”

“Cool! I can hardly wait to see you.”

“I’m a little worried, though.”

“Oh? Why?”

“Well, I sing my own songs you know, and some of the lyrics are rather bawdy. I hope nobody is offended.”

“Ha!” I laughed. “I can assure you it won’t be a problem. Just be careful of flying fluids.”

“Fluids?” Eda squeaked.

“Yes. Various fluids tend to fly around the stage at Trannie Shack shows.”

“I see.” She shuddered.

Eda was a treat to watch, a real pro. Her songs were charming, funny, and ribald. Her singing voice was strong and very feminine. It was quite a departure from the vulgar, lip-synch antics of our usual cast of drag queens. The audience appreciated Eda’s performance; the dance floor was packed with spectators like it always was for the midnight drag show, which was a new and different show every single week. A lot of straight people dropped in for the show and disappeared right afterwards.

Eda mentioned to me that she was traveling with her boyfriend, and she pointed him out. He was really cute and sitting by himself at a little table.

“He looks lonely. Why don’t I go over and flirt with him, Eda?”

“Help yourself!” Eda gamely offered, laughing.

I went over to the little table and introduced myself.

“Hi! I’m Lannie. Can I join you?”

“Sure,” he said with a smile.

I sat down and chatted him up, flirting as madly as I could. He was really nice and we had a good conversation, but he totally was not taking my bait. After a while I slapped myself in the forehead: *Silly! He’s a gay guy. They’re a gay couple. Of course he’s not interested in me. No wonder Eda was amused at the idea of me flirting with him.* I was learning.

My private parties with Rianna Silk took place in the early part of 2001. In March, I came down with a terrible flu virus. It laid me up sick for six weeks. I missed a little bit of work and put all of my social activities and cross-dressing on hold. I could hardly eat, and I dropped 20 pounds. Combined with the 20 pounds I had dropped the year before, when I went on a low-sodium diet for my blood pressure, I was down to 135 pounds. At six feet tall, my doctor said my weight was anorexic. But I loved it, because, god, could I wear clothes! I fit into a size 4 skirt. Well, squeezed in, to be honest, but I could do it!

I finally recovered from my illness, but Rianna wasn’t interested in our parties anymore. She had some new girls she was playing with, and Lannie had faded from her consciousness in the time I was ill. I was devastated. My whole life revolved around my weekend parties with Rianna. What would I do without her? I was close to panicking about it.

What I did was to start going to Trannie Shack every single week. It was an outlet for my need to socialize as Lannie, and I began making acquaintances there. I ran into Rianna from time to time, and we were still friendly. I became a familiar fixture at the Shack.

Pride

I strutted proudly into Trannie Shack, my LBD showing off my slim figure and my long, shapely legs. The place was already convivially full at 11 o'clock, buzzing with gossip and sexual arousal. I gave a smile to Yvonne, the tall, heterosexual drag queen, and her little faux drag queen wife, Princess. I chatted a few minutes with Eve Summers of Adam to Eve transformations and Michelle Garcia, a talented trans musician (former bass player with The Mystic Knights of the Oingo Boingo, which also boasted Danny Elfman as a member) and former Miss Transgender San Francisco from the year 2000. On my way to the dance floor, I shared quick "Hellos" with the girls of Lipstick Conspiracy, the all-trannie rock band that was beginning to make a name for itself in the Bay Area and beyond.

The DJ was spinning his usual early-evening Björk set, but fortunately he had chosen something with a beat. I found Zoë, a shy high-tech entrepreneur who enjoyed her nights out as a girl, dancing

happily by herself, so I joined her. I knew we would see each other at least one more time on the dance floor that evening, because we always pogo'd together when the DJ spun *Ballroom Blitz* by Sweet.

After twenty minutes of frantic dancing, I got a gin-and-tonic from the bar and made another circuit of the front room to see who else had arrived. Among the wide variety of gaudy drag queens, demure cross-dressers, adventurous transvestites, effeminate gay guys, buff dykes, hungry trannie-chasers, and wide-eyed tourists, I spotted a half dozen faces I knew. I began to circulate.

I was sharing some gossip with my old friend Rianna Silk, when my attention was taken by a tall, foxy young blonde lady who walked by the little table where we were sitting. She was slim, dark-eyed, and had a great ass that was barely covered by a tiny black skirt.

"Who is that? Is she T or G?" I asked Rianna, meaning a trans girl or a genetic girl.

Much to my surprise (though it should have been no surprise because she appeared to know everyone), Rianna replied, "Oh, that's Jessica. She just transitioned a few months ago. Do you want me to introduce you?"

"Sure," I said. I didn't really know what "transitioned" meant, but I took it to mean that Jessica was a trans girl.

"Oh, you really don't want to meet her. She's nothing but trouble."

"Come on. Introduce me."

"OK. But I'm warning you, she always turns out to be trouble for everyone she's friends with."

The next time Jessica walked by, Jim grabbed her and introduced me. We exchanged a few pleasantries over the din of the music, and said, "It was nice meeting you!" She seemed perfectly nice to me. I didn't believe that she could be as much trouble as Rianna thought. Rianna tended to be quite opinionated.

A couple of weeks later, I got an e-mail from Jessica. "You said you had a Web site," it read. "I've been thinking of having a Web site of my own. Do you think you could help me set one up?"

Woo-hoo! I most certainly could! *What a great opportunity to get to know Jessica better*, I thought. We made plans to meet the next Saturday afternoon at her office in Felton, in the hills between San Jose and Santa Cruz beach to the south. I was excited thinking about the possibilities.

Everything Nice

I got up early Saturday and carefully shaved, put on my make-up, and dressed. I wore a white skirt, a pink blouse, and strappy sandals, pretty but not too flashy. I put a bottle of sparkling wine into a cooler bag just in case an appropriate situation presented itself. I have to admit, some lustful thoughts were going through my head.

Driving south on highway 880, heading into the hills, I felt light and happy. How totally cool, to just be a girl out for a visit with a girlfriend! The fact that I had no boy clothes on hand, not even for an emergency, made me nervous, but that just put an edge on my excitement.

I had some difficulty locating Jessica's redwood building in the woods off to the side of Highway 9, but I finally found it. As I parked in the dirt area out front, Jessica emerged through a plate-glass door onto the redwood decking that constituted the building's front porch. She looked great in a tight-fitting pair of jeans and a tight white baby-doll t-shirt that left her flat midriff exposed. Her smile and her bright blonde hair sparkled.

"Hi! You found it!" she called in her high, girlish voice, and she giggled a cute, girlish giggle. "Come on in! (Tee-hee!)"

I got my purse and stepped daintily up the three redwood steps, crossed the deck in two strides, and went through the door Jessica held open for me.

I found myself in a medium-sized room, about the size of a large residential living room. In fact, the building looked like it had been built as a residence originally. Bookcases lining the walls were filled with neat rows of technical volumes. In the middle of the room, several desks held engineering workstations — personal computers equipped with large monitors and other enhancements.

"This is my office," Jessica told me, with a sweeping gesture taking in the room. "A couple of years ago, at my peak, I had six people working for me. But now it's just me."

"That's too bad," I said. "What is it that you do, and what happened?"

"Oh, (tee-hee), I guess I haven't told you. I'm a mechanical engineer. I design equipment and parts for people. It's a consulting business. I've worked for a lot of big companies in the area."

"You're an engineer too? I'm an electrical engineer."

"That's funny. Gee, we should design something together. (Tee-hee.)"

“So what happened? Is it just the downturn?” It was June 2001, and the dot-com boom had busted in a big way. All of the high-tech businesses were hurting.

“Well, that and a bad business investment. A couple of years ago, I had an idea to launch an Internet business of my own, designing parts and selling them online. I put my life savings into it and it didn’t work out. I lost everything. All I’ve got left are the assets you see here.”

“Oh God, that’s horrible! You must have been devastated.”

“Yes and no. It was bad that it didn’t work out, of course. But I was just getting involved in my transition then, and so my mind wasn’t really on the business. Transition was so exciting.”

“Oh, yes. Rianna told me that you began living full time as a woman just a recently?”

“Yes; about six months now. It was Thanksgiving when I came out to my family and went full time. Oh, that was bad idea. I ruined the holiday for everyone. Damn! (Tee-hee.)”

“So your family didn’t take it very well?”

“No. My dad isn’t talking to me, and my mom is very upset. It’s so sad. It really hurts that they’re not supportive.”

“I imagine that would hurt. Anyway, maybe we can talk more about that later, if you want to. But what kind of Web site did you have in mind?”

We sat down at one of the computers and began working on a Web site for Jessica. I enjoyed being near her, and having her talk to me like a friend. She was very smart and funny, and we had a great time. Even close up and interacting extensively with her, I could not imagine that it was possible she had ever been a man. She was one hot woman.

After a couple of hours, we had a rudimentary Web site set up and Jessica understood how she could modify it and add more pictures when she wanted to. Then we found ourselves forgetting about the Web site and just looking at the tons of pictures Jessica had accumulated on her computer. She had lots of pictures of herself, most of them looking extremely sexy in short leather skirts and high heels. I wondered if Jessica could teach me how to pose, because she had a natural talent for it. The camera loved her. Her photo collection included pictures of her trans girlfriends and a lot of guys she had corresponded with via e-mail, or gone on dates with. She also had an

Everything Nice

extensive collection of pictures of dream guys, and a lot of pornography. Like most T-girls I knew, Jessica loved pictures!

While Jessica was guiding me through her photo gallery, a thought occurred to her. She paused and turned to me with a sly smile. "Hey, I've got a little speed. Would you like to do some?"

"Speed? Like crank? Sure!" I remembered the fun I'd had on speed during my marriage, and I liked the idea of doing some with Jessica. Besides, that meant we were starting a party. My fantasies seemed to be coming true!

Jessica got up to fetch her stash, and I said, "I'll be right back." I went out to the car and got the bottle of sparkling wine. Meeting up again at the computer, I showed her the bottle and said, "I brought this in case we got thirsty. Should I open it?"

Jessica laughed and gave me a conspiratorial look, showing that she knew what I had in mind, and she approved. "Yeah! That's great. Thanks. I think you'll find a couple of glasses in the bathroom."

I got the glasses while Jess tamped some white powder into a tiny ceramic hash pipe. She lit it with a Bic lighter and took a drag, then passed it to me. Smoking speed was new to me; I'd always snorted it. But I followed Jess's lead and took a hit. It worked, and without burning my nostrils like snorting always had.

We had a wonderful time looking at pictures, telling each other our stories, and talking a mile a minute. At one point, Jessica's ears pricked up and she went on alert. Holding a finger up to her lips, she said, "Shhhhhh. I hear a car. That might be my landlord. I don't want to see him; I'm not out to him yet."

"Not out to him yet?" I whispered.

"No. He doesn't know I transitioned. I'm worried that he'll kick me out when he finds out." It seemed incredible to me that Jessica had been full time for six months, but hadn't come out to her landlord. *Is that what transitioning is like?* I wondered. *Always living in fear of being discovered?*

But the car went away and the crisis passed. We went back to partying.

After a while, Jess had a proposal. "We should have some dinner. Do you want to go out somewhere? Or we could pick up something and I could cook."

"Why don't we pick up something," I said.

“OK. There’s a little store down the road we can stop at. Why don’t you come with me in my car. We can come back for your car later.”

“Sounds good.”

We locked up the office, got into Jessica’s big old Cadillac, and headed up Highway 9 at what seemed to me like excessively high speed. We pulled into the dirt parking lot in front of a small grocery store.

Jess turned to me and said, “You can wait here if you want.”

“No, I’ll come in with you,” I said. I was pretty nervous about getting clocked, and who knows what kind of hell might break loose? — but I was having a great time being a normal girl with Jessica, so I was determined to go along with her.

We went into the store together and bought some pasta fixings and ice cream without incident. Neither the clerk nor a couple of other men in the store seemed to notice anything unusual about us two six-foot tall Amazons.

Back in the Cadillac, Jessica sped through more twisty mountain roads. She was intimately familiar with every bend and curve, knowing exactly how quickly she could navigate each one. After 15 exhilarating minutes, I saw the large green expanses of a fancy golf course opening on both sides of the road. Jessica pulled into an upscale redwood condominium complex that sat right on the golf course property.

We pulled into a parking space and got out of the car. Looking around stealthily, she motioned for me to be quiet and follow her. We skipped across the asphalt and up to the door of a unit. As Jess got out her key and opened the door, I noticed a large touring motorcycle tucked under the stairwell next to us.

When we were inside and Jess had swung the door shut, she explained why we had entered so stealthily. “Most of my neighbors don’t know about me yet,” she said. “I try not to let them see me.” Again I marveled at the unease Jessica was living with.

“I see,” I said. “Is that your motorcycle outside?”

“Yes; but I haven’t used it since I transitioned. I used to ride a lot. I loved the feeling of freedom it gave me.”

Jessica boiled up the pasta and put together a sauce and some vegetables. We ate lightly, since the drugs had greatly suppressed our appetites. After we cleaned up the kitchen, we sat on the couch in

Everything Nice

her beautiful living room to talk some more. But first we had another hit from the magical pipe.

I can't remember a more enjoyable evening than the one I spent with Jessica that night. We listened to music. We went for a walk around part of the golf course. We sat on her balcony overlooking a creek and a fairway. We danced a little.

She took me downstairs and showed me her wardrobe. I admired all her beautiful clothes. I noticed a series of blonde wigs on stands along the top shelf of her closet, and realized for the first time that her lovely blonde hair was not rooted to her scalp.

I saw her jewelry arranged in jewelry boxes and drawers, and on stands on her dressing table, and I longed for a dressing table of my own. I saw all of her lotions and potions arrayed around her bathroom sink, and wished my bathroom was filled with feminine accretions, too.

Jessica dressed me in some of her sexy clothes and we took pictures. She tried to teach me how to pose for the camera, but I was not very adept at it.

We ate ice cream.

But most of all, we talked. Jessica told me about her transition and how things had gone for her. She told me about how she had always had a nasty, violent temper as a male, but that it left her once she began living as a woman. She had been abusive to an ugly, fat woman she had married just to try to be a man, and of course that had ended badly.

I was incredulous that this beautiful girl could really be the same person as the unhappy man she described. I was amazed to start to understand what being transsexual actually meant. Jessica had me read a few pages from a book titled *True Selves* by Millie Brown, and she suggested that I should read the entire book if I was interested in knowing more. In fact, she offered to lend me the book.

A few times we flirted with the topic of whether I, too, might be transsexual and not just a cross-dresser. But it was preposterous. I knew I was a man; I always did. Transsexuals know their gender is wrong from their earliest memories. Even now, I didn't desire to actually be a woman; I just enjoyed visiting there now and then. I never even cross-dressed when I was a kid. And I told Jessica that I was basically happy; I didn't need to make any big changes in my life.

As the wee hours of the morning came and went, we became physically exhausted, but not really sleepy because of the speed. Jessica said, “Tomorrow — well, I guess it’s today now — they’re holding the Gay Pride parade in Santa Cruz. Do you want to go?”

“I guess so,” I said. “That sounds like fun.”

“Good. But we ought to try to get a few hours of rest first.” So we went downstairs and got into Jessica’s big bed together. She lent me a diaphanous white nightgown, and put on a cotton gown herself.

“You can take your wig off. I don’t care,” she invited me. But I left it on, even though it was uncomfortable. It was an important part of my female identity, and I wanted to keep being a girl. I was enjoying it so much. Jessica slept in her wig, also.

My fantasy had more than come true. I couldn’t believe how good of friends we had become, and so quickly! And even to the extent of being snuggle-buddies, actually sleeping together. We did not have sex, but that did not matter to me. It seemed like sex would only weaken our connection at that point.

After a few hours of resting our bodies and watching cartoons inside our speedy minds, it was time to get up and get ready for the parade. I’d packed an overnight bag, so while Jessica went upstairs and threw together a little breakfast, I commandeered her bathroom for a shower, shave, and new application of makeup. I put on an ugly, ankle-length turquoise summer dress I had brought along, wondering what I had been thinking when I packed it. But it was a light material and I thought it would be cool for the sunny summer day that I could already feel heating up.

We forced down a little food and hit the crank pipe again for an energy boost. Jessica, dressed in her incredibly short black leather skirt, took her estrogen hormone pills. With that sly smile of hers, she offered one to me. I swallowed it.

We snuck stealthily into the car, making sure no neighbors saw us. Then Jess drove us back down Highway 9, this time all the way into the darling little beach town of Santa Cruz.

The parade was to march down Pacific Avenue, the street than ran through the middle of the open-air Pacific Garden Mall, Santa Cruz’s main shopping district. Crowds of people were milling around everywhere, forming up for the parade, or to watch the parade, or

just to wait for their favorite bars and restaurants to open. We parked and waded into the crowd.

My eyes were popping out of my head in amazement at seeing so many queer people in one place. It seemed as if Trannie Shack had exploded and taken over the city! I saw drag queens in their sequined gowns and big hair; leather men in their chaps and harnesses; dykes on bikes in their jeans and studded jackets; people handing out condoms and safe sex information; PFLAG parents representing the organization Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; politicians sitting up on the backs of their convertibles; and on and on.

Jessica said, "Here we are! Here's the transgender group," and took me over to some normal-looking women and obviously cross-dressed men standing near a banner that read, "Santa Cruz Trans Support Group." She began greeting various people she knew while I hung back and enjoyed the scene.

"So what to you think?" I turned around to see a handsome, distinguished man addressing me. He was curiously short, about five foot six I'd say, and had a full beard and mustache. I noticed banner of the group he was with said, "SCOUT," which I thought must be some kind of Boy Scout troop. But I didn't see any Boy Scout uniforms around.

"It's wild," I said. "And such a beautiful day."

"Great weather," he agreed. "Not too hot and not too cold. Last year it was way too hot. I got all sunburned."

"I hope you wore sunscreen this year."

"Oh yes, I did."

A little while later, Jessica caught up with me. "What did you think of that trans man?" she asked. "He's pretty cool, isn't he?"

"Trans man? What do you mean?"

"That guy you were talking to. He's transsexual."

"He is?"

"Well yeah. Didn't you see the banner? SCOUT — Santa Cruz Organization Uniting Transmen."

"Oh, gee, I only saw the SCOUT part. I'm an idiot."

"Ha! Don't beat yourself up. If you've never met a trans man before, you'd never know it. They pass so well. Once they start on testosterone, they sprout facial hair and their voices drop. They're so lucky. We've got to do electrolysis and our voices never sound right."

“What do you mean? Your voice sounds great.”

“No it doesn’t. I always get clocked as soon as I speak.”

“I find that hard to believe.”

By this time the parade had started, marked by the thunderous gunning of engines by the dykes on bikes, who traditionally led off every Gay Pride parade. Groups of marchers were beginning to stir all around us. A lady rushed up to Jessica and me shouting over the noise, “You girls are tall. You carry the banner.” She grabbed us by the elbows and hustled us to the front of the Santa Cruz Trans group. The two ends of the ten-foot pole supporting the banner were thrust into our hands. The group in front of us was marching, and the imperious woman gave me a little push and said, “Go! Go!”

Without a moment to gather my thoughts, I found myself marching through cheering throngs down the middle of Pacific Avenue, holding a large banner that proclaimed, “Santa Cruz Trans Support Group!” I fairly floated down the street, having an almost out-of-body experience. I looked into the eyes of the cheering parade-watchers and smiled. I could see them smiling back at me. I thought to myself, *Jesus! I didn’t want to stay in the closet, but I didn’t expect to be this out!* The other thought that ran through my head was, *Why, oh why did I wear this hideous turquoise dress?*

Almost before I knew it, we had reached the end of the short parade route and my magical experience was over. What a rush it had been! Wow! Just a few short months earlier, Lannie’s world had been tiny, with a population of one. How it had exploded! I wasn’t alone; I was part of something. There were other people like me, and other people unlike me but facing a similarly unsupportive universe. I now knew for sure that my female identity was not just a hobby or a fetish; it was an essential part of my life, and it would remain that way forever. I had a model, I had a place to fit in, and I was making friends. And most of all, it just felt right.

Jessica and I staffed the Santa Cruz Trans booth at the Pride festival throughout the afternoon. I had an opportunity to talk some more with my trans man friend. I was amazed to find out that he had a wife and a beautiful little girl. *How could they have a little girl together?* I wondered. Later I found out she was his niece, not his daughter. (The idea of adoption didn’t occur to me, though that would have been an obvious solution to the mystery.)

Everything Nice

By mid-afternoon, Jessica and I were worn out by the sun and the speed. We said our goodbyes and left the festival. She dropped me off at my car which was still at her office, with promises that we would get together again soon. I drove home not on Highway 9, but on Cloud 9, reflecting joyously on my adventures and my new friendship with Jessica.

* * *

I awoke on Monday morning with bizarre thoughts bombarding my brain. Why had I told Jessica I was basically happy? My life was lonely and miserable, except when I cross-dressed. Didn't I really desire to be a woman? I sure enjoyed the heck out of being a girl with Jessica for the last two days. And wasn't it odd that I'd spent my cross-dressing years not in the trannie bars, but out at the shopping malls and movies like a regular woman? Why on Saturday night hadn't I remembered that I did cross-dress when I was kid: not much, but there was that period just before puberty when I tried on my mother's pantyhose and brassiere borrowed out of the laundry. I even almost got caught by my mother once when I was snooping through her lingerie drawer. I remembered that I only ever had one friend in the neighborhood when I was young, and that friend was female, a tom-boy who lived on the corner. A female best friend; could that indicate anything? I even had a whisper of a memory that a male teacher in my Catholic high school had come back from summer vacation as a woman. Did that really happen? If so, why had I suppressed the memory of it so thoroughly? And what did it mean to know you're a man, or know you're a woman, anyway? What did it feel like to be a man, or a woman? I just felt like me. *Maybe this is what a woman feels like!*

I broke into a cold, shivery sweat and had trouble breathing. Could it be that I *was* transsexual? Oh, God, what would that mean? Would I have to transition? Oh, God, how horrible would that be! Electrolysis! Surgery! Facing people I knew and telling them I was really a woman! It was unimaginable, unbearable! Would I live the rest of my life in fear of being outed, like Jessica?

I forced myself to get out of bed and shower, but I could not stop the fearsome thoughts pouring through my brain. I was in a full-on panic attack. What to do? What to do? Mechanically, I went through the motions of getting ready and going to work. I thought

that, once I got to work, my mind would switch tracks and I would be OK. Work provided my life's stability. It would rescue me today.

I was no better at work. I sat in my cubicle like a zombie, with a spreadsheet up on my computer screen in case anyone walked by, while my mind just churned and churned. It was incredible. It was horrible. How could get I out of my chair and go to the coffee room if I was dressed as a woman? How could I talk to the other engineers, presenting myself as a woman? Could I possibly function in my job, as a woman? I thought, *I'm going to march into my boss's office right now and quit. I'll go someplace where nobody knows me and I can transition in private.*

I left work early. My jitters were beginning to calm down by the time I got home. I decided I should call someone I could talk to about this.

What about Michelle Garcia? She was a transsexual woman; she would know all about this stuff. In fact, she was a councilor at a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center that focused on helping transgender people. She would be a good person to talk to. I decided I would call her. I would ask her, "Michelle, what do you think about me? What do you sense about me? Do you feel like I might be transsexual?"

I called Rianna and asked for Michelle's phone number. "I need to talk to her about something," was all I told Rianna. Rianna was just a cross-dresser; she wouldn't understand about transsexual issues, I thought.

I dialed Michelle's number, but she wasn't there. An answering machine picked up. I left her a message. "This is Lannie — Rianna's friend, you know? Would you please return my call as soon as you can? There's something important I want to ask you."

After I left my message for Michelle, I decided to call Jessica. I was reluctant because I didn't want to dump my problems on my new friend; and besides, I was embarrassed about being such a wimp. We'd already established that it was highly unlikely that I was transsexual, so what was I upset about?

Jessica, fortunately, was home to take my call. I told her about my panic attack, and my strange thoughts, and how confused and upset I was. She said, "I'm coming right over."

"You don't have to do that," I said. "I'm feeling much better now, really."

Everything Nice

“No, it’s important. I’m coming right over. I was supposed to do something with a friend tonight, but I’ll call her and cancel. Give me directions to your house.”

“But I’m not even dressed!” Meaning, dressed as a woman. I was still in my work clothes.

“That doesn’t matter,” she said. “I don’t care how you’re dressed.”

But I changed into a skirt and did a quick makeup application before Jessica got to my house. It felt important to me. Then I sat in the corner of my living room couch and waited for Jessica to arrive.

After what seemed like a long time, Jessica finally got there. She held my hand and took me through my whole story again and again. Once more we analyzed logically whether it was possible that I was transsexual. Once again, the answer came up “Highly unlikely.” I began to feel silly about the whole episode. Of course I wasn’t transsexual. Of course I was a man. I knew it.

Jessica hugged me and urged me to call her again whenever I felt like it. Then she fished in her purse and pulled out a business card.

“This is the number of my therapist,” she said. “If you start thinking about this again, or you’re unsure, or if you just want to explore it further, you ought to make an appointment and talk to Cynthia. I’m not an expert. I could be completely wrong about all of this. You should really talk to an expert if you have any doubts about it.”

Michelle Garcia returned my phone call two days later, but by that time the crisis had passed. I just told her, “Thanks for returning my call, but it’s nothing. I had a problem a couple of days ago, but it’s OK now.”

Treat Her Like a Lady

I continued to identify as a cross-dresser, but the possibility of being transsexual never left my mind. I continued to go to Trannie Shack on Tuesdays and shopping on weekends. One Sunday I decided to take a drive in my trusty Buick down to the Monterey peninsula. I thought I would visit the Monterey Bay Aquarium again.

I wore a yellow sundress, strappy sandals, and sunglasses. I parked in the large parking structure near the Aquarium, a few blocks up the hill and a few blocks up Cannery Row. As I walked downhill to the main street, enjoying the smell of the crisp, salty sea air, a couple of casually dressed young women were heading up the hill toward me. I saw them give me a good looking-over as we passed and I heard one woman laugh and say to the other, "That's a guy!" My self-confidence plummeted. I felt the other woman's eyes burn into the back of my head as she turned to take another look at me.

Everything Nice

Feeling on edge, I tried to enjoy myself as I continued to walk down the hill and then down Cannery Row. The streets were crowded with weekend tourists. I acted as nonchalant as I could, but I couldn't help but wonder how many of them were clocking me. So *what if they were?* I asked myself. *I'm not hurting anyone, and they're not hurting me. Forget about it.*

The ticket booth at the Aquarium was crowded. I knew I could brave the ticket line, but I knew it would be crowded inside the Aquarium as well. I would be uncomfortable. Besides, I didn't really need to see the fish again. I decided to skip it.

However, I had a need to pee that would not wait. Did I dare to use the nearby public restroom? I'd used plenty of ladies rooms before, but I felt so paranoid and exposed, I was uneasy about it this time. But what choice did I have? I couldn't very well use the men's room, could I?

I went into the big, concrete women's room and did my business. A few other women were inside, and coming and going, but no one paid me any attention. My spirits were bolstered after I washed my hands and left the restroom.

I still wasn't interested in the Aquarium. I took a long walk up to the other end of Cannery Row, window-shopping in the antique stores and identical t-shirt 'n' kitsch emporiums, people-watching the tourists in their khaki shorts and Hawaiian shirts, and enjoying the beautiful California sunshine. I wished I didn't need to wear so much heavy makeup to cover my beard shadow, because the foundation was melting in the heat.

At the south end of Cannery Row sat The Monterey Plaza, a small luxury hotel with a big patio deck overlooking the ocean. It was an ideal location for weddings and cocktail parties, but it was deserted when I got there about noon. I stood at the railing, not leaning over it like a guy, but with my spine regally straight and my shoulders back. I looked out at the gently rolling sea and the great majestic curve of the shoreline. A few colorful kayaks played tag with the otters on the sparkling blue waters. I could hear the seabirds squawk and taste as well as smell the salty air. The warm sun felt good on my exposed skin, but the slight breeze was a bit chilly. I pondered my life at its current nexus.

What the hell was I doing out at this beautiful place, 75 miles from home, in a wig and a dress? Why did it feel so good to be here

like this, even when people laughed and stared at me? Clearly this was not an end itself; how long could I go on with this charade? What was it my heart was really longing for? Directly below the railing, I could see couples dressed in their Sunday finery, dining on the patio of Schooners Bistro. Would I ever have a real life, like them? Why was I always so god-damn alone? For the moment I felt happy and peaceful, but unsettled — like I was in a big arena waiting for a rock concert to begin (and the drugs to kick in!).

I made my way back down Cannery Row and up the hill to the parking structure. This time as I walked, I practiced looking people in the eye — I had nothing to be ashamed of! I hoped I would run into the women who at laughed at me before: I would give them a great big smile and ask them if they were having a wonderful day!

Alas, I didn't see those ladies, nor did I make human contact with any of the many people I passed. No one was receptive to my smiles except for a couple of dogs locked in their masters' cars. The canines, like me, were eager for any scrap of friendship that could penetrate the barriers separating them from the rest of humanity.

My stomach growled and I became aware that I was very hungry. I mumbled my mantra, "Hunger is good," which helped me maintain my girlish figure, but I realized I needed to eat something.

I peeked in the windows of the cafes and restaurants I passed, but I couldn't get up the resolve to go in. As much as my self-confidence had risen, it wasn't strong enough to face an hour's confinement in a small room packed with strangers, and having to actually talk to a waiter or waitress. Besides, eating out alone always made me feel like such a loser.

I got back to the parking garage and was grateful to get out of the increasingly hotter sunshine. Coolness radiated from the concrete of the massive structure, and automobile exhaust fumes battled the clear sea air.

I located my Buick, unlocked the driver's side door, and got in. I took the garage's parking ticket from my dashboard, pushed the button to roll down my window all the way, and got some bills out of my purse so I wouldn't have to fumble with it on the way out. I knew I would have an interaction with a human at the exit and I wanted to make it as quick and smooth as possible.

I pulled up to the booth and stopped just short of the red-and-white striped, wooden arm that blocked the exit. I handed my ticket

Everything Nice

with some money to an old, thin black man in the booth. His face lit up with a big smile, from his straight white teeth to his crinkly eyes, and he said, “Did you have a nice day?”

A warm feeling arose in my chest and suffused my body. “Yes. Thank you very much,” I chirped.

“Good. Drive safe now.”

As I pulled away from the booth and turned onto the sunny street, brightness seemed to fill not just my eyes, but my entire soul. What a pleasant, cheerful man! But I was puzzled. Why had he been so nice to me? He seemed to treat me special, like he was really interested in my happiness. It felt great, but what was up with that?

Suddenly it dawned on me. Duh! He thought I was woman. He was treating me like a young, pretty woman. Wow! It had felt distinctly different than I’d ever felt relating to anybody before. Life really was different for girls! I enjoyed the feeling so much, I began to wonder what I could do to experience it again.

I didn’t have to wait long. I was still starving, and still timid. I pulled off the Pacific Coast Highway a couple miles north of Monterey to figure out how I would solve my eating dilemma. The solution presented itself in the form of a pair of Golden Arches. A drive-through window! I could handle that.

I pulled up to the speaker box, ordered a cheeseburger-fries-Coke meal, and pulled forward to the window. The young man handed me a bag and an icy cup, and then there it was a again: a big smile, and a warm “Here you go. Have a nice day!” Was it simply my imagination, or did he really seem to enjoy interacting with me? No, I was sure it was true — he felt lucky to spend that brief moment with me. And I felt lucky to spend it with him. Gosh, it was fun being a girl!

My mind turned cartwheels as I munched on my fries and enjoyed my hour-and-a-half cruise home. What had changed? Why had I never experienced these feelings in all those years that I’d been cross-dressing, and all those trips to Trannie Shack?

When I got home, I searched through the pile of business cards in my kitchen desk drawer and found Jessica’s gender therapist. With a deep breath, I dialed the number. Cynthia’s answering machine instructed me to call 911 if this was an emergency; otherwise I should leave a message at the beep and she would call me back.

“Hi. My friend Jessica gave me your name. I wonder if I could make an appointment to see you? I — I guess I think I might be transsexual? At least, that’s what I want to talk about. My name is Edward Rhodes — ummm, I go by Lannie? Anyway, I’d appreciate it if you would call me back. Thank you.”

Cynthia called me back and we set up an appointment for the following week.

As the days went by, I began wonder: Should I go to the appointment as Edward, or as Elaine? At first I assumed I would go the way I normally dealt with the world, as a man. But then I thought, wouldn’t my story be more credible if I was dressed for my female persona? The more I thought about it, the more I felt that I didn’t want the therapist to meet the boy; I wanted to present myself as the girl.

But then I worried that it might be rude or shocking if I showed up cross-dressed, when she expected to see a man. Perhaps I should call her up and ask her if it was OK to come as a girl.

Call her up and ask? How weak and dependent was that? Did I need her permission to be a girl? No, that wasn’t right at all. I wasn’t going to Cynthia to get her approval, or to have her tell me what to do. I was going to her because I wanted the benefit of her expertise, that was all. I had an issue, and her experience and knowledge could help me resolve it. It was the same thing as when I had an intractable engineering problem at work. If I couldn’t solve it on my own, I would find other engineers who had dealt with this type of thing before, and discuss it with them. That was what I would be doing with my gender therapist.

Besides, what would Cynthia be likely to say if I did call and ask if I could come to the session as Lannie? Most assuredly she would say, “What ever you are comfortable with is fine with me.”

In the end, I compromised. I decided I would present as Lannie, but I left a message on Cynthia’s machine letting her know what to expect.

Cynthia was a tall, handsome woman just about my age, with a neat helmet of brunette hair and a ready smile on her face. She was delighted to meet me. Me: Lannie.

“Thank you for the message,” she said. “Of course you are welcome to come here however you feel comfortable. Now, what would you like to talk about?”

Everything Nice

I took a deep breath. This was the moment of truth — one of many I would be confronting over the next year. I plunged in. “It seems that when I’m a girl, I’m happy; and when I’m a boy, I’m miserable. So maybe it’s obvious, and I should just be a girl. But I don’t believe it can be that easy. I want to understand what’s going on in me. I want to explore it on a deeper level. That’s why I’m here.”

It turned out it actually was as simple as that, but it took me five more months to see it.

We're Trannies!

We checked into a sleazy little motel room at 3rd and Harrison, south of Market in the city, a few blocks from The Stud where Trannie Shack was held on Tuesdays. It was Jamie Faye Fenton, Lisa, and me. I was thrilled to be out with these lovely trans women — thrilled to be going to my first rave, thrilled to be accepted as peers by real transsexual girls, and thrilled to not be going out alone for a change.

I had met Jamie Faye a few months earlier at Trannie Shack. I'd arrived at that night very early — 10 p.m. — and hardly anyone was there yet. But Michelle Garcia and another girl (hah! we were all in our mid-40's) were having a drink at the bar.

“Hi Michelle!” I greeted her brightly.

“Hi Lannie! Have you met Jamie Faye Fenton?”

Everything Nice

“Jamie Faye Fenton?” I enthused. “The famous Jamie Faye Fenton? I’ve read your stuff on the Internet for years. I’m honored to meet you!”

“The one and only,” Jamie said with a modest chuckle. “Thank you.”

Jamie and Michelle were both dark-haired beauties. Michelle was more exotic-looking due to her Hispanic heritage, with thick, wavy hair; deep, dark eyes; and a sexy, slightly husky voice. Jamie, on the other hand, was taller — almost as tall as me — and just as Caucasian as me, with an elegant feminine face that I would learn was the work product of Dr. Douglas Osterhout, the famous facial feminization surgeon. I couldn’t believe either of these women had ever had male bodies like mine. However, later, when I became more experienced, I could recognize that Jamie’s unfortunately broad shoulders and resonant male voice could be “gives” (things that give away the secret).

Jamie transitioned in 1993 and was very active in the trans community. She was responsible for putting the much-loved Boston radio show *GenderTalk* on the Internet. She founded the first online e-zine and trans resource listing, *Transgender Forum*, as well as the *MEOW* chat room, one of the earliest chat systems on the Internet. Jamie was a brilliant software engineer by trade, and actually wrote the code that powered the *Forum* and *MEOW*, as well as the popular, ground-breaking video arcade game *GORE*. She was also present at the beginnings of transgender organizations like the Educational TV Channel (ETVC), which morphed into *Transgender San Francisco* (TGSF), *The International Foundation for Gender Education* (IFGE), and the annual *California Dreamin’* conference. For a long time, Jamie Faye Fenton was the top return for a Web search on the word “transsexual.”

Jamie was also active on the social scene, by which I mean that she loved to dance, club, and party. About the time I met her, she began to circulate a little weekly e-mail newsletter announcing upcoming events and which ones she would be attending, hoping to draw more transgender people to liven up the parties. I got onto her list, and began showing up about once a week at events where Jamie was.

I was often the only other trans person who showed up at these events, or at least the only one who showed up before midnight.

This led to some thrilling adventures for me as I ventured out alone, en femme, to strange places in unfamiliar parts of town. I felt very lonely, going out by myself and returning home the same way, but I didn't know what else to do. At least this way I would get to be with other people for a couple of hours, and I gradually got to know other cross-dressers and trans folks.

Jamie was always glad to see me at these events since she was usually alone, too, and because I loved to dance nearly as much as she did. I danced a lot while I was out at clubs and bars, usually dancing by myself, and Jamie never stopped dancing, wherever she was. Jamie and I weren't exactly becoming friends, but certainly acquaintances.

I longed to get closer to Jamie, to become part of the "in" crowd, part of the gang. But again, I didn't know how to do it. One night, for example, Jamie suggested to the group, "Let's go to Power Exchange!" I didn't know what Power Exchange was — just some mysterious, apparently hard-core club of some kind. I wanted to find out, though.

"Can I go?" I asked meekly.

"You'd better not," Jamie snickered. "You're too innocent." Innocent? I was a 45 year old man, for chrissake! But I didn't go.

Then, one fateful week, Jamie's newsletter mentioned a rave party she'd like to attend. I thought I detected a veiled reference Ecstasy, which I'd heard was a very popular drug at raves. I wrote her an e-mail message saying that I'd love to find out what a rave was like,. I also made it clear that I was receptive to the idea of doing some "E," recalling the fun I'd had with Rianna Silk.

Jamie was delighted to have another compadre for the rave, and that's how I found myself in the motel room in San Francisco with Jamie and Lisa.

Oh yes, about Lisa. A few weeks earlier, the Fourth of July holiday fell on a Wednesday, so everybody could go to Trannie Shack on Tuesday night and not have to worry about getting up early for work the next morning. Trannie Shack was packed, at least three times as crowded as usual. Amidst the bustling throng, Jamie Faye found herself thrust against a beautiful, blonde, 20-something trans woman. Literally smashed together by the mob and unable to talk over the din of the music and the people, Jamie made her pleasure known by kissing Lisa. Much to her delight, Lisa kissed back. They kissed

Everything Nice

well together. They rapidly progressed to making out, and they made out heavily, publicly, without embarrassment all night long. (Not embarrassing themselves, this is; plenty of us were embarrassed on their behalf.) There were fireworks that night, but they weren't in the sky. It was the beginning of a beautiful relationship. Later, Jamie would tell me that she had planned to hit on me that night, but got distracted by Lisa first.

Thus we were a threesome that Friday night in the motel room, preparing for the rave. I didn't mind them being a couple because I wasn't shopping for a girlfriend at that point, and I was pleased simply to be out with them. I felt I might be intruding on their new-found intimacy, but if they didn't mind having me, I didn't mind being with them.

We were already dressed: me in a mini-dress and a long red wig worn with a thick braid draped forward over my left shoulder; Jamie in a black leather skirt and camisole top, and Lisa in a denim skirt and a cotton top. So getting ready consisted of killing an hour or two so we wouldn't get there too early, and doing the drugs. We had booked the motel room because we didn't plan to be in any condition to drive at the end of the evening.

The Ecstasy was in pill form, so you wouldn't think any preparation would be necessary. But Jamie liked to make a ritual of it. She got out her collection of pills, extolling the virtues of the cats, the ying-yangs, and the triple-Xs. (Pill producers identified their wares by etching symbols into surfaces of the pills.) "This was a really long, slow, mellow ride," she said about one pill, recalling her experience with the cats. "This one has a lot of caffeine in it; it made me very jittery," she said about another — this from a woman who drank vodka and super-caffeinated Red Bull to prolong her high. "This one is kind of rough. It's more MDA than MDMA," she said about yet another pill, indicating that it had more of the Ecstasy precursor drug and less pure E, and therefore would have a more psychedelic, hallucinogenic effect.

Jamie had a little testing kit she used to establish the exact chemical composition of her pills, which made me feel safer about taking them. She had a lot of fun with the kit's little test tubes and vials and litmus papers that turned pretty colors when activated by certain molecules.

The final step of Jamie's ritual was to decide how to conceal some pills about her body, to be carried to the rave in case chemical reinforcement was needed later in the evening. Her usual strategy was to place them in a small leather pouch that hung around her neck and dangled between her breasts. If the circumstances were known to be fairly safe, a pill case in her purse would suffice; whereas if there was a possibility of a body search, more creative and elaborate means would be found. To simply not take the drugs with us was never a consideration.

Besides the drugs, another item of business was to get the details of the rave's location. Raves are underground affairs because of the heavy drug use at them — mostly Ecstasy, crystal methamphetamine (meth), and cocaine: the "up" drugs. The dance's sponsors keep the location of the rave secret until the last minute in hopes that the police will not find out. You have to call a certain telephone number the evening of the rave, and a recording will tell you its location. Sometimes it's double-blind — you go to that location, and somebody there tells you where the real location is, which is usually somewhere close by.

Jamie made the phone call and got bad news.

"Bummer," she told us. "The rave is cancelled."

"Awwwww," Lisa and I moaned.

"That's OK," Jamie said brightly, ever the optimist. "We'll find somewhere else to go!"

"How about the DNA Lounge?" I suggested. "I went to their grand re-opening a few weeks ago and it was great." I didn't mention that it was also very lonely because I couldn't find anyone who would go with me. Lord knows, I never met anyone in the clubs, either. Much to my surprise and disappointment, nobody ever tried to pick me up. I'd always thought that girls get hit on all the time, but that didn't seem to be the case, at least not for me. Of course, I wasn't really a girl.

"That might work," Jamie said. "And we can walk if you're up for it. It's a nice night and it's only a few blocks from here." The DNA was on 11th between Harrison and Folsom, and we were at 3rd, but they were short blocks. "Let's see what they've got going tonight." Jamie picked up the free Metro newspaper she'd grabbed from the lobby when we checked in.

Everything Nice

As Jamie did her thing with the Metro and drugs, I lay down on one of the tiny room's two twin beds and closed my eyes. I had worked all day and a short disco nap would do me good. I soon fell into a pleasant slumber.

I woke up an unknown time later feeling very warm and loved. As I emerged into consciousness, with my eyes still closed, I realized Jamie Faye was sitting on the bed next to my head, gently stroking my brow. And Lisa was sitting at the foot of the bed, gently stroking my cock. *My cock!?!?* I opened my eyes to verify that was really what was happening. Jamie looked lovingly down into my eyes with a big grin on her beautiful face. Without lifting my head, I glanced down and locked eyes with Lisa, whose arm disappeared under the hem of my dress.

"Do you like that?" Lisa asked in a low voice.

"Yes," I answered meekly. I could feel my penis beginning to become erect.

The girls continued fondling me. I just relaxed and enjoyed it. I closed my eyes and smiled. I felt Lisa pushing my dress up around my waist and I felt something soft and warm and moist grasp my cock. I lazily cracked my eyes open to see that Lisa's blonde head was now buried in my lap, bobbing up and down. *Oh, my! This was unexpected!* And I had worried I might be a third wheel with the two lovers. Apparently tricycles were all right in their book!

I stiffened up nicely, both in my erect cock and in my arching spine. Jamie left the bedside and went over to her bags. She returned with a large tube of something.

"Slime!" she proclaimed gleefully.

Jamie now sat at the foot of the bed opposite Lisa, and Lisa let my cock pop out of her mouth. Jamie squirted some "slime" into one hand, wrung the other hand to share it, and seized my erect member with both hands. She began jacking it in the knowing way of someone who has had the experience of her own penis.

Jamie and Lisa discussed the virtues of various brands of "slime," and compared jacking techniques using my erection for demonstration, while I enjoyed the ride. Soon enough I spurted, and it was over.

"Thank you." I murmured.

"You're welcome!" they responded. "That was fun!"

"Have you ever had a threesome before?" Jamie asked me.

“Not hardly,” I said.

Lisa got a damp wash cloth and cleaned us up. I pulled up my panties (my stockings were thigh-highs so they were undisturbed by the sexual activity) and we finished getting ready to go out. At this point, all that was left to do was to swallow the pills Jamie had selected for us and get into our coats. Both tasks were speedily accomplished and we were on our way.

As we walked down Harrison in the crisp San Francisco night air, I walked on clouds — and it wasn't from the drugs, either; they wouldn't kick in for an hour. I was just delighted to be out and about as a woman, with my two woman friends. It felt so right — like something I had a right to experience, but which had been denied to me all my life. That, and not being alone — finally having made some real friends, or so it appeared. (In fact, Jamie Faye and I would become the very best of friends for the next couple of years, though Lisa would fade from the scene.) I had made it! I was in with the in crowd!

Jamie had confirmed from the Metro listing that a good-sounding dance club was happening at the DNA. When we got there, we found a line of people waiting to get in. I felt conspicuous in the crowd of straight people, we three very tall women who could probably be read as trans, but no one gave us a second look. Besides, there was strength in numbers. I certainly felt better than I had a few weeks before when I was there alone for the grand re-opening.

The bouncers at the door weren't screening people to decide who was hip enough to get into the club — that must be a New York or L.A. thing — but even if they were, what could be more hip than a trio of sexy trannies? But they were simply checking IDs; so no underage kids could get in unless they had a fake ID. The big, burly bouncers didn't blink when I presented my driver's license with a male name and picture. We were soon inside the club.

Electronic house music boomed and colored lights flashed over main dance floor — a large, airy space open to the ceiling two floors above us. We made our way around the periphery and up one of the two sets of stairs at either side of the wide stage, to the second floor where I had located the coat check room the last time I was there. We stood in another line and checked our coats, revealing our short skirts, tight tops, and high heels. We fit right in. Jamie and I were a bit older than most of the club goers, but we did see other thirty-

Everything Nice

and forty-somethings, and even a few people who were older than that. Almost everybody was in sexy club-wear or fetish clothes. Tiny blondes in tinier skirts and higher heels; bosomy brunettes showing off their bounty; tall, thin girls that looked like models dressed in sexy corsets; and guys in rubber and leather — though not exactly like the leather men I sometimes saw in the gay clubs.

We circumnavigated the second floor overlooking the main dance floor. We noted the long bar lining the back wall of the second floor, matching the bar below on the first floor; a couple of “chill” areas with comfy couches and chairs on either side of the bar, a roped-off area with a large board to mix the sound and control the lights, and some kind of video game running on computers spaced at intervals along the walls.

When we got to the front of the room where the stage was below us, we went through some doorways and found a second space, like another little club, tucked away in the back. It had a small dance floor with its own DJ, a bar, and bench seats lining the walls. How charming! Most interesting of all, however, was a small dungeon area chained off in one corner, where people were engaged in BDSM activity — binding and flogging. (BDSM stands for the popular fetishes bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sado-masochism.) That accounted for the prevalence of leather outfits in the club!

We made our way back down to the main dance floor and joined the wiggling, swaying, hopping crowd. Soon Lisa, who was more into making out than dancing, wandered off.

After a bit, that familiar rushing feeling began to arise in my brain.

“Do you feel something?” I yelled in Jamie’s ear.

“Sure do!” she yelled back, grinning.

MDMA molecules blocked the serotonin uptake re-inhibitors in my brain and the my serotonin levels rose rapidly. The additional serotonin created shorter paths between my synapses and my brain began operating in overdrive. I felt great — even better than my already good feelings of the evening. I was in love with Jamie, with everybody else dancing around me, with the club, with the music. I was flying.

Jamie wandered off in a daze, as she was wont to do. She had a short attention span.

I danced. I wandered around the club. I people-watched. I danced upstairs. I watched the BDSM people. I got a gin and tonic for my dry mouth. I chilled as I danced asses-to-elbows in the throng of young San Francisco club kiddies, drug addled under the flashing laser lights. The thought entered my head, *Thank God my mother can't see me now!*

Sometimes I ran into Jamie or Lisa; sometimes I was alone. As usual, I was surprised that nobody else in the club tried to dance with me, talk with me, or snuggle with me. (The drug made me feel eager to snuggle with anyone.) But it was all right. I felt so lucky just to be myself, and to be out dancing, and to be doing it in a mini-dress and high heels.

At midnight, the music changed beats and group of fire dancers took to the stage. They twirled balls of fire on chains, creating intricate and dangerous-looking patterns that my drug-crazed eyes found fascinating. They manipulated flaming batons and poles, and even did a dance with a large, sharp scimitar.

The fire dancers vacated the stage and a corset fashion show took place next. A parade of young, beautiful models, mostly girls but a few boys too, strutted across the stage dressed in the sexiest, skimpiest corsets I'd ever scene. That explained the prevalence of corsets I'd noted earlier in the crowd. I longed to wear beautiful corsets myself; I hoped that one day I would have the opportunity, and the nerve.

After a few hours, the drug mellowed out and I felt I'd had enough of the DNA Lounge for one night. I found Jamie and Lisa necking in the little club upstairs and they were ready to leave, too.

We got our coats back from coat-check and headed for the exit. I felt a little sad as I pulled on my coat, covering up my sexy outfit; but I knew I would have other opportunities to strut my stuff before long.

As we were walking three abreast out the door, a couple of fraternity-looking young men came walking in the same door. They gave us a good looking-over. One of the guys did a double-take.

"Are you dudes?" he asked, incredulous.

A flush of embarrassment and humiliation started to creep up my spine. But Jamie and Lisa just laughed.

"No, *we're trannies!*" they sang out merrily, in unison, as we linked arms and marched past our admirers.

Everything Nice

My embarrassment vanished instantly and I laughed too. We're trannies! It was nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, we were very special people — exotic creatures of a sort. We were celebrities! I would rarely ever be embarrassed about being trans again.

The three trannies stumbled back to our motel, locked arm-in-arm and giggling all the way. Safely ensconced back in our room, we indulged our Ecstasy-induced urges to cuddle by snuggling in various configurations until cartoons began playing on the insides of my eyelids and I fell into a peaceful slumber.

A couple of weeks later, Jamie and I made it to a real rave, a first for both of us. It was fun, though the room was not very big and the ravers were quite young. I realized I was spending a lot of time in places where I was the oldest and tallest person.

As Jamie and I left the rave at 4 a.m., we found ourselves walking beside a young man and woman who had announced their engagement at the rave.

“I saw you guys dancing together,” I said to them. “You make a really cute couple.”

“Thank you,” they answered. “We saw you dancing too. We were just discussing what a cute couple you are!”

Jamie and I had a good laugh at that. They thought we were a couple! Imagine that!

Over the next two years, Jamie and I went to a few more raves together, a lot of clubs, and various other events. After a year, the magic ran out for us on the Ecstasy. (This phenomena is a biological. The brain builds up a tolerance and the E just doesn't work anymore, no matter how much you take.) We switched to crystal meth. After a year of that, we began to notice the destruction meth was wreaking among people we knew, and the toll it was starting to take on us, so we went clean; we stopped fooling with drugs of any kind.

As I partied and talked and loved with Jamie Faye Fenton, I gradually came to realize that the young ravers had been exactly right about us. Jamie and I were a couple!

Leather 'n' Lace

I met other people besides Rianna Silk through my personals ad on urnotalone. In fact, I took the initiative and sent e-mail greetings to the dozen or so girls I found on urnotalone who lived in my area. Most of them were too closeted to meet me in the real world. I did meet up with a few girls who were, I'll just say, not really my type. But I also met Dish, an irrepressible heterosexual drag queen who would become a close, lifelong friend. It was Dish who, as soon as she saw my name, dubbed me, "Lannie the Trannie."

Dish wrote me, "If you're willing to drive over the hill to Santa Cruz, I'd be happy to cook dinner for you." I was happy to drive over the hill and eat it, and we became friends over a series of tasty pasta and chicken dinners. During these visits, Dish presented as a little old house frau, but she regaled me with stories of her great drag-queen days in the '70s and '80s.

Everything Nice

Dish taught me to use hairspray — a *lot* of hairspray. She taught me that if my blouse was sheer enough to show my brassiere, I should wear a bright red one. (The same goes for panties.) And she taught me enough about drag queens — including dressing me up like one — for me to determine that was not what I was, though I still loved them.

One evening, Dish called and told me an old cross-dresser friend of hers was visiting, and would I like to join them both to go out to dinner? Of course I would. What fun!

I arrived at Dish's adorable little cottage a few blocks from the beach. Parking my car amongst the overgrown trees and vines that hid the residence from the street, I made my way through the jungle to her front door. Stepping inside, for once I ignored the trannie kitsch that covered the walls, ceilings, and bookcases — old photos of pin-up girls, posters of obscure sexually-themed movies, books of erotica, a collection of Barbie doll heads, a green space alien in a silk teddy, a mannequin in a leather harness, anatomically-shaped candles, dozens of wigs on Styrofoam heads, and so on. Instead, my attention was devoted to Dish, who I was seeing for the first time in all her big-haired, wide-hipped, drag queen glory, and a cute blonde in tight-fitting jeans and a black leather busier top.

“Hi Lannie! Glad you could make it. This is Cheryl!”

“Hi Cheryl. Pleased to meet you.”

Could Cheryl really be a cross-dresser? Surely she was transsexual. Her long, wavy hair was clearly home-grown, not a wig. Her makeup was deftly and subtly applied. And she wore pants, not a mini-skirt! Surely not a cross-dresser! And only about five foot eight inches tall, too, lucky girl.

“Shall we go?” Dish asked. “Sorry to rush, but we’ve got a reservation at seven at the Crow’s Nest.”

“Are you sure it will be OK?” Cheryl asked, sounding worried.

“Haven’t you been out before, dressed?” I asked Cheryl. I was incredulous. She looked so good, so passable, so self-confident, I couldn’t believe she wasn’t an old hand at this.

“I’ve been out a lot,” she told me, “to bars and clubs, but never to a regular restaurant.”

I laughed. “Don’t worry about it. You look great, and everything will be fine. I’ll bet no one will even clock us!” I was joking, of

course, because no matter how good Cheryl and I might look, Dish would be clocked from 100 yards away every time.

“Yeah, don’t worry, Cheryl,” Dish said. “I’m friends with Bill, the owner of the Crow’s Nest. I’ve been delivering the mail in the harbor area for 30 years. In fact, whenever Bill’s been drinking, he says he wants to hire me as a hostess. But whenever I ask him for the job when he’s sober, he just laughs.”

We went out to the Crow’s Nest and had a scrumptious and convivial seafood dinner. I enjoyed learning all about Cheryl. She was married and had three lovely daughters just reaching adulthood. She had been cross-dressing all her life. Her wife knew about it, and grudgingly permitted it while not sharing the activity with her spouse, but the daughters were not in on the secret. Cheryl kept her clothes in a mysterious locked cabinet in the garage of her big house in Southern California. She inclined toward a dark Goth look, enjoyed heavy metal music, and, even though she was a little older than me, was still a surfer dude in her dude life. She collected and restored ’57 Chevys, and had a fantasy of working under a Chevy dressed in a beautiful white wedding gown. Go figure.

I liked Cheryl, and I invited her to stay at my house when she was in the area. A few weeks later she took me up on my offer. She traveled a lot on business, and needed to be in the Bay Area for a few days. Could she bunk at my place? Sure!

Brian arrived at my front door on Thursday afternoon, look only slightl more masculine than Cheryl. Her beautiful dirty-blonde hair was pulled back into a pony tail and she had Cheryl’s happy smile on her round, cheerful face.

TGSF happened to be holding their monthly dinner that evening, and Cheryl was anxious to let Jamie Faye Fenton and I take her along to it. She dressed in a black leather corset (ah, that was where her feminine curves came from) covered by a black lacy dress. With some makeup and her hair combed out and poofed up with some hairspray, Goth Cheryl was ready to roll.

I had never been to a TGSF dinner before myself, and Jamie was always thrilled to go out anywhere, so we were an excited threesome as we headed up Highway 101 to San Francisco. We found our way to the Hayes Valley area of the city just a few blocks from Civic Center and got a lucky parking space on the street not far from the Blue Muse restaurant where the dinners were usually held.

Everything Nice

The maitre-de at the Blue Muse told us they were booked with another party for the evening and TGSF had been shuttled off to the adjoining Chinese restaurant. We walked around the corner and found their door.

The restaurant was long and thin like a shotgun shack — if you fired a shotgun through the front door, the buckshot would tour the dining area, notice whether the restrooms were occupied, inspect the cleanliness of the kitchen, pass through the back door, and pepper the ass of a mangy cat in the alley behind the building. The half-dozen tables lining the wall to my right were empty. To my left was a room divider, through which I could see another ten small tables with people sitting at them. We made our way around the room divider and into the TGSF crowd.

Jamie immediately began greeting people by name left and right. I tagged along behind her, and Cheryl behind me. Jamie would say, "...and these are my friends Lannie and Cheryl," and Cheryl and I would say, "Hi."

My eyes were drawn to a beautiful, slim blonde woman at a table on my left. She was chatting quietly with a balding, cheerful gentleman, the only man (not dressed as a woman) in the room. I could see why he was with the blonde, because she was easily in a class above the rest of the girls I was meeting. I walked over and introduced myself, directing my attention to the woman, not the man.

"Hi! I'm Lannie. This is my first TGSF dinner."

The woman smiled. "Hello. I'm Betty. This is Bernie."

Bernie rose from his seat. He was quite tall — a couple inches taller than me. In a booming voice he said, "Hi Lannie. I'm happy you to meet you."

"And I'm happy to meet you, too," I said, letting him take my limp hand to shake it. I turned my attention back to Betty. She was wearing a slinky dress with a very thin black-and-white diagonal pattern. It hugged her body closely and fell open to reveal a lovely set of shapely, crossed legs. "That's a beautiful dress," I said, "and you have great legs."

"Thank you," Betty responded. She checked me out. "You've got great legs too!"

We'd arrived a bit on the late side. Everybody was just finishing up their meals. Jamie, Cheryl and I took a table near the kitchen and ordered some food, which arrived quickly.

Soon the after-dinner festivities began. After a few short speeches from TGSF officers, it was time for the competition. The evening's theme was "Leather and Lace," and there was to be a contest for the best leather and lace outfits.

A large, muscular African-American transsexual woman named Tiana was master of ceremonies for the contest. She was a well-known figure in the community, with a sharp, feminine-sounding voice and a wicked sense of humor. She had us all in stitches as she encouraged girls to model their outfits while she described them in flattering terms, deliberately and outrageously crediting various haute-couture labels.

Since Cheryl happened to be dressed in leather and lace, Jamie and I prodded her to enter the contest.

"I couldn't!" she shrieked.

"Sure you can!" we urged. "You look better than any of these girls. You should do it. You'll hate yourself in the morning if you don't take this opportunity." She was shy, but she wanted her visit to be memorable. Besides, we could tell that she secretly wished she could do it.

Finally Cheryl relented. Tiana gave her a fine introduction. "From Los Angeles, we have Miss Cheryl, resplendent in a stunning black gown she stole from Vampira. Let's hear it for Cheryl!" Everyone cheered as Cheryl ambled from the head of the room through the throng to the foot of the room, took a turn, and returned to the head.

But Jamie and I weren't done with our mischief yet. "Cheryl, you've got take off the dress! Show off your leather corset!"

"Are you kidding?" Cheryl cried. "I couldn't do that!"

But we kept working on her. "Come on! It's not like you'll be naked. You have the corset and a slip on. Besides, everybody here has seen it all before. Go for it! You'll regret it in the morning if you don't!"

Again we got to her and, in a moment of weakness, she agreed. I ran over to Tiana and whispered that Cheryl had another presentation. She glanced over at Cheryl stripping off her dress. Her eyes got

Everything Nice

wide and she smiled. "Ladies, we have another entry. Cheryl is modeling her killer leather corset!" And wow, Cheryl sure did look hot!

I, however, was not to escape unscathed. Before I could get away, Tiana grabbed me by the wrist and said, "Now how about you, Miss Thang?"

"Oh no, not me!" I exclaimed, blushing. "No way. Besides, I'm not wearing leather and lace."

"Oh yes you are," she insisted. "Your skirt is leather. You go!" She gave me a little shove down the runway.

I was scared, embarrassed, and shy. But I was thrilled, too. I found my feet and strutted through the cheering, laughing crowd. They liked me! They accepted me! I was part of the gang. I was in the community.

It was fun, but it was over in an instant. How exciting it had been!

Then it was time for the judging. Tiana brought the contestants back and held a hand over each of our be-wigged heads as the crowd indicated their support with hoots and cheers. I was gratified to hear some noise and see smiles when Tiana's hand brushed my red hair. But when she reached Cheryl, the audience went wild! Cheryl won Miss TGSF Leather and Lace 2001! Cheryl beamed as she accepted her prize, which was a little basket of bath products wrapped up with a pink bow.

The night was still young as the dinner began to disperse. "Where shall we go now?" Jamie asked. She got a devilish glint in her eye. "Cheryl, have you ever been to Power Exchange?"

"Power Exchange? What's that?"

"We've got to take you there. It's a blast. I guarantee you've never seen anything like it. It's a sex club."

"A sex club?" Cheryl asked, trepidation and curiosity in her voice.

"Yeah. A gay and trannie sex club. You've been there, haven't you Lannie?"

"No, Jamie, I actually haven't."

"Really? Well, it may be a bit rough for you. But if we take a bunch of girls, it will be all right." Turning to the TGSF crowd, she announced, "We're going to Power Exchange. Who wants to come?" A few girls were interested. "OK. We'll meet you there."

Hooray! I was finally going to see what the mysterious and ominous Power Exchange was all about!

We got back to the car and drove short distance to a seedy part of town near the western end of the South of Market area. We parked on a wide, deserted street. Jamie gestured across the intersection to an ugly, forboding pile of concrete with a few skinny, vertical red neon lights distinguishing it from the other dark buildings lining both sides of the boulevard. We crossed the intersection and click-clacked down the sidewalk next to the edifice. A disheveled bouncer stood at the foot of a few concrete steps in a pool of light streaming through the double glass doors above. He barely glanced at us as we mounted those steps, marched through the doors, and continued up a half-dozen carpeted steps into the lobby of the Power Exchange.

The lobby was brightly lit and innocuous. There wasn't room for much besides a small reception desk and a few doorways and stairways leading off to God-knows-where. We waited behind a couple of trashy trannies for our turn at the desk.

In a moment Jamie was signing the register.

"What are we signing?" I whispered to her.

Jamie laughed. "I think it means you read the house rules," she said in her normal, booming voice. She gestured at a printed list pinned to the wall next to us. "Some legal thing, I suppose. You can sign anything you want. They don't check." I signed "Lannie Rose." The girl at the counter did glance at my driver's license to verify that I was over 21, but she didn't cross-reference it to the register, nor did she care that my license had a boy's picture on it.

Jamie grabbed a fistful of colorful square packets — condoms — from a fishbowl on the counter, and a few tiny tubes of lube from another. "It's always good to stock up," she commented. Seeing a surprised look on my face, she added, "They're very strict about safe sex here."

Jamie led on. "We can't go upstairs," she told us. "There are three floors up there, but they're just for gay guys. We go this way."

Cheryl and I followed Jamie through a set of doors to another little lobby where there was a coat-check room and a small shop selling floggers, fetish costumes, and other colorful, erotic goods. I sat on a chair shaped like a giant high-heeled shoe while Jamie stripped down to a little black slip and black nylons, her "play" outfit. She

folded the rest of her clothes and her purse into a bin that the coat-check guy took possession of.

Cheryl and I stared around in wide-eyed wonder as we followed Jamie down a short hall with interesting rooms opening up on both sides. To the left was a big bright room with soda vending machines, some café tables and chairs, and a pool table. I noticed a totally naked man was standing by the vending machines, stroking his dick. That didn't seem like good etiquette to me, but apparently it was permitted at Power Exchange.

To the right was a dark room that featured a tall, ominous-looking post with chains hanging from it. Another room had an empty tub of some sort, and in another I glimpsed a rope net that looked like a gigantic spider web.

Jamie turned left at an Apollo astronaut — a full-size Apollo astronaut space suit — and headed down a set of concrete stairs. A motionless bouncer stationed at the top of the stairs startled me because at first I thought he, too, was a mannequin of some sort.

The stairs led straight to the building's exterior wall, where we turned 180 degrees on a small landing, and headed down the rest of the way to the lower level. We passed through a small anteroom and into the dimly-lit basement of the Power Exchange.

The beat of hard rock electronica music permeated the environment, creating an edgy excitement, but soft enough that we could talk in normal voices. The space was dominated by a BDSM dungeon area partitioned off with a floor-to-ceiling chain-link fence. Inside, I saw a couple engaged in flogging and another in bondage. Off to the side, a portly, leather-clad man was cracking a bullwhip perilously close to a beautiful woman who was tied to the fence. Outside the fence, I saw people wandering aimlessly around. A few tall, unpassable cross-dressers were chattering and giggling together. A couple of Asian ladies of indeterminate heritage (T or G?) strolled separately. Guys with hungry eyes stumbled about in a daze. They were either tall and emaciated, or short and overweight. Some of them were naked except for yellow towels wrapped around their waists.

"What's up with the towels?" I whispered to Jamie.

"They're towel boys. It costs guys \$80 to get in, but it's only \$40 if they wear the towels."

"Eighty dollars?" I asked incredulously. "I'd certainly go for the towel!" It hadn't cost us a nickel to get in, because we were trannie

girls. GGs got in free, too. Only the poor, horny guys had to pay. I liked the business model.

Play areas with distinct themes were partitioned off around the periphery of the basement. Jamie led us around to right. We passed an area with nothing but a big, dilapidated, iron-framed bed. Instead of a nice mattress and comforter, it had only a foam pad covered with a thick plastic sheet. The next area had a canopy bed with similar coverings, but a pirate theme was suggested by a bit of a mast draped with some raggedy sailcloth, a pirate cap on a wall peg, and a functional set of stocks. I knew they were functional, because a semi-naked woman was locked in them, a rather contented look on her face.

Delightedly, Jamie said, “Ah, the la-BOR-atory is open!” and entered the final play area in the corner. After Cheryl and I entered the space, along with a couple other TGFSF girls we had accumulated along the way, Jamie latched a chain across the entrance. “Nobody else can come in unless we invite them,” she explained.

A doctor’s examining table was the main useful feature of our laboratory, but the least interesting. A globe discharging continuous streams of sparks drew the eye to one corner of the room. When I touched the globe, the bright plasma was attracted to my fingertips. The fireworks were so interesting, I was startled when I notice Frankenstein’s monster looming out of the gloom to my left. Obviously we had stumbled into Dr. Frankenstein’s lab. Now I understood why the examining table had thick leather straps attached.

“Cheryl, why don’t you lay down on the slab?” Jamie invited.

“I don’t know...” Cheryl giggled, but she let herself be persuaded.

“Trannie pile!” Jamie announced, and she and the other girls began stroking, massaging, kissing, and fondling Cheryl. I found an untended arm and joined in.

At first Cheryl was tense — especially when a girl began working on this or that intimate area of her body. “Relax, Cheryl,” Jamie advised her. “Enjoy the experience. It’s wonderful. I know. I love it when I’m the victim.” Cheryl did relax, and was soon enjoying the attention and stimulation immensely.

As we teased and fondled Cheryl, people began gathering at the low partition and chain at the front of our play space. Mostly it was guys, and I noticed that most of their right arms were in motion, al-

Everything Nice

though I couldn't see what they might be involved in below the level of the partition. Oh, wait. Where the partition stopped and only the chain separated us, I could see. It was what I was afraid of — they were wanking off. Ewww!

A few girls were watching, too. Jamie recognized a couple of the prettier ones and invited them inside to join our trannie pile. They were delighted to partake.

Cheryl's treatment went on for twenty minutes, and got progressively more intimate. When a girl lifted Cheryl's skirt, slowly slipped her panties down her thighs, and began fondling her genitals, Cheryl became uncomfortable. "I think that's enough," she announced. "Thank you all very much!" We put Cheryl back together, soothed her with a few more kisses and strokes, and eased her off the slab.

Turning to me, Jamie announced, "Now it's your turn, Lannie!"

"Me?" I asked meekly, surprised. I was not used to being the center of attention.

"Yes, you. Get up on the slab."

I did as I was told. (I'm a very cooperative person.) I lay back on the examining table, closed my eyes, and relaxed. The girls converged on me.

First, I felt some gentle stroking on my upper arms. Then down my lower arms, and my hands were massaged. My legs felt gentle pressure as soft, warm flesh traveled up and down them. Some long, strong fingers smoothed my brows, stroked my cheeks and chin, and presented themselves for kisses at my lips. Simultaneously, more hands caressed my belly and worked their way up my ribcage and over my silicon breast forms. One of my shoulder straps slid down my shoulder and my blouse was pushed down on one side. My breast form was pushed out of the way and a pair of lips started sucking on my little man-nipple, which quickly hardened under the attention.

Dreamily, I cracked my eyes open and surveyed the scene from my odd angle looking up from the slab. The pretty faces of a half-dozen trannie girls smiled down at me, lovingly. Their long hair, blonde, red, blonde, brunette, blonde, and Jamie's natural black hair tumbled down toward me in little waterfalls.

Turning my head slightly, I looked at the crowd of gawkers watching from outside the partition. It seemed like a football sta-

dium to me. There were at least three ranks of watchers, the ones in the back standing on tip-toe to get a better view. Their eyes looked hungrier and hungrier. Their right arms moved faster and faster.

My consciousness turned inward to examine my own feelings. From the attention of the girls, I felt loved and included. But from my fans outside the chain, I got even more. For the first time in my life, I felt popular. I felt envied. I felt beautiful and sexy. And most of all, I felt like a celebrity. I was the center of attention! Had there been a spotlight, it would have been trained on me! I couldn't believe how my life had turned around. I could almost see myself — see my evil twin brother, Eddy — out there beyond the chain, holding my stiff dick in my hands. That was where I had belonged, out there with the losers. But not now! Now I was the star! Somehow, I had become a winner.

I didn't close my eyes again. Seeing my adoring fans added so much to the experience, I didn't want to miss a moment of it. I was startled to realize: I have an exhibitionist streak in me!

One of my tormentors was an attractive blonde woman of about my age who I had spent some time chatting with at the dinner earlier that evening. She was working at the level of my waist. She pushed my leather skirt up over my hips and slowly pulled down my red satin panties. I decided I would not be a wimp like Cheryl. I would let her do whatever she had in mind.

I hadn't thought she would go this far, but she dropped to her knees and took my penis into her mouth. In front of these other girls, in front of all my worshipping fans, she sucked me, moving her lips up and down my shaft, gently teasing my glans with her teeth. This, I thought, was rather amazing in many ways. I had no idea this sort of this happened in real life. I wondered if it was legal. But mostly I just enjoyed it.

I didn't cum because ... oh, I don't know why. I just didn't cum. I did enjoy the experience very much. *If this is what Power Exchange is all about*, I thought, *I wish had visited here sooner!*

Getting Clocked

I parked by Buick in the big lot across from the Santa Cruz Beach boardwalk and walked in the dim twilight across the broad frontage street to the giant arcade building. I felt a little conspicuous in my short magenta leather skirt, strappy sandals, and tight blouse, my long red braid draped over my left shoulder as usual. But conspicuous in a good way — I hoped some of the few young people on the street noticed me. I knew they'd be impressed, whether they clocked me or not. I liked being noticed!

I felt even more conspicuous within the confines of the arcade, but the kids didn't pay me any attention. I circled the Captain Nemo indoor putt-putt golf course with its nautical décor of diving bells, pirate ships, and old Poseidon himself, and headed upstairs to the pool parlor.

It took but a moment to pick out Jessica and her young friend Amanda at one of the tables. Jessica was leaning far over the felt for

a difficult shot, displaying her taut little butt in her tight designer jeans. The pose was no accident, I well knew.

“Hi girls!” I called out as I approached.

“Hi! (tee-hee)” Jessica giggled. “You made it. Great! Grab a cue stick. You want some beer?”

“Sure. The pitcher’s almost empty. I’ll go get another one.”

We knocked the balls around the table for about an hour, playing “last ball” so we didn’t need to pay attention much and all three of us could play at once. We giggled and gossiped and tried to attract the attention of the boys at the other tables, but they weren’t interested. I supposed we were too old (except for Amanda) and too tall (all of us at or near to six feet). Certainly not too fat, because we were all thin and — if I may say so myself — gorgeous. Especially young Amanda. (Poor Amanda. Such a pretty name. But when we first met and I gauchely commented on its implications — “A man, duh!” — she’d gasped, blushed, and said she’d never realized it before. Amanda is a great cross-dresser name, but a terrible transsexual name.)

“Do you want to go for coffee?” Jessica asked when we began to get bored with the game.

“Sure.”

“OK. Why don’t you follow us?”

Back in my Buick, I followed Jessica’s Cadillac as she navigated the few miles from the boardwalk up to Pacific Garden Mall, where I had marched in the Pride parade a few months earlier. We parked in a lot behind the line of Pacific Avenue shops and regrouped for a stroll down the Avenue.

The evening weather was balmy and comfortable. I felt terrific being with my girlfriends out in the real world among the evening revelers. The night was rich with the usual Santa Cruz mix of yuppies, hippies, lesbians, beggars, and young toughs. We tried to avoid the young toughs so no hassles would spoil our evening fun.

Starbucks beckoned but we eschewed them in favor of Santa Cruz Coffee Roastings. A few booths with old wooden tables and bench seats lined one wall. I took possession of an open booth while the girls ordered our coffees at the counter.

We sat in the booth giggling and chatting, but Jessica gradually became edgy. She excused herself to step outside to smoke a cigarette. When she reappeared at the table, she looked unhappy.

Everything Nice

“What’s wrong?” Amanda and I asked. “Did something happen?”

“No. I’m fine,” Jess snapped.

“No, something’s wrong. Tell us.”

“Some jerks gave me hard time, is all.”

“Oh no. What happened? Did they touch you?”

“No, nothing like that. They called me a faggot. Just the usual.”

“Oh, Jessica! That’s a shame. They’re just idiots. Forget about them.”

But it was clear that Jessica’s mellow had been harshed. We finished our coffees with forced joviality.

As we continued to chat, a scraggly-bearded old-before-his-time codger came up to our table. He just stood there staring at us, saying nothing. It was weird. Finally Jessica blurted out, “What do you want???? Go away!!!”

“Freaks!” the guy mumbled, and continued to stand there.

“Go away!” Jessica insisted. “I’m going to get the manager. You’re going to be arrested. GO A- WAY!”

“Freaks!” the guy mumbled again, and he turned and shambled off.

We sat in silence for a few moments as the guy disappeared out the door. “Let’s get out of here,” Jessica said. “Let’s go back home.”

“Yes, let’s do that,” Amanda and I agreed.

As we left the coffee house, we needed to pass through a gauntlet of scruffy young people loitering just outside. I felt uncomfortable and on alert, but we went by them without incident.

We headed back down the Avenue toward where we had left our cars, but Jessica began walking quickly and getting ahead of Amanda and me. I quickened my pace to catch up, but she walked faster still and stayed ahead of me. I realized that she meant to be alone. I was puzzled, but I let her have her way and walked twenty paces behind her.

“What’s wrong with Jess?” I asked Amanda.

“I don’t know,” she replied, concern in her voice.

When we got back to our cars, off the street where no one else was around, Jessica still shied away like a scared colt when I approached her.

“Let me talk to her,” Amanda said.

Amanda went to Jessica and their heads were close together as they talked in low, urgent voices for a few minutes.

I couldn't stand it any longer. I decided this was stupid. We were adults; we should be able to talk.

I walked over and said, "Jessica, come on. What's wrong? You can talk to me. We're friends. I love you. Did I do something wrong?"

Finally, Jessica looked at me and blurted out, fear and anger making her voice tremble, "Lannie, it's not you. You didn't do anything wrong. You have to do what you have to do. But I just can't be seen in public with you anymore if you're going to dress like that. You're getting us clocked, and I can't stand it. You're welcome to visit me at my house, but I just can't go out in public with you anymore."

I was stunned. This was all about being clocked? Was Jessica that paranoid about people knowing she is trans? I recalled how she hid from her landlord and her neighbors, not wanting them to know about her transition. How sad that she was that sensitive to people knowing who she really was; how sad to have that much shame! I realized it wasn't about me, and I tried not to take it personally. Hell, where I had learned about wearing tiny mini-skirts but from Jessica herself? Why hadn't she sent me the memo that we're doing jeans now instead of skirts, if the policy had changed? In any case, Jessica was clearly so upset that there was no point in discussing it further at the moment.

"OK, Jess, I understand. If that's the way you feel, that's fine. We'll still be friends. Why don't you let Amanda take you home now, and try to calm down. You're a wonderful person, you know, and a beautiful woman. I'll always be grateful for all you've done for me."

But it was never the same between Jessica and me again. As I drove home, the hurt came through no matter how much I could justify Jessica's behavior intellectually. I resolved that night that I would never, ever turn my back on a transgender friend — be they transsexual, cross-dresser, drag queen, or gender-fuck — no matter how unpassable they might be or how much they might get me clocked.

First Date

A schoolteacher named Tom saw my ad on urnotalone and wrote me a flattering letter of introduction. I'd responded to quite a few overtures from men by this time, and nothing had ever come of them. Nevertheless, I sent a nice reply to Tom, and we wrote back and forth a few times. He told me that he had spent a couple of years teaching in South America, and he loved Hispanic culture. So when he asked me out, he suggested dinner at a Cuban restaurant and dancing at a salsa club afterwards.

A real date! I swooned. I said yes before I realized what I was getting myself into.

The appointed evening arrived. As I got ready, I asked myself what in heck I thought I was doing. I was guy! How could I be going out on a date with another guy? It seemed absurd. But I put on a short skirt and heels, did my face up nicely, and combed out my long auburn wig. It was really happening.

I was waiting impatiently when Tom's beat-up old Toyota Camry pulled up to the curb in front of my house. I peeked through the curtains to watch him come up the walk and ring the bell, but I gave it a few beats before I answered. I didn't want to appear too anxious!

I pulled open the door and gave Tom a big smile. "Hi! I'm Lannie!" I said brightly.

"I'm Tom," he returned. "Wow, you look great!"

"Thank you! Come on in." I sized him up. He was kind of cute, despite being a couple inches shorter than me and with thinning hair. He looked very school-teacher-ish in his glasses and brown corduroy sport jacket. I was glad to see he had worn dress shoes, not sneakers.

"This is for you," he said, handing me a small package.

"For me?" I giggled. "How sweet!" I unwrapped it. It was a bar of soap. A fancy glycerin soap, mind you, not a bar of Ivory from the supermarket. "Uh, gee, uh ... thanks. I ummm ... take lots of baths," I stammered.

"I'm glad you like it," he said, obliviously. "Are you about ready to go? Our reservation is at six."

"Sure. Just let me grab my coat."

I locked the door behind me and stashed the keys in my tiny disco purse. Tom let me precede him down the driveway to his car, but at the car he hurried in front and opened the door for me. What a gentleman! "Thank you," I said. I was genuinely tickled. *It's fun being a girl!* I thought. However, I felt like a bit of a fraud, seeing as I was actually a man. But Tom knew that, of course. He was a trannie chaser; that's why he was looking for girls on urnotalone.com.

I felt happy and light as Tom chattered and drove us to Habana Cuba on Race Street in San Jose, a clean and bright little cantina run by a Cuban family. I felt self-conscious as we walked into the restaurant. I didn't see any heads swivel to check me out — to check out the tall, gaudy transvestite — but I felt like they all did. However, Tom was perfectly at ease and that restored my confidence.

"We have a reservation at six," Tom told the handsome young Cuban fellow at the host podium.

"Certainly. Right this way sir, ma'am." I got ma'am'd! That felt really nice.

Everything Nice

He led us up the wooden staircase and seated us at a tiny table next to the railing overlooking the first floor dining area. I sat with my back to the wall so I could see everybody, and they could see me. Tom sat across from me.

Our host left us with menus and a promise that our waiter would be right over. Tom glanced at the menu and commented that it seemed very authentically Cuban. He explained to me what the various dishes were — marinated chicken, slow-roasted pork, shredded beef, and I simply must have the black beans. I loved it. I found I enjoyed being taken care of by a self-confident man.

Our waiter came over, even younger and cuter than the host had been. Tom asked him where he was from and he said El Salvador. They had a nice long conversation about how great South America was, and compared notes about places where they had been. I felt a little bit neglected as Tom gave all his attention to the waiter, but I was impressed with his knowledge of the southern continent.

We had a delicious dinner, including deep-fried plantains for dessert. As Tom paid the bill, I thought, *I could get used to this!*

On the way out, Tom asked the host where we could find a salsa club. Armed with the location of Club Miami, we made our way downtown.

We saw the big Club Miami sign at one end of the San Pedro Square entertainment district of downtown San Jose. We found a nearby parking spot and walked to the club. I began feeling uneasy because it was well after dark and San Jose has its share of rough characters. But I had my man for protection! I took his arm as we walked down the street.

We climbed the stairs to the club. A velvet rope barred the entrance, but no line of people had formed because it was only 9 o'clock, too early for the club set. Tom paid our cover charge and we went in.

The first thing I noticed, gratefully, was that the lighting in the club was dim — “trannie-friendly lighting” we call it: it would help my female presentation pass.

The club was large and only a few people were present. The back half of the room where we entered had booths around the wall and a large bar in the middle. On the other side of the room was a large dance floor, plus a small dance floor off to the side, and a large stage. It looked like we were in for some live music.

Tom and I made a circuit of the room to check it out. I began feeling uneasy again as I noticed all of the faces I saw were much darker than Tom's and mine. It was an authentically Hispanic club, that was for sure. However, I'd heard that Hispanic guys usually like trannies, so I hoped there wouldn't be a problem even if I were clocked.

We decided to perch on a couple of stools at a tall club table behind the smaller dance floor. Tom fetched rum-and-okes for us from the bar.

We sipped our drinks and talked for an hour while more people filtered in and a band set up on stage. At 10 o'clock the music started. The band was pretty big, eight pieces including some horns and a female singer. The music was outstanding! Salsa, samba, rumba, meringue, they ran the gamut of Latin styles. The dancers were all performing in couples, unlike in the modern dance clubs I was familiar with, where people often dance randomly and alone. Tom pulled me out on the dance floor and I was embarrassed because the Hispanic kids were so good; they knew all the steps, and I knew none. But Tom didn't mind. He showed me a few things and didn't care whether I could follow them or not. He didn't seem to have a self-conscious bone in his body, and so I relaxed and enjoyed the evening too.

The club became crowded and I was glad we had staked an early claim to our little table. I studied the crowd but could not find a pale face among them, besides Tom and me.

When we became overheated from dancing, we went out on the balcony where people were smoking and it was quiet enough to talk. I got the impression that some tension might be forming between some different factions in the club that night and I decided to be sure we left early, before things might get out of hand. But at least no one seemed to pay any attention to me, and I stopped worrying about getting into any trouble myself. In fact, I was piqued that I wasn't getting any attention. *What am I, chopped liver?* I kvetched to myself.

Tom seemed willing to dance all night, but about midnight I told him I was about danced out. As he drove me home, I felt so happy. What a fun date it had been! Like something out of a fairy tale, practically. Oh, Tom was not quite a handsome prince, I'm afraid,

Everything Nice

but he was fun and smart and he'd treated me like a princess. I had no complaints.

When we got to my place, I asked Tom if he wanted to come in and he jumped at the opportunity. To make a long story short, we had sex. Isn't a girl supposed to do that on the first date? I plead ignorant — after all, it was my *first* first date with a man.

Even after all of my previous experience, I was still somewhat surprised to find that Tom loved sucking my cock. He really didn't seem to be gay in any way, but boy, did he love sucking on me! I felt uncomfortable about it, but I relaxed and did my best to enjoy it. Tom had been very nice to me all evening; I could certainly grant him that pleasure.

After a few hours of sex play, I got tired and sent Tom on his way. He didn't want to leave. I had to insist and persist, and I began to get nervous that something ugly might develop. But he finally got the message and bid me goodnight.

He asked me out again the next weekend, but he said, "It can't be as fancy, because I spent all my money on our last date." *Of course*, I thought, *schoolteachers don't get paid very well*. But I didn't mind. We had a nice little dinner and went to a movie.

After the movie Tom took me home and walked me to the door.

"Thank you for the wonderful evening," I said. "Goodnight!" And I began to close the door on him.

His eyes opened wide with surprise. "Can't I come in?" he asked expectantly.

"Oh no," I told him. "I'm a good girl. I never have sex on the second date!" Tom had a most perplexed look on his face as I closed the door and clicked the lock shut.

A New Woman

September 2001

September 2001 was a watershed month. It began with an automobile accident, saw the worst terrorist attack in the history of the United States of America, and ended with a transgender conference of extreme significance to me.

At the beginning of the month, I had a moment of spiritual enlightenment about my drinking. It came in the form of a drunk-driving accident. I had been drinking all day and all evening, alone, determined to have a good time — which I did. As I was driving home, extremely drunk, I got lost in an unfamiliar part of town. I came to a Y-intersection, and I couldn't decide whether to go left or to go right, so I went down the middle.

A signpost lived in the middle of that intersection, but I didn't let that slow me down. I plowed right through it, knocking it clean out of the ground — it was Mr. Toad's Wild Ride come to life! The front end of my Buick was crumpled, and the signpost flew over the

Everything Nice

car and crashed down on the other end, smashing out the rear window and creasing the trunk.

I got off easy. No one else involved, thank God. I wasn't injured. There were no cops around, so I didn't get arrested. (And believe me, getting thrown in the drunk tank when you're a dude in a dress is not a good thing.) The car was still drivable, though the steering was sticking badly. I never even stopped. I bullied the car back home, got on the telephone, and blubbered to my friends.

I took this incident very seriously. Terribly shaken, I decided to quit drinking.

Being a perfectionist, I wanted to make this problem go away as quickly as possible. The very next day, I called in sick to work so I could shop for a new car.

I had no idea of what kind of car I should get. I wasn't a car person, and I had nothing in mind that I wanted for my next vehicle. I decided to head to Los Gatos and look at the luxury car dealers; maybe treat myself to something really nice.

However, it wasn't Edward who went car shopping — it was Lannie. I'd always been uncomfortable negotiating with car salesmen. I didn't feel like facing them again — not the same way. But as Lannie, now that was another story. I knew everyone I spoke with would see me as a cross-dresser, not a woman, but I nevertheless felt better able to deal with the world as Lannie.

It was a hot summer day, so I dressed light. I put on a loose polyester skirt-and-blouse set in a black-and-white diagonal pattern, some sandals, and my long red wig, the one I always wore in a braid draped forward over my left shoulder. I grabbed my purse and walked out the front door.

I gasped when I saw the Buick sitting in my driveway. What a wreck! It was smashed up pretty badly. Bits of the shattered rear window were scattered across the back seat and floor, and also on the driveway around the car. Yikes! I wanted to get it out of there before my next-door neighbor, a Fillipino guy named Ramon, saw it and began asking questions.

I backed out of the driveway, but I had to pull really hard on the wheel to get the car to turn. It was definitely unsafe to drive. I wondered if I would get stopped by the police and what kind of trouble it would get me into. I crossed my fingers and drove.

I arrived safely in Los Gatos and parked my wreck on Main Street, across from the Ferrari dealership at the south end of town. The lot gleamed with Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Bentleys, and Rolls Royces. I looked both ways, crossed the street, and entered the showroom.

The salesman was about the same age and height as me, but much more solidly built. I introduced myself. "Hi! I'm Lannie. I wrecked my car last night. I need a new one."

"Hi Lannie," he said, shaking my hand warmly, "I'm Jim." To my surprise, he didn't seem to regard me oddly at all. "What were you thinking of spending?" he asked bluntly.

"Oh, no higher than 50,000 I suppose."

"I don't think we have anything that low. Let me think. Oh, come take a look at this." I followed Jim outside to the lot, where he took me to a beautiful big Mercedes Benz. "I have this on consignment," Jim said, showing me the interior. "It's a beautiful vehicle, great condition. I think the owner might come down to 50,000. I can give her a call."

"It's a beautiful car, Jim," I agreed. "But I was thinking of something sportier."

"Sportier. I don't think I have anything ... wait a minute, it's not on the lot; it's in the garage. I have an older Ferrari that might work for you."

A Ferrari? Wow! That would really be something!

"Do you want to see it?" Jim continued. "It will probably take a half-hour or so to get it ready."

"That's fine," I said. "I'll just go get some lunch."

I went back across the street, visions of me in a Ferrari bright in my mind. That would certainly be making lemonade out of the lemons that were my previous night's bounty. I ducked into a small restaurant and ordered a club sandwich and a Coke. (A beer would have been nice to quell my hangover, but I remembered I had quit drinking.)

As I ate, I considered my finances. I had never put kids through college or had any expensive hobbies, so I had plenty of money in the bank to easily cover the cost of the vehicle. But the money was a lot more than it was sensible for me to spend; I knew that. I also knew that luxury sports cars had notoriously high maintenance costs and headaches, not to mention how much the insurance would be. Still,

Everything Nice

I was earning over \$100,000 a year as an engineer; I could afford it. What else did I have in my life to spend money on? And I needed to do *something*. I needed a car right away, and I didn't want some crummy little Escort or Geo that I'd be unhappy with for years.

I decided to go for it, assuming I liked the test drive. But I didn't actually have the money in liquid form. I would need to cash out some mutual funds. I decided to go to the Bank of America in town and get that done.

I explained my situation to a nice woman who didn't seem disturbed by any of it, not the cross-dressing, the car wreck, or the prospect of a Ferrari. However, she said I would have to talk to Mei, the investment counselor who normally handled my account. We got her on the telephone.

"Hi Mei. This is Edward Rhodes," I said, and explained what I needed. "By the way," I added, "I should tell you about something because you're bound to hear about it. I'm actually sitting here dressed as a woman. You see, I have this other life as woman, Lannie, and that's what I am today."

"Oh, really?" Mei said. "OK, no problem. I'll get working on the funds."

I returned to the dealership and found Jim waiting, Ferrari keys in hand. "She's just outside," he said, "This way."

Jim let me pass first through the side door (*It's fun being a girl*, I thought), and I saw the Ferrari parked at the curbside, pointing up a gentle hill. What a beauty! Sleek, burgundy, it looked like it was going 100 miles an hour just sitting there. I began to fall a little bit in love.

"Do you want to drive?" Jim asked.

I hesitated. "I haven't driven a clutch in a long time."

"Maybe I'd better pull it out of there, then," Jim said. The Ferrari was generously parallel parked, but it was on a hill and other cars were parked a little ahead and behind.

"Good idea," I agreed. Jim held the door for me and I climbed into the low seat. Then he went around the car and squeezed his bulk into the driver's side.

Jim turned the key and engine gave a throaty growl, followed by a smooth, powerful hum. "Here we go," Jim said.

He moved the stick to the first gear position and eased his foot off the clutch. Nothing happened. We did not move. He pumped the clutch a couple more times. Nothing.

“Darn!” he exclaimed. “That clutch is out again. I’m sorry. I’m going to have to let the mechanic have it a bit longer.”

“That’s all right,” I said. “I probably ought to think about it some more anyway.”

I was disappointed, but relieved. *I guess the Ferrari was just not meant to be*, I mused.

I thought I would poke around Los Gatos’s auto row, up on Blossom Hill Road and Los Gatos Boulevard, where I used to jog when I lived with Loren on Robert’s Road. But first, I had another chore to do. I needed to drive over the hill on the east side of Los Gatos to see my State Farm Insurance man.

Jon Silva had been my insurance guy for my home as well as my automobile for many years. In fact, Loren had recommended him to me back in the days we lived together, and I’d never had any reason to change. I’d visited Jon’s office a few times over the years, whenever I got a new vehicle. The first time I went to Jon’s office was when I got rid of my ’69 Rambler station wagon and bought my first new car, a Volvo sedan. Then, when I bought my second new car, a Mazda 626. Again I was at Jon’s office when I got my first sports car, the Mazda RX7. I was back again for the Chevy S-10 pickup truck and finally the Buick LeSabre, whose sad end I now needed to report to Jon.

I parked my poor battered Buick in the lot in front of the small strip mall where Jon had his office. I walked in and said “Hi” to the secretary whose name I never remembered. “Is Jon available?” I asked. “Please tell him Edward Rhodes is here to see him.”

“Take a seat,” she said, eyeing me curiously. I could see old Jon’s round, balding head bent over his desk in the office that was separated from us by a pane of glass. When the secretary announced me, he quickly wrapped up what he was working on and came out to greet me.

“Hello!” he said, his always-jovial smile spreading wider than ever. “What have we here?”

“Hi Jon. The thing is, I’m a cross-dresser, and I spend a lot of time this way. I go by Lannie, by the way.”

“I see. Should I be expecting a change of status soon?”

Everything Nice

“Oh, no,” I chuckled. “I’m just a cross-dresser.”

We went into his office and he took my accident report. We walked out to lot so he could inspect the damage. Back in the office, he said, “You’ve got a clean record with us. I think we can take care of this. Thank goodness no one else was involved. There are a few details that probably don’t need to be mentioned here in the file.”

“Thank you so much, Jon. That’s wonderful. You’re great.”

I was glad to have that chore successfully taken care of, but it was the middle of the afternoon and I was getting nowhere on finding a new car. A plan was not forming in my head. I didn’t know what to do and I was frustrated. Why couldn’t I be satisfied with some run-of-the-mill, boring car?

I decided I should go to the dealerships and look at some vehicles. I drove past all of the car lots on Los Gatos Boulevard, and then turned around and drove past them again. I couldn’t even get interested enough to stop. I began to think maybe I should admit defeat and rent a car for a while. I hated to have that damn wreck staring at me accusingly for days or weeks, but what could I do?

Just as I found my will breaking and my mood starting to fall into a black depression under those sunny skies, my eye caught site of a sexy black Mustang displayed in the prestigious corner position of the Los Gatos Ford lot.

A Mustang! I remembered that I liked Mustangs. In fact, for some weeks I’d been listen to a Robbie Fulks CD where he sang, “I’ve got the Mustang loaded. I’ve got a wrong to right. I’ve got a little red bullet. Let’s kill Saturday night.” It was stuck in my brain. Perhaps I would just stop and look at that Mustang.

I parked the wreck at the curb and walked over to inspect the sporty vehicle. Within seconds, a salesman was at my side. Another large man, he was not as nicely dressed as Jim at Ferrari but he was more jovial. “I’m George. What can I do for you?” he asked brightly.

I gave him a short version of the story. He showed me the Mustang, a ’97 GT with a five-speed manual transmission. I asked if he had any others and he showed me another one, a blue one with an automatic transmission. I liked the black one. We went for a test drive. George gave me pointers on shifting and using the clutch.

I fell in love a little bit. (With the car, not with George, as nice as he was.) We sat down at a desk off the small showroom floor to negotiate.

“How much is it?” I asked.

“How much do you think it’s worth?” George responded.

“I have no idea,” I said. “I don’t know anything about cars.” It felt nice to confess my ignorance. There was some power in it. I didn’t need to pretend I knew what I was talking about, and that had never worked for me anyway.

“How does 19,000 sound?” George asked, looking me in the eye.

“Yikes! That sounds like a lot. That’s almost as much as a new one, I’ll bet.”

George was momentarily taken aback by the breathtaking magnitude of my ignorance. Finally he sputtered, “What do you think it should be?”

“I was thinking more like 15,000,” I boldly replied.

“Oh no, no, no, that’s much too low. But let me see what I can do. I’m going to see the manager.” I thought this was a good sign. In my past experience, they only went to see the manager when it was time to try to sell me the overpriced floor mats and undercoat.

Ten minutes later, George returned. “I can go 17,000,” he said. “That’s really the best I can do. The car is in tip-top condition. It only has forty thousand miles on it, and it’s been owned since it was new by our own service manager. Believe me, he’s kept it like brand new. And your trade-in isn’t really worth anything, you know.”

I considered for a moment. “OK,” I said. “Let’s do it.” There I was, a crazy cross-dresser with a smushed-up Buick, and I had done the best negotiation of my life. Perhaps it was because George didn’t know which of his strategies to use with me, the one he used with women or the one he used with men. I later looked up prices for similar cars in the newspaper, and 17,000 was just about right.

We did the deal. I was able to write a check, because I did have just a little over that much in my checking account. I had my camera with me and I asked George take a picture of me standing next to my new Mustang. I had a big smile on my face. I was one happy cross-dresser.

Everything Nice

When I called Rianna to tell her about the Mustang, she said, “No! You should have gotten a feminine little car like an Escort or a Geo.”

“Hey,” I told him, “there’s nothing wrong with hot chicks in sports cars!”

So my September started off with a low point followed by a high point. But my resolution to stop drinking did not last. Once I had sobered up and gotten my new car, my point of view changed. Before the week was out, I was drinking again.

* * *

I woke up on the Tuesday morning of September 11, 2001, with a worse-than-usual hangover. Getting out of bed and taking a shower was a struggle. I didn’t make it out the door until 9 o’clock.

I flipped on the radio as I drove to work. I couldn’t seem to find any music. All the morning drive-time programs were talking about something that had happened — had happened on the East Coast, apparently. Nobody was giving any details, and I couldn’t figure out what it was. Perhaps a fire in a skyscraper?

When I got to work, everyone was gathered around a few television sets in our demonstration room. I looked at the screens and saw images of two huge towers crumbling to the ground in a great billow of smoke.

“What’s that?” I asked incredulously.

“It’s the World Trade Center,” someone said. “Haven’t you heard? They got hit by planes. 747s.”

“What? Was it an accident?” I asked. “Did you say there was more than one plane?”

“Yes, two planes,” I was told excitedly. “They think it was a terrorist attack. The Pentagon got hit, too. We’re at war!”

“War? With who?”

“We don’t know yet. Whoever flew those planes, that’s who.”

Most of us stayed glued to the televisions for the rest of the morning, watching the planes hit the towers and the towers collapse over and over again, as the news stations replayed the footage. Rumors of yet another plane being down in a field somewhere in Pennsylvania were gradually confirmed, and we wondered if there were more to come. Someone said a plane was headed for the White House.

I had a therapy session scheduled for 4 o'clock that afternoon, and I slipped out of work and went to it. I told Cynthia, "There's this terrible tragedy that's happened in New York, I know. But to be perfectly honest, I don't feel particularly affected by it personally. I don't know if there's something wrong with me, that I don't feel it, but I'd like to just let that go for now and talk about myself as usual."

"That's all right," Cynthia reassured me. "There's nothing wrong with you. It's too close to the event for you to process it yet, that's all." And so we had a regular session, talking about me and my gender adventures.

I never did come to feel emotionally involved in 9/11. I felt much more affected by the embargo and then the slaughter in Iraq. To me, the terrorist attack was just a random thing that we needed to deal with as a nation. But the embargo and the occupation: those actions were the United States' free choices. I felt guilty that I could do so little to try to stop them, but I didn't even do the things I could have done, like writing my congressman or going to anti-war demonstrations. I just didn't feel that I could make a difference.

* * *

The following week was the Southern Comfort Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. SCC is the largest annual conference for transgender people in the world, drawing 700 to 800 attendees. Jamie Faye Fenton and I had our plane tickets and reservations for a hotel room to share. I hadn't been on a plane in a long time, and I'd planned to travel en femme, as Lannie. Of course, my driver's license and my plane tickets were for Edward. T-girls did this all the time, travelling en femme with male ID, and I'd only heard of a single case where it had been a problem. But now the country — and especially the airports — were on high terrorist alert. Did I dare travel as a female? (Jamie's ID had been legally changed to female years ago, so she was in no jeopardy.)

I did dare. By this time, I was pretty much living my life as a "128 girl," as Jamie put it — 128 hours a week as a female and my 40-hour work week as a male. Truth be told, I was something more than a 128 girl, because I was slacking off at work pretty badly. Fortunately for me, the economy was in a recession after the dot-com bubble burst, and I didn't have much work to do anyway.

So it seemed quite natural for me to travel as a female.

Everything Nice

As we pulled into the parking lot at the San Jose airport, a sign warned us that security people could search under our vehicle and in our trunk for hidden bombs. However, I didn't see anybody performing searches, and we made it into the parking lot unsearched.

We checked our bags at the airline counter. I had packed lots of clothes, shoes, and cosmetics for the four-day jaunt. A perky young airline clerk put tags on our bags and issued us our boarding passes. She didn't say anything about the male name on my ticket.

New, more stringent security measures were in place at the checkpoint into the gate area, but the line wasn't very long. At the beginning of the line, a young, fresh-faced, brown-skinned security guard with a foreign accent asked for our IDs and boarding passes. I casually handed mine over. The guard glanced at them, then looked closer. He looked up at me and back at the paperwork. "This you?" I think he said, though I'm not sure I understood through his accent.

"Yes, that's me," I said brightly.

"Just a moment," he said, jumping off his stool. He went away and returned moments later trailing an older, matronly security guard.

"Is this your ID?" she asked me politely.

Before I could respond, Jamie Faye piped up. "It's OK," she said. "We're transsexuals."

"Oh," the guard said with a sigh of relief. "That's fine then." Turning to the young, obviously brand-new guard, she said, "If they say they're transsexual, then it's OK that their ID doesn't match." Apparently *transsexual* was the magic password.

We changed planes in Dallas and had to go through another security checkpoint to get to our gate. I wondered if I would have another incident. I handed my boarding pass and ID to a laconic guard who might have come fresh from riding the range. He examined my papers carefully and then gave me a slow, thorough looking-over from head to toe. Handing me back my ID, he grinned and said, "It looks like you've lost some weight!"

"I have," I laughed. "Thanks for noticing!"

Arriving in Atlanta on Thursday evening, Jamie and I took a cab from the airport to the downtown luxury hotel, the Sheraton Colony Square, that was hosting SCC. As we neared the hotel, I knew we were in the right place, because I started spotting very tall woman obviously wearing wigs.

The front door of the hotel opened directly into the lobby bar and check-in area. Woo-hoo, trannies were everywhere! I felt like I had stepped into Opposite World, where most people were transgender and only a few freaks were straight. I felt very comfortable in this crowd, but I also missed the feeling of being special.

Jamie disappeared into the mob, greeting people she knew left and right. I wasn't very good at meeting strangers, so I was thrilled when a striking, tall brunette introduced herself to me. "Hi. I'm Anne Lawrence."

"Hello. I'm Lannie."

"Is this your first Southern Comfort? I don't think I've seen you before."

"Yes, it's my first."

"Do you know who I am?"

"No. Should I?"

"It's OK. So, what phase are you in?"

"I'm pre-transition," I said, thinking it was a cute joke. Little did I know that trans people use that term quite seriously.

"I see," Anne said. "Well, good luck to you. Have a nice conference." She wandered off.

A little while later, I hooked up with Jamie again. "I met a nice woman named Anne Lawrence," I told her.

"Oh? That's nice. What did she want?"

"She just introduced herself and wished me a nice conference, that's all."

"Did she ask anything about you?"

"Well, she asked what phase I was in, and I said pre-transition," I said, wondering how Jamie had known.

"That figures," Jamie chuckled. "Anne is only interested in post-ops." In other words, Anne wasn't interested in trans women who have not had sex reassignment operations, and so still had penises.

We checked in, got our room keys, and took the elevator up to our room. We wanted to go out dancing, so we freshened up and changed into clubbing clothes — short skirts and high heels. The kitchen was just closing down when we grabbed a quick bite to eat. Then we jumped onto one of the conference shuttle buses that was headed out on the town.

Everything Nice

A girl on the bus told us that a club called BackStreet Atlanta was better than any of the clubs on the official tour, so we got the bus driver to drop us off there.

BackStreet was something else! It was a “private” club — you buy a \$10 “membership” good for a year — so it was allowed to operate and serve booze after hours. Dancing goes on all night long. We had the multi-level dance floor pretty much to ourselves until midnight, when the place filled up quickly. The crowd was primarily gay men (primarily with their shirts off) but some straight couples showed up too, because it was the only after-hours joint around.

I was a bit surprised there were so many gay guys south of the Mason-Dixon line, having bought into the myth that they’re all in San Francisco. But there they were, and they knew how to party. They seemed less “gay” than the guys I was used to seeing in the city by the Bay, but someone pointed out to me that appearing gay in the deep South could be hazardous to one’s health.

We danced for a while and then wandered up to BackStreet’s third floor, where a whole other club existed. It was called Charlie Brown’s and featured a wild drag show that started at 2 a.m. and went on until — until after I left, anyway. The Mistress of Ceremonies, Charlie Brown, was funny and nasty, and loved teasing audience members. The drag performers were absolutely gorgeous, doing their lip-syncing acts.

We got back to our hotel very late, but somehow made it downstairs for the big lunch gathering the next day. After lunch, Jamie and I attended an educational session titled “Trans-Trans Intimacy and Sex.” We thought we were going to hear some hot sex tips, but it turned out to be about relationships. A couple that consisted of a trans woman named Corissa and a trans man named Max shared about their personal experiences. Their message was that we — of all people — should be open to relationships with people regardless of our preconceived notions of what we may be looking for. I enjoyed meeting Corissa and Max, but I was disappointed that I didn’t get any hot sex tips.

The next time I saw Corissa and Max was a couple years later when they appeared in the film, “Southern Comfort.” The movie was a tragic documentary about Robert Eads, a trans man who died of ovarian cancer while trying to find a doctor in the southern states

who would provide medical care for him. Max and Corissa were neighbors and best friends of Robert and his girlfriend, Lola Cola.

Jamie and I split up after the Corissa and Max session. I went off to a session called “Living in the Trans Woman’s Body.” When I entered, I saw my new friend Anne Lawrence at the front of the room. She was *Dr. Anne Lawrence* and she was conducting the session along with another woman, Carrie Davis. This session was for trans-women only — those of us who identified as female — to share and discuss the effects of hormones and surgeries on our bodies. Anne and Carrie were surprised and delighted at how large of a group showed up, 52 in all!

We sat on towels on the floor in a big circle. The doors of the room were closed, and some women shed their clothes to intimately share their bodies as well as their experiences with the others. Anne got completely naked, and I thought her body was very nice!

We consumed the entire hour simply with a check-in, going around the big circle and everybody introducing themselves, saying why they were there, and adding any other short comments they liked. When it was my turn, I meekly said, “I’m Lannie, and I’m not even sure if I should be here. I’m pre-transition, and I don’t really even know if I’m transsexual. I’m here to learn more about it.”

“Of course you are welcome here,” Anne said. “We’ve all been where you are. Welcome!”

I was amazed at the wide variety of women I met in that room. Some were very feminine, some fairly masculine. A few had fabulous feminine voices, some had high voices that didn’t quite ring true, and lot had resonant male voices. A few were absolutely gorgeous, a lot were nice-looking women, and a lot were plain and overweight. Apparently being transsexual wasn’t about being pretty. I got a visceral feeling for the physical and emotional impacts of transition that I’d never picked up from the books. I was grateful to everyone for sharing, and for including me in their sisterhood.

Friday night, Jamie and I planned some serious clubbing. After the big group dinner and speeches, we went back to our room and changed into sexy outfits. Then, with big grins, we each swallowed an Ecstasy pill. We planned to be at Backstreet Atlanta by the time the drug kicked in.

Everything Nice

The drug actually started reacting in our systems while we were in line to get into the club. By the time we were safely ensconced in the dark interior, we were flying.

I had a terrific time dancing, wandering through the crowds, checking out Charlie Brown's, and having a few gin-and-tonics. Now and then Jamie Faye and I would cross paths, but mostly I was on my own. As usual. Out in the middle of the crowded dance floor, hip to hip with all those beautiful, sweaty men, the laser lights flashing and the drug sparkling in my brain, I wondered what my mother would think if she could see me now.

A cute but very short man with a heavy beard asked me to dance. *A trans man!* I realized with delight. I usually just danced solo, so I was tickled to be asked. I nodded yes and let him lead out onto the packed dance floor.

In the dance clubs, songs never really ended; they just morphed from one beat to another. So when I got tired, I signaled to my galandant dance partner and elbowed my way off the floor.

My little friend followed me. He wanted to buy me a drink and seemed to want to hang with me. I'm afraid it creeped me out and I ditched him. I was ashamed of myself because I had just heard all these great things about trans-trans relationships from Corissa and Max that afternoon, but I wasn't prepared to handle it yet.

As it became nearer to morning than night, I searched out Jamie in the still-crowded club. She was standing close to an attractive brunette T-girl, and they were in deep, intimate conversation. But I wanted to get back to the hotel, so I broke in.

"Oh, hi Lannie!" Jamie said, unperturbed. "I'd like you to meet Dana. She's a local girl. She said she'd give us a ride back to the hotel."

"Great. That's what I was coming to talk to you about."

Dana was a cross-dresser who didn't go out very often. But she always went out when Southern Comfort was in town, because of all the new girls she could meet. She ferried us the short ride back to our hotel, and we asked her if she would like to come up to our room for a bit. She accepted in a way that made me think it was a foregone conclusion.

When we were all assembled in our room, Jamie and I tried to be good hostesses. We performed a three-girl trannie pile, with Dana being the recipient of our attentions. When she left the room

an hour later, she was very glad she had come out to Backstreet than night.

On Saturday, Jamie and I followed a similar schedule as we had on Friday, including the trip to Backstreet. It was extremely unusual for me to party three nights in a row, but this was a special occasion.

On Sunday morning, everyone was checking out of the hotel at the same time, and it was quite an amusing sight. The conference was dominated by cross-dressers, a fair number of them accompanied by their wives, and for many of them this was their one chance to dress all year. But on Sunday morning, they were all back into their male personas for the trip home. A lot of people said hello to me, but I couldn't ever figure out which woman any of the dudes had been!

After settling our bill, Jamie and I went up to the dining room where a dozen transsexual women were meeting for breakfast. I felt honored to join them, though they didn't actually include me in the conversation much.

This group of trans women were in their forties and fifties. Most were dressed in jeans and T-shirts or sweatshirts. They all had comfy shoes, not sexy high heels. Their faces looked feminine and natural, and they wore very little makeup. Their hair tended to be thin and stringy. I felt like grabbing a couple of them and telling them, "Get a wig, honey!" But I was the only one in a wig, and it made me feel definitely out of place.

As I spent my last morning in Atlanta with these wonderful women, I wondered if I myself would ever be one of them, too.

Over the Rainbow

In the weeks following the Southern Comfort Conference, I found myself becoming more and more discomfited about acting like a man. I would drive to work in the morning thinking, “Wouldn’t it be great to be doing this as a woman? Instead of hating going to work, it would be fun!” When I had to change back into Eddy after spending some time as Lannie, I felt very sad. This thought began running through my mind: *There isn’t a single thing holding me back from transitioning. Why don’t I just do it?*

At Trannie Shack, Michelle Garcia gave me a peculiar look and whispered in my ear, “It’s fun being a girl!” *Thanks, Michelle, I thought. Why hadn’t you been there to tell me that six months ago, when I called you in a panic?*

I discussed my feelings with my therapist. Cynthia suggested that I might want to take some steps in the direction of transitioning, without doing anything irrevocable. Why didn’t I start laser hair

removal to get rid of my facial hair? Why didn't I see a doctor and get cleared for going on hormones, should I decide I want to? Moreover, there didn't seem to be any point in continuing our weekly therapy sessions, because I seemed to have things pretty well figured out.

I liked the hair removal suggestion, so I located a local clinic with the right equipment. With great nervousness, I set up an appointment with them. I met Adrienne, an RN who does the laser treatments, and I summoned up the courage to tell her, "I think I'm transsexual. I want to remove my facial hair because I may transition and live as a woman." She said, "That's fine," and got me started.

On the subject of hormones, they weren't something I was particularly interested in. I knew it was part of the standard process, but I also knew they took a while to have an effect and I was all for instant gratification. But I thought getting prepared for them would be a prudent step anyway.

Cynthia recommended that I see Dr. Joy Schaffer, who was herself a trans woman and who counted numerous trans women as patients. I saw Dr. Joy and she was happy to get me started down the path. The first thing she wanted was a thorough set of blood tests.

When I came back to review the test results, Dr. Joy looked me in the eye and asked, "Do you drink?"

"Huh, yeah!" I told her. I was always scrupulously honest with my doctors.

"Well you'd better stop, or you'll need a new liver within five years," she said.

It wasn't my first warning. Two years earlier, around the turn of the millennium and my 45th birthday, I'd went to a "doc-in-the-box" — a walk-in clinic — for a physical. The doctor didn't like something she saw in my blood tests. Apparently, my bilirubin count was high, whatever that is. She ordered me to stop drinking for a month and see if it came down.

Resisting the demon alcohol for 30 days was one of the hardest things I ever attempted, but I did it. On the morning of day 31, I got my blood drawn again, gave a great big sigh of relief, and dove back into a bottle. A few drunken days later, I got a call from the clinic. It was what I dreaded, the worst news possible: "The doctor still doesn't like your test results. She says to go another 30 days without drinking and check it again." AAAAAAAAARGH! But I made it through another 30 day drought, and this time my test results satisfied the

Everything Nice

doctor. Surprisingly, she did not give me a lecture about staying off the booze; but the truth is, I probably wouldn't have listened to that advice anyway. At the time, I felt that the sooner I died, the better off I would be.

But two years later, I wanted to live! I saw that my gender identity issues were largely to blame for my core unhappiness, and I had fresh hope of being able to build a better life for myself. (It still hadn't occurred to me that the drinking itself might be an equally important root cause of my misery.)

On Thanksgiving Day, 2001, I had my last drinking binge. I spent the day by myself, drinking, like I usually spent holidays. The next day I had my last hangover, and that became my sobriety birthday. I really didn't find it very difficult to quit this time, because I was so excited about all the other changes going on in my life.

Some of those changes were happening at work. Some months earlier, the executives at my little start-up company had announced that we were running out of funding. The survival plan was to find somebody to acquire us. *Oh great, another acquisition*, I thought, remembering my previous unhappy acquisition experience.

As the holidays arrived, an acquisition deal firmed up and the papers were signed. At the beginning of December, management announced that our little company would no longer exist as of January 1; we would become part of a slightly larger company working in the same technology. What was more, our facility was going to shut down and we would move into the new company's building. They had plenty of space because their business had cratered recently also. I didn't really see how merging the two desperate groups would lead to success, but that wasn't my responsibility.

The acquisition was an inflection point that created an opportunity for me. On January 1, I would meet 200 new co-workers. I felt ill at the thought of them meeting Edward. I decided it was time. They would never meet Edward. They would meet Elaine!

I called up Cynthia and left a message on her machine. "I've decided to transition over Christmas vacation," I said. "I suppose we ought to have a session or two and talk about it."

We scheduled a session right away and I described the situation to Cynthia. "Don't you think that's kind of abrupt?" she asked me. "You're not even on hormones yet. That schedule doesn't give

us enough time to prepare your company. I really think you need to slow down.”

I always took Cynthia’s advice to heart, since I was a very cooperative person and I had a great deal of respect for her wisdom and experience. But this time I would not back down.

“I don’t care about the hormones,” I said. Dr. Joy wanted to wait and see if my liver recovered its health under sobriety before starting me on hormones. I didn’t know how long that would take, and I didn’t care.

“As for preparing them at work,” I continued, “I don’t think you understand how small this company is. It’s just 25 people in a building. I could walk around and tell every one of them personally tomorrow.”

Cynthia grudgingly accepted my plan. What else could she do? I didn’t give her a choice.

And so, a couple of weeks before Christmas, I had private meetings with the CEO, an Indian fellow, and the company president, a guy from Taiwan. They were entirely accepting and supportive. “If that’s what you need to do to be happy,” they told me, “then we’re fine with it. Just keep doing the same great work you’ve been doing for us for the last two years.”

I announced my plan to the entire company at our Christmas lunch just before vacation. “If that’s what you need to do to be happy,” everybody told me, “then we’re fine with it.”

On Monday morning, January 2, 2002, I walked into the front door of my new office building wearing a pantsuit, an auburn wig, and a big smile. “Hi, I’m Elaine!” I chirped to the receptionist.

“Hi Elaine. I’m Lenore. Welcome!”

Family Reunions

And where was my family my during my gender adventures? Nowhere, is the answer. I didn't share any of this part of my life with them — not until I had gone over the rainbow and become a woman.

Geographically, my family was scattered across the county. Mom and Dad had retired, sold the little house on Colbath Avenue for many times its purchase price, and moved to Carson City, Nevada. My sister lived near Portland, Oregon, with her husband and son, and my older brother and his wife lived not too far from them in Salem. Michael had resided near me in Silicon Valley for ten years, during which period I had seen him only two or three times, and he'd recently moved to Indianapolis, Indiana. We kids had put many miles between each other and our parents, just as my father had put many miles between us and the extended family, so many years before.

I'd visited my parents in Southern California once or twice a year when I first moved to Northern California; but when I got married, that miserably low frequency dropped further still, and soon I made no regular visits at all.

Later, when Janice left me, I began visiting annually again, now to Carson City instead of Southern California. I went either for Thanksgiving or Christmas, depending on how much snow I would have to drive through in the mountains surrounding beautiful Lake Tahoe. I would drive down on the holiday itself, because the traffic would be light, stay the night at my parents house, and drive back the next day. That was plenty of time to catch up on family news and bond a little, without driving me crazy.

It always felt strange being under my parents roof again, having my mother serve me (she would never let me cook dinner, put the sheets on the bed in the spare bedroom, or anything like that), and needing to be quiet after my dad's early retirement to bed in the evening. It also felt odd being in their sterile, shipshape house, with "a place for everything and everything in its place" as my dad taught me when I was little. (At one point in my life I made a conscious effort to be more messy, because someone I was living with complained she couldn't put down a magazine without me grabbing it and putting it into a neat pile.)

A few years before my transition, I was startled when my telephone rang and it was my sister; startled, because I hadn't got a call from any of my siblings — well, ever, really. Mary had had an inspiration. Wouldn't it be nice if we got the entire family together in Carson City to celebrate our parents forty-fifth wedding anniversary? All four siblings embraced the idea and we soon had a plan put together. Everybody was excited. It would be so nice to see each other again, and to do something that we knew would make our parents very happy.

On a sunny June day, I made the five-hour drive through Sacramento and over the Sierra Nevada mountains to Carson City. We all assembled at my parents house on Armory Street: Mary, her husband Randy, and their teen-age son BJ; Bob and his second wife Marie; and Michael and me. Smiles and hugs were exchanged, beer tabs were popped, and stories were swapped.

Precisely at 4 o'clock, the doorbell rang. "Who could that be?" my mother asked, and went to answer it. Surprise! It was the photog-

Everything Nice

rapher we had hired to take a family portrait. My mother rushed to her bedroom to change clothes and fuss with her short, curly white hair.

When the photographer left, we jumped in our cars and reconvened at a nice Italian restaurant at the other end of the little town. We had a sumptuous meal, for which I graciously picked up the tab. (I was the only one in the family earning a good salary, so it was the least I could do.) We consumed several bottles of wine and got what was downright emotional for this family. I drank more than my share of the wine and BJ drove me in my Buick back to my hotel afterwards.

We all enjoyed the reunion so much that we decided to do it again in five years, for Mom and Dad's fiftieth anniversary.

To our delight, we found ourselves having another reunion just a couple of years later, but this time, it was in Indianapolis. My little brother, who had always been a slow developer socially, was finally getting married. Bob and I rented tuxedos and stood up for him at the wedding. (By this time, I was wishing I could be in a bridesmaid gown instead, but it was too soon for that.)

I felt bad that Mike's bride, Janet, had such a large group of friends and relatives at the wedding, but Michael only had the immediate family. I thought it was important for Janet's people to get to know Michael a bit, so I composed a speech about him that I gave as a toast at the reception.

My toast got a lot of laughs in the right places and everyone thought I was brilliant and funny. More importantly, though, was that they saw how much Michael and I loved each other, and that they felt closer to the groom now that they knew some things about him.

I didn't get laid at the wedding reception because, well, I never did.

The next Christmas, I visited my parents as usual. What was unusual, though, was that it was the last time I would ever appear to them — or to anyone else — as a boy. When I got home late Christmas afternoon, I changed into girl clothes and never wore boy clothes again.

In January, I sent my parents an e-mail message from work, not realizing it would say "Elaine" in the return address. I had planned to come out to them in person at some point, but that blunder forced

me to make a hasty set of telephone calls, filling my family in on the incredible transformation I had made in my life.

Everyone took the remarkable news surprisingly well during my initial round of conversations. They were surprised, of course — stunned would be an appropriate term — but they accepted that I must have thought about this carefully and knew what I was doing. They also accepted that it was my life and I had to do what I thought was right for me. However, once the shock wore off and the reality set in, their attitudes took a negative turn. Sending them photos may have been a poor idea.

My parents were “disgusted” by the photographs. They still loved me, they said, but they simply couldn’t cope with seeing me like this. I should never, ever come to visit them unless I could come as their son.

Michael hung in there until my older brother declared, “I don’t know anything about this stuff, and I’ve decided I don’t want to know. Please don’t tell me anything about it. Moreover, when you travel, please let me know what state you are going to be in, because I don’t want to ever accidentally run into you.” Then my little brother decided that was a prudent course as well, and he became hinky with me.

My sister, God bless her, stood by me. She couldn’t understand why everyone else had a problem.

I reached out to my parents and brothers with regular phone calls, but it was no use. After a while, I gave up trying. Never once did any of them call me up and ask, “How are things going in your new life?” or said, “Gee, this must be hard on you, too” during one of our conversations.

I would have to find a new family, as do many transgender people. Some families, however, do have the capacity to accept such a change. My heart always dropped when another trans girl would tell me, “My mother hugged me and took me out shopping for some new clothes,” or “My mother went to her closet, returned with a sweater, and said, ‘Here I think this will fit you.’” I was happy for them, but sad for myself.

Of course, the family reunion for my parents’ 50th wedding anniversary was off. I had spoiled everything.

Admirer

I didn't get to Tinker's Damn until late that evening, about 10:30. Usually I tried to be at the little gay bar in Santa Clara by 9 on Wednesdays so I could act as hostess at our trannie socials. Otherwise, girls might show up, find no one there except gay guys, and leave. But this evening I was down in Santa Cruz having dinner with Dish. He was a postman in real life, and had to get up early every morning to walk his delivery route. (A few times a year, he walked his route in drag.) So it was possible for me to drive down, have a nice visit and dinner, and make it back to the valley in time for our social, just slightly on the late side.

I smiled as I swept past the bouncer at the front door of the bar. He knew me well and didn't bother to check my ID. I stepped into the room and looked around, letting my eyes adjust to the dim neon lighting. To my right was a low rail setting off a carpeted area that held the pool table. A couple of guys were playing and another

was watching. Often one of girls would be at the pool table, but not tonight. My eyes swept counter-clockwise to the half-dozen low, round tables that occupied the rest of the front room. There, where my girls usually congregated, was no one but a young breeder (heterosexual) couple.

Next, I scanned the bar along the wall to my left. Most of the stools were occupied by working-class, neatly dressed dudes and a couple of dykes. But ahh, right there in the center of the bar was a smiling face and big blonde wig that belonged to a T-girl I knew. Melissa! — a six-foot-five-inch tall cross-dresser who always wore the shortest mini-skirts I saw. She was in earnest conversation with a dapper older gentleman.

It looked like Tamara was the only T-girl in the place. I went over to greet her.

“Hi Tamara!” I called loudly over the rock music that was blaring from speakers in all corners of the room.

Tamara swiveled her head to see who had called her name. Her face brightened. “Hi Lannie!” she cried. “How are you? Oh, here, this is Mark. Mark, this is Lannie.”

“Hi Mark,” I said.

“Hi Lannie. I’m pleased to meet you.”

“Me too. I’m happy you’re here.”

“So Lannie,” Tamara said, “I’m glad you made it. April was here before, and Michelle, but they left.”

“Oh, a slow night,” I lamented. It was difficult keeping our social going because the girls did not consistently support the event. Then they would complain that there was nowhere to go without driving up to San Francisco. That’s another reason why I made sure I was there every single week — to provide a base of continuity.

“Excuse me, ladies,” Mark said, sliding off his bar stool. “I’ll be right back. Here, take my stool, Lannie.”

“Thanks, Mark.” Mark headed to the restroom, leaving Tamara and me alone to chat for a few minutes.

“Who IS that?” I asked Tamara. “He’s kind of cute!”

“Oh, he came to see Tina,” Tamara told me. Tina was another girl who had started up the socials, along with Jamie Faye Fenton and me. Tina was an older, English cross-dresser with a wonderful, dry sense of humor. She also had a rich and varied sex life as a woman, if her tales were to be believed. Tina was pretty good about showing

Everything Nice

up at the social every week, too, except when health problems had her down. Jamie Faye, on the other hand, dropped in an out quite randomly. She was an idea person, not an execution person; her part had been thinking up the socials.

“Tina?” I exclaimed upon hearing that Mark was here to see her. Dapper was not really Tina’s style, I thought.

“Yes. I guess they’ve been e-mailing.”

“Well, good for her. I’ll tell her Mark was looking for her.”

As Mark returned to the bar, I got a better chance to look at him. He was slim, tall (slightly shorter than me, and a *lot* shorter than Tamara), and with neatly trimmed, slightly thinning gray hair. He wore a tweed jacket and a woolen scarf in the distinctive Burberry design. He reminded me of Fred Astaire, though he was not quite that reedy. I hoped he could dance.

I thought that Tamara and Mark might have a little thing going on between them, and I didn’t want to butt in. So I excused myself and strode to the dance floor in the back. I made sure my ass wiggled as I walked.

Tinker’s had a fun little dance floor, just big enough for a half-dozen people to throw themselves wildly around, or for 30 people to dance asses-to-elbows. Disco lighting was supplied by lasers and several mirrored disco balls of different diameters. The floor was hard, enabling good turning and sliding. Floor-to-ceiling mirrors covered the back and the left side walls; like most T-girls, I loved mirrors so I could admire my beauty and elegance — and reassure myself that I don’t look like a dude in a dress. The right wall held a booth for the DJ to spin the music and the remaining wall had a riser with a rail that had a little shelf for drinks. Folks who preferred watching and drinking to dancing could sit on stools on the riser and wish they had the nerve to be dancing too.

As was usually the case this long before the midnight rush, the dance floor was empty. I had it all to myself. I twirled, strutted, wiggled, and watched myself in the mirrors, or stared up at the lights and marveled at how I had gotten to this place in my life. When Iz Kamakawiwo’o strummed his ukulele and sang *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*, wistful tears formed at the corners of my eyes.

I danced alone for 45 minutes. When I went back into the main room, Tamara and Mark were gone, and no T-girls were in sight. So I went home.

Bak at home, I called Tina.

“Tina, you had an admirer at TD’s tonight!”

“Who, love?”

“A guy named Mark? An older fellow?”

“Oh, him. Did he really show up? How nice!” Tina giggled.
“What did he look like?”

“I thought he was very distinguished. He had on a nice jacket and a sweater vest. He even had shiny shoes. I thought he was cute. You’d better show up next week, because if you don’t and he does, I’m going to steal him!”

“Oh, hon, go right ahead if you want. He’s not really my type anyway.”

However, when I got to Tinker’s at 8:30 the following Wednesday, Tina was already sitting at the bar talking directly into Mark’s ear. We had a good turn-out that night, with about 10 girls showing up in the next couple of hours. We had a lot of fun gossiping, catching up, and dancing in various combinations of solos, couples, and larger groups.

I made sure I had an opportunity to talk to Mark. I didn’t intend to steal him from Tina, mind you, but the man was entitled to make up his own mind!

We were in a little cluster at the bar, Tina and another girl on barstools, Mark and I and another girl standing. Tina, as usual, dominated the conversation with her raucous jokes and barking laugh. However, Mark and I were soon having a side conversation.

“I’m sorry I didn’t get a chance to talk to you more last week,” Mark said.

“Oh! When I finished dancing, you were gone.”

“I didn’t realize you were still here.”

“Anyway, I didn’t want to intrude between you and Tamara, you know.”

“We were just talking. Tamara is married and she’s not interested in any other romance.”

“Darn! I wish I had known. I definitely would have talked with you some more.”

“Well, no matter, we’re talking now.”

“Indeed, we are.”

“So, I’ve read a lot of your Web site. You are quite prolific.”

Everything Nice

“Thank you,” I said, a little embarrassed. I had some pretty intimate things on my Web site. “You know all about me then.”

“A bit. I’m a writer too, you know.”

“Really? What have you written?”

“I’ve written a book. It’s called *DILLIGAFF*. It’s about the year I spent in Vietnam.”

“*DILLIGAFF*?”

“It’s a military acronym. It stands for *Do I Look Like I Give A Flying Fuck*? It was my motto in Korea.”

“Sounds about right. What’s in the book? Did you see combat?”

“No, not a bit. I was a clerk. Still, it was a very traumatic time for me. I did get shot at once.”

“I can hardly imagine. So, can I read your book?”

“Sure. I published it on the Web. Here, I’ll give you the URL.” He took a business card out of his wallet and wrote something on the back. He handed it to me and I examined it in the dim light of the bar.

“Great! I’ll take a look at it.” I slipped the card into my tiny disco purse.

When I left the bar a little while later, the first thing I did when I got in my car was to fetch Mark’s business card out of my purse. I turned it over and examined the *front*. Oh, my! He was a lawyer! I read the name of the firm. His name was there; it was the first name: he was senior partner in his own law firm. Score! This was definitely a class of gentleman I was interested in.

Over the next few weeks, I read Mark’s online book and talked to him about it when, off and on, he showed up at our mixer.

Right about this time, Tina decided to put together a field trip to the city. “I found this lovely piano bar on north Market,” Tina told us. “It’s called Martuni’s and they pour great martinis. Extremely strong! And it’s very trannie-friendly. I always see some other girls there. Why don’t we all go up there on Saturday?” So we made a plan to meet at Martunis on Saturday about 10. A half-dozen girls said they would be there. Also Mark, and Bernie, the fellow I had met at the TGSF dinner on the Leather ‘n’ Lace night. Since Mark was going to be there, I decided I would definitely use the opportunity to promote my case.

Obsessively prompt, I arrived at Martunis, dressed to the nines, at 8:30. There was hardly anyone in the place. I got a Coke and perched on the high bench seat at a little cocktail table along the wall. I waited. I ordered another Coke and waited some more.

After about twenty minutes, Bernie arrived. He looked around, spotted me, smiled, and came right over.

“Hi Lannie!” he said. “We’re the first ones here, huh?”

“Yes. How are you Bernie?” I’d met Bernie a few times before, but I’d never had the opportunity to speak with him much. It was nice to have the chance to get to know each other. Bernie and I would become close friends as the year went on.

Mark was the next to arrive, marching in a little while later. I was disappointed that I wouldn’t have some time alone with him, but there was nothing I could do about that. However, I switched my focus intensely from Bernie to Mark as soon as he joined us.

Mark seemed happy to see me. “Hi Lannie!” he chirped. “Hi Bernie!”

“Hi Mark. I’m glad *you* made it.”

“I’m glad you made it. I didn’t know if you were coming.”

“I wouldn’t miss this!” I responded. We made small talk, and I flirted as best I knew how. “What a nice scarf,” I told him. “I liked it that first night I met you.”

“It’s Burberry.”

“Oh, is it? Very nice.” And so on.

Much too soon, Tina and Kay showed up. Kay was her usual droopy-dog self, and Tina was sparkling.

“Hi loves! Sorry I’m late. Have you been here long?” Tina cuddled right up to Mark, hanging on his arm quite obviously possessively. Kay spilled a drink on my foot.

“Thank you for dinner last night, Mark,” Tina announced, making sure we all heard. “It was lovely.”

“You’re welcome,” Mark said meekly. “It was fun.”

So Tina and Mark had a thing going. That was that, then. I dropped my plans of flirting with Mark. I wasn’t going to try to steal a girlfriend’s guy.

A few other girls showed up and were soon imbibing heavily and convivially. My plan was busted, and I didn’t fancy hanging around watching Tina dote on Mark. I excused myself.

“It’s been nice seeing you,” I said.

Everything Nice

“You’re leaving?” “You can’t leave!” “It’s so early. Have one more drink.” “Where are you going?”

“I said I’d meet Jamie and Lisa at the DNA,” I said. “I’ve got to be going.” I extracted myself from Martunis and drove the short distance to the DNA Lounge.

I was disappointed that my plans with Mark had come to naught, but it had been a long shot anyway. I licked my wounds and partied with Jamie and Lisa.

The DNA was having a cross-dressing night where some guy bands were going to dress as girls and some girl bands would dress as guys. We thought that sounded like an event where we would fit right in. As it turned out, we didn’t really fit in at all. It was a strictly straight group, and the cross-dressing was half-hearted and taken as a big joke. However, a lot of the kids were in awe of meeting a real transsexual, especially one as pretty as me. A fellow who was photographing the event asked if he could take some shots of me, and of course I accommodated him. He had me sit on the bar, my long, lovely legs dangling over the side. The kids gathered around and asked me questions and said, “You’re so pretty! Were you really a man before?” I ate it up.

A couple of weeks later, my telephone rang.

“Hi. This is Mark. From Tinker’s Damn, you know? And Martunis?”

“Of course, Mark. I know who you are. *DILLIGAFF!* How are you?”

“I’m fine. How have you been.”

“Very well, thank you.”

“I was wondering if you would like to have dinner with me. We could go out to the city together, maybe on Saturday.”

I was stunned, flattered, and tickled.

“I’d love to, Mark. Why, I didn’t know you cared! I thought you were Tina’s guy.”

“No, no. Nothing like that. I just took her out that one time. I wanted to ask you out sooner, but I thought it would be rude not to wait a bit. I didn’t want to hurt Tina’s feelings.”

“What a sweet guy! How considerate of you!”

Later I would learn that there was a little more to the story than that. It seemed Mark had been talking to T-girl who lives in the North Bay named Charlene. Charlene was a great one for bringing

new girls out, like Rianna Silk did for me, and for organizing outings. She knew everybody. I had mentioned to Charlene that I'd met Mark and tried to steal him from Tina. So when Mark told Charlene that he liked me and wondered if I would go out with him, Charlene had kicked his ass. "Ask Lannie out!" she ordered Mark. "She likes you. She'll love it." It was so high school!

Mark took me out to The Cosmopolitan, a classy restaurant in the Embarcadero area of San Francisco. Mark admitted it was his standard first-date place, but I didn't mind. The food was great and there was live jazz music. Best of all, it wasn't a queer hangout. Mark wasn't afraid to take me out in "normal" society, and I really appreciated it.

After dinner, Mark took me dancing at the Top of the Mark, located, of course, on the top floor of the Mark Hopkins hotel on Nob Hill. A live band played pop tunes of the 70s and 80s as we had a cocktails (and Cokes) and danced.

It was my fairy-princess moment. I felt like a dream I had not dared dream had come true: I was out at a fancy club with a handsome, successful lawyer, and I was a beautiful woman! It was difficult to believe it was really happening.

At the end of the evening, Mark gave me a nice kiss and a hug, but he didn't try for anything more — except to ask to see me again. He was a gentleman.

I had talked Mark into letting me meet him at his house in San Leandro, in the East Bay, arguing that it would be far out of his way to drive south to pick me up at my home in San Jose. My actual motive was that I wanted to check out his house. I anticipated a small mansion in the hills, a residence suitable for the senior partner of a law firm. I was disappointed. Mark lived in a little old tract house in the flatland at the foot of the hills, and inside it smelled strongly of dog. Mark had been widowed for about a year, and he didn't have a woman's touch with the homemaking, let us say. I learned that his practice was in duties and tariffs (not the most glamorous area of the law) and the law firm was really just an arrangement for three lawyers to share an office. So I hadn't hit the jackpot.

No, that's not fair and it's not really true. I *did* hit the jackpot, because Mark was smart and funny and kind and handsome, and he treated me like a princess. Mark was a trannie chaser, a great trannie chaser: He was fascinated by trannie girls and loved to be

around them, not primarily for sex, but just for our company. Mark was proof that a trannie chaser, or trannie admirer, as we sometimes more respectfully called them, could be a wonderful person and a great friend to a T-girl.

Mark and I became a couple, and everyone got used to seeing Mark and Lannie whenever a trannie affair was held. Mark loved dancing as much as I did — almost as much as Jamie Faye Fenton! — and would often out-dance me. He had a funny style of dancing, with stiff, jerky movements and a vacant stare, but his spirit and goodwill were unquenchable.

One night when we were dancing at Tinker's, Mark told me, "You should get some platform shoes."

"Are you kidding?" I replied. "I'm already too tall."

"No, no, you're fine. You should get platforms. They really turn me on."

"Listen, if you buy them, I'll wear them."

And that's how I wound up with five pairs of eight-inch platform shoes. I enjoyed wearing them. It got me lots of attention, which I ate up. I was an awesome sight at 6-foot-8, but my innocent demeanor kept me from being too intimidating. Small Asian people always wanted to have their picture taken with me when I wore my platform shoes.

Mark was generous. He enjoyed giving me gifts, especially from Victoria's Secret and Frederick's of Hollywood. At first it was difficult for me to get used to the idea of letting him give me things — even paying when we were out on dates. After all, ever since college I had always taken care of myself, and been the one to treat on dates. But quite quickly, it began to feel very natural, and soon the idea of a Dutch treat date became anathema to me. I would reciprocate by cooking dinners at my house, giving him gifts from time to time, and by being extremely nice to him.

After a while, the gift-giving became too much. Mark was having merchandise drop-shipped to my door once or twice a week. I tried to slow down the momentum by holding the packages until we were together before I would open them, but he didn't take the hint. I felt like he was using me as a Barbie-doll, not thinking about what I might like or actually want to wear, but just getting me to model all the things that turned him on in the Frederick's catalogue (which, of course, never look as good on a real human being). Finally, in the

nicest possible way, I asked him to stop that, and, with a little pout, he did.

Mark told me he loved me dearly and asked if we could have an exclusive relationship. But I told him I wasn't ready for that. I liked him a lot but I wasn't in love; and besides, my life was changing so much — I was changing so much - I simply couldn't make any commitments about what my future might bring. Mark accepted my position.

I guess I would be remiss if I didn't mention this: Mark loved to suck my cock. It didn't do much for me, and he would get frustrated when I could not cum, which was often. But I did my best to enjoy our sex play, and Mark swore it wouldn't make any difference when I had my sex reassignment surgery to change my penis into a vagina; he would still love me.

Sex Change

In the summer of 2002, I began thinking about sex reassignment surgery or SRS, what is commonly known as a sex change operation. After half a year living full time as a woman, it had become quite clear to me that I wasn't a man who preferred living as a woman. No, I really was a woman, in every sense of the word. I was certain I would live as a woman for the rest of my life, and die as a woman. The prospect of being an old woman no longer scared me; in fact, I was looking forward to it. The prospect of being an old *man*, however, terrified me. I was a woman, and that was that.

I didn't really hate my penis. But it was doing me no good. I hated always tucking it out of the way, which could sometimes be uncomfortable. I hadn't urinated standing up or masturbated in a year. I could still get a little sexual pleasure from it, but it didn't mean much to me. I came to realize that I didn't really even want it — the pleasure that came from it, or the penis itself.

However, even though I decided I would be better off without my penis, the idea of sex reassignment surgery was intimidating. I decided to try some warm-up surgery, to see how bad surgery was. *A nose job would be just the thing*, I thought. My nose was a little larger than I liked, and it had a bump. Why not get that taken care of?

On a friend's recommendation, I visited Dr. Robert Brink, a plastic surgeon in San Mateo. I liked him, and I liked what he said he could do for my nose. What, in fact, he showed me he could do: He took a digital photograph of my face and morphed it on the computer to demonstrate exactly what I would look like when he was done with me.

We also decided to "shorten my upper lip," which meant shortening the distance between my upper lip and my nose. This distance is generally smaller in female faces than in males, so shortening it would help feminize my face. What was even more important to me, though, was that it would roll my lip upward a bit, exposing a little more lip. My thin, flat upper lip would take on a cute little "Cupid's bow" shape.

Unfortunately, Dr. Brink did not want to do the nose and the lip in the same surgery, because he was concerned about maintaining adequate blood flow in the area. So first I had my nose done, for \$7,000, and then a couple of months later the lip, for another \$3,000. Jamie Faye Fenton ferried me to and from the clinic for my surgeries and nursed me through my recoveries. The anesthesia and pain killers worked great. I never felt a thing — except for the anesthesia needles going in. God, those needles in my upper lip hurt!

On a follow-up visit to check on my beautiful new nose and lip, Dr. Brink commented, "Gee, now that we've shortened the upper lip, the nose could be a little smaller."

"And is that surgery complimentary?" I asked rhetorically.

"No, I'm afraid not."

"I'll pass for now." I could have slapped him! Why didn't he just go smaller in the first place? But it was OK. I knew going in that Dr. Brink's style was to err on the conservative side, and I thought that was smart. I liked my new nose, and I didn't worry about making it any smaller.

The rhinoplasty went so well that I had no qualms about moving forward with my SRS.

Everything Nice

At the end of September, I attended the Southern Comfort Conference again, primarily to gather information about the procedure. (My secondary purpose was to spend a couple more nights partying with Jamie at BackStreet Atlanta. We even hooked up with Dana again.) I heard a fascinating talk from Dr. Sanguan Kunaporn, a thin, tiny surgeon from Thailand, about the services of his clinic. However, I wasn't enthused about the idea of traveling overseas for surgery. I didn't relish traveling in the best of circumstances, and those would not be the best of circumstances.

Through my laser hair removal operator, I heard about a surgeon who was performing SRS procedures in Palo Alto, just fifteen miles from my home. To my delight, the sawbones was even female. I interviewed Dr. Annette Cholon and found her to be a competent plastic surgeon (to the best of my ability to judge) and a darling person. She had only performed the procedure as lead surgeon a handful of times, but she had assisted Dr. Donald R. Laub, Stanford's pioneering sex change surgeon, for many years. Besides, it was not exactly brain surgery. A dozen or more surgeons around the world were doing fine procedures. I had confidence that the pixie-ish blonde surgeon would create a wonderful vagina for me.

Best of all, Dr. Cholon had no waiting list, while most popular sex change surgeons had waiting lists of six months to a year. I scheduled my surgery for February 10 the following year — at that point just five months away.

I had some wonderful experiences during those five months. One was that I treated myself to a corset — a really nice one, like the ones I had seen modeled at the DNA Lounge the first time I went there with Jamie Faye and Lisa. In fact, I went to the same custom corset shop that had sponsored that corset fashion show. The shop, called Dark Gardens, happened to be just a couple of blocks from the Blue Muse restaurant where the TGSF dinners were held.

I went to Dark Gardens, picked out the design I wanted, and got fitted for it. A couple months later I picked up the finished corset. The price was \$575, but I felt like spoiling myself, so I didn't worry about the money.

I planned to wear the corset primarily under other garments, so I did not choose an elaborately decorated design. It was a solid salmon color, cut high to disguise my rather flat bosom, and it laced up the back with a white ribbon. Laced tight, it gave me a great

hourglass figure. I loved the feel of being laced tight in it, as well as the look. I found a floor-length satin skirt to wear with it at a Jessica McClintock outlet. I wound up wearing this outfit out only about three or four times, and I did wind up using the corset as an outer garment.

At Christmastime, Mark took me on a spectacular shopping spree in San Francisco. He booked us a room overnight at the Sir Francis Drake hotel just off Union Square. We shopped our way around the Square and up and down some side-streets. I was not a good shopper in terms of spending money (except for the occasional corset), especially when it came to other people's money. Mark wanted to buy me everything, but I only accepted a few things.

We ate dinner at a fine restaurant that featured seafood and was decorated like we were underwater. The waitress looked at my bare arms in my sleeveless dress and commented, "You must work out. You've got great definition."

"Not really," I said, and Mark and I shared a secret smile. I was a little bit stung, though, because it was the masculine characteristic of my musculature that the waitress had noticed. Not that I have great guns for muscles; I just didn't have the fat that women of my age usually accumulate on their upper arms. Of course, it didn't make the waitress think I was a man or a freak, just a woman with particularly nice arms. It was nothing I needed to be hurt by, but I was sensitive about that sort of thing.

At dinner, Mark had a couple more martinis than usual because it was the holidays and we had the hotel room right next door. He got pretty vocal and a bit belligerent on some topics we were discussing. I was amused. We talked about the impending war in Iraq, and Mark, Mr. *DILLIGAFF*, the Vietnam veteran, insisted that it would be ugly, that there would be house-to-house fighting in the cities and we'd take a lot of casualties. Unfortunately, he was exactly right.

After dinner, as we were walking down the street to our hotel, we passed a shop with some lovely gowns in the window.

"Stop a sec?" I asked Mark. "Look at these beautiful gowns!" A tall, thin mannequin was wearing what appeared to be a dark velvet gown, but it shimmered with subtle streaks of reds, blues, and greens. It was sleeveless and hugged the curves of the model's body, all the way to the floor.

"Should we go in and look?" Mark asked.

Everything Nice

“OK,” I agreed.

We went inside the tiny shop. There wasn't much to see on the ground floor, but a white metal spiral staircase led to a second floor. I wandered up the steps while Mark engaged the shop woman in conversation.

The upstairs was more spacious because it held only a few items. Three mannequins were wearing gowns similar to the one I had seen in the window. I examined them closely and felt the material. They were heavenly.

The sales woman's head appeared at the staircase, followed by her shoulders, body, and Mark. She saw me admiring the gown.

“Would you like to try it on?” she asked. She had some type of European accent and looked like she belonged in a fashion show herself.

“Oh, I don't think so,” I said. I had also noticed the prices on the gowns. They were in the seven hundred dollar range, which was astronomical as far as I was concerned.

“Go ahead,” Mark prodded me. “Try it. I'd like to see it on you.”

I let myself be persuaded. The lady took the gown right off the mannequin and led me to a little dressing room. I changed into it, and I couldn't believe how well it fit. It hugged *my* curves, as it had the mannequin's — and I hadn't even realized I had any curves!

I came out of the dressing room and Mark gasped.

“Whoa! That's fantastic!”

“It fits you really well,” the shop lady agreed. “Come over here.” She had me stand on a little platform in front of a three-way mirror. The dress really was breathtaking. I was breathtaking!

But I was shy. “I don't know,” I worried. “It hugs my body so closely, and the back is so open.” The front of the dress came all the way up to my neck, but the back had a big empty swoop almost to my butt.

“You look great, dear,” the shop lady reassured me. “Don't worry. You've got nothing to hide.”

I smiled at Mark and almost laughed out loud. I most certainly did have something to hide! But I didn't need to share that with the shop lady. Besides, I wouldn't have it any more after February.

Mark turned to the shop lady. “We'll take it,” he said.

“Mark!” I exclaimed. “No!”

“Yes! Why not? You need a dress for the Cotillion in January. This will be perfect.” The Cotillion was a beauty pageant and talent show held to crown Miss TGFSF every year.

I whispered in Mark’s ear. “Do you know how expensive it is?”

Mark said, “Don’t worry about it. I want to get it for you.” And he did. It was a wonderful Christmas present, and I was stunning at the Cotillion a month later.

When we got back to our hotel room, I had a surprise for Mark.

“Wait here,” I told him, as if there were anywhere else he could go, and I took my suitcase into the bathroom. I changed into a tiny, sexy Frederick’s of Hollywood “Ms. Santa Claus” outfit. (When I wore it, I called myself “Santa’s Little Helper.”) It was a red mini-dress with fuzzy white trim. I laced myself into knee-high white plastic boots with eight-inch platform heels. I pulled long, white satin opera gloves up my arms. And I pinned my matching Santa cap onto my pile of red hair. The red hair was my own, too. By this time, it had finally grown out enough that I didn’t need to wear wigs anymore, thank God.

I don’t know which Mark enjoyed more, unwrapping his present, or playing with it.

* * *

The weekend after my shopping spectacular, it was girls-night as Jamie Faye Fenton, another transsexual friend of ours name Melinda, and I joined the “Three Babes on a Bus” for a tour of San Francisco dance clubs. The Three Babes chartered a comfortable touring bus and took groups around to four or five clubs in a evening. All the cover charges were taken care of, and we got priority, walking right into the clubs when the bus parked out front. We had 45 minutes to enjoy the club, and then we all climbed back onto the bus and moved on to the next stop. Most of the guests were women and we fit right in. They knew we were trans — it was hard not to notice when there were three of us together at once — but they treated us like one of the girls, or three of the girls I guess. We had a blast.

The one thing that did *not* happen when we were out with the Babes was that guys didn’t ask me to dance or hit on me. But I was used to that, so I was only mildly disappointed. However, at the end of the night, in the very last dance club, we did get a little action.

Everything Nice

We were at a large, fun club that had a 1950s theme and played a lot of old-time rock'n'roll. It was crowded with folks ranging in age from young to my age.

After wandering around the club a while on my own, I came upon Melinda chatting it up with several big, handsome young guys. Apparently Melinda had told them she was trans, or they had figured it out, because she was answering questions about it. I didn't know whether they clocked me, but one guy said to me, "Come on," and led me toward the dance floor. I followed, thinking he wanted to dance. But he went past the dance floor, urging me to follow him, and headed into the men's restroom. He wanted me to go in there and give him a blow job! As soon as I figured that out, I was gone.

A little while later, a cute young fellow asked me to dance. After we danced, he took me to a table at the side of the room and offered to get me a drink. I accepted a Coke and he chatted me up. He was a journalist from England, recently assigned to the Bay Area. He lived in Oakland. He was pretty drunk! We danced some more, and he danced close. He kissed me and grabbed me some, and I enjoyed it. He asked for my phone number and I hoped he would use it.

Jamie Faye wandered by and I really wanted to keep my guy to myself, but I didn't like to shut out my friends, so I introduced them. The first words out of Jamie's mouth were, "Do you ever go to Trannie Shack?" and she proceeded to talk about other queer clubs. In the taxi on the way back to our hotel a short while later, I said accusingly, "Jamie, you outed me!"

"What do you mean?" Jamie asked, looking confused.

"That guy didn't know I was trans," I explained. "And then you start talking about all the trannie bars. Geez!"

"Oh!" Jamie exclaimed, genuinely startled. "I assumed he knew. I'm sorry if I spoiled something for you."

"Don't worry about it, Jamie," I reassured her. "He was so drunk, he wouldn't remember me tomorrow anyway. But in the future, please don't out me!"

"Oh, yeah, I'll try to watch for that." But Jamie was so "out and proud," it was hard for her to remember some of us like to fly under the radar — at least now and then.

* * *

My surgery was postponed a week because the assisting surgeon Dr. Peter Davis had a schedule conflict. So my V-day was to be February 17, 2003.

The night before my surgery, Jamie Faye Fenton stayed with me to calm my jitters. Also so I could be sure she would be awake at 5:30 a.m. to take me to The Surgical Center of Palo Alto. Dr. Cholon performed the procedure in a little operating room set up in this small office building near the Stanford campus, rather than a hospital, to keep the total cost of the surgery down to about \$15,000.

Jamie and I arrived in the dark of Monday morning at 5:30 and sat in silence in the small waiting room. After 10 minutes passed, a nurse appeared at the check-in window. She had me sign a few papers and then led me back to a room where I changed into a surgical gown. I lay on a gurney and waited some more. In a little while, a waif in a baseball cap and sweatshirt breezed in asked me how I was doing. It was Dr. Cholon!

“Are you sure you’re my surgeon?” I asked with a smile. “You don’t look like one!”

“You don’t expect me to get dressed up this early in the morning, do you?” she joked back.

A short while later they wheeled me into the OR. The anesthesiologist stuck an IV into my arm and a put a mask over my face. I woke up six hours later with a vagina.

Falling Into the Pit

Jamie picked me up at the Surgical Center and drove me the five miles to the Recovery Inn of Menlo Park, where I would spend a few days under 24-hour nursing care. I was amazed they didn't use an ambulance, but I guess my condition wasn't that delicate, and we were trying to control the cost.

My mother called the hospital room in the afternoon to ask if it had gone OK. I was happy to hear her voice.

On Wednesday, Dr. Cholon took me back into the OR to investigate some bleeding that would not stop. She didn't find any problems, and the bleeding stopped when she packed me back up again. This minor complication cost me an extra day in the Recovery Inn. On Thursday, I was taken off the morphine drip. I walked a few shaky steps around my room and ate a tiny amount of solid food. On Friday, Mark took me back to my house.

It was great to return home after what seemed to be a very long week. Jamie came by to see how I was doing before heading off to the clubs on Friday night. She and Mark arranged between themselves to keep a 24-hour watch on me for the next few days. Mark would take that first night. They would help keep me comfortable, get food and drink when I wanted it, and dole out my complex regimen of antibiotics and pain killers which needed to be taken at various intervals. We set up a log to write down when I took what, to keep it all straight, and we set a timer to beep when the next medication was needed.

Exhausted, I lay on the couch downstairs and watched some television with Mark. He helped himself to a couple of martinis. I apologized for being too weak to make them for him, like I usually did. I even kept a martini glass chilled in the freezer and a bottle of Tanqueray gin in the wet bar especially for him.

After a few hours, I asked Mark to help me up the stairs to my bed. It felt fantastic to be back in my own bed once again, even though I was tethered to a urine bag and in considerable discomfort. I lay in a daze, letting the time drift by.

Eventually I heard the medication timer beep-beep-beeping downstairs. Time for my pills! I waited to hear Mark's footsteps on the stairs. And waited, and waited. I heard nothing but beep-beep-beep. *What the heck was going on*, I wondered.

I finally struggled up out of bed, took my urine bag in hand, and walked gingerly down the stairs, hanging on to the oak banister for dear life. I shuffled into the den. Mark's head was leaning back on the couch, his eyes were closed, and gin-stinking snores issued from his drooling, slack-jawed mouth.

I was disappointed at Mark's dereliction of duty, thinking of the potentially hazardous consequences to me, but I understood. Mark was undergoing a very stressful experience, too. He was not a caretaker by nature, and look what was happening to the woman he loved. I mentally forgave him, got my own pills, and made my way back upstairs to bed.

Jamie Faye was much more attentive the following night, and my other friend Bernie took over nursing duties thereafter. Bernie cared for me attentively over the next few months, expecting absolutely nothing in return, except that I allow him to rub my feet. Bernie had a thing for feet. (He also had a thing for being spanked,

Everything Nice

but that was not my bailiwick. When he needed a good spanking, Bernie visited Daddy Huey in San Francisco.)

I spent the next couple of months in my house healing. Many girls got out and about after the surgery much sooner than I did, but I preferred to take it slow and easy. A great deal of that time was devoted to pushing hard plastic dildos into my new vagina to stretch out the skin and pubogynecocous muscle, which is the muscle used to do kegel exercises, or start and stop one's urine stream. I dilated, as we call it, while watching television in the den — an advantage of living alone.

The very experience of being in a body with a vagina instead of a penis was profoundly satisfying. I really didn't appreciate how wrong the penis was until it was gone. Having a vagina felt like the most natural thing in the world. I loved standing naked in front of the full-length mirror in my bathroom and seeing my completely female body — nothing to hide, nothing to feel funny about. I thought, *If only someone had told me a long time ago that sex changes were possible, how different my life might have been.*

I continued to experience a certain amount of discomfort, and I needed to wear sanitary pads to protect my panties from ooze for a few more months. However, come April, I was recovered enough to go out and reclaim my life.

Much to my dismay, I discovered that my old life was gone. There was nothing for me to reclaim.

I had no job to go back to, because I had been laid off just prior to my surgery. Coincidence? It's hard to say. All I know is that I was one of six people who got the ax that January.

My family was gone from my life too. They wanted nothing to do with me. Their attitude was, "We still love you, but we just couldn't cope with seeing you." Apparently they loved the man and had no capacity in their hearts to love the woman. I reminded my mother that she always told me I could grow up to be anything I wanted to be, even the first American pope. She also said many times that I would find the right girl eventually. But she didn't see how that counsel applied to situation of me growing up to be the right girl. I reminded my father of how he had once told me he always felt I was different and he couldn't connect with me; but he said he didn't remember any of that. So, other than regular phone calls to stay in

touch with my mother, my family was unavailable to me (except for my sister, Mary, who supported me completely).

My best friend Jamie Faye had moved to San Francisco, where she became even more heavily involved in the trans-party-club scene. I was less interested than ever in that scene, since I had now been sober for a year and a half. Even our weekly socials at Tinker's Damn were gone, having dried up during my recovery period when I wasn't there every week to provide stability.

My other close friend was Mark. We had one sexual experience after my surgery. He'd been heterosexual all his life, married to three different women, and so I thought he might enjoy having some pussy again. But apparently he had moved past that, because it really didn't interest him. Soon he was dating another cross-dresser, a girl who was even taller and thinner than me!, and he stopped calling. I was hurt, but I knew it was OK. We both needed to move on. I'd never allowed us to make a commitment to each other anyway, anticipating that this day would come.

In short, other than my house, my health, and, thank goodness, a substantial amount of savings in the bank, I had nothing. All I did was dilate and watch lots of DVDs. And feel terribly frustrated with life and sorry for myself.

* * *

As summer began, two new life-forms moved into my house. First was a calico kitty-cat.

I had never owned a pet, except that when I was a kid, I had some guinea pigs and a little turtle. The poor turtle! One day my mother had noticed a pencil sticking into the air and moving magically around my desktop. For some unknown reason, I had stabbed a #2 pencil into my turtle's shell, and walked away. Kids, huh? Oh, I had lived with pets, but I'd never had responsibility for them since the guinea pigs and the unfortunate turtle.

I guess my maternal instincts were starting to kick in, because I began thinking of getting a dog or a cat. Finally I decided dogs need too much attention and cleaning up after, so I would get a cat. A short-haired, de-clawed, full-grown cat.

One Saturday in June, I was fuzzy-headed from a night of partying on speed with Jamie Faye (I was sober, but not completely clean yet), and feeling lonely and sorry for myself. I decided it was time to take action, so I went down to the animal shelter to get a cat.

Everything Nice

I described to the kid who helped me what kind of animal I was interested in. He sent me outside, down a path to another building, to a particular cage. In it was a beautiful, forlorn-looking calico cat. I asked to hold her. She snuggled into my arms as if escaping from a torture chamber. When I soon learned what a scaredy-cat she actually was, I realized how terrified she must have been in that cage in the shelter!

I took her home, of course. She hid under my bed for a week, but eventually she grew to trust me — though it took a year before she would lay on my lap or let me snuggle her. She came with the name Cali, presumably for calico, but I re-branded her Calpurnia in honor of Calpernia Addams, the famous trans actress.

Shortly after Calpurnia moved into my house, I got a call from my old friend Rianna Silk.

“Hello, Lannie. This is Rianna.”

“Hi Rianna! It’s been a long time since I last saw you.”

“Yeah, a real long time. How have you been? I heard you had your surgery.”

“Yes, I did. It went well and I’m doing great.”

“That’s good. Listen, I’ve got a favor to ask you. It’s a really big thing, and I don’t want you to feel obliged to say yes. Only agree if you really want to.”

“Ummm, OK. What is it?”

“You know Princess, don’t you? From Trannie Shack?”

“Sure. Princess, the beautiful little faux drag queen.”

“Yes, her. She’s getting a divorce and it’s pretty ugly. Her husband has thrown her out of the house.”

“Oh. That’s rough. Her husband is Yvonne, the drag queen, isn’t she?”

“That’s right.”

“I’ve tried to talk to Yvonne a few times, but she always gave me the cold shoulder. But Princess was nice to me.”

“Yeah, that’s Princess. She’s really sweet. And here’s the thing. She’s been staying in my apartment for a couple of weeks, but she can’t stay here. The place is much too small. So I was thinking that you might let her move in with you. You’ve got that big house and all. But like I said, don’t do it because you think you owe me. Only do it if you really want to.”

“I see. That really is a big deal. Let me think a minute. How well do you know her?”

“We’ve been friends for a really long time. She’s a good kid. You won’t have any trouble with her. I guarantee it. In fact, I’ve warned her she better not cause you any trouble if you let her stay with you.”

“Well, let’s see. Sure! Why not? It will be fun to have another girl around the house. It’s pretty lonely around here anyway.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

“OK then. Thanks a lot. I’ll tell her. When can she move in?”

“When does she want to move in?”

“How about this weekend?”

“Yeah. That will be fine.”

The more I thought about it, the more excited I became. The glamorous Princess Sparkles here in my house! What fun! The thought even crossed my mind that we might wind up it bed together at some point. It was an attractive thought. *Hmmmm*, I said to myself, *I guess that means I’m still bisexual*.

Early Saturday afternoon, the doorbell rang. It was Jim (Rianna in boy mode) and Princess. Well, it was Jim and a ragamuffin of a little gal in jeans and a dirty T-shirt. *Ha*, I laughed to myself — at myself — *What did I expect? Didn’t I yet know that women are only glamorous when they’re all dolled up?*

But there was another surprise, too. Amongst the small pile of suitcases and boxes, I spotted a pet carrier. Uh-oh!

“Lannie, this is Princess,” Jim said.

“Please don’t call me that,” Princess piped up. “My name is Tammy.”

“Hi Prin — umm, Tammy. Listen, you didn’t tell me you had a cat. That’s going to be a problem.”

“Oh, don’t worry,” Tammy responded quickly. “It’s not a cat. It’s lizards.”

“Lizards?!?”

“Yeah. Bearded Dragons. Like in the movie *Holes*. I’ll introduce you once I’m unpacked.”

So that was how Pea — umm, Tammy and the Bearded Dragons arrived in my house. There were three lizards, so I actually had

Everything Nice

five new life forms living with me, counting the lizard, Tammy, and Calpurnia.

I wanted to get one more house rule straight right up front.

“You don’t smoke, do you?” I asked Tammy.

“No. I quit.”

“Oh, good. Because I really can’t stand smoking in the house.”

“No problem with that.”

“Do you do drugs?” I asked next. I wasn’t going to prohibit them on premises, necessarily. I just wanted to know if she partied, or if she would have a problem with the fact that I still partied a bit with Jamie.

“There’s something you should know,” Jim interjected. “Tammy used to have a problem with meth — crystal methamphetamine — but she’s clean now.”

“Oh, I see. How long have you been clean?”

“Since Christmas. I’m really through with that shit now. It was really messing me up.”

“Good. I’m happy for you then. I do a little bit of that myself, but only when I’m out clubbing.”

“That’s cool. Just keep it away from me!”

That evening, I was introduced to Judy, Carolyn, and Sally, the three Bearded Dragon lizards. Tammy liked to walk around with one, two, or all three of them clinging to her shirt on her upper chest.

“Sally’s pregnant,” Tammy announced. “We’re probably going to have babies tonight. I’ve got to set up a nest for her.” We ran around to some pet stores to scare up some special sand that birthing lizards like to burrow into, and live crickets for the lizards to eat.

It was fun having Tammy around the house — at first. We had girl-talk and I heard about her hard-scrabble life growing up in the backwaters of Kentucky until Yvonne rescued her and brought her to California. Now that she was getting divorced, she said, the first thing she planned to do was get her GED. She had never graduated from high school.

She asked if I had a computer and I invited her to use it when she wanted. She began looking up GED preparatory classes right away. However, soon she was engaged in another computer project. “Can you help me download all my photographs from my husband’s Web site? They’re valuable and I’m afraid he’ll find a way to keep me

from getting them.” They were valuable because they comprised a goodly part of the content on a tranny porn site run by Yvonne.

Tammy didn’t have a car, or any money, so she hung around the house all the time, usually using the computer. I was still out of work myself, so Tammy’s constant presence soon became a burden.

Then Tammy’s personality began to change. I thought she was in a depression due to the divorce and the tough times she was going through. But it wasn’t just depression. One time she flew off the handle and screamed at me because Jamie and I had went out clubbing and not invited her along. Another time she was bouncing around the house like a ping-pong ball, jabbering merrily nonstop. I realized she was using meth again.

Six weeks after Tammy began living with me, I came home from clubbing with Jamie at 3 a.m. on a Saturday. Tammy was up and glowing with excitement.

“You’ll never guess what happened to me tonight!” she chirped.

“What?” I asked.

“I just barely avoided being busted!”

“Busted? Oh, dear. Tell me about it.”

“The Feds came in and busted this meth house I was spending a lot of time at. I knew it was going to happen. I could feel it coming down. They’d had the place under surveillance for weeks. I knew it was coming down tonight, so I left early. About an hour later they busted down the door and took everybody to jail. I got away just in time.”

I was shaken. “God, that’s terrible! It scares me. Do you think they may have followed you here?”

“Oh no. No way. They don’t want me. They were after this house I was at. They don’t care about me. You’ve got nothing to worry about.”

But I was worried. I began to consider how bad it would be if cops came to my house, found some drugs, and arrested me. Going to prison is bad enough in the best circumstances; to be a trans person in prison is very, very bad (though at least I would go to the women’s prison). And I thought I was having a hard time finding employment now; it would be a hell of a lot harder with a record of an arrest or a felony drug conviction. Finally, it could wipe out my life savings. I could lose my house and car.

Everything Nice

I could lose my freedom. I had a lot to lose, and the thought of putting it in jeopardy made my stomach weak.

The next morning I called Jamie Faye Fenton.

“Jamie, I need you to come over to my house *today*. I need to talk to you about something important.”

“OK. I’ll be there in about two hours.”

A little while later, Tammy headed for the front door in a light mood.

“My boyfriend is picking me up,” she announced. “I’ll be gone the rest of the day.”

“OK. Have a good time. Be safe.”

“I will. Don’t worry. Oh, by the way, if anybody you don’t know comes to the door, it would probably be best if you didn’t answer it.”

“Didn’t answer it?”

“Yeah.” She laughed. “I don’t want to explain it right now. I’ll talk to you later. Bye.”

“OK. Bye then.”

A little while later the front doorbell rang. I peeped out a window. It was my Filipino next-door neighbor’s teenage kid. The one who, some years earlier, had pulled a knife on his parents.

I wondered if it was because of this person that I had been warned not to answer the door, but I decided to answer it anyway.

“Hi,” the nice-looking kid said. “Is Tammy here?”

“No. I’m afraid she just went out.” The kid’s face dropped.

“Do you know when she’ll be back?”

“Not for a while, she said.”

“Oh. Damn. Well, listen, she did a big favor for me, and I wanted to thank her. Would you give her this?” He offered me a small brown bag, like a lunch bag.

“No,” I said firmly. “You’d better give it to her yourself.” I shut the door on him. I was not going to be a go-between for some drug deal.

Now I was really outraged. Tammy was dealing drugs to my neighbor’s child? What could she be thinking? If Ramon, — the kid’s father — got wind of it, he’d be mad as hell at me, and I wouldn’t blame him. I would sic the cops on me, if I were him. This was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Tammy would have to go.

When Jamie arrived, I told her the story of what was going on with Tammy. Jamie thought for a few moments, and agreed with Tammy.

“I don’t think you have anything to worry about. I don’t think there is any reason why the cops would come here.”

“I don’t care,” I said. “I’m too scared. I’d like you take all our drugs out of here, so at least if there is a problem, I can say that my nose is clean. I don’t care if you keep them or throw them in the trash. I just don’t want them around anymore. I have too much to lose.”

“OK. If that’s what you want, I’ll take them. Does this mean you don’t want to party anymore?”

“Not necessarily. But for right now, I don’t think I’m going to. This whole drug scene has me creeped out. I don’t feel safe in my own house, and that’s no good. I think I’m going to go clean, at least for while.”

“OK. I can understand what you’re going through. It is terrible to feel vulnerable in your own house. But I’ll miss our clubbing together.”

“Well, me too. But you know what? I haven’t really been finding what I want in the clubs anyway. It’s not like I’m meeting new people. I always wind up going home alone. I’ve got to try doing something different with my life, I think. I’ve just got to.” And I did. At least, I never took any recreational drugs again.

I still had the problem of getting rid of Tammy. She was tweaking out of control. What if I asked her to leave, and she simply said, “No, I’m staying and you can’t make me leave!” What if she got nasty? What if she got destructive? I knew the meth could make a person capable of bad behavior.

The next day I drove up to Berkeley to visit Jim. After all, he had started this episode in motion. He was Tammy’s friend. He guaranteed her good behavior. I didn’t necessarily expect him to solve the problem for me, but I knew he would care and I knew he had a lot more experience with this sort of thing than I did. He had street smarts.

Jim cooked me a nice pasta lunch while I laid the whole sorry story out for him.

“She’s using again, huh? I can hardly believe it. I thought she was clean. That’s too bad.”

Everything Nice

“Yes, it’s a shame. But it’s what tweakers do.”

“That’s true. God, I’m so furious at her for screwing this up! I told her what a nice person you are, and what a great opportunity this is for her. I warned her not to screw it up, and she went and did it anyway. Stupid, stupid, stupid.”

“Yes, it’s a shame. She’s got potential, but not if she keeps doing drugs. Now, my problem is, how do I get rid of her? I’m afraid of how she might react if I ask her to leave. She could even bring the cops down on me in revenge.”

“I don’t think she’ll do anything, but that doesn’t matter. You really need to protect yourself. I think what you ought to do is call the police yourself. Say, ‘I’ve got this drug addict in my house and she won’t leave.’ They’ll be happy to come and get her out for you.”

“I don’t know that I want the police involved. What if they find drugs on the premises? Isn’t that risky for me?”

“No, it’s not a problem. If you call them, then obviously they’re not your drugs. If you are proactive, they’ll help you and take care of her.”

“Hmmm, yes, I see. Maybe that is what I need to do. But it will be really rough on her. I hate to do that to somebody.”

“It’s not your fault. She brought it on herself. But listen, I have another idea. Why don’t I go over to Yvonne’s house and say, ‘Your wife is being a problem. She’s your responsibility. Take care of it.’ I can lean on him pretty hard. Believe me, he’ll take care of it.”

“That sounds like a good idea. Do you think it will work?”

“I’m sure it will. Let’s see, he’s a software engineer, he works all week. We probably couldn’t do it until next Saturday. Can it wait that long?”

“I’m not sure. I’m pretty nervous and the situation is unstable. But realistically, yes, I’m sure it would be OK if I left it another week.”

“OK. Why don’t you see how it goes for the next few days and give me a call. If it still seems like the best plan, then we’ll do it on Saturday. But I still think you ought to call the cops. That’s what I’d do.”

“Thanks for the advice. I’ll think about it.”

I thought very hard about it on the ride home, and for the next few hours. Finally I decided that I simply couldn’t be that cold-heart-

ed. Tammy at least deserved a chance to handle this in a civil fashion. I decided I would talk to her, though it broke my heart to do it.

When Tammy came home that evening, I wasted no time.

“Hi Tammy. Listen, we have to talk about something important. Can you sit down with me right now?”

“OK. What is it?” She was puzzled, but calm and in control. We sat next to each other on the couch in the den. I looked directly into her eyes.

“Tammy, this is it. You’re a good person and I like you. But your drugs are out of control. It makes me feel unsafe in my own house. I just can’t have that around here.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s the thing with the police last night. And just the fact that you’re using again, when you were supposed to be cleaned up. And then, this afternoon, I found out that you’ve been dealing drugs to my neighbors’ kids.”

“Dealing to kids? What are you talking about?”

“This afternoon the kid next door came over and said you’d done a big favor for him. He wanted me to give you a bag of something, but I wouldn’t touch it. It’s some kind of drug deal, and I really don’t even want to know about it.”

“Oh, no, you’ve got it all wrong. It was just marijuana, and he’s not a kid. He’s over 18.”

“Tammy, you’re missing the point! He is my neighbor’s child, and you are dealing illegal drugs with him! If his dad finds out, he’s going to be furious, and I don’t blame him. Tammy, you’re a guest in my house, and you’re dealing drugs in my neighborhood. That’s just way over the line.”

“Oh. I guess I can see what you mean. But aren’t you being a bit hypocritical? You do drugs too.” She didn’t say it argumentatively or petulantly; she was simply stating the way she saw the situation.

“OK, sure, it’s a little bit hypocritical. But it’s my house. I get to make my own choices about what I do here. You are my guest. It’s not fair of you to put my life in jeopardy.”

“Your life? In jeopardy?”

“I don’t mean like I’m going to get killed. I mean that I could wind up in jail, or lose my house. Everything in my life is in jeopardy.”

Everything Nice

“OK. I get it. I don’t agree, but you’ve got a right to think what you think. So I guess you want me out, huh?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“OK. No problem. I’ll move in with my new boyfriend. I just have one big favor to ask you though.”

“Sure. OK. I’m not mad at you, you know, and I don’t hate you. I just need to fix this for my own well-being. So what’s the favor?”

“I can get out right away, but is it OK if I leave some of my stuff here for a few days? We’ll come and pick it up as soon as we can; a few days at the most.”

I breathed a great sigh of relief and laughed silently to myself. Apparently this girl had some experience being kicked out of places; she knew exactly how to go about it! I had been willing to give her a week, maybe even two to vacate, and here she was offering to go right away. Score! I was glad I had given her a chance to do it right and had not sucker-punched her with the cops or her husband.

“Oh sure, that’s no problem. No problem at all. Take a week if you like.”

“Thanks. I really appreciate it. So do you want me out tonight, or is tomorrow OK?”

“Tomorrow is just fine. Thank you for taking this so well.”

“No problem. It’s your house. Thanks for having me.”

So the Princess episode ended with a whimper, not a bang, thank goodness.

* * *

I, however, was left in a terrible depression. I was having suicidal thoughts — not so much of actually committing suicide, but just thinking that I’d be better off if I were dead. I did, however, know how I would do it if I decided to. I’d do it like a Roman senator: I would slowly bleed to death in a warm bath, like my friend John had told me about in high school. Too bad I didn’t have any friends to feast and celebrate me while I went.

I was profoundly happy with my body, but I was so lonely, and I just couldn’t seem to get anything going in my life. I wasn’t making any connections with people. My attempt at reaching out and giving someone — Princess — a helping hand had blown up in my face. And, now that I wasn’t partying with the sniffables, my last defense against my bad feelings was gone. I was miserable.

Another disappointment in my life at this time was that my sex drive had not returned since my surgery. In fact, I didn't seem to be able to be sexually aroused by anything anymore. I had sensation in my clitoris, my labia, and a little bit inside my vagina, but it didn't turn into sexual arousal. Before my surgery I could be stimulated in my anus with an appropriate toy, but even that didn't work now. My small AA-cup breasts and little man-nipples weren't particularly sensitive either.

Besides my body not getting turned on, my brain didn't turn on either. I suppose my brain not turning on is what kept my body from turning on. But pretty women no longer got me hot, nor did handsome (or pretty) men, either. The only thing that seemed to get me interested at all was if a guy was really mad about me, really desired my body — and especially if the guy was classy and well-off financially.

I was interested in sex, desirous of sex, wanting to have good sexual feelings and have them assuage my loneliness. I thought if I had some sex, maybe my ability to be aroused might return. Perhaps a lot of sex would be necessary; I was willing to do the footwork. But I was unable to find opportunities to explore my sexuality. I did fool around with transsexual girlfriends a few times, but that did not get me aroused. It was frustrating. I remembered how, at one time in my life, sex had been the only experience that lived up to or exceeded its billing; how sad that now it felt like nothing at all.

I read that poor sex drive in women was often due to low testosterone, and could be treated with testosterone hormones. My testosterone count after my surgery was so low, it didn't show up at all on the blood test. It was much lower than the normal level for women. So I asked my doctor if I could try adding some testosterone back. She prescribed a testosterone gel that I rubbed on my inner thighs each evening.

The testosterone did nothing for my sex drive. The experiment failed, to my great disappointment. After two months using the hormone, a thought occurred to me. I tried to remember whether my depression had first come over me at the same time I started using the testosterone gel. Was it possible that the hormone was causing my depression? I determined to test the theory by stopping use of the gel.

Everything Nice

Bingo! Within two days, the worst of the dark blackness of my depression lifted. Oh my God, I'd been physically poisoning myself! I gave the rest of my testosterone gel to a cisgender woman (cisgender means not transgender) who was worried about her low sex drive, and my deep depression did not return.

Nevertheless, I was still depressed, just not so badly as before.

As if it were an omen, or a physical symbol of my depression, I came across a large, ugly bug in my kitchen. Eek! I was a sissy about bugs. I grabbed a magazine and crushed it. A couple of days later, a similar bug appeared. I studied it before I crushed it. I thought it was a cricket. Where the heck did it come from? Then I remembered: Judy, Carolyn, and Sally, the three Bearded Dragons. They ate crickets. My house was infested with crickets.

Cali chased a couple of the bugs and then lost interest. Some hunter. I recalled hearing that crickets were good luck, so I began capturing them with a shot glass and a business card, and throwing them outside. Some days I captured three or four crickets; other days, none. It was two years before the crickets became a rare sight (or sound) in my house.

Depression is, of course, mentally painful. But life has a way of mirroring our inner turmoil in our external lives. In my case, my inner pain was reflected by having hot needles thrust into my face, over and over again, for hours at a time. This was electrolysis. I had spent two years undergoing laser hair removal treatments, but the laser couldn't take care of my light gray facial hairs; it relied on dark melanin to absorb the laser energy. My progress with the laser stopped after the first year, but I kept at it, hoping against hope to avoid the electrologist's needle. Remember that little boy who was so scared of needles that he didn't get any ice cream? Perhaps the little boy had somehow had a premonition of what lay in store for him many years later; maybe that's why he was so terrified.

I finally admitted defeat with the laser, and found a good electrologist. The process of electrolysis was this: a very sharp, thin needle was inserted into a hair follicle; then electric current and a blast of radio-frequency energy was sent into needle, heating the follicle so lye was generated, killing the follicle. That hair would fall out and never return.

This process was repeated for every hair left on my face. It hurt, as you might imagine — like a bee sting, or, well, like a hot needle

plunged into my face. I had a two-hour electrolysis session every week for a year before my face was finally and permanently clear. It was painful and depressing, but I was fantastically delighted when it was complete.

Besides electrolysis, I kept myself busy by writing two books. The first book was a memoir composed of the essays, stories, songs, and poems I had written during the period of my transition. Many of the pieces had been published in *Transgender Forum*, the online e-zine founded by Jamie Faye Fenton, and I'd received positive feedback from readers. I organized it all and polished the writing, and I thought it made a pretty nice book. I titled it *Mistaken for a Boy*, from a song in the book with the hook, "Don't want to be mistaken for a boy." Later I changed the title to that of another piece in the book, *Dirty Panties*, because it was more provocative and attention-getting. I decided to try to get *Dirty Panties* published. I hired a professional editor to do a copy edit, and banged it into shape. I began querying agents.

Meanwhile, I captured everything I'd learned throughout my transition into another small book entitled, *How To Change Your Sex: A Lighthearted Look at the Hardest Thing You'll Ever Do*. I figured this volume would appeal only to a limited audience, so I self-published it on a print-on-demand service, Lulu.com. I gave away over a hundred copies, and about a dozen copies a month began moving through Lulu.

I sent a copy of *How To Change Your Sex* to my parents. I figured they wouldn't read it — incredible as it seemed to me that a parent wouldn't want to know what their child had written — but at least I thought they'd enjoy having a copy. As far as I knew, it was the only book anyone in our family had ever published, outside of some law books my cousin Jack wrote. But much to my surprise, the book showed up back in my mailbox a couple weeks later. No note or anything, just the book. I called and asked them, "Why did you send the book back?"

"We weren't interested in reading it," my mom said. "We thought you could give it to a friend."

"Mom, it's a book," I said. "I can get all the copies I want."

Between that and the secret family reunion, I decided to give up trying to stay in my parents' lives. The secret family reunion? Oh, yes. One Sunday I called to say "Hi," and my mother sounded very

Everything Nice

strange. Finally she blurted out, “Your brother Mike is here. He and Janet brought the baby out for us to meet.”

“Oh! How nice,” I replied.

After hesitating a moment, my mom continued, “Your sister is here, too.”

“Oh?” It was unusual for one sibling to show up at my parents’ house. For multiple siblings to show up at the same time was unheard of, outside of the big 45th wedding anniversary celebration. But my mom wasn’t finished yet.

“Yes. And Bob and his wife were here yesterday. They just left.”

“Oh. I see. You were having a family reunion and not telling me.”

“I’m sorry, honey. We just thought it was best not to mention it. It would have been very awkward to have you here.”

“I know, mom. But you didn’t have to keep it a secret. I’m an adult. You could have just told me and asked me not to come. I would have understood.”

I got the message loud and clear: It would be easier for everyone if I just disappeared from their lives. And so that’s what I did. From then on, I made only the obligatory phone calls on Mother’s Day and birthdays, and didn’t try to share anything about my life with them.

My writing activities took me through to the holiday season. I was still friendless and depressed. I was doing my best to be outgoing and have fun, but it wasn’t working out very well for me. For example, there was Halloween.

* * *

I hadn’t made plans for Halloween night, but at the last minute I decided to don my Santa’s Little Helper outfit and go out to the regular Friday evening ballroom dance party at The Starlite Dance Club in Sunnyvale, where I was taking ballroom dancing lessons. I participated in the Lindy Hop and Salsa classes and stayed for most of the subsequent open dancing. Santa’s Little Helper was a big hit. More men wanted to dance with me than ever before. If it was a rumba, I would laugh and tell the fellow, “We do lots of rumba at the North Pole!” Then I would proceed to step on his toes and do my worst rumba ever. It was probably the Lindy shoes messing me up.

By 11 o'clock, the crowd was thinning out and my feet were getting tired so I left. As I was driving home, I thought, It's Halloween, and how often do I get to be Santa's Little Helper? I ought to go somewhere else before I call it a night. I headed for a restaurant and bar called the Blue Pheasant in Cupertino. I had went there a couple of months before, and I recalled having had a good time. The bar was small and a rather déclassé, but they had a good DJ and the patrons were friendly. The previous time I was there, three men had danced with me, and I enjoyed that the dancing got somewhat intimate on the tiny, overcrowded dance floor. One of the guys tried to get me to go home with him but I wasn't really interested. Another bought me a Coke and even took my phone number. He never called, of course.

When I got to the Blue Pheasant on this Halloween night, I discovered a line of people waiting to get in. I joined the queue, trying to avoid the copious cigarette smoke and listening to some of the chit-chat going on around me. It was mostly in Spanish so I didn't understand much of it. The line wasn't moving and I was getting chilled, even through my pleather trench coat, so after a short time I gave up.

I regained the warmth of my Mustang. As I left the parking lot, I flashed on a memory of dancing at the Los Gatos Lodge a long time ago, the place where I'd met my Hawaiian beauty Vivian, so I turned onto nearby highway 85 heading south.

When I got to the Lodge, it was dark. Apparently they didn't dance there any more. I remembered another hot spot in Los Gatos so I headed there, beginning to think I was crazy to imagine that somewhere I had last visited more than fifteen years ago would still be in business.

When I got close to where I thought the place was located, I heard music. It sounded like a live band, and they sounded pretty good. I found a parking space close by, which I thought was a good omen, so I parked and locked the car. I crossed the street and went up a flight of stairs to Number One Broadway.

Number One Broadway was a smallish bar and it drew a middle-aged, extremely yuppie crowd. Most of the women were petite blondes, and many of the men wore ties. On this particular Halloween night, the place was full — uncomfortably packed, in fact. I paid eight dollars to get in and went immediately to the bathroom to

Everything Nice

doff my coat and freshen my lipstick. And to pee, which was another reason why I hadn't headed straight home!

After finishing my business, I waded into the crowded bar. Perhaps a third of the people were in costume. Quite a few seemed to be getting double-duty from their Renaissance Fair outfits, just as I was getting double-duty from my Christmas outfit. One particularly tall, gnarled old wizard kept watch near the front door. (At the end of the evening, when I was leaving, he said, "Darn! I meant to ask you do dance!") I noticed a number of cat-women, some more successful than others. A French maid, a sailor, some witches and vampires, a biker guy (who may or may not have been in costume), a few nuns of both sexes, a guy in a karate gi, and a guy in a toga. I didn't see any ghosts — but then, they're invisible, aren't they?

The band, named Sage, was even better than they had sounded from the street. Their eight pieces, including a horn section, were too big to fit on the bar's tiny stage, so the keyboard player was on the dance floor off to one side. They played a mix of funk, blues, disco, and Motown hits. The music was very loud. This was one of those bars where the music was too loud to talk over, but everyone did anyway, yelling directly into each others' ears.

Immediately, as I entered the main room, a couple started talking to me. The guy was 40-something, thin and balding, but not bad looking. The woman was a petite blonde (of course), a little younger than the man, very pretty, laced tightly into a sleek black Fredericks of Hollywood corset. As I leaned close to yell into the woman's ear, "EXCUSE ME? I COULDN'T HEAR YOU!", she began kissing me on the lips — with tongue! It turned out she was kissing a lot of guys and girls throughout the evening. She was a very good kisser, soft and gentle, but eager.

Soon a cute blond guy asked me to dance, so I followed him as he elbowed his way onto the tiny dance floor. We danced until a sexy Tina Turner diverted his attention away from me. Later I danced with that couple I had met earlier, and this time the guy started kissing me. He was *not* a very good kisser — he was rough and tried to stick his tongue in my mouth. Two petite blondes who were dancing and making out with each other corralled me into their little hootchie-coo for a bit, too.

I danced until the band shut down at 1:30. I enjoyed myself immensely. Best of all, my Santa's Little Helper outfit was a big hit.

One guy, struggling to come up with a quip, told me, “With a helper like you, Santa doesn’t need any reindeer!” I smiled and said, “Thank you,” but a nearby cat-girl gave us a puzzled look. I shrugged and told her, “Damned if I know what that means!”

When I was slipping on my coat to leave, the guy from that couple started talking to me again. “Don’t leave,” he said. “When’s the last time you had a good orgasm? Why don’t you come with us?” I definitely could have been talked into it, but I thought he was only half serious; besides, the girlfriend was enthusiastically making out with a tall, cute guy right next to us. There were a couple other fellows hanging about nearby — waiting their turn, apparently, to neck with the girl. (Earlier in the evening the guy had confided in me, “We’re totally secure and we trust each other, you know?” Poor sap!) I couldn’t figure out exactly what the situation was, but it didn’t feel right to me, so I decided to leave.

As I walked out the door, the guy from the couple followed me outside to the second floor landing. He looked me directly in the eye and asked, “Trick or treat?”, clearly not meaning it rhetorically.

“I’m sorry? What do you mean?” I asked, puzzled.

“Trick or treat?” he repeated. “C’mon, tell me, are you all woman? You’re all woman, aren’t you? I’m being honest here, you can tell me...” And like that.

I didn’t really care, so I told him. Besides, I figured that he was operating under the Halloween exception — it’s OK to ask because lots of men go around dressed as women that night. (All of them are transgender to some degree, whether they know it or not.)

“I’ve had a sex change operation,” I said.

“Oh,” he responded. “You’re very pretty. I wouldn’t have known at all. OK, I’ll tell you. I saw a whisker, and that scared me. But you’re really cute. I’d have gone to bed with you in a minute if I hadn’t seen the whisker.”

“Then I guess I’ll just have to find that whisker and get rid of it,” I commented with forced joviality. I left, suddenly feeling very alone in the world.

When I got home I turned on the bathroom’s bright makeup lights and peered closely into the magnifying mirror. I could not see a whisker. Maybe the guy’s eyesight was sharper than mine, or maybe the light had caught the stub of a hair just right. It was not worth obsessing over.

Everything Nice

So Halloween had been kind of fun, but ultimately disappointing. My next great idea was that I ought to get my cherry properly and absolutely popped. I was too old to be a virgin!

How I Popped My Cherry

There I was, nine months after my SRS and still I had not popped my cherry. At that point I had tried three test penises but all I had learned about was erectile dysfunction. (In the penises' defense, they were attached to trans women who were taking estrogen, which weakens the willy. And besides, only an extraordinarily hard erection could penetrate my new, tight pussy.)

Some remnant of my old, masculine problem-solving impulses drove me to remedy this sad state of affairs. In a flash of inspiration, I googled up some swingers parties. Google responded with 48,200 hits. I located two parties in my area that looked pretty good. I sent this e-mail to them both:

Hi! I'm an attractive, fun, playful, single woman. I wonder if I would be welcome at your party? Here's the catch — I have had a sex change. Even though I am now 100% female, I understand it can still be a big turn-off for some people. On the other hand, maybe

Everything Nice

your party could benefit from the unusual bit of kink my presence would add? As a matter of personal choice, I always explain about my background before I fool around with anybody, so there is never a question of deception or lack of consent. So what do you think? I appreciate your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

One of the parties never answered my query, but I got this very nice response from the other:

We have had many transgender ladies join us. In fact, the woman who created our Web site was once a male. A number of trans women have become regular members, and usually the single males have no problems. You would be welcome here.

I was in!

A few weeks went by as I contemplated whether this was something I really wanted to do. The prospect of popping my cherry under the preferred circumstance of a loving relationship seemed remote. I was feeling an increasing desperation to find out what sex would be like with my new vagina. Besides, the holidays were approaching and a sense of loneliness and isolation was creeping up on me. I decided to go for it.

I spent Thanksgiving day alone with a turkey sandwich. When I got up at noon the next day, I called the number of the swingers party and asked if there was an event that evening. "Yes, we're having a party tonight," the man on the line responded. "We don't know how many people will come, considering the holiday, but we've had a few confirmations already." I said I would be there.

I ate some dinner around six o'clock, leaving plenty of time to dress and get ready. From the information on the party's Web site, I anticipated both the environment and the clientele would be classy and somewhat upscale.

For my outfit I chose a Victoria's Secret long-sleeved silk blouse with vertical black and white stripes. I left the blouse unbuttoned far enough to provide a glimpse of my red, lacy push-up bra. (I planned to unbutton one more button when I got to the party.) Below this blouse went a short, short, black stretchy skirt to display with maximal effect my long legs and to allow a flash of my red satin panties if I moved in just the right way. I wore thigh-high stockings that could be left on during play of any kind.

Most importantly, I selected a pair of black patent leather fetish shoes with five inch spike heels and plenty of ankle straps. The shoes put my overall height at an imposing six feet five inches — I would not be overlooked that night!

I sat at my dressing table — similar to the one I had seen at Jessica's over a year earlier — and combed out my red hair. I left it lying loose on my shoulders, because any styling would not be likely to last long once the party got underway. I parted it on the left and pulled that side back behind my ear with a black plastic hair clip. For my makeup, I went heavy on the eyes and lips to look as alluring as possible, but I didn't worry about foundation and such because it would be wasted at this event.

I packed a small bag with supplies to cover all eventualities, including a bikini for the promised hot tub. At half past ten, I hopped into my Mustang and hit the road.

I stopped at the first traffic light. When it turned green, I loosed the power of the 'Stang's 4.6 liter engine, but my left foot slipped and I popped the clutch. I quickly recovered and was on my way, but a red light flashed in my rear view mirror. *Uh-oh, the cops!*

I pulled over to the side of the road and turned off my engine and the radio. The police cruiser rolled to a stop behind me. A handsome young officer got out and approached my window.

“Good evening, officer,” I greeted him.

“Good evening, ma'am,” he responded. “What happened back there?”

I smiled sheepishly and said, “My foot slipped off the clutch. You see, I'm wearing these really high heels tonight...”

“Have you been drinking?” Officer Handsome asked.

“No, sir,” I told him proudly. “As a matter of fact, today is my two-year sobriety birthday!” I always knew sobriety would come in handy someday, and here it seemed to do the trick. The officer gave me a warning and sent me on my way. What fun! I had never flirted my way out of ticket before. VLE!

Rather than feeling distressed by my run-in with Johnny Law, I felt rather elated it had gone so well. I took this as a good omen for the evening, although I did try to drive more cautiously.

The party was at a small, nondescript tract house on a quiet, tree-lined suburban street. I parked and made my way past a few

Everything Nice

houses, feeling a little out of place in my sexy outfit. I click-clacked up the walkway of the party house and rang the doorbell.

A smiling, ruddy-faced, older gentleman answered the door and invited me in. This was Lee, the man I had spoken with on the phone, the owner of the house and host of the party. I said I was Lannie but he had already guessed that. He introduced me to two younger fellows who were hanging out in the entryway — Rash, a tallish Mideastern guy, and Mitch, a typical Silicon Valley white guy. After asking Mitch to give me the grand tour, Lee disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

Mitch somewhat tentatively pointed out the comfortable living room and the tiny bathroom, both of which I could see without leaving the entryway. Then he took me down the short hallway and showed me two small bedrooms. They were practically bare of furnishings or decorations except for big mattresses — covered with clean sheets, thank goodness — thrown on the floors. To the right was a small but richly furnished master bedroom that, Mitch told me, was off-limits to party guests. Mitch also mentioned that Lee and April, our host and hostess, didn't participate with the guests except for socializing.

I asked about the hot tub. “It's closed for the winter,” he told me. That seemed odd; weren't hot tubs best when the weather was cold?

In short, the party was clearly not going to live up to my expectations of a classy, upscale affair. The other guests wore casual clothes that had no ambitions of being sexy or fetish-like. The facilities were just a house in the suburb, opened for partying. On the other hand, the clean and comfortable environs were not at all sleazy, except for the televisions playing continuous hard-core porn in the living and dining rooms. I was not impressed, but neither was I disappointed, nor did I feel an urge to bolt. This would serve my purpose just fine — as it would the purposes of the other guests as well, I imagined.

It was already eleven o'clock when I arrived. Apparently this was early by swingers-party standards; besides Mitch and Rash, I saw only two other guests, a man and a woman necking heavily in the living room. I went into the kitchen to greet my hosts and thank them for having me at the party.

Lee and April were a warm, convivial couple. Swinging had been their lifestyle and profession for many years, and they had end-

less enjoyable stories they loved to share. I got the impression they shared the same stories a lot because they repeated several in just the hour I spent with them. Maybe it was due to the booze.

The couple had run a famous swingers hotel in Oakland in the '80s, and then some things in San Francisco before moving down to my neighborhood in Silicon Valley. They had met many celebrities, both in and out of the sex industry, and everyone seemed love them.

As I hung out in the dining room chatting with Lee and April, more guests began to trickle in. They greeted our hosts warmly and with familiarity, obviously a long-standing group of friendly acquaintances. I realized they were not unlike a bridge club or church group, except here people had meaningless sex, too.

Less than a dozen guests attended the party that night. I was one of three women. I got the impression that all the guests were working-class folks, economically somewhat below the rank of Silicon Valley professional. The guys each ponied up a fifty-dollar entrance fee but ladies got in free. Lee and April were not going to get rich on this operation, but I'm sure it provided a nice little supplement to their incomes.

Going into the party, my idea was to find a threesome with a couple. I was exploring my new sexuality and was not sure if I went for guys or girls or both, so I thought this approach would be a risk-free (and frisky!) way to find out. Given the scarcity of women at the party, it didn't look like my fantasy was going to pan out.

Just before midnight, a huge, fat, jolly fellow, Karl, arrived. He glanced at me and did a double take. I could see I had captured his attention. After he greeted me and our hosts, he wandered off; but he kept returning to the kitchen every few minutes. I got up to use the restroom and when I returned, Karl accosted me. "Would you like a foot rub?" he asked.

I loved foot rubs, so this was a very good move on Karl's part. Anything would have worked though; by that time I was ready to get something going. I wasn't particularly attracted to Karl but I didn't know if I would have much to choose from that night and I was on a mission. I gladly retired with him to the living room, which was empty now; the woman I had noticed earlier was in one of the bedrooms with two or three guys. We took possession of one of two couches that were configured in an L shape.

Everything Nice

I felt the heavy couch tip a little when mammoth Karl set his considerable weight down on one end of it. I stretched out over the rest of the cushions and presented my feet to him. He fumbled with my ankle straps and eventually managed to get my shoes off, then proceeded to give me a pretty good foot rub.

After a few minutes a cute young stud entered the living room and plopped down on the other couch. He was thirty-ish, about five feet ten inches, short black hair, clean-faced, lean, and cut. He smiled at me, said his name was Gary, and did I want to play?

“Sure!” I smiled, without hesitation.

“Let’s go in the back,” he suggested.

I gestured at Karl. “I’m getting a foot rub right now,” I pointed out.

“OK,” Gary said. “In a little while, then.”

Gary and I made small talk for a few minutes. Karl seemed shy and rarely chimed in. Besides, I guess I had presented him with a conundrum by agreeing to go into the back with Gary.

I decided this would be a good time to practice my policy of disclosing my transsexuality to prospective sex partners. I felt I owed them the right to decide for themselves whether it made a difference to them.

“Guys,” I announced, “I want you to know something about me before we play. The thing is, I have had a sex change.”

The big fellow’s hands flew off my feet as if my toes had suddenly turned into hissing snakes. The color drained out of his face. “Gug, gug...” he articulated.

“I can understand if you have a problem with it,” I added, soothingly.

“Gug, gug...” Karl repeated.

“You know,” I told him, “you can still rub my feet.”

But it was too much for Karl to bear. “I’m sorry, but I can’t deal with this,” Karl cried. He leaped off the couch and made a beeline toward the entryway. I don’t know if he was headed for the kitchen or the front door, but I never saw him again that night.

I looked inquiringly over at Gary. He cocked his head, and I could almost see the wheels turning inside his noggin. After a moment he looked me in the eye, smiled, and said, “It doesn’t matter to me. Let’s go!”

“God bless you, Gary,” I said, and I honestly don’t know if I said this to myself or out loud. In any case, Gary took my hand and led me back to one of the small, mattress-filled bedrooms.

As soon as we stepped into the room, Gary began unbuttoning his shirt. “Do you have protection?” I asked.

“Uh, no,” he said. “Do you?”

“Just a sec,” I said and went to get the goody bag I had left with my coat in the hall closet. I came prepared. I was sure condoms would be available somewhere at the party, but I was especially concerned about lube because my neovagina did not produce much lubrication for itself.

When I returned to the bedroom, Gary had finished taking off his shirt. I had immodestly unbuttoned my blouse down to the waist. He came over to me and briefly fondled my breasts (more brassiere than breast, to tell the truth) and squeezed my butt. Then he unbuckled his belt and started unbuttoning his jeans. “Would you suck me?” he asked politely. I quickly learned not to expect foreplay at a swingers party.

I pushed Gary’s hands away and finished unbuttoning the jeans. I pulled them and his tighty whiteys down around his ankles. Being somewhat familiar with the drill by now, I dropped to my knees. I was relieved to find a fine looking cock that appeared to be the same size as my second-to-largest dilator. I had been worried I might encounter a monster cock too big to penetrate me. I was also relieved to see he was cut because I find uncircumcised cocks to be a little bit creepy. *I probably just need more experience with them*, I thought. *I’m willing to do the footwork!*

I took Gary’s cock into my mouth and sucked, stroking it all around with my lips while I cupped his balls in my right hand and squeezed firmly. The cock quickly became erect.

Blow jobs were not my favorite thing in the world but I didn’t mind giving them from time to time. I was gratified by my ability to give the guys pleasure and, boy, did they ever enjoy it. I’d been told I gave head very well; but then, the only bad blow job is the one you don’t get — isn’t that how most men feel? The thing I disliked the most about sucking cock was that it always went on for too long. I had a short attention span and, more importantly, I just hated having the attention focused somewhere other than on *me, me, me!* In

Everything Nice

any case, Gary surprised and pleased me by pulling back after a few minutes and asking, “May I go down on you?”

“Sure!” I said, after letting his cock pop out of my mouth.

Gary laid me back on the mattress and I assumed the position I knew so well from my dilating ritual: knees up and legs spread. He pushed my skirt up over my hips and slipped off my red satin panties. He took a moment to enjoy the view and I could tell he liked what he saw. (Up until that point, he may have had some uncertainty about what a transsexual woman’s pussy might look like. Mine looked perfectly normal.) I was glad I had lasered and shaved my pubic bush down to a Brazilian, just a small landing strip of hair at the crest of the vulva, and I thought I looked pretty good! Then he dived in.

Gary’s tongue licked around my vulva and prodded at the mouth of my vagina. He massaged my clitoris with his right thumb and forefinger while his left hand reached up under my bra to fondle my small right breast. He was pretty good, but not nearly as good as a certain trans woman friend of mine who had introduced my vagina to this particular pleasure some months before. He accommodated my request to take it easy on my clit, which was pretty sensitive.

While Gary masticated my muff, I glanced around and noticed two naked men in the room watching us get it on. They stood at a respectful distance of a couple feet away, one on either side of us, each slowly and steadily stroking his cock. Gary and I could have shut the door if we wanted privacy, but I didn’t mind. My exhibitionist streak was still intact.

Gene, the guy on my left, was clean-shaven and looked like he was probably an engineer. He was fairly tall and solidly built with a huge cock. It must have been ten inches long and six inches in girth (two inches thick, for those of you who are too hot and bothered to do the trig). My largest stent was only an inch and a half in diameter, so there was no way Gene was going to get a shot at penetrating me. The guy on my right, Ron, was a scraggly-bearded, pot-bellied, skinny hippy. His unit was Gary-sized, so he had a chance with me.

After a little bit of cunnilingus, Gary asked if I would like him to penetrate me. “Sure!” I replied — my mantra for the night. He reached for a condom, opened the foil packet, and graciously proceeded to put it on himself rather than asking me to do it. I grabbed the lube tube, squeezed a generous dollop of the slippery gel onto the

palm of my hand, and massaged Gary with it, getting his tool nice and slick, and nice and hard.

I lay back on the mattress, surreptitiously applying some lube to my vaginal lips in the process. Gary leaned over me with a smile. With my right hand, I helped guide his cock toward my vaginal opening. When I felt the tip press into just the right place, I let go and let Gary's able groin muscles take over. He pushed gently into me.

Gary began pumping slowly in and out. Frankly, I wasn't quite sure he was actually in, because I couldn't feel anything inside. It certainly didn't feel like the hard plastic of my dilators, or the hard rubber of my vibrator. I felt his cock with the fingers of my right hand and, sure enough, it was going in all right. *So I guess this is what it feels like*, I thought. It occurred to me that perhaps one or two of those earlier test penises had, in fact, penetrated me, and I simply hadn't realized it.

As Gary picked up the pace of his pumping, I participated by thrusting my hips up to meet him. We got into a pretty good rhythm together, although we had to stop every so often to resynchronize. I breathed heavily and noisily, letting little squeaks of pleasure escape my throat. Partly I was faking it to entertain Gary and our audience, which at times grew to be four or five strong, but mostly I was just doing my best to get into the spirit of the moment. I was trying to get myself aroused.

After a while, Gary suggested we try doggie-style, so I turned over. It didn't work very well because I'm so tall. So we switched to female dominant position, which was one of my personal favorites, but that didn't work very well either because Gary was bottoming out in my vagina. His shaft was about six inches long and my depth was only four inches, having experienced some shrinkage since surgery, despite my faithful dilating. So I couldn't sit down all the way on him. Besides, he was starting to soften up a bit. We finally found a spoon position — on our sides, my back to his front — that worked great. After a little while, we tired out and decided to take a break.

So how was it for me? I enjoyed myself, no doubt about that. Mostly I enjoyed the attention and being in the spotlight. I guess I suffered from low self-esteem; most of my life I'd felt like a bit player in everyone else's dramas. But tonight I was the star! Or at least the co-star. I also enjoyed the physical involvement and the physi-

Everything Nice

cal sensations, at least for a while. But it wasn't too long before the rubbing started to feel irritating, and even somewhat painful. More lube helped but only to a point. Unfortunately, I didn't feel anything orgasmic or any sort of erotic sensations, and I didn't feel much of anything inside my vagina. My vaginal lips and labia were sensitive, and my clitoris even more so, but that quickly turned more irritating than sensual.

We relaxed and made small talk for a little while, Gary, Gene, Ron, and me. Gene and Ron stopped stroking while we talked. I chastely pushed my little skirt back down over my hips.

After a while, Gary asked if we could go again. You know what I said, don't you? "Sure!"

We got a fresh condom onto Gary. I did the honors this time; I was starting to feel a bit of affection for my Lothario because he had been so considerate with me all evening. We did more of the same things we had done before, but for a shorter time. Gary never did cum, but he certainly seemed to enjoy himself. I felt good about that.

Eventually we took another rest break and, after a bit, Gary left the bedroom. I continued to chat idly with naked Gene and Ron, who told me some of the history of this swingers party. They had both been coming here, on and off, for years. They were particularly excited to talk about one woman who had attended the party regularly for a period of time; she simply adored sucking cock. She would suck all comers for hours and hours. What a gal!

Gene and Ron started getting excited and Gene suggested maybe I would like to suck his cock. I said, "OK," (which was somewhat less enthusiastic than "Sure!") and he shuffled over to me on his knees. I was still lying back on the mattress, so I propped myself up and took his giant cock into my mouth. It was a mouthful. Ron also scooted forward on the other side of me and looked plaintive. I reached out and took his cock in my right hand, which perked up his spirits immediately.

For a period of time, I really don't know how long, I alternated between sucking Gene's cock and Ron's, while rubbing the one that wasn't in my mouth. I felt pretty good about this interaction because they were getting a lot of pleasure and I was fulfilling my porn star fantasies. Eventually, my energy and my will to suck ran out, and we took a break.

Gary reappeared in the room, and some other guys, too. Lee, the host, popped in for a few minutes. We chatted about various things. Gary mentioned he had noticed he was bottoming out in me and asked if that was normal. I told him my vagina was somewhat shallow and that most trans women were probably deeper than me. He reassured me it wasn't a problem; it didn't prevent him from having a great fuck. He was just curious. I appreciated his comments.

I happened to notice, for the first time, that Gary's upper torso and arms were covered with major tattoos. His shirt had hidden them when we started and I guess my mind was on other things once his shirt came off. I said, "Wow, Gary, those are some major tatts!" or some similarly witty comment, prompting him to ask, "Don't you like tattoos?"

"My policy is never to have sex with anybody who has tattoos!" I teased. Gary chuckled. I thought for a moment and then added, "I think my new policy is *only* to have sex with people with tattoos!" He laughed with appreciation at my flattering remark.

Before too long, people started drifting out of the room until only Ron, the hippy, was left with me. We talked some more and I came to like him as a person. He told me he'd had a girlfriend for a few years, someone he had met at this very swingers party. I found that pretty interesting and wondered if he might be hinting at something, like he was thinking I might become his new girlfriend.

I mentioned to Ron that Gene's cock was certainly big, too big to fuck me. Ron told me I should be careful about having sex with Gene because he rubs some kind of cream into his cock before the parties. The cream makes him stay erect for a very long time. "He'll rub you raw," Ron said. Live and learn, huh?

Somehow the time had gotten to be half past two in the morning. Ron and I seemed to be the only guests remaining. Our hosts had gone to bed. Apparently Ron had lock-up privileges. I was thinking it was probably time for me to go when Ron whispered, "I'd like to have sex with you, if you're up for it."

"Sure," I whispered back.

Ron was very gentle and kind, but our intimacy was still just fucking, not making love. Ron wasn't very hard at that point so it didn't last long. But it was satisfying in its own way, for both of us, I thought.

Everything Nice

As he walked me to my car, Ron asked if I thought I would come back to the party some time. I told him I would, thinking I would do it before Christmas. My Santa's Little Helper outfit would be just the thing for holiday fun! But I never went back. My mission was accomplished, and it was a success. I learned, however, that sex outside of a loving relationship was just not a turn-on for me. I might not have sex again for a long time, waiting for that loving relationship, but that was OK. Because you know what? It wasn't about the sex, not for me.

Climbing Out of the Pit

I was no longer a virgin as a female, but that fact did not cure my depression. I experienced the most miserable holidays I ever had, without even a bottle or a line to cheer me up. Not even a good cup of coffee, because I had given up caffeine as well. *Perhaps*, I thought, *I am suffering from seasonal affective disorder.*

January showed up on the calendar and I was still depressed. I had to do something. Eventually, I asked for help. I went back to my therapist, Cynthia, and described my plight. “What else can I do?” I cried. “I’ve already changed my sex, for God’s sake. What else do I need to change?”

Cynthia had two suggestions for me. The first was to try taking antidepressant medication. The second was to go to a meeting of an alcohol recovery group.

“Recovery?” I exclaimed. “But I haven’t had a drink in two years!”

Everything Nice

“Lots of smart, strong women attend recovery meetings,” Cynthia patiently explained. “Why don’t you just try going to a women’s meeting, and see how you get on with them?”

I took both of Cynthia’s suggestions, and they set me onto the road to the recovery of my spirit. The antidepressants pulled me out of the worst depths of my depression, and I met wonderful, loving, supportive women in the recovery program. I learned that recovery was not just about not drinking; it was also about learning how to live a sober life. That was exactly what I needed to learn. I worked the program hard for a couple of years, and I gradually rebuilt my life.

Being unemployed was fun while it lasted, but I needed to get back to work to build my sense of self-worth and keep from draining my life savings. I knew I didn’t want to go back to engineering. It had long since ceased to be fun for me, and I discovered I couldn’t do the job effectively once I began going to work as a woman. For some mysterious reason, when I was a woman, my opinions were not needed and I wasn’t given responsibility for anything. I actually rather enjoyed the relief from the pressure to deliver results, but I soon realized I really couldn’t do the job anymore unless I was willing to fight for respect.

I initially resolved to do something far removed from engineering. I hoped to find an occupation that would allow me to interact more directly with people. The problem was, I couldn’t think of anything I wanted to do that met that criteria. Finally, I made a plan to go into nursing. It was a half-hearted plan at best: I would get the minimum possible nursing credential — Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) — start working, and see if I liked it.

I located the appropriate classes at a local two-year college, but they were all full. For three semesters I tried to get into the classes, but couldn’t. Meanwhile, I took the first aid and CPR classes, and researched more about what CNAs and nurses do — and what they are paid to do it, which is not much. I came to realize I was not cut out to be a nurse.

I formulated a new plan. I decided to go into technical writing. I had always enjoyed the writing part of my engineering job, and people often told me my engineering documentation was the best they’d ever seen. I’d even toyed with the idea of switching from engineering to technical writing before, but I was unwilling to endure

the loss of status and salary it would entail. However, pride goeth before the fall, and a technical writing career looked pretty good to me now. The pay would be a lot less than I earned in engineering, but it was still a lot better than I could earn as a CNA — or a manager at Kinkos, which I also briefly considered.

I figured my 25 years of engineering experience more than qualified me to write data books and the like, so I began applying for technical writing positions. I got nowhere — not even an interview. On the advice of a dear friend, who also happened to be a technical writer, I decided to go to school to earn a certificate from a technical writing program. I thought it was funny. Here I had an engineering degree from U.C. Berkeley and an M.B.A. from Santa Clara University, but I needed to go to community college to become employable.

As I set my new plan in motion, I decided it would actually be fun to be a college student again. More fun than the last time, in fact, because this time I got to be a co-ed, albeit a 49-year-old one.

It was fun. I was surprised at how tough the courses were at De Anza College, but I was impressed with how much I learned in the three quarters of classes I attended.

When I received my certificate, I packed up my new portfolio of writing samples and began applying for positions once again. Things looked pretty grim. I wasn't even sure if I should be applying for intern jobs as a new college graduate, or as a senior writer, based on my years of engineering experience. I almost landed an intern position which would have had me working at slave wages for half a year, but the offer went to another candidate. My prospects seemed bleak for a couple of months, but I used the tools I had been given in my recovery program to keep my spirits up and believe that my Higher Power had a wonderful job in store for me.

Higher Power came through, but she didn't make it easy. All of a sudden, I found myself in contention for three jobs that all looked quite good. One was a short commute from home, the work was in a technical area in which I was an expert, and it was a marvelous, go-go, industry-leading company with great growth prospects. It seemed that the salary offer would be really good, too. Another prospect was a slightly longer commute and in a technical area that was so simple for me, the work promised to be "mind-numbingly

Everything Nice

boring” — in the words of my potential supervisor! It was a solid company that offered security and probably a pretty good salary.

The third opportunity was with a small technical marketing firm in Redwood City, a scary 45-minute commute from my home. The work was also scary, because my background was so technical, and this writing would be more of a marketing kind. Me, a marketeer? But I found the opportunity attractive because it would move me further away from engineering, which no longer interested me, and which was too male-dominated for my new tastes. In fact, the technical marketing firm was owned and run by a woman named Peggy. She was stylish, blonde-haired, roundish dynamo. I liked the idea of having a woman boss, and being part of a female-owned business. And I liked Peggy, who, being a few years older than me, reminded me of the Aunt Peggy I had known briefly when I was a tyke.

The way it fell out was like this. The mind-numbingly boring opportunity was the first to make me a formal job offer. The salary and benefits package were much better than I had thought possible. The annual salary would be \$75,000, not too shabby, even if it was a lot less than the more than \$100,000 I had earned as an engineer.

I contacted my other two prospects and let them know that I had an offer in my pocket, and they had better move quickly if they wanted me. I was inclined to accept an offer from the go-go high-tech company with the short commute, if they extended one. However, the manager there said she couldn't move that fast and wished me good luck. I wondered if it had anything to do with the fact that I had explained about my sex change to their HR guy; but I'll never know the answer to that.

Peggy, at the technical marketing firm, asked me to come in for another meeting right away. In short order, I had an offer in my pocket from The LPS Group, Peggy's company. It was for \$10,000 less than my other offer. Thus my Higher Power presented me with this dilemma: Should I take the sure-thing job with the high salary and the short commute, but with mind-numbingly dull work? Or the frighteningly unfamiliar job with the long commute and low salary?

I took the risk. I'd learned that nothing changes in my life unless I make changes, and I sorely wanted to change the course my life was on. It would have been all too easy to drift back into the familiar

life that had left me miserable before. I would just be a female version of my former, miserable self. I accepted Peggy's offer.

It was touch-and-go for me for the first couple of months. Everything I wrote seemed to be all wrong. The second week I was there, Peggy fired another writer, and that put the fear of God into me. I really didn't know whether I was capable of doing the work.

One day I dropped a draft of something off at Peggy's desk. "You know," I said to her, "I'm absolutely terrified to write anything."

Peggy looked puzzled. "Why is that?" she asked.

"It seems like everything I write is wrong. You ask me to change everything."

"No, no!" she exclaimed, concerned. "Don't feel that way! That's just the way the writing process works. That's what editors are for. You're doing really well. I can tell that you're going to have this down in no time."

Hearing that made me feel a lot better. And Peggy made a point of giving me a lot of positive feedback after that conversation. As time went on, I also got to review the work of our other writers, especially our contract writers, and I could see that I was delivering very good work by comparison. My professional self-confidence returned and I settled in comfortably at LPS.

Peggy turned out to be a darling woman, smart and sharp as a tack, a demanding but caring boss. Her people, all ten or so of us, loved her and would go to the mat for her. Peggy had a husband but no children, and when Christmas arrived she treated us like family, throwing a big all-day party, and showering us with expensive presents and cash bonuses. No wonder we loved her so much!

I settled into my new career and my self-respect and feeling of being useful were restored. I bought an iPod shuffle to turn the long commute into a daily pleasure cruise, and I began getting up a 5 a.m. to beat the traffic. Things were going pretty well during my days, but my nights and weekends were still too empty. There didn't seem to be any men who were interested in dating me. How would I ever cure my loneliness?

* * *

"I've got a big favor to ask," Dish warned me. Or I should say Dennis, since he wasn't in drag. We were in an Italian restaurant in Milpitas having lunch together.

Everything Nice

I did *not* respond, “Anything you need, you’ve got it.” We were friends, but we weren’t that close. Instead, I said, “OK. What is it?”

“Can I stay at your place for a bit while I look for a house to buy?”

“Ohhh. That is a big favor. I’ll need to think about that.” After my experience with Princess, I was once-bitten-twice-shy about taking in a houseguest.

“I understand. Let me know what you decide.”

Dennis had retired from the post office a couple of years earlier. He pursued his dream, which was moving to the peace and quiet of Taylorsville, about four hours northwest of Lake Tahoe, and smack dab in the middle of absolutely nowhere. He got his wish: a beautiful house on several acres of land, including his own babbling brook. He had the peace, quiet and solitude he craved.

It nearly drove him nuts. He missed his friends in Santa Cruz, and the occasional commute from Taylorsville to see them was wearying. He had decided to move back to the Bay Area, probably into the hills just north of Santa Cruz. The problem was, where would he stay while he looked for his new house?

I was surprised and flattered that he asked me. Was I his closest friend? Perhaps just the closest friend who had a spare bedroom. In any case, he obviously felt closer to me than I had realized.

Within a few minutes, I made up my mind.

“Sure, you can stay with me, Dennis. Stay as long as you like,” I told him.

“Oh! I thought you were going to think it over for like a few days.”

“I thought it over, and why not? You’ll be a great roommate.”

And a great roommate he was. He cooked, he cleaned. He bought me a fresh bagel every morning. We went out to dinner two or three times a week, and he always paid. “Listen, it’s still a lot cheaper for me than staying in a hotel,” he’d say. Every evening we watched *The Daily Show* together and ate frozen yogurt with fresh strawberries on top. We became really close friends — even I felt it.

It took three months for Dennis to find the perfect house and move in. He had made money on the sale of the house in Santa Cruz, as well as the house in Taylorsville, so he was in good shape to afford a home in the pricey Bay Area real estate market. He was so

grateful for staying at my house, that he bought me a wide-screen plasma television as a parting gift. Now that's a houseguest!

As I confronted the idea of living without Dennis, I thought about how much I would miss him. I realized that living alone had been driving me crazy, always coming home to an empty house, and being in my own head too much. I decided I'd better get myself another roommate. Besides, she or he could help out with the rent. I was barely covering expenses at my current salary.

A ready-made roommate was waiting in the wings for me. I had been attending a Unity church for the past year, and I'd met a nice guy named Tony. He was in his mid-forties, single, and cute. Therefore, of course he was gay. He'd been laid off his job in the dot-com bust of 2001, and lost everything. The sagging economy made it difficult to find work, and he had health problems as well. Things were so bad, he was living a recreational vehicle in the driveway of one of the other church members, with no electricity. To make matters worse, winter was coming.

I decided to be a good Samaritan and invite Tony to live in my spare bedroom. I wasn't signing up for a lot; Tony's health had been good for a while, and he had found a job that he would be starting soon. I figured I would be getting rent out of him in two or three months, or else he would move into his own apartment. Best of all, his current landlord told me Tony was a great cook.

The day Dennis moved out, I called Tony's cell phone. "This is Lannie," I said. "How would you like to come and live in my spare bedroom?"

"What?" Tony cried. "I can't believe it. You would let me do that?"

"Yes. I'd love it if you would. It will help me too, because it's too lonely around here if I don't have a roommate."

"Ummm ... do you understand that I'm broke?"

"Yes. Of course. I'm not asking for rent."

"I mean, I'm really broke. Sometimes I can't even afford food."

"That's OK. We'll work it out."

"You are so generous. I can't believe it! When can I move in?"

"Right away. This afternoon if you like."

"I'd like that. I don't have anything to move, so it's easy."

"Great. I'll see you when you get here."

Everything Nice

It was as easy as that. Dennis out; Tony in.

Tony was a pretty good roommate, but he was no Dennis. He was, in fact, a fabulous cook. The problem was that he never cooked. He preferred to eat fast food, which I avoided. He drank gallons of Coca-Cola, which I avoided. We also ate on different schedules, so we rarely shared meals together, and I still found myself eating alone. Bummer. That was the thing that made me feel most lonely.

He was neat enough that I didn't have a problem, but he rarely cleaned. Even more rarely than me, and I wasn't very good with the vacuuming and mopping. He didn't take out the trash very often.

The spare bedroom gradually became imprinted with Tony's personality and taste. One by one, the things I had in the room would appear outside his door, as his own stuff took their place. Tony loved everything Asian (especially young Asian men), and the soon the bedroom looked like a Chinese whorehouse — strings of Chinese lanterns with red bulbs, an oversized bamboo and paper fan on one wall, a picture of Buddha over the head of the bed, and Asian bric-a-brac on every horizontal surface. With my permission, the loft outside his room became his gym and began to fill up with exercise equipment — free weights, a used Bowflex machine, and a cross-country ski machine. I never saw him work out, but perhaps he preferred to exercise when I was out of the house.

I found myself feeling resentful that Tony was buying so much stuff for himself, yet not offering to pay any rent or utilities for the house. But I told myself, it wasn't really very much money he was spending, and he probably needed some things to help himself feel like he had a life again.

Fortunately, our television viewing tastes had a reasonable overlap, so we watched *The Daily Show* together (without strawberries and yogurt) and could usually find a movie that interested us both. However, he could sit and watch the History Channel or the Nature Channel for hours, and their trivia didn't appeal to me.

One benefit of living with Tony was that I got an intimate view of gay culture. I'd known a lot of gay men, of course, since I hung out in gay bars a lot during my party year, but I'd never had any close gay friends. Tony was the first. I warned him that he represented every gay man in the world to me, and he assured me that every gay man in the world was just like him. He had a sense of humor, thank goodness.

What I noticed was that he had a lot of sex. Whenever he cared to, he would head out to the gay bars and have sex with one or more guys. And he cared to three or four times a week. “I got laid five times this weekend,” he once told me, “and it’s only Sunday afternoon — I may not be done yet.”

“I’ve been pretty active, too,” I joked in response. “I got laid a year ago.” The king of the dry spells had become the queen of the dry spells. For Tony, a dry spell was a few days without sex.

And yet, it wasn’t just about sex for Tony. In fact, when he had a lot of sex, he told me it was because he didn’t have a lover, and the sex was a poor substitute. He craved a boyfriend the same way a heterosexual woman does, and when he found one, he loved him the same way as well. He also looked at men the same way a heterosexual man looks at women — with lust, to say the least. The difference is, he would usually have sex with the men he lusted after. Heterosexual men dream of having the kind of score rate Tony had.

Tony did start his new job a week after he moved in. It was doing some computer work for the Kaiser health system, and he hated it. He was a salesman by trade, and he really wanted to find sales work. Later he actually did transfer into a sales position at Kaiser.

Unfortunately, Tony’s health went bad again soon after he started working. He had all manner of strange symptoms, and the Kaiser doctors were baffled. They tried really hard to prove it was HIV/AIDS, but Tony was clean on every HIV test they threw at him. After that, there was a different diagnosis every month, and they always turned out to be wrong.

As a consequence, Tony would work a few weeks, and then be out for four or five weeks, over and over. After about nine months of this, his blood pressure, along with his heart rate, skyrocketed. It stayed up for weeks and weeks. They put him on all manner of meds, but they couldn’t fix it. Tony was unable to work for weeks, which stretched into months. Having a sick and possibly dying roommate was not very cheerful for me, and it looked like I might never get any rent. However, I was grateful I was not him, and I was glad that I was able to help him out.

An irony occurred to me. I’d always been incredulous when I heard of women who let chronically unemployed boyfriends free-load off them. Now here I was in exactly the same position, with a man freeloading off me — and I wasn’t even getting laid.

* * *

“Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in!” Michael Corleone wailed in *Godfather III*. That’s what happened to me, too. Just when I began to get my life together after recovering from my surgery, I found myself reluctantly becoming more and more pulled back into the transgender community.

Several forces were pulling me back in. For one thing, I was writing those books, *How To Change Your Sex* and *Dirty Panties*. The transgender community was the primary market for them, especially the first one, so I needed to be plugged into the community to promote them. Besides, if I was going to pass myself off as an expert on transsexuality and transgenderism, I needed my contacts in the community for primary research — I needed to talk to a lot of transgender people.

But I wasn’t doing the books to make money. That would have been a foolish ambition. I was doing the books because I felt I had something of value I could give back to the community that had nurtured me through my transition. I was grateful for the opportunity to pay it forward.

In addition to the books, I also joined the Santa Cruz Triangle Speakers bureau, an organization that sent panels of LGBT people out to schools, businesses, and government agencies to tell our stories, in order to promote understanding and tolerance — or better yet, acceptance — of our people.

Another activity I took up was to run workshops at the annual California Dreaming transgender conference held in San Jose, under the auspices of Carla Blair and my friends Laura and Pammie. The first year, I took as my topic, “How I Changed My Body.” The next year, recalling my disappointment at the “Trans-Trans Intimacy and Sex” session at my first Southern Comfort Conference, I decided to make up for the lack of sex talk by discussing “Sex, Parts 1 and 2: Exploring Your Sexual Boundaries Before and After SRS.” That year, I was delighted have the chance to meet and hang out with Lola Cola, the woman from the Southern Comfort documentary film. She was a lovely person.

However, the strongest force pulling me back into the transgender community was simply friendship. For all that I was successful in my new job, and no matter how earnestly I undertook dating, I was maddeningly unable to make friends in the normie world. In

a very real way, it snapped me back psychologically to my “before” time, when I was so alone and friendless. Other than the fact that I was now sober and female, it seemed as if nothing had changed at all.

For a while, I pointedly avoided the transgender community and tried to form relationships only in the real world; but the best I could manage were some short-lived friendships with people in my recovery program.

Finally, one day I kicked myself. *I'm being an idiot avoiding transgender friends!* I exclaimed. Why was I doing that? I liked and respected a lot of transgender people, and obviously we had a lot in common. Did I think it made me a better person if I avoided them? Did it prove anything if I could or could not make friends in the normie world? Did it make me any less worthwhile as a woman, or as a person? *No*, I realized, *it did not!* From that point on, I began to cultivate rather than avoid friends in the transgender community. True, some post-operative transsexual women might have accused me of being “stuck in the transgender ghetto,” but I didn’t care. They were wrong! That was self-loathing thinking, I decided; and I would have none of that! So I proceeded to welcome transgender friends and community into my life.

* * *

If you went down to an old section of San Jose, on Race Street a few blocks north of Steven’s Creek Boulevard, you may have noticed a banner on the side of drab stucco building. The banner simply said, “Carla’s.” A sign on the front of the building read “Odd Fellows,” but that was because the building’s second floor housed an Odd Fellows hall — not because of any odd fellows you might have noticed hanging around the premises.

Inside the building, on the first floor, you’d have found Carla Blair, the godmother of most of the transgender girls in the South Bay. Her shop was a beauty salon and boutique, but mostly it was a social gathering spot for friendly trans people, both experienced old-timers and scared newbies. Many a girl had her first ever make-over done by Carla.

The walls of a couple of Carla’s side-rooms and the main social room were lined with tall wooden lockers. Cross-dressers rented the lockers on a monthly basis, to keep their feminine wardrobe out of

Everything Nice

their families' way — families that often did not know about the cross-dresser's secret passion.

I first became aware of Carla's back in my cross-dressing days, when her shop was in another location off Bascom Avenue. I saw a small ad she ran in the Sunday newspaper. I tried to talk myself into going there, but I never had the courage.

Years later, Carla had a Web site that I stumbled across. It provided a lot more information about the shop, but I still did not pay her a visit. By that time, I was running around partying with Jamie Faye Fenton, and from what I could tell, Carla's sounded like a place where a bunch of old biddies sat around drinking tea. It just didn't seem like my kind of scene.

However, soon Jamie Faye told me that Carla was hosting a dinner at The Cats restaurant in Los Gatos on Saturday evening. Carla held these dinners once a month as an opportunity for girls to socialize together in a safe space out in the real world. Jamie suggested that we could join them for dinner, and then go dancing afterward. It sounded like a good plan to me.

The Cats restaurant was located in a fascinating old building just off highway 880, near where it became highway 17 and began its twisting journey over the mountains to Santa Cruz. The funky old Cats building dated back to the Gold Rush days, when it was a stagecoach stop on the trip to San Francisco. The entrance to the tiny parking area in front of the building was guarded by two huge cats named Leo and Leona. It was unclear whether the restaurant owed its own name to cat statues, or simply to the fact that it was located in Los Gatos, Spanish for "The Cats."

Jamie and I got to the The Cats and found a group of fifteen women seated around wooden tables in the back of the bar area, near the bandstand. Jamie, as usual, immediately began greeting everyone by name. She knew *everyone* in the transgender community, or so it seemed.

"Jamie, who you have you got there?" called out a pretty, petite blonde woman. It was Carla Blair.

"Hi Carla!" Jamie called back. "This is Lannie. Lannie, say hi to Carla."

"Hi Carla!" I dutifully responded.

"Lannie," Carla said, capturing my name into her mental files. "You're very pretty. Where are you from?"

“Right here in San Jose.”

“Oh. Come sit down and meet the girls.”

Carla quickly introduced me around the tables. Most of the women were older and quite obviously cross-dressers. Some were very pretty, and a few appeared to be cisgender women. Probably spouses of cross-dressers, I guessed.

I forgot the names of most of the girls right away, but a few stuck with me. Faye, a willowy redhead with a sweet smile, was with a Sidney, a short but handsome guy. I didn't know what to make of them at first, but as the evening passed, I figured out that they were a married couple, and Faye was a trans woman, Sidney a trans man. Another attractive blonde woman named Jackie spoke sincerely in a soft, intense voice. My attention was also attracted by a dignified, statuesque lady who was introduced to me as Lea — Rosalea. She had the most beautiful, long silver hair tied in a knot on top of her head and trailing down her back in a ponytail. When she stood, I saw that she had a stunning hourglass figure: large bosom, thin waist, and ample hips. She wore a rippling, floor-length skirt in a deep purple color, a purple and white cotton top, and sparkling purple jewelry. Throughout the evening, she was very quiet, sitting back and observing the goings-on. I wondered if she might be a college professor who was studying transgender culture.

I began to spend more and more time with Carla and her girls. It turned out that, for the most part, they *were* a bunch of old biddies who sat around drinking tea — or cola — but that was exactly what I needed as my partying days wound down.

I grew to love Carla, who, for reasons I cannot fathom, took an instant liking to me and treated me like family. I was in awe of the time and energy she put into helping the transgender community and our individual girls and guys. When I whined to Carla that men didn't want to date me because I'm trans, she said, “Me too, you know. Guys don't want to date me when they find out I work with trans people.” So she was truly one of us, even if she was happy with her born gender.

Over the next year, I ran into Faye and Sidney, Jackie, and quiet Lea from time to time at Cats dinners, at Carla's shop (where I began going for two hours of electrolysis every week under Marilyn Dahl's skilled needle), and at other trans events. I got to know Faye, Sidney, and Jackie, but lovely Lea remained an enigma.

Everything Nice

In January, almost a year after my surgery, I was at another one of Carla's monthly Cats dinners. This time, we had the private banquet room upstairs for our large group of 25 girls. After dinner, chatter about the upcoming TGSF Cotillion was fluttering around the table. "Are you going?" "I'm going! Are you?" everyone was chirping.

Personally, I wasn't planning to go. In fact, I was starting to pull back from the trans community at this time. After all, I was a "normal" woman now; I didn't need to hang around with cross-dressers and pre-ops!

"Are you going, Lannie?" someone asked me point-blank.

"No, I'm afraid not."

"Why not? You've got to go!"

"I really can't afford it. I'm unemployed, you know." I thought that would be an unassailable excuse, without hurting anyone's feelings.

"I'll pay for your ticket," a voice piped up from the head of the table. It was Lea, my silver-haired professor.

"Oh, I couldn't let you do that!"

"Sure you could. Why not? Please let me; I would consider it an honor. You do so much for the community."

I wasn't sure what it was I did for the community, other than sharing my charming self, but how could I refuse such a kind offer?

"OK, I guess. Thank you, Lea! So yes, I'm going to Cotillion."

Lea's gift was even more generous than it appeared, because she herself was unable to attend the event. She had another engagement planned — her sex change surgery. She was going to the same surgeon who had done my procedure. One of the reasons she felt grateful to me was that I had blazed the Dr. Cholon path, as she was not well-known at the time.

I became friendlier with Lea after that, but she was still a quiet enigma. As it turned out, she was not obviously not cisgender, and not a college professor, although she was an employee of Stanford University. She was a network architect running the computer networks on campus. In fact, she'd been at Stanford for 30 years, in various technical capacities.

I visited Lea at the Recovery Inn as she recuperated from her sex change surgery. She recovered much more quickly than I had, God bless her. As I returned to my car after my visit, I saw a plump-

ish, older woman emerging from Lea's SUV. I figured that she must be Lea's wife, so I introduced myself.

"Hi! I'm Lannie. I'm Lea's friend. You must be Helen?"

"Hi," Helen said brusquely, and walked on past me. *Not very friendly*, I thought. *She probably has issues with Lea's transition, poor thing.*

A year later, my therapist Cynthia started a therapy group for post-operative trans women. Apparently I wasn't the only one who was having difficulties adjusting to life afterwards. At our first meeting, we had five post-op girls plus Cynthia. One of the girls was Lea.

At group, we shared our stories and our current difficulties and successes. It was a safe environment where we could freely discuss things that only post-operative transsexual women could truly understand. I found it very helpful, and the other girls seemed to as well. I dubbed it the Post-Toasties group, since we all seemed to be getting burned by life one way or another. But later I decided to put a more positive spin on it, and rechristened it Poster Girls.

At one of our early sessions, the subject of our vaginas come up. I hazarded that we ought to get together and compare vaginas sometime. I was half-joking, but half serious, because I was curious about how my neo vagina might be similar to or different from others.

Much to my surprise, Lea smiled and said, "I'd be happy to. When do you want to do it?"

I laughed. She had called my bluff. "One of these days," I said, noncommittally.

A few weeks later, I was at a fashion show at Carla's. Ann Grogan was showing off the gorgeous corsets from her business Romantasy, using trans girls for models. Among the models was Lea, whose stunning figure was due in part to a Romantasy corset. The highlight of the show was when Faye appeared in a fabulous white wedding dress and renewed her marriage vows with a handsome, tuxedo-clad Sidney.

As the show broke up, I asked Lea if she'd like to grab a bite to eat with me. We went to the California Kitchen at the Westfield Valley Fair shopping mall. Our dinner conversation was warm and friendly. As we walked to our cars afterwards, I said, "Would you like to go to my house and compare vaginas now?"

"Yes, I would," she replied, and that's just what we did.

The idea that more than just a clinical inspection might develop did cross my mind, I confess. For that reason, I brought Lea upstairs to my comfy king-size bed for the unveiling. I was surprised to see that her vagina looked quite different from mine, even though they both had been created by the same surgeon.

“You can touch it,” I invited Lea, as she examined my vagina. “Oh! That feels kind of nice. You can put your finger inside if you want.”

It turned out that thorough inspections of the two vaginas required use of fingers, tongues and even a Hitachi Magic Wand vibrator. By the time we were done, a couple of hours later, we agreed that we had just participated in lesbian sex. And it was nice.

After that, Lea and I became the best of friends — friends with benefits, of course. I liked Lea a lot, and she fell quite in love with me. Unfortunately, she was still married to Helen, so I was not willing to make an emotional commitment to the relationship. In fact, I wasn't really sure I wanted to, because I still thought I wanted a boyfriend, not a girlfriend. However, I most certainly did want a friend. My best friend Jamie Faye Fenton and I had grown distant since I became post-op and she had moved to San Francisco, and I had a friendship void in my life. Lea became my friend and lifeline.

Lea didn't have much time for me because of the demands of her job and her demanding Helen. (Helen had a boyfriend of her own, but she still demanded a lot of Lea's time and attention, which Lea seemed more and more reluctant to grant her.) Lea was, however, always available when I really needed her.

Eventually, Lea carved out some regular time for me and we fell into a routine. Every Wednesday evening we would meet for dinner, which was convenient because her home and job in Palo Alto were halfway between my job in Redwood City and my home in San Jose. And every Saturday morning, I would sleep in late. At 8 or 9 a.m., I would hear the front door of my house being unlocked; then the door of my bedroom would creak open; then there would be a rustling of clothes and a naked Lea would appear in bed beside me.

Friends with benefits: and Saturday mornings were when the benefits kicked in. However, the benefits were just cuddling, because neither one of us were at all orgasmic.

Nevertheless, even though I loved Lea dearly and enjoyed our cuddling, I was still determined to see if I could have a conventional heterosexual love-life with a “normie” man.

Dating

Hello, Dali!

It was our third date and, if you're like me, you know what that meant. The third date was when I would tell the guy about my sex change. I could expect one of two reactions to my revelation, more or less. The guy might say something like, "Wow, that's amazing. You look terrific. You're so brave to have done that. I wish you all the happiness in the world. However, I've suddenly lost interest in you. Buh-bye!"

On the other hand, the guy might say, "So what? That's in the past. I love you for the person you are right now. What shall we talk about next?" Those were the two possibilities — except, the latter reaction never happened. At least, not that I've heard of. But Rick was great. Maybe he would be the exception.

I had met Rick through a personal ad I placed on a free Internet dating service — not urnotalone, but a regular service for

straight people. It was just after I finished earning my technical writing certificate and before I found my job.

Rick had picked up on an answer I wrote to the canned question, "In my bedroom, you'll find ..." I said, "Teddy bears." Rick wrote to tell me, "I have a teddy in my bedroom too!" (I was surprised no one responded to the other part of my answer, which was, "A bookcase full of fetish shoes.")

I wrote back to Rick, "Your bear sounds very nice. I should like to meet him some day."

Rick replied, "You can see a picture of my bear on my Web site, and even read a story about him." He supplied an URL.

I commented to one of my girlfriends, "What a ditz! Does he think I'm really interested in his teddy bear?"

As it turned out, Rick wasn't being a ditz at all. He was just being subtle. On his Web site I found dozens of beautiful sonnets which simply made me swoon. I was mad for sonnets! They were quite good, too, and I told him so. We bantered a bit about sonnets, but our correspondence petered out. I thought, *Here's another guy who is too shy to actually ask me out on a date*, and I let it go at that.

But Rick did not let it go. A few days later he wrote again. "Did I lose you?" he asked. He wondered whether I was disinterested due to his height, which was several inches less than mine. In fact, he wondered in verse:

Perhaps you saw my height and measured thus
My life, and found me shy an inch (or four),
But what in size I lack, my soul's a plus,
And that's worth all the time, I think, for sure.

Rick's reappearance made me happy, and I was tickled he would write me in iambic pentameter. So I replied in kind:

Poetry and Teddies sure are nice,
I might go out with you just once (or twice!)

Gee, wasn't that a clever way for me to angle for an actual date? Hey, there's nothing wrong with asking for what you want!

And it worked. Rick's response included a tentative, "Are you game to get together next weekend?"

I replied in the affirmative, and prodded him with, "What do you have in mind?"

That's where Rick rang my bell big time. The itinerary he suggested for our first date included going to San Francisco for a re-

ception at an art gallery that was releasing some new Salvador Dali etchings, dinner at La Colonial (whatever that was, but it sounded classy), maybe drinks in the Redwood Room at the Clift Hotel, and dancing at the Starlite Ballroom on top of the Sir Francis Drake Hotel off Union Square.

Whoopie! Rick had hit a home run. First base: I loved that he was assertive and confident enough to actually plan out a date. Too many guys asked, “Where do you want to go? What do you want to do?” dumping the decisions back into my lap. Second base: A cultural event, an art show! It sure beat the latest popcorn movie at the mall. And Dali happened to be one of my favorite artists; OK, one of the few artists I actually knew. Anyway, I found his work fun and interesting. Third base: I loved a long, leisurely dinner with plenty of time to get to know each other on a first date. Yes, I had happened to mention this to Rick in our earlier correspondence, but kudos to him for following through on it. Unfortunately he almost got tagged out leading off third with the drinks thing, because he obviously didn’t pick up on the “Booze: Never! (me or you)” in my profile. But I was willing to let that go, and Rick slid into home with dancing, an activity I still loved.

Our big date was just a few days away and I looked forward to it with eager anticipation. I hadn’t been on a date with a man in a year, and this promised to be a memorable one. I looked all through my wardrobe to pick out a great outfit. Finally I decided the occasion called for some shopping. I knew I would wear pants because I was tired of freezing to death in San Francisco, so I picked up a black, tailored jacket at Ann Taylor, along with a sexy, sleeveless, low-cut turquoise knit top with some cute white buttons on the side.

Saturday arrived soon enough. I spent a couple of hours putting curlers in my hair and trying to remember how to do a full make-up job, complete with foundation, eye shadow, and blush. I drove to Rick’s apartment because it was on the way to San Francisco, and besides, I wanted to check out his crib.

Rick lived on the upper floor of a large, two-story apartment complex. I ascended the outside stairs and clacked the brass knocker on the door identified with a matching brass letter K. The door swung open and Rick’s face lit up as he took in my tall, thin body, sexy cleavage and wild red hair. Later Rick would tell me — more

Everything Nice

than once — that I was the only woman he ever met who looked better in person than in her Internet profile picture.

For my part, I was relieved I could say the same about Rick, because he was not a very photogenic guy. Besides, he had warned me he'd put on some weight since the picture was taken and, for all I knew, I might have been greeted by a three hundred pound walrus. Not at all. Rick was stocky but by no means fat; just the slightest bit of a pot belly, to my eye. He lived up to his five foot eight billing, certainly no more. His dark brown hair was clearly combed forward, but he still had plenty of raw material. His face was a little jowly, but a happy grin and smiling blue eyes made it quite attractive. To top it off, he was dressed in a coat, a tie, and shoes that shined — and a fedora, which he managed to pull off without looking silly. All in all, a pretty good package!

We had both apparently thought black was the right look for an art show in the city. Me in my black slacks and jacket, Rick in black pants and jacket with a dark shirt and a bright, solid tie: we were a matched set.

Rick said, "You look really nice. Won't you come in?"

"Thank you," I said, and walked past Rick as he stepped aside.

I was not impressed by Rick's apartment, a smallish one-bedroom model that was pretty cluttered. However, the clutter was mostly books, and I liked that. Rick took me around and pointed out the expensive artwork adorning his walls. I thought this gesture was a touch pretentious, but at least I could see where he chose to invest his money, which obviously wasn't in his domicile. Personally, I chose to invest in a house instead of artwork, but hey, that was just me. I began to get the picture that Rick was a dilettante, with just enough knowledge of the arts to be dangerous. No, that's not fair. Really, he had just enough knowledge to be interesting, because he certainly knew more than I did!

After the apartment tour and some small talk, we had to get moving. We went down to the apartment carport and jumped into Rick's black Toyota Celica GT. We took a freeway onramp just blocks from the apartment and begin the forty minute drive to San Francisco.

We headed up highway 280, which bills itself as the World's Most Beautiful Freeway, meandering through the green, rolling hills of the peninsula. Rick chattered non-stop the whole time. In stereo-

typically male fashion, he talked about himself, things he'd done, places he'd been, and people he'd known. He did ask about me from time to time, but I was not very forthcoming and the conversation would quickly find its way back to the subject of Rick. I was amused to find I had merely to mention a new subject and Rick would be off on some observation or anecdote with no further urging needed. No doubt Rick thought I was a marvelous conversationalist!

When we got to the city, Rick guided the Celica off the freeway at the Embarcadero and drove past the beautiful new baseball park, Pac Bell stadium. One of Rick's friends had assured him the Giant's game would have ended hours earlier, and we didn't encounter traffic congestion.

We turned left and Rick guided us deftly through several blocks of downtown to a parking structure he was obviously familiar with. We wended our way up seven levels before we found unoccupied territory, where we parked and took the elevator back to ground level.

We emerged from the elevator into a small shopping corridor that we would traverse on our way to the open street. Rick pulled me into flower shop and asked the shopkeeper for two red roses, de-thorned. He presented me with one rose, making me fairly swoon, and said the other was for a woman who worked in the gallery. I began to get a picture of what this reception was all about. The gallery, and the woman for whom the rose was intended, had sold Rick all of the artwork I had seen on the walls of his apartment. Apparently Rick had a little social ritual of visiting the gallery, occasionally buying a piece of artwork, and then having dinner and drinks in the area. He was delighted to share his ritual with me tonight.

Rick took my hand in his as we walked up the windiest block in San Francisco to the gallery. Although it was the middle of July, the chill wind made me glad I had worn pants. I was even starting to regret I hadn't brought a warmer jacket.

The 300 block of Geary Street was crowded with galleries, but we homed in on Christopher-Clark Fine Art. Some Dalis were displayed in the gallery's windows and quite a few people were milling about inside. The gallery patrons were uniformly Caucasian and neatly dressed in coats, ties, and cocktail dresses or pantsuits.

We walked in and a pretty young woman seated at a reception table asked, "May I see your invitation?" She was scanning a list of names.

Everything Nice

Rick stammered just a little bit and said, “Uh, no, I don’t really have an invitation. Stacey invited me.” Stacey was the woman for whom the other rose was intended.

The woman smiled and said, “Oh, that’s fine. Welcome!” In we went.

Etchings lined the walls of the typical single-room gallery space. A few free-standing sculptures were scattered around the floor, and a couple of large tapestries dominated the wall to my right. Next to each piece was a tasteful plaque stating the piece’s title, artist, medium, and other details identifying the work. Most included a price; the dollar amounts ranged from the low to mid ten thousands. As we browsed, the work seemed to be all Dali, though later I found other artist’s work as well.

Rick wanted to go upstairs so up we went. I assumed he wanted to find the champagne, or Stacey, or both. We found the champagne table first. The pretty young server asked us if we would like a glass. Rick happily accepted. I said, “No thank you, I don’t drink,” so she gave me some sparkling water instead. Rick didn’t seem disappointed that his plan (I assumed) to get me drunk had already failed.

Rick asked me to excuse him for a moment and he went off in search of Stacey. I continued browsing Dali etchings. They were exquisite. My familiarity with Dali was frankly limited to the melting clocks, and I was charmed by the range and imagination of his work. I was amazed at how much form and emotion he could evoke with a few simple scrawls. I had just completed a drawing class at De Anza and I had some appreciation of just what a talent that was.

I got to the back of the gallery, still upstairs, where something of an office was set up to house a few desks for conducting the business of the gallery. In this area, I was attracted to some beautiful etchings that did not appear to be Dalis — they were too photo-realistic. I read the plaques and was taken aback to discover I was viewing Rembrandts! I had no idea Rembrandts could be seen — even touched, if I dared — in galleries like this. I had thought they were the stuff of museums only. I was amazed to find myself in the presence of such beautiful and valuable works of art.

Rick caught back up with me and we continued to tour the gallery. We came across some photographs, not by Dali, but of Dali himself. I was puzzled about why they were in the show — just for the sake of curiosity? We also found some Picassos, and I didn’t under-

stand why they were there, either. The mysteries were soon explained as we were treated to a short lecture by Jean-Christopher Argillet. The Frenchman's father had collaborated with Dali for several decades while the great artist produced the series of etchings that were on display. These pieces had just been released from Argillet père's personal collection. Argillet père was also the photographer who had taken the pictures of Dali which were included in the show.

As for the Picassos, it seems the surrealists threw Dali out of the movement because they considered his work too crazy. Because of this, Picasso and Dali were not on speaking terms for many decades. Eventually Dali tried to make up with Picasso by producing his own versions of some of Picasso's work, specifically, some bullfight-themed images. Picasso's pieces were displayed in the show side-by-side with Dali's versions for us to compare. The end of the story was that Picasso never viewed Dali's homage, and the two great artists remained estranged for the rest of Dali's life.

Half way through the lecture, Rick whispered in my ear, "Do you want to go?"

I was relieved Rick had less patience in the gallery than I did. I had feared he might want to ponder the artwork for much longer than I could tolerate. A little art went a long way with me. Nevertheless, I was finding the lecture quite interesting so I whispered back "Can we stay a little longer?"

"OK," Rick agreed

When the lecture concluded, we left the gallery. We had an hour before our dinner reservation, so Rick asked if I wanted to see the Big Chair in the lobby of the Clift Hotel. I was not familiar with the Big Chair, so I eagerly assented.

We walked a couple of blocks to the Clift Hotel. Sure enough, the Big Chair was there in the lobby. The Big Chair sat on a three-foot high pedestal and rose an additional ten feet into the air. It had a leather seat and back, lightly decorated, looking a bit medieval. The chair wasn't so big as to discourage one from trying to sit on it, but surely big enough that anyone who did would look rather silly. Rick said he had had his picture taken sitting on the Big Chair at one time, but the Big Chair is actually a work of art so I didn't think sitting on it was encouraged. On the other hand, there wasn't a chain across it or a sign forbidding it.

Everything Nice

The Big Chair became boring after about a minute. I was attracted to a roaring fire in a nearby fireplace because I was still a bit cold from the evening air. We sat on a divan across from the fire and chatted a while. Then Rick suggested, "Let's go see the famous Redwood Room."

We went down a short hallway, past some elevators, and arrived at the Redwood Room. It was sumptuously paneled with redwood, as I had anticipated.

The Redwood Room was an upscale cocktail lounge with a restaurant off to one side. Electronic rock music was throbbing through the room, but not loud enough to interfere with conversations that were going on between the nicely dressed couples populating the chairs and sofas.

Rick directed my attention to one of the large portraits hanging in the room. He told me to stare at it for a few minutes. I did, and after a while I saw the man in the portrait subtly change position. I'm afraid I wasn't very surprised, because it was obvious to me the portraits were not oil paintings but rather some kind of LCD display. Besides, I'd been to Disneyland and seen the similar portraits in the Haunted Mansion.

"Should we have a drink?" Rick asked.

"Yes, please," I answered.

We took a seat at an empty couch in front of a low coffee table. A hostess scurried over to us and said, "I'm sorry, this table is reserved." She pointed at a small "Reserved" card displayed on the table.

In a friendly voice, Rick said, "Oh, we're only going to be here a short while. We'll give up the table right away if the people who reserved it show up."

Much to my surprise, the hostess said "OK" and walked away.

"I've found that if you talk to people nicely," Rick told me, "they'll usually give you what you want." Personally, I'd frequently found just the opposite to be true, but maybe I didn't know how to talk as nicely to people as Rick did.

Despite having gotten the hostess's permission, I still felt a little uneasy as we occupied the couch. I kept thinking that every group entering the bar was probably our "Reserved" party.

A waitress arrived and asked us what we'd like. I requested cranberry juice and soda. Rick thought a bit, hemmed and hawed a

little, asked about a couple of drinks listed on the cocktail menu, and finally ordered a glass of champagne. I took this as a good sign — heavy drinkers have no difficulty ordering drinks! However, it also occurred to me that maybe he was simply refraining from ordering his usual double shot of Everclear in front of me.

We finished our drinks. To my relief, the “Reserved” party never showed up and indignantly demanded their table. The time of our dinner reservation was approaching, so we bid farewell to the mysterious shifting portraits and the Big Chair and headed back out to the chilly streets of San Francisco.

“Should we get a cab?” Rick inquired politely.

“Nonsense!” I replied. “You said it’s only a few blocks. Let’s walk.”

Arm-in-arm (I loved taking a fellow’s arm) we walked four or five windy blocks and turned into what looked like an alleyway. It opened into a parking lot, and off to our right was a staircase leading up one level to La Colonial restaurant.

La Colonial was a fancy, upscale Vietnamese restaurant, harkening back to the days when Vietnam was a French colony. We walked up the stairs and through a beautiful garden walkway into the elegant dining room. A hostess seated us at a small table along the back wall. Tables to our left and right were occupied by convivial parties of two couples each. Just across from us a large, circular table was surrounded by rambunctious young people; a couple of girls with blonde hair were particularly loud and giggly.

Rick recommended the duck, apparently his regular on his frequent gallery-and-dinner outings. (I imagined Rick doing these outings on his own, ending up drunk at the Redwood Room, and I felt a bit sad for him.) I said, “Then that’s what I’ll have, too,” even though duck isn’t really a favorite of mine. I liked to flatter my guy in small ways like that.

I noticed the waiter at the next table, tall and thin, twenty-something, with a little wispy, light brown hippy beard and a friendly smile. I commented to Rick, “He’s really cute!” I also liked to tease my guy in small ways like that.

Rick thought a second and replied, “I don’t really judge the cuteness of guys.”

The cute waiter came over to our table. “Have you decided what you’d like?” he asked.

Everything Nice

“I’ll have the duck,” Rick ordered, “and a glass of champagne.”

“May I have the duck too?” I inquired. The waiter looked startled.

“Don’t you think you’d like to try something different?” he asked. He described a few other dishes. I realized the meal would be served family-style, everyone welcome to select from any platter, so I changed my order to a beef dish. Rick didn’t seem to get the concept, but he didn’t mind.

Rick continued to chatter throughout the meal. His ex-girlfriends began to creep into the conversation. The good news was that Rick still had a great deal of affection for all of his ex’s. He apparently had had three major loves, one of whom he proposed to three times!

Somehow or other we got around to talking about some gay people we knew. I was relieved to find Rick was very open-minded on issues of diversity, especially after his comment about not judging the cuteness of guys. I had interpreted that as a slightly homophobic attitude, but actually it was merely strongly heterosexual. In fact, Rick was quite liberal politically, and we both had fun bashing President George W. Bush.

I don’t want to give the impression that Rick monopolized the conversation. He did make an effort to include me and ask things about me. For example, at one point he said, “We’re so alike. Neither of us has been married or had children.”

“I’ve been married,” I told him.

“Oh. I wonder why I thought you hadn’t?”

“Probably because I checked ‘single’ and not ‘divorced’ in my online dating profile,” I speculated.

But I kept my answers short and unrevealing because he seemed to be happy to carry most of the conversation as a monologue. Besides, I liked to preserve a certain amount of mystery early in a relationship.

As we finished up our meal, Rick asked, “How did you like the duck?”

“The beef was terrific,” I replied, “but I didn’t try the duck.” Rick had really relished the duck but he had hardly touched the beef. So I had left the duck alone. I still wasn’t sure if he understood the concept of family-style serving.

“Sure, you had some duck!” Rick insisted.

“Not really,” I insisted back.

“Well here, try this last piece.” He passed me the last little scrap of the duck.

“Ummmm,” I said. “Very good.” It was good, I suppose, but I was glad I had ordered the beef.

As we finished up our meal and Rick paid the bill, he asked if I would like to go dancing at the Starlite Room next. I of course said yes. Again he offered to get us a cab, but I thought an after-dinner walk would help us digest our meals.

We put on our jackets and strolled down to Union Square, enjoying the sight of people lined up for theatres and nightclubs, and window shopping the boutiques and ritzy department stores. We walked arm in arm again, and I still carried my lovely long-stemmed rose. We passed the restaurant where my last boyfriend had taken me to dinner three Christmases earlier, and the shop where he bought me the spectacular silk Cotillion gown. I didn't mention these memories to Rick.

We turned left off Union Square and walked half a block up Powell Street to the historic Sir Francis Drake Hotel. The lobby was beautifully decorated in classic San Francisco period decor, all red velvet and fringes and mirrors like a Barbary Coast bordello. We took the elevator up twenty-one floors to the Starlite Room on the roof of the hotel.

The elevator doors opened and we found ourselves in a small crowd pressing to get into the nightclub. Everyone was dressed in upscale clubbing attire and appeared to be twenty-something years old. Some pretty good rhythm and blues music pulsed from the club.

I was afraid we were going to be in for a long wait, but it was still early in clubbing time and people were rapidly ushered through the line. As we got close to the concierge, an usher motioned to us. Sounding slightly embarrassed, he said, “Would you mind leaving your rose here with us? We're afraid some people inside may think you took it from our bouquet.” I noticed a huge bouquet of red roses prominently displayed on the bar.

“Oh, that's fine!” I said, and handed him my rose. I was glad to let them hold it, because it would only be an encumbrance inside the club.

Everything Nice

Rick noticed I was fumbling with my tiny disco purse and he interjected, “No no! I’ve got it,” thinking I was looking for money.

“It’s not that,” I told him. “I’m getting my driver’s license. These clubs card *everybody*.” I knew the club scene from my club kiddie days a couple of years earlier.

Rick paid the cover charge, and they did *not* ask for my ID. I seemed to be wrong about a lot of things when I was with Rick. I needed to learn restraint of tongue!

Once inside, we instinctively headed in the direction of the pounding music. We squeezed through the crowd between the door and the bar, but once we got to the area where the little club tables were, the crowd thinned out. I glanced around and could easily see we weren’t going to find an unoccupied table. That was OK because I wanted to explore the club and dance, not sit at a table and drink.

A wall separated us from the band and the dance floor. We turned left and I noticed the wonderful picture windows. Rick preened proudly and shouted in my ear (he had to shout to be heard over the music), “The view of the city is spectacular!”

The view was indeed spectacular. The walls were entirely glass from waist height to the fifteen-foot high ceiling, giving a 180 degree view of the beautiful city of San Francisco. I was drawn as if by a magnet to the nearest window and I drank in the view. The city unfolded below me, building lights sparkling like an overstuffed Light-Bright toy. The night was lovely and clear. I could see out to the Golden Gate Bridge, Fisherman’s Wharf, Angel Island, and, over there to the right, the Bay Bridge that led to Oakland and to my alma mater, U.C. Berkeley.

I followed the windows around the room to take in the view, and I soon found myself at the edge of the crowded dance floor. Across the floor I could see the music was coming from a very live band, five guys plus a female singer with a powerful voice. They were pounding out R & B and disco hits from the ‘70s and ‘80s, good enough and accurate enough that I wouldn’t have been surprised if it had been a deejay instead of a band. Rick shouted something in my ear that I assumed to be, “Wanna dance?” so I nodded my head and we squeezed onto the nearest corner of the dance floor.

With trepidation, I waited to see what Rick’s dancing would be like. He didn’t strike me as a rock’n’roll type of guy; and besides, I was once-bitten-twice-shy because my last boyfriend, Mark, had had

most peculiar dance moves. I was pleasantly surprised to find that Rick shook his thang and moved his feet quite well. With a sigh of relief, I fired up my thang and started cooking.

We finished dancing to one song and danced half-way into another, but the heat was becoming oppressive. Rick motioned me off the dance floor. When I had followed him away from the loudest of the music, he shouted in my ear, "Should we check our jackets?" I had looked for a coat check on our way in and I didn't think the club had one, but it was a great idea so I practiced restraint of tongue and agreed. In addition to the overheating problem, my disco purse was clumsy to carry as I danced, even with a shoulder strap, so I wanted to check it if I could.

Rick led me all the way across the club, past the bar, and there was indeed a coat check. Rick checked his coat and my coat and purse. I noticed the restrooms were nearby as well, and I excused myself to use the ladies room.

When I returned, Rick was searching his pockets. "Did I happen to give you the coat check ticket?" he asked. Somehow, he had already misplaced the ticket. That struck me as kind of lame, but I was impressed that he handled the situation without embarrassment, simply going back to the coat check girl and asking for a replacement. Problem solved. If it had been me, I'd have felt terribly humiliated.

Unencumbered by our jackets (or my full bladder), we made our way back to the dance floor. But we only caught the end of one number when the band took a break. Not to worry, because barely a moment of quiet ensued before recorded music began blasting. We danced some more, but I noticed the music was going into the urban/rap mode, which was not my favorite. I thought it would be better to save our energy for the live music so I took Rick's hand and led him off the floor.

"I don't really like dancing to urban music," I told Rick.

"Me either," he agreed.

We wandered back to one of the windows with the spectacular view. Although many of the little tables were unoccupied, drinks, coats, and sundry items marked all the tables as taken.

I noticed some space between the end table and a big, decorative, potted tree of some sort, so I wiggled in and put my nose up against the glass. Rick came up behind me and put his arms around

Everything Nice

my waist. I relaxed into the comfortable shelter of Rick's embrace. It felt very good. As Rick held me, he described various points of interest we could see from our perch high above the city, and he told some interesting stories of the goings on here and there recently and in years gone by.

The inside ledge below the window was waist high and a few inches deep. I realized I could get part of my butt up onto it, so I turned sideways and half-sat on it, one long leg braced against the floor and the other deliciously crossed at the thigh. Finally I was a little shorter than Rick. He leaned over and gave me a gentle kiss on the lips. I responded, so he kissed me with a little more passion. I held his kiss for a few moments. I felt his tongue dart out and touch my lips, but when I did not part them, the tongue disappeared. I was relieved, because I didn't like it when guys shove their tongues in my mouth on the first date, as many tried to do. In fact, I didn't really like French kissing any time except in the heat of passion.

We generated some passionate heat as we necked there in full view of the city but, inside the club, half-hidden by the draping leaves of the potted tree. Rick's hands became a little bolder and explored widening areas of my body, courteously staying away from my naughty bits. We necked and talked silly talk, and the band's break passed quite pleasantly. I began to think Rick might be good for more than just a few dates.

When the band started up again, we hit the dance floor and poured our passion into moving our bodies. The time flew past midnight and the dance floor became packed solid. The people-watching was fun. I saw one pretty young blonde thing, provocatively dressed, mercilessly teasing her boyfriend with her vivacious body. The boyfriend loved it. A woman almost as tall as me was dancing with a shorter fellow, and I felt not quite so freakish. An old guy in a tuxedo showed up with a variety of cute, youthful women, and I guessed it was his birthday party. Go, man, go!

Rick didn't seem to be watching me much, at least directly, but I knew how to get his attention. I turned around and backed into him, bumping his tummy with my butt. He liked it. He put his hands on my hips and helped me grind. He slipped his arms around me and hugged me. Now and then I could feel his erection bump my thigh. I knew he must be frustrated because I was so tall and my legs so long, his erection was positioned too low to rub on my butt!

All part of my evil plan, because I wasn't ready for dirty-dancing with Rick just yet.

We danced for about an hour, by which time we were well worn out. We had a long ride home ahead of us, so we decided to leave the Starlite Room. We un-checked our jackets and my purse, fetched my rose from the concierge, and took the elevator back down to planet earth.

The lobby was so gorgeous and I was so tired and grateful to be out of the crowds that I asked Rick if we could sit for a few minutes and rest. We found a comfy settee with a panoramic view of the lobby, including the sweeping antebellum staircase and second-floor balcony, and plopped down on it. I leaned back into Rick's arms and we relaxed, chatted, and people-watched for a quarter of an hour.

Most of the sparse lobby traffic was young people going to or returning from the Starlite Room. We commented to each other about how young the girls were, and how provocatively they dressed. "A scandal I tell you!" Rick would say with mock indignation, and I would reply something like, "What would her mother think if she knew she was out dressed like that?!"

We weren't going to get home without getting our fannies off the settee, so we finally got up and made our way out of the hotel. The coolness of the outside air felt wonderful. It didn't seem quite as chilly as before because the breeze had died down, and because our bodies were warmed by all the dancing. The walk back to the parking garage was lovely and went quickly.

As we waited for the elevator in the parking garage, Rick mentioned he didn't remember if we had parked on level seven or level nine.

"I think we're on nine." I said.

"No, I think it was seven," Rick replied.

"We're on nine. I'm sure of it!" I insisted.

"OK."

So we rode up to level nine. The elevator doors slid open. Only a few cars were parked there and Rick's was not among them. "Oops, I guess it's seven. You were right," I conceded. I seemed to be wrong about a lot of things when I was with Rick. I needed to learn restraint of tongue.

Rick had neglected to take the parking ticket with him, and it was one of those garages where you pay the ticket in the lobby. Rick

Everything Nice

said he would go back down and pay the ticket. I offered to go with him but he said no, I should just wait in the car; it would only take a moment. I didn't really want to be alone in the parking garage, but my feet were tired and hurting from pinching shoes, so I agreed. I locked myself in and looked through Rick's eclectic collection of CDs as he ran his errand. I found a lot of Broadway show tunes, which didn't surprise me since Rick had told me he acts and sings. I also found some classical music, and a few things I didn't even recognize well enough to categorize.

Rick was only gone a couple of minutes. Soon we were headed back down the 280 freeway, not so beautiful in the dark, but with a lovely view of the stars. The ride home was a little quieter than the ride up had been, but with Rick around, the silence never lasted long.

We arrived intact back at Rick's apartment complex. As we pulled into his designated parking space, Rick commented, "You still haven't met my teddy bear," so I agreed to come up to his abode.

I expected Rick would make a move on me — try to get me to bed, you know? — since he had been quite frisky in the Starlite Room. OK, we both had been quite frisky. But I told myself I would just meet the teddy bear, use the bathroom, and go. Well, maybe I would allow a little necking, but for no more than fifteen minutes! But in my heart, I knew that if Rick played his cards right, he could have me that night.

So what do you think happened? I met the teddy bear — in Rick's bedroom, mind you — I used the bathroom, and I left. Rick didn't try to make a move on me at all! I didn't know whether to be proud of what a gentleman he was, or insulted. But, as I thought about it later, I decided it was simply a matter of the time being quite late and Rick being quite tired. He had wisely postponed our first sexual encounter until better circumstances presented themselves.

Rick walked me out to my car, arm around my waist, and he took a couple of kisses before he let me go. (No tongue again, God bless him!) I drove home thinking, *What a wonderful date that was!*, and hoping Rick would ask me out again.

Disclosure

The next day I emailed a short thank-you note to Rick: “Thanks for the fantastic date last night. I had a marvelous time. You were so gallant and kind. Did you make it to church this morning? I made it, but I took a long nap right after lunch.”

Rick replied: “Thanks to you as well. I had a great time. I did make it to church, though I was a little late. Why don’t we get together for some dinner on Saturday night? And maybe dancing after? I had such a great time last night, I miss you already!”

Hooray! I was in!

But Saturday was not to be our next date after all, because Rick got anxious and took a flyer. “It’s such a warm night tonight,” he wrote me in an email on Wednesday. “What would you say to coming over to my place about eight o’clock? We could sit out on my porch and listen to the crickets. I could whisper endlessly into your ear about how sexy you are.”

Everything Nice

I suppose a gal should play hard to get, but it sounded good to me. I asked if we could make it nine-ish, after my meditation class, and Rick happily agreed.

Wednesday evening arrived quickly. I donned a short, skimpy denim halter-dress and went to meditation class, but my mantra for the night could only be *Rick*. Mainly I was bolstering my determination that I would not go to bed with Rick that night, no matter what — and questioning why I thought it needed to be that way. Fundamentally, I suppose I believed Rick deserved to know about my sex change before we made love, and I didn't want to disclose it until our third date. The most difficult question was whether dropping by his apartment on a weeknight constituted a date, for counting purposes!

I got to Rick's place a little after nine, assumed a sexy stance by cocking a hip as far out as I could cock it, and clacked his door-knocker. In scant seconds the door opened and once again I could see a delighted smile break out on Rick's face. I gave him a quick peck on the lips as I strutted past him into the apartment.

Rick directed me to the promised balcony where he had laid out a platter of French bread and cheeses, along with two crystal wine glasses filled with lemon soda. I walked over to the wooden railing and admired the view. Rick's apartment backed on a suburban river — a drainage gully, really — and beautiful trees and brush were all I could see from the balcony. It was so much nicer than the barren suburban streets in my recently-built neighborhood. I was entranced.

As I commented on how nice his balcony was, Rick came up behind me and put his arms around me. I cuddled back into him as he began to tell me all about the trees and critters and all that went on back there. I could see some stars over the treetops. It was quite romantic.

After a few minutes of chit-chat and sweet nothings, I noticed Rick's hands had begun to wander. He rubbed my back and massaged my neck and shoulders a bit, which was lovely. But his hands were straying farther and farther down my thighs and towards my breasts and buttocks. Things were progressing more quickly than I'd anticipated, but it was exactly the direction I expected it to go, so I decided to relax and enjoy it. As a matter of fact, I felt lucky to be

with a guy who was confident and assertive enough to go for it, yet respectful enough to go about it in a courteous fashion.

Nevertheless, I was startled when Rick's right hand slid over my ribcage underneath my right breast and seized my left breast completely. Yet, it did feel good! I continued to relax into it. Having met with no resistance — having, in fact, met with welcome — Rick wasted no time before he slipped his hand into the deep-cut cleavage of my halter dress and began caressing my bare breast. I believed this was known as second base, at least the way we counted the bases when I was young, yea many years ago.

We soon had a serious make-out session going. I leaned my head back and met Rick's questing lips with mine. This time when his tongue reached out, I parted my lips and teeth and let him in. I swear I could feel the joy quivering in his tongue. Fortunately, he did not feel the need to discover whether I'd had my tonsils removed. (I had.) He simply seemed happy occupying my personal interior space to about the depth of my eye teeth.

My height in three-inch heels made vertical necking strenuous, so we retired to the cast-iron settee on the balcony. Now that barriers had been broken and the direction of the evening was more or less clear, we were able to relax and have some cheese, soda and conversation as we necked. It was loose and luxurious. I felt so warm and sexy and desirable!

From time to time, the thought entered my head that maybe tonight should be the night we discuss my sex change. But each time the thought surfaced, I talked my self out of it. I reasoned that the second date was too early for disclosure, and reassured myself we would *not* be having sex tonight!

At one point, Rick asked me, "Do you like to get your feet rubbed?"

"It's about my favorite thing in the whole world!" I exclaimed.

"Then take off your shoes and I'll rub your feet."

"No," I replied, and he looked perplexed. I was teasing. I continued, "You take them off!" It was a little kinky thing most men enjoyed, even if they weren't foot-fetishists — and I enjoyed it too.

"I've never really done that before," Rick said, but he was game.

I was wearing leather sandals with stacked heels and long leather thongs that wrapped around my calves. The knots in the thongs

baffled Rick for a while, but he managed to unknot them and get my shoes off. Unfortunately, his foot-rubbing was desultory and uninspired.

After snuggling and squirming in a variety of positions on the uncomfortable iron settee, I proposed we continue what we were doing inside the apartment. It was getting chilly outside anyway.

Just inside the sliding glass door, Rick threw some pillows on the carpet and suggested we sit on the floor. The carpet looked clean enough so I was OK with suggestion. In fact, it seemed romantic. Straight to the bedroom would have been more practical, but tacky.

Rick suggested I pick some music. I was intimidated by his extensive CD collection, so I concentrated on the dozen disks that happened to be right in front of me. "Why don't you pick one of these two?" I asked, handing him a Marley and a Sade. I liked the way Rick had been taking the initiative on everything we had done so far, so I didn't want to accept the responsibility even for picking the music.

Rick chose Sade and we resumed our necking session sprawled comfortably among the pillows on the living room carpet as Sade purred her sexy tunes.

Rick enjoyed caressing my body and especially fondling my breasts. I just adored being touched all over, so it was great for me. He also loved kissing. I guess you would call them deep, passionate kisses. But I call them sloppy, invasive kisses, and they were not my favorite thing. *That could get to be a problem*, I thought. I noticed that, while Rick loved putting his tongue in my mouth, he didn't particularly care if I used my tongue. I decided it must be a dominance thing, his little way of possessing me. Not a conscious thing, I supposed, but just something that made him feel good.

Soon Rick made a move to push the skirt of my dress up my hips, but I put my hand out and stopped him. "Rick," I said nicely, "I'm not ready to get naked with you yet."

"Oh, OK," Rick replied, unruffled by the rebuff. "That's fine." I liked that he was so respectful of my wishes. I had gone out with more than one guy who wouldn't even respect my wish to say good-night and go home, so I was particularly sensitive to this issue and grateful for Rick's attitude.

Remaining clothed did not slow us down much. Rick continued to caress me and soon worked his way up my inner thighs to

the land of milk and honey. I liked being touched all over, as I mentioned before, and that included down there, so this was OK with me. I had a secondary agenda as well. I wanted Rick to know exactly what I had down there (a vulva!) so he would have no confusion about that when I told him about my sex change.

I soon found my back arching and my hips rocking. Rick fondled his way down my body until his head was on my thighs, and he began kissing there. Finding a loophole in my “no nakedness” clause, he pushed my panties aside (after exclaiming, “Oh! Red panties!”) and began exploring my vulva with his lips and tongue. He zeroed in on my clitoris and concentrated there.

My clitoris was sensate, but not particularly sensitive any more. I enjoyed having it stimulated, but it didn’t stimulate me to orgasm — at least, it hadn’t yet. I believed — I hoped — that one of these days, in the right circumstances and when I was in the right frame of mind, I would find that peak, but I wasn’t there yet. All of which is to explain that I enjoyed the cunnilingus, but orgasms were not in the offing for me that night.

As Rick continued to take and give pleasure, he braced himself with one hand on the floor and used the other to explore and caress my tummy, inner thighs, labia, and vulva. Suddenly I felt a pop! as his finger slid past my PC muscle into my vagina. Ooh! What a nice sensation that was! I rocked my hips and expelled short, quick breaths, like I’d seen girls do in porn movies, and like I’d read about in Betty Dodson’s book *Sex for One*. I could feel Rick’s finger probing for my G-spot, but I didn’t think I had one. I did have a prostate in about the same place the G-spot should be, and that was supposed to have some erotic sensitivity, but it wasn’t doing much for me.

After a while — quite a while! — Rick came up for air. My resistance was down and I was totally into the moment. I decided things had progressed so far, it was ridiculous to hold back. I smiled conspiratorially and asked, “Do you have a condom?”

I could see mixed emotions on Rick’s face. My surrender was a testament to his excellent skill at love-making, yes. But at the same time, he didn’t want to go there for some reason.

“I do,” he said, “but let’s save that for next time.” I must have looked puzzled because he mumbled an explanation. “I’m kind of worn out now,” he said. *Oh, I get it*, I thought. *Mr. Stiffy is not so stiff!* Well, that was the problem with dating men over fifty.

Everything Nice

We continued to tussle, albeit more languorously, and after a while we just lay in each other's arms enjoying the physical intimacy. Rick confessed he thought the best part of sex was the foreplay and afterglow. I assumed he was lying, telling chicks what they want to hear, but he seemed sincere. In subsequent days I realized he was telling the truth. I began to form a theory that it might not be just a matter of romance, but also related to Mr. Stiffy's endurance.

As the evening wound down, I was delighted and satisfied. What incredible "not sex" we'd had! *This*, I decided, *definitely counted as a date*. Saturday would be the third date. Saturday would see disclosure, for sure.

* * *

The next morning, Rick sent me an e-card with this lovely sonnet which he wrote just for me:

She walks in long-legg'd beauty through my life,
A blue-eyed smile coursing through my soul.
Her touch can still the waters, soothe the strife,
A kiss within her arms a world unfolds.
I listen to each telling word she breathes.
Though tall beside, I yet aspire high
To hear the thoughts that float upon the breeze.
And hand-in-hand into the world to fly.
She passes by my eyes, a regal Queen,
And I, a lowly beggar, plead my case
To have one moment in her earthly scene,
A speck in time to slow the future race.
Three hours passed with you goes much too fast.
To search your body-mind the time must last.

Tickled, you ask? I was thrilled! My lover (to be) was writing beautiful sonnets for me! And the poem was even good, too. I thanked him profusely. In subsequent weeks I would receive many more wonderful sonnets from my Rick.

As Thursday and Friday passed, I found myself thinking a lot about Saturday's upcoming disclosure. In my mind, I rehearsed my exact presentation. It would be short and to the point. I also wrestled with what to wear for the fateful date. I wanted to wear something skimpy and sexy to turn Rick on. On the other hand, I was afraid

if I wore something too outrageous, there might be a risk that after disclosure, I would look in Rick's newly opened eyes like a clown. Or worse, like a dude in a dress. Oh my!

Strangely, though, I was not anxious or apprehensive about the result of the disclosure. I felt fairly certain Rick would reject me, but I also thought he would treat me respectfully. He'd probably give me one of these: "You are so brave for doing that. I admire you. But I can't date you." If that happened, I wouldn't feel badly toward him. Some people — most guys, my experience so far told me — simply weren't equipped to handle the situation. They had no experience, no point of reference, and they just didn't know what to do, except to flee. If that happened, I would be all right with it. Oh sure, I'd be disappointed and I'd call up my girlfriends and blubber about it. But I'd get over it and chalk it up to the life of a trans woman.

On the other hand, perhaps — just perhaps — there was a chance Rick might somehow be OK with it. After all, I was *very* firmly imprinted as a woman in his mind. So who knows? If that unlikely outcome should happen, I would be delighted.

But I had to admit, as great as Rick was in so many ways, I was not falling in love with him. I definitely liked him and wanted to spend more time with him, but I doubted we would have a long-term relationship. The chemistry wasn't completely clicking for me. Indeed, I was skeptical of whether I was capable of truly falling in love again with anyone. So whichever way the disclosure went, it would be OK with me.

What was it about Rick that wasn't clicking for me? Let me count the ways. I found his slobbery kisses and pot belly off-putting. (The belly was a lot larger than I had initially thought.) He was allergic to cats and I had a kitty. While I liked that he talked a lot, I noticed I was already getting repeats of stories and I feared he would become a bore before long. And I also began to notice that he talked about external things, but shied away from heart talk, in typical male fashion. As I learned more about Rick's background and watched his behavior, I began to theorize that he was a very hurt little boy who had miraculously managed to pull a semblance of a life together. Kudos to him for doing it! But I was dubious about whether he was a man I would like to have a long and deep relationship with.

Don't get me wrong. I was trying my best not to judge Rick or put my assumptions and expectations on him. I fully intended to

Everything Nice

take him as he was, day by day and hour by hour, and have the best time with him that I could. I also intended to support him and make him happy in any way I could. I would give it a chance and see where it led — if I got the chance. I only log these negative reactions to explain why I thought I would not be crushed if he rejected me.

Come Saturday, I was still undecided about what to wear, although I had narrowed my choices to a few outfits. I began getting ready several hours before I needed to leave for Rick's apartment. I showered, washed my hair, threw in a few curlers to give it some body, and ran the full make-up routine again.

As the time became short, I decided to go for the super-sexy outfit and let the chips fall where they may. My ensemble was extremely simple: a gold and black knit tube dress that barely covered my ass, and silver sandals with five inch heels and ankle straps that laced up my calves. Thigh-high stockings (ass-high, actually) but no panties or bra, as they would show through the tube dress. It was a typical outfit from my club kiddie days. I added some big silver hoop earrings and a black choker with a few rhinestone studs and I was good to go.

I examined myself in the mirror and decided I looked good. I would surely make an impression on Rick, as well as on any other man who saw me that night. Hell, I stood six foot five in those heels! However, while I would look great in the dance club, it struck me as a bit much for dinner. So I threw on an eggshell, tailored Ann Taylor jacket for a cover-up.

I teetered across the parking lot and up the stairs to Rick's apartment, paying close attention to my five-inch heels. I passed one of Rick's neighbors who was just leaving his apartment, and the fellow looked me over and gave me a big smile. I figured Rick's standing just went up a few points in that neighbor's book!

When Rick opened the door, his delight was evident and I was glad I had chosen the sexy outfit. Rick tried to lay some slobbery kisses on me, but I cautioned him off saying, "Fresh lipstick!"

We made some small talk and soon headed out to dinner, me in my sexy outfit and Rick looking natty in a jacket and fedora. We drove a few minutes to Mountain View and found parking in a structure behind Castro Street, a redeveloped block with a lot of nice restaurants and shops.

I teetered down the stairs of the parking structure and across the lot, a bit more sure of my footing because I had Rick's arm to steady me. He seemed to enjoy my small, careful steps. Perhaps it made him feel a little more dominant having me somewhat hobbled in my heels. Or maybe he just liked the way my ass wiggled.

The walk to Zucca's, a restaurant where Rick dined and hung out frequently, was short. As we approached the hostess podium, Rick called out greetings to many of the staff and introduced me to a few. He was showing me off, and I loved it!

The hostess was a pretty blonde girl of about twenty named Lindy. She greeted Rick by name and showed us to one of the little tables on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant, where we could enjoy the warm, clear evening weather. As we walked with the hostess, I thought I saw her sizing me up and looking puzzled. I wonder if she had clocked me. Perhaps not. Perhaps it was just because I was so monstrously tall, or so ridiculously overdressed.

We had a leisurely and delicious dinner. Rick had a glass of wine and I had lemonade. I was introduced to more of the staff. The owner of the restaurant came over and chatted with us for a while. However, I had difficulty being mentally present, because I kept thinking about the disclosure that would occur later that evening.

My plan was that, after dancing, I would ask Rick if we could have coffee somewhere before we went back to his apartment. I thought it was a good idea to do the disclosure in a public place, just in case Rick totally freaked out and wanted me out of his presence immediately. Or — worst case scenario — in case he became violent. In my purse was my cell phone, loaded with the phone numbers of three taxicab companies, and enough money for cab fare home if I needed it. I was never a Girl Scout (or a Boy Scout), but I did believe in being prepared.

After dinner, we walked down a block to a dance club, pretentiously named The Monte Carlo. Rick paid the cover and we went in.

I was surprised to see Rick had taken me to a happening, modern dance club, the kind in which I used to rave all night. It was a beautiful, big club with a fancy bar, lots of couches and tables, and a large dance floor. Some of the couches were filled with groups of people who turned out to be, I think, a wedding party, but the dance

Everything Nice

floor was empty. The time was only ten o'clock so the club kiddies hadn't started showing up yet.

The deejay was spinning electronica house music with a solid, heavy beat. Rick and I dumped our jackets and his fedora in a booth by the bar and headed for the dance floor. I'd always liked using the empty dance floor in the early clubbing hours because I could move about freely and throw my arms around — and presumably be the center of attention. Rick seemed to like it too, so we danced until we were winded. Then we got bottles of water and retired to our booth.

As the night wore on, we sat in our booth and watched the club kiddies trickle, then flow in. The wedding party left and most of the couches were removed, presumably to the VIP area. We went back and forth between snuggling and talking in our booth and dancing on the increasingly crowded dance floor.

I joked to Rick, "I usually only go places where I can be the tallest and oldest person there!" Rick laughed. "I like being out with you," I continued, "because then I'm not the oldest!" But the truth was, we were a good twenty years older than almost everyone else in the joint.

By midnight, the club was in full swing and the dancers were shoulder to shoulder. I was increasingly nervous about the impending disclosure, and I finally decided it was time to get it in motion. I asked Rick if he was ready to leave and he assented, so we gathered our stuff and made our way out of the club.

As we headed back up the street, I asked Rick, "Is there somewhere we can get a cup of coffee?"

I could tell that Rick sensed this was going to be more than just a cup of coffee, but he held his tongue. He thought a moment and said, "Zucca's should still be open. We can get coffee there." This idea wasn't as good as the anonymous Starbucks I'd imagined in my rehearsal, but I hadn't seen any Starbucks on Castro Street so I said, "Fine."

When we got back to Zucca's, the restaurant was empty but the door was still open and I could see the staff bustling around inside. We went in and Rick greeted the owner. "Can we get a cup of coffee?" he asked.

The owner thought it over and decided it was OK. "Sure," he said. "We'd be happy to serve you."

Rick led me to a table near the bar, where several of the staff were cleaning up. I suppose he thought he might chat with the staff. But I whispered to him, "Can we be somewhere private?"

Rick understood what I was getting at and he led me further back in the restaurant. He called out to the owner, "Is it OK if we sit back here?"

"Sure, fine," was the answer.

We sat down and Rick asked me, "Is this the big talk?"

I giggled to myself and replied, "Sort of. But I don't think it's quite like any big talk you've had before!"

A waiter came over and asked what we would like.

"Can you do a cappuccino?" I asked. The waiter glanced back at the bar to see if the espresso machine had been cleaned yet. He told me he, "Yes ma'am," so I ordered that and Rick ordered regular coffee. After the waiter left, I realized I hadn't specified decaf, but I decided the caffeine would help me get through what I needed to do.

Rick waited respectfully to see where I would take things next. I started with a little preamble. Pulling a tiny teddy bear out of my tiny purse, I gave it to him and said, "This is for you. It's to remind you that we *bear-ly* know each other yet." I said it with a smile, leaning heavily on the pun.

Rick accepted the little gift and waited to see what would come next. I didn't waste any time, but went straight at it: "There's something I want you to know about me. You know how you have your epilepsy and your asthma? But with modern medical science, you have them totally under control and you can live a normal life? I have something like that too. Basically, I had a birth defect surgically corrected. It doesn't cause me any trouble anymore, except that some people I meet can't deal with it. I think we need to find out if you can cope."

I paused for a moment to let Rick brace himself. Then I continued.

"The thing is, I've had a sex change."

Rick kept a perfect poker face and thought for about thirty seconds. Then he spoke. "I'm not sure we can have a relationship ... but we can still have sex tonight!"

I laughed, softly out loud but loudly inside. I laughed from the release of my tension. I laughed because it was going to be all right.

Everything Nice

I laughed because Rick was a better man than I had given him credit for. I laughed because I was being accepted for who I was.

And I laughed because it was such a typically male response!

Rick added, "I sort of suspected."

"Oh?" I asked. "What made you suspect?"

"A couple of things seemed a little wrong in your vagina," he said.

This, I wanted to hear about. "Oh? What were they?"

"Well," he said, "for one thing, the clitoris isn't hooded."

"No, not very well," I conceded.

"What else?" I asked.

He thought a moment, then said, "I guess that's it, really." I wondered if there was something else, but he just couldn't articulate it. Something he couldn't quite put his finger on. No, wait, he had put his finger on quite everything on Wednesday evening!

"Thank you for telling me," I said. "You're right, my clitoris is mostly exposed. However, I'm fairly certain everything about my vulva lies within the normal range of variation in female genitalia. There's quite enormous variation, you know." I suspected Rick didn't have enough experience with vaginas to debate this point, and he seemed satisfied. I also suspected that, consciously or unconsciously, he was making up the fact he had "suspected" to bolster his conception of his gender-identification skills. He certainly hadn't given me any indication he suspected. But I didn't know. Maybe he did suspect. It really didn't matter.

We talked about it a little more, but not in much depth. I told Rick, "I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have, but first I'd like to caution you. Most men who have relationships with women like me have the attitude — well, it's like I put it before: their darlings were never really men. They were always women; they just needed to have a birth defect corrected. So be careful what you ask, because you may not want to put certain images of my previous life in your mind at all."

Rick had two questions for me. He asked how long ago I had my sex change, and I told him three years. He seemed satisfied with that. Then he asked his other question: "Was your ass always so cute?"

"No!" I exclaimed, giggling. "It sure wasn't!"

Our conversation soon wandered away from my sex change and on to some things in Rick's life. I was not surprised by this, because I had experienced the same thing many times when I disclosed to people. I thought what happens is that people just don't have a frame of reference for discussing sex changes, so they unconsciously go back to more familiar ground as soon as they can. I used to think, *Hey, I've had a sex change here! Shouldn't I be the topic of discussion?* But this time I simply thought, *Great, he's OK with it. Just as well we don't dwell on it.*

At one point, Rick volunteered that the reason he was able to accept me and my sex change was because he had taken EST in the '60s and it had made him a much more open and accepting person. I thought, *Hooray for EST!*

I was grateful Rick was honest about the fact that he would need some time to digest the information before he decided if he could have a relationship with me. I decided not to penalize him for that, and to reward him for still liking me and wanting to have sex with me. So we went back to his apartment and had an exceptionally nice time.

Sex was very different for me as woman, compared to how it had been when I believed I was a man. Before, sexual arousal was all about my hunger for the pretty girl. I wanted to touch her and lick her and so on. Now, as a woman (and with all of that nasty testosterone out of my system), sex was all about what was getting done to me — being touched and licked and so on. Knowing my partner was getting turned on by it, by me, by my body, was also part of the turn-on for me. This mode of arousal explained, at least in part, why I was bisexual: I didn't care whether it was a man or a woman making me feel good, as long as they were into it too. It wasn't an intrinsically a male-female thing; it was more of a top-bottom thing. But it was certainly that way for me.

I underwent another unexpected change when my sex changed. As a man, I was a very independent person. As a woman, I was still independent, due to circumstances, but I felt a strong urge to find somebody strong and kind and wealthy who would take care of me. *Where did that come from?* I wondered. But it was another part of what turned me on as a woman. What kind of car a guy drove suddenly meant a lot to me, because a shiny new Jaguar or Lamborghini shouted Wealth! Taste! Strength! And if it meant small penis size, as

Everything Nice

wags taunted, then all the better, because my vagina was tight and shallow!

What else was different about sex after my SRS? I also liked the idea that I basically just needed to lay there, and the guy had to do all the work. I wasn't just being selfish — they wanted to do me, after all! And the truth was, once I got warmed up with some good foreplay, I became plenty playful myself. At least, I was plenty playful that night with Rick.

The biggest difference for me about sex, though, was love. The old saying goes, "Men use love to get sex, while women use sex to get love." That's how it went for me. As a woman, the affection and connection with my partner was the main thing. The physical act, while it felt good, became secondary.

I was anxious for the next few days after the momentous third date, wondering what Rick would decide about us after my surprise had a chance to sink in. I'd often gotten a positive initial reaction from someone, only to get a negative reaction several days later.

On Sunday and Monday, we exchanged a few bland emails. (Rick wasn't much of a phone person, and that was OK with me.) I noticed that the messages were pointedly non-committal about whether Rick wanted to see me again. I didn't put any pressure on him. It was purely his decision at that point.

Tuesday saw several interesting developments. One, Rick discovered my Web site, the one on which I'd posted lots of stories and essays about my transition, as well as some wild pictures. He seemed intrigued.

The second interesting development was that Rick went back to Zucca's and the owner asked him, "Was that a 'he' or a 'she' you were with last night?"

Oh my, I *was* clocked! I was sure it was Lindy, the blonde hostess, who had clocked me, but I was wrong. The next time we went to the restaurant, I said to her, "You're the one who figured out about my sex change, weren't you?"

"What?" she exclaimed. "Sex change? What are you talking about?"

"My sex change," I repeated. "Oh, I guess you didn't know about it." Not only was I wrong in guessing she was the one who clocked me, but I was also mistaken in assuming word would have

passed around through the entire restaurant staff, since Lindy still didn't know.

Being clocked, in this case, wasn't entirely bad. For one thing, the guy was uncertain — so it was only half a clocking. And I was sure it happened because I was dressed so outrageously, attracting lots of close scrutiny. But the best thing about it was that Rick was suddenly yanked into my world, having to deal with a clocking. It made him much more sympathetic to my plight.

I was proud of the way Rick handled the situation. When the owner confronted him, Rick simply told him, "She's a transsexual." No prevarication, no jokes or winks, just the facts. Good for him!

The third interesting development occurred on the third day after the disclosure. Rick asked if I would like to come over to his place the next evening, as I had done the week before. This was a great sign, but I was still a little worried. It was possible, I negatively thought, that Rick might want a relationship limited to just sex. However, the next day my fears were laid to rest. During the day — before I went over in the evening — Rick asked if I would like to go with him to see the opening of the musical version of *Harold and Maude* on Sunday. *You bet I would!* I liked musicals. But best of all, we were back to normal. Rick accepted me! Rick liked me!

Rick gained more points in my book day by day. He was smart. He was gentleman. He treated me with respect. And, best of all, he loved touching me. We began seeing each other about once a week.

Bad Sex

As I drove to Rick's one evening, I was thinking, *Maybe we can make it an early evening. I really don't want to have sex. I'm just not feeling it.*

But I did think it would be nice to snuggle a while. So when I got to Rick's apartment, I sat down on the couch in front of his always-on television. As usual, an old movie was playing. Rick caught me up on the plot and gave me the background and significance of the film, and I settled in to watch the rest of it.

The couch was perpendicular to the television set. Rick sat at the end farthest from the TV. I sat next to him, then swung my legs up on the couch and cuddled back into his arms. It felt cozy and secure. Rick prattled on about this, that, and the other thing, and I half-listened, half-watched the movie, and mostly just relaxed.

Rick began rubbing my shoulders and my back. I liked that. He reached farther down and rubbed my hip, my tummy. Yummy! I

felt Rick's hand straying closer and closer to my left breast, but that was OK with me. He was nice. He earned it.

Oh! Rick began fondling my breast over my blouse. We'd been intimate many times before, so it would have just been silly to deny him my breast now. But it still seemed a bit forward of him to just grab it like that.

Soon Rick's hand was reaching under my blouse, squeezing my bare breast. I thought, *I should put an end to this now. I should say, "It's getting late, I need to go."* But, it felt good. Huh! I sucked in my breath — Rick had pinched my nipple. Surprising, again, but agreeable. He rolled my nipple between his thumb and forefinger. He kneaded my left breast. He fondled my right breast. The sensations were pleasurable for me, and Rick certainly seemed to be enjoying himself. I decided I would let him have his way with me, as long as it kept feeling good.

After a short while, Rick unbuttoned my blouse and took it off me. He unbuttoned my jeans. I raised my hips off the couch so he could pull them off me, too.

"Ummm, nice!" Rick commented when he saw my black satin panties, which he left in place for the time being.

Rick began touching me all over, stroking my thighs, rubbing my tummy and abdomen, playing with my breasts. He kissed my neck and lips. He sucked on my nipples. I just lay there in a reverie. I felt really good. I thought I ought to let Rick know he was doing well. "That feels great!" I murmured.

Rick began kissing me hard and thrusting his tongue deep into my mouth. Ewww! *Why is that such a big turn-on for you?* I wondered. *Because you are invading me, possessing me?* French kissing was not my favorite thing, but I decided to accommodate his desire, at least for a bit.

As Rick alternately kissed me and sucked on my breasts, his right hand stroked my thigh and moved in between my legs. He started rubbing my vulva through my panties. Wow, it felt really good! I started rocking my hips a little, and arching my back, to get the friction just so. I clutched at his shoulders, his back, his head, to get some leverage and to stimulate him to keep stimulating me. I thought I wouldn't mind if this went on for a while!

My breadth began coming in quick gasps, in sync with the rocking of my hips. I let little squeaks of pleasure escape my throat.

Everything Nice

“Oh Rick, Rick!” I moaned a few times to let him know that I knew who was pleasuring me, and that I appreciated it.

When did Rick’s clothes disappear? I didn’t even notice. But I realized he was naked now, too. He finish getting me completely naked by slipping my panties down my thighs, down my calves, over my feet.

Rick started fingering my clitoris. He did know how to rub a clitoris, I’ll grant him that. I was really getting into it now. I was starting to think about orgasms.

Ooh! That was surprise! Rick was caressing my buttock with his other hand, but with a slick, sneaky move, he popped a finger into my vagina. That got my attention! We’d done this many times before, but that initial pop always took me by surprise. It felt good. I wished I could feel that sensation over and over, but it wouldn’t have been a surprise the next time.

I slid my hand down the front of Rick’s body, down to the inside of his thigh. I was feeling for his penis, but I didn’t want to grab it directly. I just wanted to gauge his readiness. He was ready.

As much as I was enjoying myself, I knew we needed to strike while the iron was hot. “Is there a condom?” I asked.

What do you know, there just happened to be a little square foil packet on the end table, and small bottle of liquid lubricant as well. I roused myself from my reverie and took the condom and lube. I squirted a little lube on my right hand and grabbed Rick’s penis, slowly squeezing and rubbing it, getting it even harder. “Uh-uh-uh,” he moaned.

With my other hand, I held the condom and attempted to open the packet with my teeth. A little corner broke off and I realized it wasn’t as easy as it looked in the movies. (Is anything?) I used both hands and ripped the packet open.

I took out the condom and studied it in the dim light. Which side did it unroll from? I couldn’t be sure, but I picked a side. I placed it on the tip of Rick’s penis and started unrolling it down the shaft. Whew, it worked. I had got it right-side up. “Uh-uh-uh,” Rick moaned some more.

Rick then suggested I should mount him from above, female dominant. I knew what was going on. Now that Rick’s cock was out, it was all about the cock. He had gotten comfortable there on

his back while I put the condom on him, and he would just as soon stay there.

It was OK. I wanted it, and I didn't mind controlling it at that point. I straddled Rick's midsection. I took his sheathed cock in my right hand and positioned it at my vaginal opening. Slowly I lowered my weight down onto Rick's pole, relaxing my vagina as best I could to allow it to enter me.

In it slid, and it felt very good as it filled me up. I used the muscles in my hips and thighs to slide up and down on Rick's penis. This was a very delicate operation, because if I rose too far, he would pop out of me.

Rick started rocking his hips to match my motion. No, no! When I go down, you should go up! When I go up, you go down. But we rose and fell together, with a net of zero motion on Rick's penis. Zero motion equaled zero friction equaled wasn't doing anything for me, and I don't think it did anything for him, either. I stopped and started again, trying to get in counter-sync with him. But it was no good; he kept matching my motion. I tried just staying still and letting Rick provide the motion. I couldn't control the speed or depth, but it worked a little better.

Whoops! Something was wrong.

"Did I pop out?" Rick asked.

I didn't have much sensation inside my vagina, so I was not certain. I used my hand to check.

"Yes, you're out," I reported. What was worse, he was too soft to get back in. I rubbed it a little to see if I could stiffen it back up. But there didn't seem to be any hope.

Shit, what to do now? "Too soft," I say. "It won't go back in."

I lay down beside Rick. I knew what would happen next.

We snuggled a little bit and then Rick asked, "Will you use your mouth? Please?"

But I didn't feel like it. I didn't feel like anything. The foreplay was great; he'd gotten me all rev'd up. But now it seemed it was up to me to pleasure his cock. It was all over for me, because I got no pleasure out of that.

A good sport, I stroked his penis with my hand for a while. "Uh-uh-uh," he moaned. "That feels so good." *Good, I'm happy for you*, I thought sarcastically. But soon I was bored and my hand began

Everything Nice

cramping. I knew Rick wasn't going to cum — he never did — so there was no end in sight. I gave up.

I felt dirty as I drove home later that night. Why did I subject myself to bad sex? Maybe it would have been better if we had simply made an early evening of it.

* * *

In an attempt to fix the bad sex situation, I suggested that we might try Viagra, and Rick reluctantly agreed. One Sunday afternoon we gave it a go. I was happy to find that the little blue pill worked as advertised. For the first time in our relationship, Rick got a rock-hard erection and was able to properly fuck me.

It was great. As it turned out, Rick's penis was just the right size for my vagina. Unfortunately, after about ten minutes, Rick's asthma kicked in and he was too winded to move. So he rolled over onto his back and suggested I get on top and essentially fuck myself with his dick. This I did, and it worked OK, but it wasn't the way I wanted to spend my sex life. In addition, I was, unfortunately, not able to achieve anything like an orgasm.

* * *

A funny incident happened between Rick and me in December. We were out to dinner at the beautiful, upscale open-air Stanford Shopping Mall just before Christmas. (I often made a joke about the three little words a woman loves to hear — “Stanford Shopping Mall.”) Before dinner, we walked around the mall taking in the Christmas decorations, laughing to see the throne where Santa Claus would sit with little children on his knee the next day, and window shopping. As we passed a jewelry store, I teased, “Oh look, Rick, they have wedding rings!” I thought it was funny because the subject of marriage had come up before, and Rick made it clear to me that he wasn't ready for that kind of a commitment. I'd told him I wasn't, either. In fact, we'd never even made a commitment to be exclusive with each other, and frankly, I'd been shopping for a boyfriend-upgrade for the prior couple of months.

The next evening Rick gave me a serious, “Lannie, we have to talk.”

“What's up, Rick?” I asked.

“It's just this. I think we talked about it before, but I wanted to make sure you understand that I don't feel I'm ready for marriage

at this point. Maybe someday, but not for a while, I'm sure. That's all."

"Uh ... that's cool with me, Rick. I mean, we did discuss it before, and I know that. I'm not interested in marriage either."

"OK. I just wanted to make sure we're clear."

"No problem. Let me ask you, though, what brought this on?"

"It was the wedding rings last night."

"The wedding rings?"

"Yes. You were pointing out the wedding rings at the jewelry store."

"Oh, that! Gee, Rick, I was just joking around. I didn't mean anything by that. I'm sorry if you thought I was serious."

"No, I knew you were joking. I just wanted to be sure we're clear."

Even at that, he didn't seem totally convinced. I guess I learned that single women can't joke with single men about marriage, because too many single women take the subject way too seriously. I should have known that already from Janice's parting comment to me, "You're never going to marry me anyway," so many years before.

* * *

Rick and I went out on New Years Eve, heading into 2006 together — but on the verge of being not together. I drove so Rick could drink. We went to Zucca's for dinner, as usual, and then down the street to a burger joint with a bar, a small dance floor, and live rock music. The band was pretty good, playing old Lynyrd Skynyrd tunes and such. We danced a bit, and Rick got pretty drunk on champagne. He didn't seem surprised that I didn't want to come in when I dropped him off at his apartment later that night.

Rick asked me out once in January, and I said I was busy. After that, he stopped asking, and we didn't see each other anymore. Our affair had lasted exactly six months — the longest, Rick said, that he had ever been with anyone. Strangely enough, I think it was the joke about the wedding rings that broke us up.

Coupling

It all started when my friend Kristi, one of my few cisgender girlfriends, sent me the URL for a Web site that had reviews of on-line dating services. People would post to this site to describe their various experiences. I wasn't familiar with most of the services listed on the site, and they only had one or two postings each, but a few well-know, major brands had quite a few entries. I had played with Match.com and Yahoo personals before — it was how I'd met Rick — so I was curious to scan their postings. And I had heard about eHarmony, which Kristi was trying, so I looked at them, too.

The stories were consistent, and they were bad. It seemed that maybe five or ten percent of clients had luck with online dating services. For the rest of us, it was frustrating and hard on the ego. I commented to Kristi that all the services had basically the same formula, and this showed that it just didn't work. I speculated that the key problem was that when you met someone in the real world,

you instantly got a feel for the chemistry you had with them. It was something that only came across in person; no amount of e-mailing or phone calls could provide the same feel for a person.

One service that took a distinctly different approach was eHarmony. The crux of their method was that they enforced an extensive screening policy. It didn't work, either. The postings about that Web site, as well as Kristi's experience, bore that out. The thing was, you could screen for deal-breakers: Do you smoke? What's your age / weight / height? Are you a Republican? But the mysterious things we actually find attractive in a person could only be discovered in 3-D.

"Except," I mentioned to Kristi, "maybe craigslist is different." The quirky Web site craigslist.com seemed to operate in a slightly different dimension of cyberspace. Cool people hung out there. Connections happened. What made it different? I could see a few things. For one, it was totally free (except for employment ads, which supported the site) and had no advertising. For another thing, postings sunsetted after a week, so the site was not a huge garbage collector. Maybe the key was the clean, text-based presentation. Maybe it was just because it was run out of a funky old Victorian house in San Francisco. What I knew for sure was that I'd gotten my current, very cool job by posting my resume on craigslist. Maybe it worked for personals, too.

Inspired by my own observation, and bored and discouraged with my relationship with Rick — this was a couple of months before our eventual break-up — I decided to check out craigslist personals. *Maybe I can find a boyfriend upgrade*, I thought.

I scanned the categories. "Strictly platonic." Heck no. "Women seeking women." Possible. I liked women's bodies, but I was uncomfortable with the idea of a romantic relationship with a woman. "Women seeking men." Not applicable. "Men seeking women." Yes, that would be it.

I glanced down the rest of the list to see if anything else applied. "Casual encounters!" jumped out at me. Eek! That was for sex dates, right? I couldn't help myself; I had to take a look. As I expected, I saw such lurid headlines as, "Want head?," "Big hard cock needs attention," "Looking for porn buddy to watch films with," "Ladies I'll make you cum hard!" and "Hot Guy with a Hot Thick Cock Looking To Fuck a Hot Girl NOW!" *Good lord*, I wondered, *who could be*

that desperate? Or, more to the point, what *woman* would be desperate enough to answer such ads?

So I played around on the “Men seeking women” list for a couple of weeks. I had short correspondences with a few guys. I even met one guy for Sunday brunch. He was a big teddy bear of a man, not really my physical type, but he seemed very nice, so I thought I would give him a chance. In person, he was very nice, but oh so boring. His hobby was bird watching; I learned more about birds during that brunch than I ever wanted to know. And frankly, in the presence of that copious pile of flesh in 3-D, I just couldn’t imagine myself making love to the fellow. Thanks for brunch, and buh-bye!

I began to think that craigslist personals had the same fatal flaw as the rest of the online dating services. I recalled that, back in the pre-Internet days, personals ran in the back pages of local tabloid newspapers and everybody knew they were strictly for losers. Then, when Internet dating arrived, everybody knew it was strictly for propeller-heads. But then the World Wide Web emerged, and soon everybody was online — e-mailing, mapquesting, banking, and, yes, dating. But now, I cynically decided, the cycle had come full circle and cyber-dating had become, again, strictly for losers.

What kind of losers needed to use personal ads to find dates? I knew quite well, because it was the kind of loser I used to be. We were older people, usually divorced (or never married — they were real losers!), who were simply desperate to find a life partner. Oh lord, was I that kind of a loser again?

No. I realized I was not that kind of a loser, because I was not looking for a life partner. I was just looking for some dates, some fun and — dare I say it? — some sex. Yes, I had to get honest with myself: I was looking for some sex. And I was cruising the wrong craigslist category. I wasn’t a “Men seeking women” loser, I was a “Casual encounters” loser!

I decided to look more closely at the “Casual encounters” list. This time, I recalled that I had met a woman named Evelyn who told me she met men through craigslist “Casual encounters.” I asked her if it wasn’t terribly dangerous (meaning terribly sleazy), and she told me that it was not. Evelyn said she had a pretty good sense of people, and she carefully selected guys who were OK. She had quite good luck with it, and often wound up dating the guys for some time after. Evelyn said these guys were decent people but just too shy

to ask a woman out on a date. A casual encounter was all they can handle at first.

So if “Casual encounters” could work for Evelyn, maybe it could work for me. (Evelyn also told me she was a member of Sexaholics Anonymous — no laughing matter, as she explained it to me — but surely not everyone on “Casual encounters” was a sexaholic!)

As I perused the postings, I found some reasonably tasteful ones. Some, in fact, seemed to have been posted by people looking for the same thing as me. For example,

Generous, financially \$ecure gentleman looking for... - m4w - 44

Good looking cauc man, professional, married, 6', 195 lbs, looking for a younger woman for occasional fun. Must be cute, discrete and willing to accept financial assistance. No pros please.

That sounded like an interesting proposal. But the emphasis on money smelled funny. I wouldn't answer that one.

How about this one?

man 4 a women - m4w - 40

Hi ladies. I am looking for a birthday gift that only a women can provide. I am a gainfully employed businessman, looking for a no strings attached relationship with a woman who is looking for the same. Feel free to call me if I have peeked [sic] your interest. My personal cell phone number is [...] Please do not call me if you are not completely serious. Darren

Darren sounded like a nice guy. Kind of dumb for posting his phone number, and not knowing the difference between “peeked” and “piqued,” but hey, I wasn't husband shopping, after all.

Here was another one:

Looking for a tall shapely mature woman - m4w - 44

I am looking for nice mature woman who is also in need of some attention herself. Ideally you would be 40-65 years old, tall, and shapely. Me - 44, 6' 4", 205 lbs. fit and disease free. I will listen to you, and I will give you what you need. Do you feel qualified? Then I would very much like to hear from you.

That was pretty much up my line. Or this one:

Everything Nice

Interesting Male seeks... - m4w - 40 (san jose downtown)

Interesting and cultured white male seeks NSA [no strings attached] relationship with a woman aged 28 - 50 with a sense of humor, self-awareness and sensuality.

In short, I saw that it might be possible to find a decent guy in the “Casual encounters” list.

I also noticed a few ads like this one:

Married white couple looking for a playful bi woman!-mw4w-35

We are an attractive, married white couple looking for an attractive woman to play with, together and seperately. We are in our mid-thirties, both attractive and both h/w [height/weight] proportionate (pics will be sent if you catch our interest). Let's get this party started!!

Hmmmm... That got me thinking. A threesome might be fun! I'd had a threesome in mind two years earlier when I had popped my cherry at that swingers party, but the opportunity hadn't presented itself at the time. It still sounded like fun. And it would give me a chance to find out if I was still bisexual, as I thought I was.

I wound up answering nine or ten ads, including a few couples. I included my picture with each reply, because I knew that made a big difference. And do you know what? I didn't receive a single reply form any of them!

My ego was taking a beating. Why didn't anyone answer me? Weren't my pictures cute enough? Was I missing some important point of protocol? Was I just too damn old? (Not that I had disclosed my age — or my sex change.) Were they so deluged with replies that they couldn't be bothered to give me the courtesy of an answer?

With mounting frustration and hurt, I awoke one Saturday morning with the thought dancing in my head that I might place my own ad. I didn't plan to actually follow through on anything. I just thought that I would get to see the kinds of responses people who placed ads had to deal with. Maybe that would give me some insight into why nobody answered my ads.

I opened my computer and began composing an ad for the “Women seeking men” category. I played with a couple of ideas. I wanted to come off as real and frisky, but not sleazy; well, not *too* sleazy, anyway. I tried this:

Tall, Slim, Redhead SWF is a SURE THING

Let's have a nice long dinner, tell each other stories and lies, and enjoy each other's company. Then, if you've been a nice boy, we can do more. Consider it a "sure thing" date, no strings attached. You don't even have to call me in the morning, unless it's into the kitchen for coffee (decaf, please).

I thought I would ad some personal information:

I'm six feet tall and slim. People always ask me if I'm a model. I tell them not at this age, which is forty-something. My legs are incredibly long and I promise to wear high heels and a really short skirt. Maybe even fishnet stockings. I don't drink, drug, or 420, but I don't mind if you have a glass of wine with dinner. You are welcome to smoke, just don't reply to this post if you do. Please be single, disease-free, clean-cut, fit (no big pot gut), and fun-loving. Have working equipment and be a top. You don't have to be as old or as tall as me. You're probably Caucasian or Asian, and a yuppie or professional. You drive a nice car. Send a picture (no X-rated, please, I'm a classy dame) — no picture, no reply. Tell me where you want to take me for a nice dinner and maybe some dancing, and have a place to get intimate afterwards. No money involved, I'm not a pro. I'm not a flake — I show up and deliver. I'm free this evening.

But it seemed to be getting way too long. Perhaps something snappier, like this:

I Love Hotels

SWF seeks a nice guy with a slow hand and a nice hotel room in the San Jose area for a few hours of sweet lovin'. You be a non-smoker, d/d/420 free, and I'll be the same. I'll be a tall, thin, redhead, a knockout or so I am told. I'm not a pro and not a flake — I show up and deliver. Send a picture (no X-rated, please) — no picture, no reply. The good-looking guy with the reservation at the nicest hotel gets me!

Or this:

Nightclub Two-Step

You meet me at Starlite Dance Club. You waltz me and tango me. Then you take me back to your place where you salsa me and cha-cha-cha. How does that sound? Please be d/d/420/smoke free. I'll be the same. I'll also be a tall, thin redhead in a short short skirt.

Everything Nice

But, even as I savored my own sharp wit, I remembered the flavor of most of the “Casual encounters” postings and I began to dread to think of the types of responses my ad would garner. A little light went on in my head, and I suddenly thought, *Why not post an ad for a couple?* I had already decided a couple would be fun, and it would be a good filter on the types of replies I would receive. Besides, having another woman involved seemed to be a safer proposition as well. And not just physical safety, either. If I were seeing a couple, I would be emotionally safe — my brain would not get to thinking there was a chance of finding a serious relationship in the situation.

And so it was that I composed and posted this ad in the craigslist “Casual encounters” list:

Tall, Slim, Redhead SWF seeks couple

Are you a couple who wants to add a little spice to your sex life? Why not enjoy me for an evening! I’m bisexual and ready to enjoy both of you. I’m tall, slim, a redhead, forty-something, and fun-loving. My legs are incredibly long and I promise to wear high heels and a really short skirt. I don’t drink, smoke, drug, or 420, but I don’t mind if you have a couple of cocktails. Safe sex only. You host or we meet at a hotel — if you want, we could meet for dinner before. No money involved; I’m not a pro, or a flake. I’m just a nice girl who enjoys meeting good people, and having sex with them. Send a picture (no X-rated, please) — no picture, no reply. I’m free this evening.

It was 10 am when I logged into craigslist. I was amazed to see that over one hundred ads had already been posted that very morning. I posted my ad and went down to breakfast.

At noon, I went back upstairs to my bedroom to check the computer. The gmail account I had set up for craigslist replies had thirty messages waiting. I had hit the motherlode! I was astonished to discover the number of couples who liked having an extra woman to spice up their love lives from time to time. Curiously, I noticed that a lot of the couples involved an Hispanic woman; I couldn’t imagine why that might be.

I began reading the messages and responding to each one, even the ones without pictures. I was bound and determined to be courteous, so I wrote back even if only to say, “Thank you for answering my ad, but I’m going to pass.”

Only a few of the messages were from lone guys. I blew off two of them but pursued one older gentleman. We exchanged e-mail for a few days and then he disappeared. The rest of the replies were from couples.

I began sorting the couples into categories, using gmail labels to put some order to the mess. I classified them as “In play,” “Great couple for sometime,” “Dudes,” “Needs followup,” and the like. By the time a few hours had passed, I was up to over fifty replies and I was about two-thirds of the way through reading them all. I found a half dozen couples that I was interested in pursuing. I realized that if I wanted to have a date that very night, I needed to pick a couple soon and start closing the deal.

My number one pick was this reply:

you seem intresting, we are a very fun couple, i am French
37, very fit shes 38, average, dont smokes, no drog, let us
no i will send you some pic, voila.

It was too bad that he didn't have the courtesy to use his caps key, but I had learned I needed to be forgiving in small matters. We exchanged pictures and a couple more short e-mails. He was tall, thin, and good-looking. His girlfriend was thin, long curly brunette hair, and nice-looking. I was mostly attracted to him. He sent me his phone number so I called him.

It was a disappointment. In brief, he was at work and just fooling around on the off chance he could score. The other half of the couple was just a woman he knew, not a girlfriend, and she wasn't even in on the deal at that point. I told Frenchy, “Au revior!”

The clock was ticking. Plan A had fizzled out and I was getting a little panicky. I called my back-up couple. They had written me:

Crazy..Sexy..Cool Couple Here 4 U!
Hi There,

We were compelled to write you! You sound like the lady we have been searching for. We are a sensuous married biracial couple living in the East Bay. She is a WF 5'7", 135 lbs, beautiful face, eyes, slender body and gorgeous red hair.

He is a well educated BM, 5'8", muscular build, silky black hair and brown eyes. Our hope is to meet a lady just as you with red hair (both our weakness) for some fun times in front of the fireplace or to take a dip in the Jacuzzi with and enjoy a hot night of passion

Everything Nice

and fulfillment. She is very bi-sensual and he enjoys watching her with other women.

We plan on entertaining at our place this evening and would love the opportunity to discuss mutual interest. Here is a picture of her in exchange for a picture of you! We will also be willing to exchange phone numbers to expedite our conversations. We look forward to hearing from you...

Kisses,
M & D

Dawn and Marcus, as I would come to know them, were one of the very first couples to respond to my ad. They sounded great, and so I'd expected lots of similarly great responses to follow. Very few of the replies I got were so good. My main reservation about this couple was the location — East Bay, *probably Oakland*, I thought, since Marcus was black. My other reservation was that Marcus was black. I was sorry to think it, to admit I was bigoted, but the fact was that I just found myself most attracted to people who were most like me — skinny, geeky, and, well, white. But neither of these things were deal-breakers for me. In fact, I gave myself extra brownie points for being willing to consider being with a black man. (As a matter of fact, I had been with a black man once before. But he had turned out to be the whitest person I ever met, outside of the color of his skin.)

Plan A having failed, Dawn and Marcus bubbled to the top of my list. I e-mailed Dawn my phone number and asked her to call me. I waited and waited, but the phone did not ring. Damn! Was Plan B going awry as well?

After fifteen minutes, I checked my computer. I had a message from Dawn: "I just called [...]... a man answered. Seems I dialed the wrong number. Can you call me instead: [...]" I was an idiot! I had transposed two digits when I sent her my phone number.

I immediately dialed Dawn. She picked right up and I apologized for the mix-up. She said, "No problem." We had a nice chat and we got along very well. She seemed to be a little bit worried that I might be too inexperienced, probably worrying that I would flake out on them. But I told her I had done several threesomes and a swingers party before, and she became satisfied.

As we talked, I began to realize exactly what the situation was. Dawn and Marcus were lifestyle swingers. When they had written,

“We plan on entertaining at our place this evening,” they were talking about a small swingers party. It wasn’t really what I had in mind for the evening, but the time was short and my alternatives were limited. I decided to go for it.

* * *

A few hours later I was dolled up in my black-and-gold tube dress and black boots, and headed north on highway 880. It was the same dress I’d had luck with on my third date with Rick, except this time I was wearing red panties, because Dawn had told me Marcus liked seeing a woman in high heels and panties.

My destination was Hayward, not Oakland as I had prejudicially surmised. I got to a beautiful apartment complex in the foothills and parked. It was a big complex and I had trouble finding my way in the dark, so I rang Dawn on my cell phone and had her come to the parking lot and fetch me.

I took an instant liking to Dawn. She was casual, friendly, and cheerful. She was tall — not Lannie tall, but about five-nine. She was in her mid-thirties and also thin like me. She wore a sexy leather corset-top revealing some cleavage, and a dark mid-length skirt. Her pretty face was framed by short, straight hair which was about the same shade of red as my own.

She greeted me pleasantly, sounding distinctly not Californian. I asked her, “Is that a New York accent?”

“No,” she giggled, “Milwaukee.” Just a clean-cut Midwestern girl, who happened to marry a black man and live a swinging lifestyle. I could dig it.

I perched on a high barstool at the kitchen counter as Dawn pattered about putting around snacks and drinks. We made small talk. However, I was buzzing and my body was tingling. On the phone, Dawn had suggested that I might want to come by early so I could meet her and Marcus before the others got there. I assumed this meant they wanted the first poke at the fresh meat, and I was ready for action. I longed to be touched.

But no, we just talked. Dawn told me Marcus was in the back getting ready, and he appeared after a half an hour had gone by.

Marcus was much handsomer than I’d expected from his picture, a solidly-built, clean-cut middle-aged guy. He had a gentle, elegant manner that, he explained, came from his Georgia upbringing, and which led many people to assume he was gay. Marcus was a

Everything Nice

fifth grade schoolteacher and Dawn managed an office of a popular weight-loss program. They had a ten-year-old son, but he spent time at a friend's house almost every weekend so the parents could party.

Marcus was clearly turned on from the first moment he set eyes on me. "You're simply stunning!" he told me. I appreciated the compliment, but I still wanted to be touched.

My host got me a soda water and fixed drinks for his wife and himself. They told me that tonight was a break from their usual routine. Their custom was to go dancing in San Francisco, where they would meet up with other swingers from an Internet group they belonged to. Later they would invite whoever they felt like back to the apartment for, well, the orgy. Tonight they had happened to decide to stay in, and Marcus had happened to cruise craigslist and see my ad. It was clearly meant to be!

I asked where they liked to go dancing, thinking it probable that I would not know the place, since there are so many clubs in San Francisco. I almost fell off my barstool when Dawn said, "Oh we always go to the same place. It's called AsiaSF. Have you ever heard of it?" Had I? It was famous for its beautiful transsexual waitresses!

I was tempted to explain to them right then and there that I was transsexual myself, but I suppressed the urge. "Oh yes, I've been there," I only said. "You dance in the basement, right? It's a very fun place."

They got to talking about how pretty the "he-she" waitresses were, and Marcus opined that one or two of them may not be he-shes. "Oh no," Dawn assured him, "They all are." I didn't bother confirming what I well knew to be true.

I wondered what would happen next, now that Marcus was here. The answer was, more talking. I got up to look out the sliding glass patio door at the lovely view of the valley lights, and I danced a little bit to the rap music that had been playing in the background this whole time. At one point Marcus came up and put his arms around me and danced a little bit, and at his touch I thought, *Thank God!* It felt nice, but it didn't last.

I couldn't understand all the talking. I hypothesized that they were waiting for more people to arrive before the physical part of the party started. I heard them mention that another couple was expected at nine, so I decided to be patient until then.

The other couple arrived at ten. It was a black guy from East Palo Alto, a bit rougher sort than Marcus, and a plump Filipino girl. They weren't married, but were obviously hot and heavy for each other. So now we were two couples, and we could get down to ... more talking.

The new dude was anxious to try some of Marcus's homemade chocolate-chip cookies — puzzlingly anxious, it seemed to me. Then Marcus explained, "I'm not going to offer you any cookies because you said you don't want to do any drugs." Oh, marijuana cookies. I got it. I was a little disappointed because Dawn had told me on the phone that there would be no smoking, no drugs, and little drinking. But they were drinking steadily, the drugs were in the cookies, and both of the guys were sneaking smokes out on the patio. But I wasn't upset, because it wasn't excessive.

Actually, we weren't only talking. Marcus also insisted on showing me their swingers group on the computer. I wasn't particularly interested, but I politely looked on. It just seemed weird to me. Marcus was getting all turned on reading the messages from the other swingers and looking at their pictures — while right here we had five willing swingers ready to go in real life!

I had also told Dawn that I would need to leave about midnight, so I was starting to get anxious. Was it possible I would be unable to get laid at a swingers party? The clock kept ticking and my skin kept crawling.

At ten-forty-five, the guy who was to be the final member of our party arrived. He was also a black guy, younger than the rest of us, slickly dressed and obviously a playa. So now that the whole gang was here, we finally ... talked some more.

It was eleven-fifteen when Playa started caressing Dawn in the kitchen. East Palo Alto and Filipina had been making out lightly for some time, and now they started getting heavy. Marcus, seated on a couch in the living area, watched with fascination showing on his face. After a few minutes, I went over and sat next to Marcus. He took the hint and put his arms around me. We began to cuddle, though Marcus's wide eyes were still glued on the others.

I invited Marcus to remove my boots, which he happily did, and he took the opportunity to push up my dress and find my red satin panties. I could tell he was pleased.

Everything Nice

Somebody suggested that we move the action into the bedroom. The other two couples disappeared instantly, but it took Marcus and me a few moments to become untangled.

I stumbled into the bedroom and was greeted with the sight of four naked bodies writhing on the bed. Whoa! When these people got down, they got down! East Palo Alto was not actually on the bed, but standing at the foot of the bed pumping Filipina who lay in the middle of the bed on her back, legs spread. Dawn was on the far side of the bed sucking on Filipina's left breast. Playa was fondling Dawn's butt.

I was game. I cast off my dress and panties, leaving on only my thigh-high stockings, and joined the party. I located Filipina's other breast and began sucking on it.

We jumbled around in various permutations for a while. Filipina was usually the center of attention in the center of the bed, quite passive, but moaning and enjoying herself. I wished I could change places with her. It reminded me of a trannie pile, except that I was the only trannie.

As the orgy progressed, East Palo Alto focused most of his attentions on Filipina; I wondered why they hadn't just held a private party. Playa and Dawn paid most attention to each other, but they noticed me from time to time as well. I explored Dawn's body and she liked it. At one point I noticed Playa was fascinated with putting his finger in my vagina, and that felt good to me.

I should mention that there was a big box of condoms on the bedstand, and the guys were constantly reaching over for fresh ones. That was one thing I liked about swingers, they knew the rules.

Although the girls claimed to be bisexual, I noticed that most of the action was girl-on-guy. Dawn played with Filipina a little bit, but it wasn't her main thing. Earlier Dawn had explained to me that some of the swinger girls claimed to be bisexual but they didn't eat pussy, so it hardly counted. I'm not sure if I saw Dawn eating any pussy. But I made sure she knew I was bisexual, by eating hers!

The guys were bisexual to the extent that they didn't freak if some of their parts touched other guys, but they certainly weren't into gay sex per se. What I really liked about the guys was that they were very dominant. They knew what they wanted, and took it. It was quite a change from the relatively timid guys I'd been with be-

fore. I'm not saying it was because they were black; I'm not saying wasn't.

Marcus was missing from the early action because he was playing host, blowing out candles in the living area and lighting them in the bedroom, and so on. When he came to join the fun, he headed straight for me. Hooray! He presented his erect dick to me and said, "Taste this. I think you'll like it!" I was familiar with guys asking me to suck it, but this was the first time I'd ever had it put quite that way. Tentatively, I kissed the head of his penis. It was peppermint! Yum! It was a new trick for me, peppermint lube. And I liked it. Sucking dick was not my favorite activity, but this made it fun. I happily sucked away.

After a while, a water break was declared. The other two couples went out to the kitchen, but Marcus and I were occupied. Marcus said, "I'd like to fuck you. May I?"

"You can try," I said, "but I'm afraid we're going to find you're too big to get in." I wasn't just being coy. I knew damn well that Marcus was significantly thicker than my biggest dilator, and it was just not going to go.

"That's OK," Marcus kindly said. "Let's try."

Marcus already had a rubber on. I told him, "You probably ought to get some lube."

"I already put some on," he said, "but we can use more." He got a tiny tube of lube and squeezed about two drops into my hand. I silently howled with laughter. *You call that lube?* In the world I came from, where there was lots of anal sex and neo-vaginas that didn't self-lubricate, lube meant fistfuls!

I said nothing and lubed my vaginal opening with the two drops. Marcus kneeled on the bed between my legs, bent over me in classic missionary position, and proceeded to make love to me. But I was right. It would not go in, at least not past my PC muscle. Marcus didn't seem to mind, and we proceeded to do the deed for a while. When we finished — or should I say, when we were done, since there was no climaxing involved on either side — I said, "I'm sorry you couldn't get in me."

"Don't worry about it," Marcus said, God bless him. "It was fine."

We went into the kitchen and joined the other two stark-naked couples who were chatting and drinking ice-cold bottles of water. I

Everything Nice

decided it was late and I'd had enough. It was one o'clock. I gathered my clothes and said goodnight.

"I hope we see you again," Marcus said.

"I hope so," I said. "Maybe I'll meet you at AsiaSF some time. That sounds like fun." And I left.

I considered the evening a success, though not a huge success. I was kind of disgusted with my vagina for being too small to accommodate Marcus, and for not being orgasmic. I felt like my vagina was good for nothing. Although I had enjoyed myself, I really hadn't been sexually turned on at all. I decided I was indeed bisexual, because I was equally un-turned-on by the guys and the girls.

On the positive side, I felt I had gotten lucky that evening, at least in one regard: I hadn't been clocked — the fact of my sex change had never come up.

Sexual Hubris

The next morning I sent a little thank-you e-mail to Dawn and Marcus, attaching a couple of pictures (of me, of course) that we had talked about. I didn't get a reply. I thought that was kind of rude, but maybe I was breaking swinger protocol with the thank-you note.

Buoyed by my moderately successful bi-sexual experience, I proceeded to set up not one, not two, but three dates with couples for the next weekend — which happened to be Thanksgiving. I would meet a suburban white couple at their home in Cupertino on Friday evening. Saturday would find me at a hotel in Fremont with a Chinese lady and a Dutch man. Sunday afternoon I would meet a young professional couple at their home in San Leandro, not far from where my orgy had been held. I was a hot commodity, and I was going nuts.

During the week, I was on top of the world. I thought I had found the fountain of youth, or at least the fountain of sex. Who

Everything Nice

knew willing single women would be in such demand to play with couples? I bragged about it to my girlfriends. I envisioned fucking my way through the holidays, which had been bad times for me in recent years. In short, I was setting myself up for a big fall. Hubris, you know?

I had Thanksgiving dinner at Dish's house. The meal was delicious but the company was boring for me because I didn't know anyone except Dish. And besides, they didn't want to have sex with me!

With great anticipation, I dolled myself up on Friday evening in a sexy silk blouse, short black skirt, and my trusty high-heeled boots. I had a bit of trouble finding my host's house, but he guided me in by cell phone and came out to greet me at my car.

This couple looked nothing like the picture they had sent me. The husband looked older and more square. The wife looked younger and more hip. I didn't find the fellow particularly attractive, but I liked the woman. However, I was puzzled. There I was in all my sexy finery, and they were dressed in casual lounging-around-the-house clothes. OK, I could go with the flow.

The lady had prepared a nice cheese and fruit hors d'oeuvres plate, multi-layered like a wedding cake. We sat at the dining room table in their beautiful, richly-decorated, suburban ranch-style home and talked. The guy immediately picked up that I was in alcohol recovery because he was too, and we swapped recovery stories.

The couple had been married only a short while, and I could tell that they both had issues from their prior marriages. They had some palpable stuff going on, but I hoped it didn't need to spoil our fun.

After a while the guy suggested that we move to the living room. *OK, here we go*, I thought. He sat in an easy chair and she sat at the edge of a comfy couch. The guy had told me in our e-mail exchanges that the girl was usually a slow starter, so I planned to help her along. I sat down next to her, went to put my arm around her shoulders, and asked, "May I touch you?"

"Not right now!" she snapped, her body stiffening.

Whoa! What's going on here? I pulled my arm away and said, "OK that's fine!"

And so we talked. *What is it about all these swingers wanting to talk?* I screamed internally.

We talked about books. We talked about movies. She talked a lot about her elderly father, who was suffering from dementia. He said, “We don’t watch TV. We like to spend our evenings sitting around talking like this.”

Time crept oh-so-slowly by. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. *What the fuck?* I thought, but I continued making polite conversation. *It’s OK*, I told myself, *I go with the flow*. I began feeling foolish sitting there in my come-fuck-me clothes.

After *two hours* of small talk, the guy started mentioning that he had a head cold. The woman began saying that she was on her period. Finally, the guy said to me, “You look bored. You know, you don’t have to stay if you don’t want to.”

What the fuck? I was flabbergasted. “Well, I guess I’ll go then,” I said.

They walked me to the door and bid me goodnight. The guy told me, “We thought about calling you and telling you about her period, but then we thought that we could at least get to know each other.” *What the fuck?* I thought yet again. (A) Being on your period didn’t mean you couldn’t have sex. And (B) if you thought it did, didn’t you think I should have had the right to decide if I wanted to spend my Friday night “just getting to know you?”

I courteously said goodnight, thanked them for their hospitality, and wished them the best. But as I drove away, I found myself becoming furious. What had just happened? Why did it happen? How *dare* they waste my Friday night! *I’m a hot commodity, you know. Everybody desires me!* I felt angry, frustrated, and humiliated. Once again, it seemed to me, I had put myself out there; and once again, it had blown up in my face, just like so many other bad dates I’d been out on. I wanted to crawl into a hole, pull the lid closed, and never come out again.

* * *

Saturday found me still pretty upset. The bloom was off the rose. *Maybe these things just don’t work out*, I thought.

My mood worsened when I got an e-mail message from my Sunday couple, canceling our date because the wife was sick. I was grateful that they canceled, and had given me 24 hours notice to boot, rather than having me over to “get to know each other.” But I was suspicious of the excuse. I had been warned that a lot of flakes answered these posts, and I was beginning to believe it. I replied to

Everything Nice

my couple politely, but labeled them “flakes” and decided I would not consider them again.

Nevertheless, I pulled myself together and got my spirits up for my Saturday evening date. I dressed up nicely — though not as provocatively as the previous night — and headed up to the hotel in Fremont.

My couple that night had come down from Berkeley and took the hotel room for our meeting. I thought it was nice of them to meet me halfway. I had chatted with Diane, the Chinese woman, on the phone a few times and she seemed very nice. She told me that she and Roel, the Dutch man, had just gotten engaged! I worried that it might be an awkward time to have a party with me, but Diane assured me that she considered me to be good luck, because she had found me the very morning they had gotten engaged. Besides, Roel had granted Diane’s sexual fantasy a few weeks earlier. That fantasy was to be with two men at once. Now Diane wanted to grant Roel’s fantasy, which was to see Diane in action with another woman. Diane was inexperienced with other women, but she was interested in trying it, too.

When Diane answered my knock on their hotel room door, she put me at ease immediately. I had been expecting something of a Chinese dowager from her photo, but she was much prettier and younger than I expected. She had on a nice skirt, a sexy blouse, and a big smile. We greeted each other with laughter and began gabbing.

Diane introduced me to Roel, who was a big, well-built fellow. He was pretty shy and quiet, it seemed to me. But Diane said to just wait, and he’ll warm up.

I was bound and determined not to let “talk talk” happen to me again that night, so I plopped down on the couch next to Roel and cozied up to him right away. Diane brought me a club soda and sat on the couch next to me. As we chatted, I began to touch Diane on the hand, on the arm, on the thigh. She seemed a little nervous, but she started responding and touching me back. Since I knew their objective was for Roel to see us ladies together, I concentrated more on Diane than Roel.

Soon we were giggling and fondling and starting to get intimate. Diane moved over to Roel and brought him into the action. We messed around a while and soon Roel and I were arousing Diane quite thoroughly. As Diane came up for a breather, she pointed at

the big king size bed I could see through the double doors to the bedroom, and she suggested we all go in there.

Diane and Roel preceded me to the bedroom, discarding clothing as they went. They hopped stark naked onto the bed and began cuddling. Going with the flow, I cast off my clothes and joined them. Diane and Roel were snuggling and doing I'm not sure what exactly, so I began stroking Diane's thighs and buttocks.

After a moment, I noticed Diane and Roel whispering together. In my hubris and ignorance I thought, *I wonder what marvelous surprise they're cooking up for me?*

A surprise it was, but it was not marvelous. Diane turned her head to look at me and Roel said, "Can we ask you a question?"

A tinge of apprehension fluttered through my mind, but I was feeling great. Finally, an assignation was working out the way it was supposed to. How wonderful and sexy and normal I felt! How nice to be part of humanity, part of sexually-active humanity! Sex had been a very small part of my life up until then, Rick notwithstanding.

So I said, "Sure."

"Were you ever a man?" Roel asked.

I was stunned. I realized getting clocked was a possibility going into this whole craigslist adventure, of course, but the thought had pretty much disappeared into my mind's background noise. I never got clocked. I hadn't even been clocked at the orgy.

My first thought was to lie, to bluff it out. "Why would you ask that?" I started to reply. But I was a terrible liar, and besides, my sex change was something I didn't want to lie about. I wasn't ashamed of it, and I was resolved never to deny who or what I am, not ever again.

So I swallowed that initial answer even as it came out of my mouth, and I replied, "Yes, it is true that I have had a sex change."

Diane and Roel were very kind about it. Roel said, "We really like you a lot. We'd even like to be friends. But we just aren't ready to deal with that in bed."

Diane added, "We can go out into the living room and talk for a while if you like."

But I wasn't there to talk. I didn't need a new trans support group. What I needed was to get out of there.

Everything Nice

"I understand," I said. "I'll just go." I burned with humiliation as I stood up stark naked at the foot of the bed and looked around for my clothes. I felt ashamed as I pulled on my panties, two sets of eyes watching me. I felt like a big, ugly, freak as I pulled on my skirt and buttoned my blouse.

Diane continued to make soothing sounds. "I have a friend who went through that," she explained. "I know how hard it is. *He* really went through a lot. He was just like a real woman."

"I think I *am* a real woman," I mumbled softly, wryly.

"Oh, I'm sorry, that was politically incorrect." No, Diane, it wasn't *politically incorrect*; it was terribly hurtful. But I knew she was trying her best to be nice. She continued, "Roel knows a man who became a woman too. He's still friends with *him*. We think you're really nice. You can stay and talk if you want."

"Thank you for your kindness, Diane, but I'm going to go," I said. "I'm sorry if I spoiled your evening. I hope you're not too weirded out." I slipped into my coat, gathered my purse, and left.

* * *

Back in the car, I was basically in brain freeze. I couldn't believe it hurt so much. I thought I was past all that. I thought I could handle being clocked, in any circumstances. But this had taken me by surprise, and when I was in an extremely vulnerable position. My ego simply crumbled. A few minutes ago, I was a sexy, desirable, fun, *normal* woman. Now I saw that I had only been fooling myself. I was nothing but a freak. I realized I was ashamed of what I am, for the first time in my life.

Suddenly, it occurred to me that maybe this might explain what happened on Friday night with the couple who only talked. Did they clock me, but were too — what, polite? scared? — to bring it up? Or maybe they didn't actually guess that I was trans; maybe they just smelt something queer about me.

I also thought about the swingers party the week before. Jesus, what if the three large black dudes had clocked me in the middle of the orgy? Oh my God, that could have been bad. I liked to think I was a good enough judge of character that I could screen out guys who were likely to become violent, but I didn't have a chance to screen East Palo Alto and Playa. Lord, I might literally have not made it out of there alive. Maybe I was lucky nobody except Marcus paid much attention to me in the group grope. (On the other hand,

they were swingers. Maybe they clocked me and didn't care. That also could explain why East Palo Alto and Playa didn't pay much attention to me.)

It wasn't yet 9 o'clock as I drove home. I decided to stop by Hollywood Video and pick up a DVD to kill the rest of the evening. A lot of people filled the store, it being Saturday night. I found I couldn't look anyone in the eye. Head bowed, eyes downcast, I stumbled through the aisles. I felt like screaming, "DON'T LOOK AT ME! I'M A FREAK!"

I held it together until I got home. I walked in the door and met my roommate, Tony. "You're home early," he said in a curious tone.

"I got clocked!" was all I could blubber out before I burst into tears. I managed to outline my basic dilemma in a few sentences, and said I needed to go upstairs to my bedroom for a cry. I'd be down later to watch the movie with him if he wanted to.

I staggered up the stairs and sat heavily on the edge of my bed, trembling and with the waterworks flowing freely. Before I knew it, Tony was at my side, holding me. "I'm a freak, I'm such a freak!" I bawled. I was having a real breakdown, something very unusual for me. I rarely ever even cried. I felt like my whole world had crumbled down around my ears.

After ten or fifteen minutes, the tears began to dry up. Tony said soothing things to me, and I pulled myself back together. But I didn't try to force it. I'd learned that it was important to process my emotions, and I let them keep coming as long as they wanted.

Finally somewhat rational again, I told Tony I'd meet him downstairs in a few minutes. I made phone calls to a couple of transsexual girlfriends, but neither of them picked up. Stupidly, I didn't ask them to call me back as soon as possible. I guess I thought I was over the worst of it.

Downstairs, I made a big bowl of popcorn and Tony and I watched *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*. It sucked. It was the perfect movie for the mood I was in.

Soon after the flick was over, I lay in bed trying to fall asleep. But things got black again. The feeling that I was some kind of horrible freak again filled my being. I tossed and turned for hours. I tried to think of someone I could call in the middle of the night, but I could think of no one. Eventually I dozed off.

Everything Nice

I woke at 6 a.m. and a feeling of panic and dread covered me like a dank, dirty blanket. My mind spun out of control on horrible, ugly thoughts. I began thinking of ways to kill myself, something I hadn't done with any seriousness for some time. I wondered if I could arrange a fatal accident with Tony's dangerous-looking Bowflex exercise machine. I decided I could only whack myself painfully, but not fatally. I thought about going to the ocean and swimming to Japan. I considered my old reliable, running a warm bath and slitting my wrists. But I couldn't do that to poor Tony, who would find me. Besides, he'd probably find me before I was dead.

I didn't feel I was close to actually putting a suicide plan into action, but I realized the train of thought was bad, bad. Suicidal ideation, I think they call it. I needed help. I had friends; I didn't need to go through this alone.

At 7 a.m., I picked up the phone and called my best friend, Rosalea. I thought I would get her answering machine, but I forgot that she usually went in very early to work on the networks before the business day started. She picked up my call and I found I could hardly talk. "Can you come over here right away, please?" I pleaded. "I really need you."

"Yes," Lea answered without hesitation. "Is it all right if I wrap up a few things here first? I'll be there soon."

I felt better immediately, knowing help was on the way. I went downstairs to unlock the front door for my friend, not remembering that she had a key. Then I sat on the couch next to the front door to wait. It was the exact same place I had waited for Jessica years before, when I'd had the panic attack over realizing I might be transsexual. There was no other place in the world that had anything helpful to give me at that moment. I might just as well stay right there. Soon I was curled up into a fetal ball in the corner of the couch. An hour crawled by slowly. After a while, I got chilly and went back up to bed.

Lea found me soon after, quivering under the covers. She took off her clothes and joined me, holding me tight. It helped immensely to feel her warmth and support. Over the next half hour I managed to burble out the story of what was wrong and how my life — our lives, for she was trans too — were totally fucked. We were freaks and there was no hope for us.

Lea held me and comforted me for three hours that morning. Eventually the clouds began to clear. Perhaps I was simply tired. Perhaps the upset had burned itself out. I told Lea I thought I could fall back to sleep now, and I thought it would be OK for her to be about her business. She convinced herself that I would be OK and started to pull her stuff together and leave. Just then Tony arrived from wherever he had been that morning, and was startled to bump into Lea, whom he had never met before. I heard them introducing themselves to each other as I drifted off to sleep.

When I awoke a couple hours later, I still felt shaky but the black dread was gone. Tony showed up and gave me a beautiful white rose, a mylar balloon shaped like a huge butterfly, and a lovely note that read

Lannie,

This butterfly reminds me so much of you. It spoke to me and I thought I would share with you what it had to say.

The butterfly reminisced of the days when she saw herself as a lowly caterpillar and how her heart was broken by those that looked down upon her. She learned there really is no way for a lowly situation in life to improve, and produce what we want of ourselves without ourselves making a change in our perspective — from fear to love. Regardless of what we are on the outside, it's never too late to be who we are in our hearts. She embraced the notion of her fear, nurtured the fear into love, and transformed her life. Her heart that was broken was actually opening. She sprouted wings and took flight in beautiful splendor.

I see you as a beautiful butterfly — you are colorful, elegant, subtle, graceful, awe inspiring. Most of all you are my friend. I love you for who you are, not what you are. You are not nor ever have been your genitals. You are a lovely beautiful person because of your heart.

Love,

Tony

This beautiful, caring note made me burst into tears again, but this time they were tears of love rather than fear.

I still felt like a freak, and I didn't see how I would ever show my face in the world again. Fortunately, by blessing or coincidence, I had appointments lined up in the next few days that would help in my healing. I had planned to take Monday off work because I was chairing a recovery meeting at noon. It was my home group, a large

group of only women; I told my story and received a lot of support and helpful advice from the ladies. I chaired another recovery meeting on Tuesday night with some other particularly close friends. And Wednesday evening, I had a meeting of a support group for post-op trans women that included my friend Lea.

When I went to work on Tuesday, I was still pretty wrecked. I could barely dress myself in the morning, because everything I put on looked goofy and freaky to me. I decided to have a heart-to-heart with my boss, because she was bound to notice there was something up with me, and I didn't want her to worry. In addition, I decided that part of my disastrous fall was because I hadn't adequately dealt with my trans nature, and I thought that coming out to my boss would be helpful. Besides, Peggy was a warm, compassionate woman, and I craved her support.

Early that morning, I got the opportunity to shut the door to Peggy's office and have the talk. I started off by asking her, "Do you know about my sex change?"

"Of course I do," she answered. "I researched you before I hired you."

"Good for you!" I said. "I'm glad you were smart enough to Google me." It was easy to find out about me by googling. As a matter of fact, I came up the fourth listing if I just googled "Lannie."

So the laugh was on me! For two months I'd thought I was working in total stealth, nobody knowing I was trans, and I was completely wrong. My world was shifting under my feet.

Peggy was totally sympathetic and supportive. On Thursday I took the opportunity of a business trip to Boston to come out to another young writer I worked with, and she thought it was cool. With all this help and support, I quickly regained most of my self-respect.

The final piece of the puzzle fell into place on Friday. As we flew home from Boston, I started reading a book I'd brought with me. It was titled *Radical Forgiveness* by Dean C. Tipping, and it reminded me that the true sources of upsets are not circumstances and events, but core beliefs. I examined my core beliefs to see what was involved in my recent downfall. One of my core beliefs, I discovered, was that I was a weirdo, and I feared I was too weird to ever be loved. Even when I was a little kid, I always identified as the weird one. I wasn't sure where it came from, but being transsexual no doubt

had a lot to do with it. It was a belief I'd clung to, almost as a badge of honor, throughout my life. I interpreted events to reinforce this belief. But lately, since my successful integration into society as a woman, I hadn't been getting much reinforcement that I'm a weirdo. Maybe I even set myself up for the big fall specifically to prove I'm still a weirdo!

Pulling this core belief out into the light of day, I saw that it was demonstrably false. People did love me. People accepted me. They even admired me. They always had. I'd never been a weirdo. It had all been in my mind. I was *normal*.

I began to release my hurtful core belief. I was OK. I always had been. Trans or not, it didn't matter. I was a wonderful human being!

Nevertheless, my days of cruising the "Casual encounters" list were over. I may have decided I was lovable and normal, but being trans was still obviously a big problem in the sack. I knew one thing for sure: Never again would I go to bed with somebody without disclosing that I'd had a sex change. It wasn't that they had a right to know. It was simply that I never wanted to be hurt like that again. Never.

Something Fishy

Coming off my devastating downfall, dating couples, I thought I would abandon the dating race for a while and just appreciate my Rick. (It was still during the holidays, just before our relationship ended.) But Kristi did it to me again. She sent me a link to plentyoffish.com, an absolutely free online dating service. She said she was having a lot of luck fishing there, and a lot of fun, too. So I had to check it out.

I filled out a profile just so I could see what was there. I didn't intend to try to actually get any dates, so I didn't take the profile seriously. For example, they had a slot for "Describe your ideal first date." I put down, "Full body massage. You do me or take me to a spa. Your choice. Happy endings? Why you nasty boy!" Since Christmas was approaching, I attached a picture of myself as Santa's Little Helper.

Oh man, did I ever start getting hits! It was fun, and great for my ego. I began to think I might pursue a date, if anyone looked

particularly good. Most of the hits I simply deleted, no longer feeling inclined to spend time on courteous blow-offs.

I wound up corresponding with several guys, and even talked to a few on the phone, but only one resulted in a date. The lucky fellow was named Phil. His brief initial note closed, "Please grant me the courtesy of a reply." As lack of courtesy on the Internet was a sore point with me, and since I felt guilty about how many guys I was deleting without a reply, I did respond to Phil. In his next short note he sent me his phone number and asked me to call. I replied that I didn't have time for phone calls.

We exchanged a couple of other brief e-mails over the next two days. Then, again, he said, "It sure would be nice if you called me early this evening." I wasn't going to call him, but I wound up doing it anyway. This is how it happened: After work, I planned to meet a couple with whom I had corresponded during the craigslist debacle. I had helped the guy fine-tune his horrible ad, and he was so grateful, he and his wife wanted to take me to dinner. I dialed Phil on my cell phone as I drove down the freeway to meet them, simply for something to do.

Phil was happy I called. We chatted a little and seemed to hit it off.

"I want to meet you!" he said.

"I'm sorry, but I'm booked up solid for a while due to the holidays," I told him.

"What are you doing right now?" Phil asked.

I explained about meeting this couple for dinner. In a suddenly playful mood, I asked him, "Have you eaten yet, Phil? Why don't you join us for dinner?"

"I've already eaten," Phil replied. After a moment he added, "But I could join you later for desert." We negotiated about the time, and he said he would come by the restaurant.

I met my couple at the Fish Market in Sunnyvale, per our plan. They were nice, but booooooring. All they could talk about was their softball league, and I was not at all a sports person. So I was quite relieved when Phil made his appearance.

Phil was a tall, thin, balding, friendly man. I thought he looked rather like the late movie critic Gene Siskel, but a bit older. I guessed Phil was in his late fifties. He was clean cut and well dressed, like I liked 'em. At first impressions, he seemed OK in my book — some-

body I might enjoy spending time with. Besides, he owned a house, and it was a long time since I'd been out with a guy who owned a house. But I doubted I would fall in love with the guy.

Phil and I didn't get a chance to talk much at the restaurant because of all the important softball news, but I could tell he liked me. I adopted a teasing attitude, as I had in our e-mails and phone calls, because I still didn't expect this thing to go anywhere. Phil asked how my fishing (plentyof...) was going, and I told him he was the only guy I'd met. He asked why, and I said, "Jeez, because you demanded it, and I like to do what I'm told."

"What do you mean, demanded?" he demanded. "I never demanded anything."

"You did!" I insisted. "In your very first note you said, 'Give the courtesy of a reply!'"

"I didn't demand, I asked," Phil asserted.

"You demanded!" I claimed. "Then you demanded that I call you. 'Phone me tonight!' you said."

Phil laughed, realizing he was being teased, and that he had no hope of winning his point. "Well, I'm glad you did."

"I'm not saying it's a problem," I continued, somewhat more seriously. "I actually like a fellow to be assertive. I'm tired of going out with weak-willed, namby-pamby guys." It was true; I wouldn't stand for being ordered around, but I did like guys who would take charge and make plans. I liked to be able to relax and just say "Yes!" Maybe what I was looking for was what they used to call "being courted."

After desert, Phil said he would walk me to my car. As we stepped out into the cool night air, I put my arm through his and snuggled up. I still craved to be touched. "I like to take a fellow's arm," I declared.

"I'm glad you do," said Phil.

At my car, we said goodnight and I gave Phil a light peck on the lips. "Let's do that again," Phil demanded, taking to heart my advice to be assertive. So we shared a longer kiss, and he tried to French me! I didn't let him in.

Phil wanted to take me out to dinner right away, but I gave him a date for a Saturday two weeks away because I was so booked up. After all, I was still seeing my Rick, although that relationship was cooling — icing over, in fact. In the intervening period, Phil

e-mailed and called me asking if I couldn't see him sooner. *No, Phil, no. I told you when I could see you!* But I didn't fault him for being assertive.

The Saturday of our date finally rolled around, and Phil called to finalize plans. "Can I pick you up at your place, or what would you like?" he asked.

"What I would like," I said, "is to come to your place." It was my same old *modus operandi*, wanting to see how nice his place was. And for another thing, I didn't want Phil in my house just yet. I didn't want him making himself at home, and I didn't want him noticing things that reveal that I'm a transsexual woman. Like copies of my book, *How To Change Your Sex*, laying around. Finally, I was thinking that, if he was going to try to talk me into sleeping with him, he'd have more luck at his place than mine, because he was *not* getting into my bed that night!

"Oh, I don't know," Phil responded. "Your place is on the way to the restaurant. We'd be doing a lot of backtracking if you came here."

I gave in. "OK, you can pick me up here." I told him my address and the directions.

Phil picked me up right on time. I let him in the front door but immediately said, "Are you ready to go?" I felt rude rushing him right out, but I wanted to.

"Sure," he said, and we left.

Phil drove a nice Toyota, similar to Rick's. He took me to a terribly romantic restaurant, The Grandview, half-way up Mount Hamilton. We were shown to a table next to the window, with a spectacular view of the twinkling Silicon Valley lights.

The restaurant was crowded with holiday revelers. It made service slow, but that was fine. We were in no hurry. We had a great time getting to know each other. As was usually the case, my date did not probe deeply enough into my background to give me any need to deliberately cover up the fact of my sex change.

Eventually, a little old French waitress who looked rather like Dr. Ruth Westheimer, the sex doctor, waddled over and took our orders. Her name was Ramona, and we became chums through the lengthy meal. She thought Phil and I were a darling couple, and she became quite excited when she learned it was our first date. When Phil went to the bathroom, Ramona said to me, "Let me be your

Everything Nice

mother and give you some advice. Respect yourself. Respect yourself. Be nice to your man, but don't sleep with him. You don't have to. Have respect for yourself." I laughed and thanked her for the advice. I guess I had my marching — or non-marching — orders for the evening! I thanked God for the brilliant little angel he had sent my way.

Phil took me home through the driving rain that had materialized while we were eating. He parked in my driveway and turned off the engine. I did not invite him in. I kissed him; I let him French me a little; and I said goodnight.

"What, that's all?" Phil cried, half joking, trying to be assertive.

"That's all! Goodnight!" I laughed and hopped out of the car. A disappointed Phil drove away into the storm.

Phil got me to agree to go to dinner with him the following Tuesday, even though he understood it was a "school night" and I would need to make an early evening of it. At the time, I was getting up for work at five in the morning to beat the commute traffic to Redwood City.

On Monday, I got a plaintive e-mail from him. "I'm sorry, I need to cancel tomorrow," it read. "It seems I have an appointment for a PG&E guy to come and fix my heater in the evening."

When I talked to Phil on the phone that evening, I said, "I'm not letting you off the hook that easily. Can I come over to your house and cook you dinner?"

This suggestion surprised and delighted Phil. "Do you like salmon?" he asked me. "I can grill some salmon if you bring a salad." We agreed to that plan. And my plan — to check out Phil's house, and to purposefully put myself in a vulnerable position to be seduced — was also working.

* * *

The next day, I left work early so I could snatched a half-hour nap before going out. I wanted to be wide awake later that evening.

At six, I headed for Phil's house. I got stuck in some horrible Christmas-shopping traffic and I arrived late, in a frustrated frame of mind. A bottle of sparkling cider had popped open in my front seat, too, spraying my clothes and the dashboard and further dampening my mood.

When I got there, Phil was so happy to see me, my spirits soon rose.

The exterior of Phil's house hadn't been much to look at in the dark, but I suspended judgment until I could see it in the light. Once inside the front door, I looked around. Phil's living room contained a big comfy couch positioned a few feet in front of a big TV in an entertainment center. Other than an exercise bike, and a few golf trophies, the room was practically empty. *At least it wasn't a terrible mess*, I thought, trying to make the best of it.

"How long have you lived here?" I asked, thinking there were probably boxes of stuff in the garage waiting to be unpacked.

"Twenty-three years," Phil replied. So much for the boxes-of-stuff theory.

In short, it was nice that Phil owned a house, but it wasn't a place in which I was anxious to spend a lot of time. Oh well.

As I mentioned, Phil was really happy to see me. He was all over me, hugging me and trying to French kiss me. I flumped down on the sofa in self-defense, and he sat beside me. We chatted and snuggled a little. When he started to get frisky, I declared it was time to fix dinner.

I put together the salad, which for some reason impressed Phil immensely. I guess I had told him I don't cook much, and he thought that meant not at all. He grilled the salmon on a goofy little electric counter-top grill. They were huge slabs of salmon, enough to feed an army, and they didn't cook all the way through. Phil served them up on some very feminine china that he said he inherited from his grandmother. I picked around the edges of my salmon slab and found enough cooked pieces to satisfy my appetite. *Thank goodness it isn't pork!* I thought.

After dinner, we returned to the sofa. Show tunes were playing on the stereo, and Phil declared he was a big fan of musicals like *Phantom* and *Mama Mia*. He said he wanted to take me to see the movie version of *The Producers* when it opened the next week.

Phil demonstrated the sofa's fancy features. A console folded down in the middle. It had knobs and buttons and holders for drinks. Both ends of the couch turned into recliners, and the console controlled vibrators in the cushions. They weren't great massagers like in the chairs at Sharper Image; they just rumbled. I joked, "Where do I put in my quarters?" as Phil set my recliner to a low rumble. It

Everything Nice

was the ultimate bachelor couch. I could envision Joey of television's *Friends* reclining at one end, Chandler at the other.

Phil swung the console up into the back of the couch and slid over next to me where he could stroke my left arm. I couldn't really cuddle because I was lying back in the recliner. I waited for Phil to start being assertive. And waited. And waited. Signs of progress were not forthcoming. Phil just kept caressing my left arm as we talked.

Finally, I realized I would need to make the next move, so I went to my old reliable: I asked Phil to remove my boots. He gladly and capably assented. I swung my legs up across his lap and lay back on the couch. This presented Phil with a new fondling opportunity, and he began rubbing my stomach with his right hand and my thigh with his left. I wondered when, if ever, they would start to stray into forbidden territory (which might not be forbidden tonight!) However, I was resolved to disclose my sex change before we went too far. I wasn't going to take the chance of getting clocked in bed again. I began looking for an opportunity to bring up the subject, and Phil gave me a doozy.

Out of the blue, Phil said, "I googled you but I didn't come up with anything."

"Oh?" I said, sounding quite surprised.

"Why?" Phil asked. "Is there something out there about you? There's certainly some stuff about me. I can't believe it, but you can still find out about my ex-wife. Can you imagine? My ex-wife! And we've been divorced for six years!" How horrible!

"Oh," I said ominously, "yes, there is stuff out there about me."

"Bad stuff?"

"You might think it's bad."

Phil's interest was piqued. The hook was baited, and Phil bit.

"What is it?" he asked. "Come on, you can tell me." I could see from the look on his face that he thought it would be something silly, some little thing that wouldn't trouble him at all.

"It's about my sex change," I said calmly, almost playfully.

Phil was startled. I saw the wheels turning in his head. Then he said, "Ha ha. I never know when you're joking."

Uh-oh. I'd brought that on myself. I was always joking and teasing with Phil. Nothing for it now but to play it safe. "I'm serious, Phil. It's true."

I think he knew it was true, but he didn't want to believe it. I saw that his brain was freezing up at the very magnitude of it. His hands on my belly and thigh began moving more and more slowly.

We sat there for a few minutes. "Why don't you go Google me right now?" I suggested. But he didn't want to. He really didn't want to know.

I thought of something. Reaching for my purse, I got out one of the bookmarks I used to promote *How To Change Your Sex*.

"Look at this," I said, handing the bookmark to Phil.

He glanced at it. He noticed the title of the book. But still he resisted. "It's just a bookmark," he said. "It doesn't prove anything."

Incredulous, I said, "Look at the picture Phil. That's me. I'm saying, 'I changed mine!'"

Phil looked at the picture. "That doesn't even look like you," he grunted.

"Look like me?" I cried. "It is me!"

Then Phil noticed the name of the author of the book. My name. "By Lannie Rose," it said. That broke through. Phil put two and two and two and two and two together. His face blanched. "Oh!" he moaned.

We sat in silence for a few minutes, his hands barely moving on my belly and thigh. I broke the silence.

"You can ask me anything," I said gently.

"I know that," Phil snapped.

A few more minutes of silence passed. The Phil asked me something.

"When you were in Europe," he inquired, "what countries did you go to?" At first I wondered if he might be implying that I went to Denmark for my sex change. But no, he had just changed the subject to something he was comfortable with. That happened a lot when I outed myself to people.

We chatted about other things for a while. Then I drew the discussion back to my sex change. "I have to tell you, Phil," I said, "I'm rather surprised and impressed that you haven't thrown me out of your house already."

"Why would I do that?" Phil asked. "You said you could stay until nine." But it gradually became clear to me that the reason I had not been thrown out was because Phil's brain was frozen. He

Everything Nice

couldn't do anything. He couldn't even remove his hands from my body, as much as he wanted to.

We talked a little more and I decided I had better go. I tried to leave Phil with some comfort. "Phil," I told him, "don't be surprised if you have a different reaction in a day or two as this news sinks in. That happens to a lot of people. And if you don't want to go out with me anymore, I quite understand. I won't hold it against you. I know some people just can't deal with it."

Phil walked me to the door and bid me goodnight. He did not try to French kiss me. I said, "Goodnight, and happy googling!"

I never heard from Phil again. I e-mailed him a note the next day, but he did not grant me the courtesy of a reply.

Fortunately, I was not devastated this time. Apparently my self-esteem work had born fruit, as did my decision to disclose my sex change early. Besides, I wasn't that anxious to see more of Phil anyway. It was a relief as much as anything.

* * *

The next day, I pulled my profile off plentyoffish.com. I was done playing. It just wasn't working for me. But I still got a few e-mail messages from fans. One guy, Jack, was a masseuse and wanted me to call him. Ooh, a masseuse. Cool!

I called. He was very nice. He was actually an architectural engineer but he did massage — real, therapeutic massage — as a sort of hobby. He droned on and on about different things in his life, and I "uh-huh'd" him for a while. Pretty boring, as usual. I wasn't wild about Jack, but I did like the idea of a massage, so when he began pressing to see me, I wasn't entirely opposed. I decided to throw some roadblocks his way and see what happened.

"I've got two problems with seeing you, Jack," I told him. "The first one is the distance."

"It's only forty-five minutes," Jack said. "That's nothing to me. I don't see that as an obstacle at all."

"It's an obstacle for me," I said. "But I guess it's not an insurmountable obstacle."

"Thank you!" Jack said. "That's an attitude I like."

"But there's another obstacle, Jack."

"What is it?"

"I've had a sex change, Jack."

That one gave Jack pause. “A sex change?” he mused. Then he came around. “Well, that’s OK,” he said. “I’d still like to meet you.”

Nice! Jack’s stock shot up a few points on my exchange. We talked a little while longer. He asked a couple things about my sex change, like how long ago it was. He seemed fine with all of my answers.

Wrapping up the long phone call, Jack said, “I’ll call you next week. We’ll talk some more, and set up a time I can take you out.”

“OK,” I said.

I never heard from Jack again.

These experiences forced me to conclude that, while being transsexual did not diminish me in the least as a human being or as a woman, it was a big damn problem when it came to dating. I supposed I would stop trying, and just wait for the right guy (or girl) to drop into my life. Everybody told me that would happen. Right, like I could really believe that. But I couldn’t think of a single damn thing I could do about it.

Return to craigslist

New Years came and went, Rick stopped asking me out, and I began feeling lonely again. One day, it suddenly occurred to me that I had missed a trick on craigslist. I had played the “Men seeking women” list, but no one had answered my replies to their ads. I had placed my own ad in “Casual encounters,” to disastrous results. But I had yet to place an ad for my wonderful self in “Women seeking men.” Perhaps that was the way to hook up with the good ones.

So it was back to craigslist for me. I decided to avoid the problems I had encountered on my recent dates by being completely upfront about my sex change. This is the ad I placed:

You don't want to date me

I'm a gorgeous, sexy, 40-something redhead, tall and slim like a model. I'm smart, funny, and fun-loving. But you don't want to date me, just because I've had a sex change. What a shame! You're missing out on a

wonderful girl. Unless you're bold enough to leave the past behind and live with me in the now ...

I posted my ad early Tuesday evening, thinking I could line up one or two dates for the upcoming weekend. I'd forgotten how much work it was to follow up on an ad. I was quickly inundated with responses; 70 poured into my inbox over the next few days.

Another interesting thing happened. Just a few hours after I posted my ad, I got this message:

Your posting has been removed by the craigslist community.

Several craigslist readers flagged it for the following reasons:

MISCATEGORIZED: posting appears to be in the wrong category

PROHIBITED: posting appears to conflict with craigslist Terms of Use

SPAM: posting appears to have been posted too frequently, OR in too many categories, OR is being regarded as commercial spam. To advertise a business or service, please post under "services offered."

After reviewing your posting and our policies, if you are convinced that those flagging your post were mistaken, please feel free to repost.

What the ...? My post had been removed from the list. I went to craigslist help to try to understand what had happened. I learned that craigslist was self-policed by the craigslist community. If anyone thought a post was inappropriate, they could flag it. When an unspecified threshold was reached, the system automatically removed the offending post and sent out the explanatory message I had received. It was all very democratic, but the result was the tyranny of the majority. The world of craigslist had no court of appeals.

It sounded fair enough. So why were people flagging my post? I had no doubt but that it stemmed from the mention of my sex change. Miscategorized? I supposed that flag came from people who did not think I should be allowed to post as a woman. Prohibited? I read through the craigslist *Terms of Use*. All I could come up with was that they thought mentioning a sex change was "pornographic." But spam? Why would anyone flag it as spam? Now, that was just malevolent.

Everything Nice

I felt hurt and angry. I reposted, appending this paragraph to my ad:

This is a repost. I presume people flagged my ad because I mentioned my sex change. That's very hurtful and disrespectful. There's nothing pornographic about my sex change, it's just a medical fact. If I don't mention it, guys accuse me of deceiving them. And if you don't think I'm a woman, what the heck am I? I don't have a ... oh, I'd better not say it, or you'll think I'm being pornographic. People, if it bothers you, just go away and leave me alone. Be grateful it's something you don't have to deal with. No need to flag my ad. I'll just repost anyway — and that pops me back up to the top of the list!

My ad survived a few hours before it was once again removed. My spirits were considerably raised because I received quite a few replies from people who totally supported what I was doing.

I started to become amused. I reposted with this coda:

This is my second repost. People, if you flag me, I have to repost simply to assert my human rights. And each time I repost, I go to the top of craigslist and get a lot more hits. So keep on flagging me, if you like!

We played this game over the next few days, them flagging my ad, and me responding with funnier and funnier reposts. For example:

This is my FOURTH repost. I would have dropped the whole thing by now, but as long as you self-appointed craigslist police keep flagging me, I have to repost to assert my basic human rights. Look, people, transsexual women and men exist; we walk among you; get used to it. So keep on flagging me, and I'll keep reposting and popping up to the top of the list. All the more hits for me!

As I said in the post, every time I reposted, my ad would appear at the top of craigslist. That's the way craigslist works: new posts are added at the top of the list, and posts older than seven days are removed from the bottom of the list. And the hits on my ad — the responses in my inbox — kept rolling in.

On the third day, I got tired of the game, and reposted a final time with this codicil:

This is my SIXTH repost. You guys are getting pretty good — my last repost came down in only 27 minutes. Well, this will be my final repost. Thanks to all your flagging and popping me back up to the top of the list, I've received more than a hundred responses in my inbox. So far, only one has been hate mail, and one told me to go to church and God would save me. (He already has.) About 20 percent of the responses simply support my right to post on this board, and the rest are nice guys who want to ask me out. (Girls, there's a hint: if you're not getting good responses from the fellows, try saying you've had a sex change.) Thank you for all your help, craigslist Gestapo!

OK, so I exaggerated a little bit with the “over a hundred responses.” As I mentioned before, I had a total of 70 unique respondents. A handful of them seemed worth pursuing.

Brent was a cute guy in his 40s. He directed me to his *Hot or Not* picture. It was an outdoor shot. He was very Caucasian, short brown hair, athletic build, dressed in a t-shirt and walking shorts. What got me, though, was that he was squatting down next to a beautiful cocker spaniel whose name, I would soon find out, was Bill. Brent wanted to talk on the phone, but our hours didn't coincide, me being an early bird and him a night owl. We never did have that phone call, so I guess I must not have been very attracted to him.

David was a 50-year-old Chinese guy with a Fu Manchu mustache. We exchanged pictures and he said, “No thanks.” I said, “OK,” but I included another picture, and then he was interested again. We wound up having some deep e-mail conversations about spirituality and the nature of the cosmos, but he was skittish about starting a relationship with me. I didn't push, I just philosophized with him. Then one day he wrote that his old girlfriend had returned, so that was that.

A young stud from Australia wrote that he thought I was hot, so I wrote back a provocative response, figuring Australia was well outside my preferred dating radius. It turned out he was living close by on a work assignment. He was interested in meeting me, but I was suspicious so I drew him out for a while. As I suspected, after exchanging e-mail messages for a week, he turned hostile. First, he admitted he was looking for casual sex. When I rebuffed him, he tried to convince me that in Australia, “casual sex” meant close

Everything Nice

friends, with benefits, just not getting married. When I didn't buy it, he called me a dick. I asked him what that meant in Australia, but he was done with me.

One guy told me up front that he was married and looking for a mistress. Other than the married thing, he seemed to fit the profile of the kind of guy I was looking for: he was a pretty high ranking executive in a software engineering firm. He was even tall and good looking — lean and buff. I agreed to meet him for coffee after work one day. The day arrived, and in the afternoon an e-mail message arrived in my inbox. He said something had come up and he had to cancel. I never heard from him again.

I got a very chatty introductory letter from a fellow named Mitchel. He was a sales executive, single, and not bad on the eyes. He lived 40 miles away from me, which was a deal-breaker as far as I was concerned, but he talked me into giving him a chance. (Did I mention he was a sales executive?)

In Mitchel's third e-mail message, he told me his son had been killed by a tiger. I tried to take it seriously, but — I couldn't believe this — he sent me a picture of the tiger! It was rearing up on its hind legs, towering over his son!

I finally had a phone conversation with Mitchel and I got the rest of the tiger story. Mitchel was quite proud that, when his 23-year-old son had told him he wanted to become a tiger trainer, Mitchel was fully supportive. (I think the implication was that he was open-minded enough to be fully supportive of my sex change, too.) All he told his son was, "Be careful!" Kids, huh? They never listen. The son found a cheesy tiger-trainer school in Las Vegas, and before he knew it, the tiger took him down. This had happened five years earlier. Mitchel sued the tiger-trainer school and won.

Mitchel also told me he was recently divorced and living in a small — but nice — apartment. And that he had no money; he really needed to close the deal he was working on that day because he needed the \$300. He told me about his job. He told me about his daughter. He told me about his championship-level pool playing. He told me every single thing that had happened to him at work that morning. In short, he told me way too much. I told him I couldn't take it all in, that it was more than I was ready for, and broke off our contact.

A businessman in Los Gatos named Dean told me that he had dated a trans woman years ago, and he would love to meet me. But he was an older guy, and pretty portly. I couldn't see being with him, so I told him, "No thanks."

He persisted. He wrote back and asked why I didn't want to meet him.

"You didn't particularly ring my bell," I told him. "I had lots of prospects to sort through, and I'm afraid you simply didn't make the first cut."

"But," I went on to say, "you're persistent, and that's a quality I like!" Besides, he lived nearby in a lovely part of town, and he seemed to be a reasonably well-off businessman. By this time, most of my high-grade candidates had flaked out, so I was willing to give Dean a shot.

"How can I ring your bell?" Dean wrote back.

"You could ask me out on a date," I replied. "I know it's old fashioned, but it rings my bell."

I never heard from Dean again.

I did meet one guy for coffee. His name was Roger. He was 6 feet 2 inches and blue-eyed, just like me, though a little taller. We spotted each other in the parking lot on the way into the agreed-upon coffee shop. I took his arm and snuggled right up to him as we walked. I could tell he liked it. I liked it a lot, because I so rarely got to be with a guy who was taller than me.

We ordered our coffee and he paid. We found a place to sit in the corner, where it was fairly private, and had a nice, long talk. I found out what he did for a living, which, I realized, we had not discussed in our 23 e-mail exchanges. He built race cars! He owned two Jaguars himself — the real ones, with twelve-cylinder engines. (He hadn't driven one that day because they were both being worked on.) I was glad that I drove a fairly respectable Mustang GT, which seemed to impress him. Not bad for a girl, you know. I began having visions of being taken for test drives around the track at Laguna Seca, traveling really, really fast.

Roger was a child of the '60s, an aging ex-hippie. He had dropped acid and listened to the Grateful Dead, like me. He had liberal politics and a laid-back philosophy of life, just like me but even more so. His face was rather craggy, his longish blond hair was thin-

Everything Nice

ning, and he had a bum knee, but he had a lot of qualities I liked — the two Jaguars, for starters. I felt that we made a real connection.

I never heard from Roger again.

The upshot was, I didn't have any dates that weekend, or ever, in spite of all the effort I had put in. I felt I was now truly and finally done with craigslist.

Munch

Munch (BDSM)

from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A munch is a low-pressure social gathering for people involved in, or interested in, BDSM, usually at a restaurant. The purpose is socializing... Unlike a play party, a munch is meant to be a casual affair, without dominant/submissive roles, fetish attire or play.

The announcement in our Yahoo social group (TG Party Girls, which was the successor to Jamie Faye Fenton's e-mail events newsletter) was for a munch at a Chinese restaurant, to be followed by an "evening of dungeon play at the infamous Power Exchange." This particular munch group had been meeting on a Thursday evening once a month for several years, and was open to accepting new people. I hadn't been to a BDSM play party in several years, and I thought I might like to try bringing a little kink back into my life.

Everything Nice

Besides, I had never been to an actual munch before, and I loved trying new things. I had Friday off for the President's Day holiday weekend, so I decided to attend the munch.

Thursday arrived and I left work earlier than usual so I could catch a quick nap before the evening's entertainment. I woke from my catnap with an hour to spare, to make my preparations.

Touching up my makeup, I leaned heavily on the eyeliner to make smoky, evening eyes. I fluffed my long, wavy, red hair. I donned my tiny leather circle-skirt, my tight, front-laced leather crop-top (exposing a generous amount of my flat tummy), and my high-heeled boots, all black of course. I accented with a pearl choker collar, large white plastic hoops dangling from my earlobes, and a super-long string of pearls looped three times around my neck. Cute, but something was missing. Oh, yes! Red fishnet stockings held up with a red garter belt, and red satin panties. I deliberately put on the panties under the garter belt, making them difficult to remove. I planned to be a semi-good girl.

With my black opera gloves shoved hastily into in the pocket of my black pleather trench coat, off I went. I beat my way through the 6:30 rush hour traffic, up highway 101 toward the beautiful, kinky city of San Francisco.

I followed the freeway until it ran out of road at Duboce Street in the city. I knew from my Google map that a right turn would take me directly to the Power Exchange, where I planned to park. However, I took the turn a block too soon, and I didn't see the PE. When I got to South Van Ness Avenue, close to where the restaurant should be, I realized the PE must be behind me.

The Mission and Van Ness intersection was wide and weird. I saw that I was on Mission when I needed to be on Otis, where it veered off to the right of Mission. I circled around a block, made the turn onto Otis, and quickly found myself in front of the familiar old Power Exchange.

I thought I recalled parking being available right next to the club at Gough, but no cars were parked there and it didn't look to me like a parking lot. So I turned left, which strangely kept me on Otis, and parked just across the intersection. Mine was the only car parked on the street there, but I read the sign and the meters and it looked like it was permitted. I also recalled parking in the same spot in years gone by.

The February evening was chilly in the city, although not so cold as the city's summer evenings. I pulled my trench coat tight around me for warmth, and also to conceal some of my sexy outfit. But I knew that, as I walked, my boots and red fishnet stockings poked out through the flaps at the bottom of my coat. It was OK. After all, this was San Francisco, and it was still light out. I knew I would be safe.

I had hoped to get to the munch at 7:30, when it was scheduled to start, because I thought socializing at the munch would be the best part of the evening for me. Despite my attire, I expected to quickly become bored at the play party, and I would leave early. However, the heavy rush-hour traffic had delayed me; the clock had already struck 8. I wasn't worried. There was still plenty of time to eat, because the PE didn't open until 9.

I walked the long block back up Otis to Van Ness, seeming to attract no undue attention from the people I passed on the street and waiting at the bus stop. *Darn!* I would have liked some attention.

I turned left on Van Ness and walked up half a block, but no restaurants were apparent in that direction. So I turned around and retraced my steps. Crossing the wide, weird intersection, I knew that a lot of drivers sitting in their vehicles stopped at the light must be looking me over, and I felt good about that.

Walking a block the other way, I still didn't see any restaurants. I got the printout of the Google map from my purse and discovered that, oh yes, the restaurant was on Mission, not Van Ness. So it was back to the weird intersection and across again in the perpendicular direction. A little way up the next block, I came to an Asian restaurant. I looked for a sign to see if it was the right one. But as I drew abreast of the big plate-glass window, I saw a crew of a dozen raggedy-looking people at a long table. *That must be the munch!*, I thought.

I went in and headed for the big munch group. I passed a few Asian couples dining at smaller tables in the nearly-empty restaurant. They were casting bemused glances at the munch group.

I strode up to munch table. Heads swiveled to take in my Amazonian, leather-clad wonderfulness. I gave them a big smile and announced, "Hi! I'm Lannie Rose. Is this the munch?"

Heads nodded and few mouths said, "Yes."

Everything Nice

At first glance, the group looked to me like it was all men, except for one obvious woman at the near end of the table. I directed my attention to her. "Are you Robin?" I asked, referring to the person who had posted the munch invitation in our Yahoo group.

"Yes!" she said, in a deep, masculine voice. Robin was, of course, a cross-dresser.

We exchanged friendly greetings, "It's so good to finally meet you!"

"May I sit here?" I asked, indicating an empty chair next to Robin.

"Please do!"

I made myself comfortable as the guys around me introduced themselves. Across from me was Lou, a little old man who was said to be an expert with the whip. Next to him was a heavyset, middle-aged guy named Harry; and next to him, a young man named Paul. They were happy to see me, and very friendly.

A waitress scurried over and took my order for beef chow fun. Food was already arriving up and down the table. I chatted pleasantly with Robin, Lou, and the rest.

I was a bit surprised that I seemed to be the only person in fetish wear. Most of the people, including a few women I now noticed at the other end of the table, were in jeans, T-shirts, and casual jackets. Robin was in a nice skirt and blouse. As time went on, however, I began to notice that some of the shirts and pants were, in fact, leather, and leather wrist-bands and collars could be seen here and there.

My chow fun arrived and I began to eat. The food was mediocre but palatable. I didn't care. I was too excited to eat much anyway.

As I was eating, a tall, thin guy came in dragging a rollie suitcase, like an airplane carry-on bag. He glanced around and made for my end of the table. I assumed it was because he was attracted to me!

"Wow," I said to him, pointing at the suitcase, "I can see you come prepared."

"Yes," he said, in a cute British accent, "I have my toys. It's mostly tying ropes, but I didn't bring any of my suspension equipment because Power Exchange doesn't have anywhere I can do suspensions." I loved British accents.

He pulled a chair up to the very end of our table and ordered coffee from the waitress.

As the eating was winding down, another cute, dark-haired guy came over and introduced himself to me. "Hi. I'm Marty."

Lou piped up, "Marty is the guy who founded this group three years ago. We've got him to thank for it."

I was honored that the head dude had come over to welcome me. What nice people!

Marty told me he had watched my legs as I was crossing the intersection at Mission and Van Ness earlier, and they were very nice. Hooray! I knew I could attract some attention!

The dinner conversation was about this and that, most of it not very kinky. We did talk a little about what different people's specialties were. Harry said his was spanking. I said, "Oh, that's nice."

"Do you want me to spank you?" he generously inquired.

"Sure!" I said enthusiastically.

A very pretty young woman arrived. She looked Italian, with large, dark eyes; rich, red lips; and long brunette hair. She was dressed in a smart business suit, apparently having come straight from work. She introduced herself as Adele and pulled up a chair next to me. But she actually wanted to be next to Peter, the British guy. It seemed they were together. *Too bad*, I thought. I would have liked to be with either one of them!

When Peter was socializing at the other end of the table, I asked Adele if she and Peter were a couple. She laughed and said, "No, we only get together at these things." Then she told me, "I'm going to go put on my fishnet stockings. You inspired me!" I liked that.

Soon it was 9 o'clock and time to walk down to the Power Exchange. Boys and girls coupled up because the PE let couples in for free. Girls (and trans girls, including cross-dressers) always get in free, but single guys gotta pay.

Lou asked if I would be his partner. I said, "I'd love to!"

I stuck close to Lou as we walked across that wide intersection one more time, and on down Otis. I made the acquaintance of some other members of the group as we walked. One pretty black girl told me that we could expect to see more of the group's members at the club, about doubling the size of our contingent. Considering the quality of the food I had eaten, I understood why some folks preferred to meet at the club.

Everything Nice

The PE was not yet open when we got there, and we queued up at the door. The routine was for the group to be the first ones into the club so they could take over the large dungeon space downstairs.

More people joined our group as we waited. I noticed one short, round woman who wore a beautiful frock coat with ornate brass buttons. The coat looked familiar. I asked the woman, "Is that a Kristi Smart coat?" My friend Kristi, the one who had turned me on to the Internet dating sites, was a talented designer who sold her coats, and other fashions, at conventions and over the Internet.

"It is!" she exclaimed. "They're the best. I own two of them."

"Cool," I said. "Kristi is a good friend of mine. She stays at my house when she's in the area." I felt in with the in crowd!

I noticed a guy with an intriguing box in his hands. "What's that?" I asked. He was happy to explain.

"It's an electric shock device," he said. "It works with this remote control, so you can shock somebody with it when you want. Actually, it's not just shocks. It can give pain or pleasure. The frequency is specially tuned to stimulate a human's pleasure centers. Usually devices like this cost \$600 or \$800. But ours only costs \$40." It turned out he ran a business that sold the devices. I wished Jamie Faye Fenton was there, because she loved clever inventions, especially when they had a sexual purpose. I also wondered whether I might get a chance to have this gadget tried out on me some time that evening — for the pleasure part, I hoped, and not so much the pain.

Before long, the doors of the club opened and we made our way inside, signing our names in the guest book as usual. I pulled out my driver's license to show the gal at the register, but she didn't even bother to look at it. I guess they were familiar with this particular group, so they relaxed the procedures a bit. *Awww*, I grumbled to myself. *Now I could show a female ID.*

Ah, so there I was, back in the good old Power Exchange once again. I looked around. Things seemed pretty much the same, except it looked a little cleaner and brighter than I remembered. Probably just because it was early in the evening, I thought. Or maybe because I wasn't on drugs.

I still had my long trench coat wrapped tightly around my body. I'd planned to check it and my purse, but I realized that my

fellow munchers had a great deal of equipment with them, so I figured I could just drop my things somewhere in the dungeon.

We made our way down the long, progressively darker hallway. We went past both doors to the lounge area with the pole-dancing stage and soda-and-water vending machines. A naked guy was standing in the corner stroking it, and I wondered if it was the same naked guy from years before. We went past the room with the medieval banquet table — laid out with a plastic feast — and a St. Andrews cross, where Jamie Faye and I had once co-dom'd a truly submissive woman friend of ours. (It was the only time I dom'd; I preferred being a sub.) We passed the room with the slings, the giant spider web, and the stairway to “The Bates Motel,” the most private play room in the PE. Finally we passed the full-sized Apollo astronaut and headed down the twisty staircase. I used the handrail and walked very carefully in my high-heeled boots.

The basement was just as I remembered it. Exiting the small anteroom at the bottom of the stairs, I saw that the space was still dominated by the dungeon area, separated by a floor-to-ceiling chain-link fence from the rest of the room. The periphery of the basement space was still divided into individual play areas. First was the big poster bed where I had spent many an hour waiting for something to happen. Nothing ever did, except that eventually my friends would decide to go back home. Oh, one time on that bed I did make the acquaintance of Dee Dee Myers, the Vietnam war vet and outrageous trannie girl who was known for marching nearly naked in the San Francisco Pride parade. We only talked! She was a fun, fascinating person.

I remembered the next room being a captain's quarters on a pirate ship, with another big poster bed and the Hunchback-of-Notre-Dame stocks, my favorite toy. But wait, this was different! Arrrrr, no more pirates. White walls, bright lights, and sparse, space-age furniture created a lounge in the 2001 space station. Interesting.

The last area on the end was still Dr. Frankenstein's lab. His monster stood patiently in the corner, awaiting my return. The lighting globe was buzzing in the other corner, also happy to see me again. However, the furnishing was slightly different. The slab — the operating table, as in, “Come up to the lab, and see what's on the slab” from the Rocky Horror Picture show — was gone. Aw shucks.

Everything Nice

I told Lou the slab was where I'd lost my PE virginity, and discovered my exhibitionist streak.

I turned around to survey the dungeon area. The group was metamorphosing before my very eyes. Off came the T-shirts and jeans, and from the satchels and suitcases, the leather fetish gear emerged: vests, caps, chaps, and harnesses of various designs. Also, doms were unpacking their toys, laying out arrays of paddles, canes, whips, riding crops, and floggers of various types. One of my table-mates, who had mentioned at dinner that he was more into the artistry than the pain, was already making two floggers dance a complicated ballet, their many long leather tails twirling like a stripper's tassels, as he flogged a naked fat woman bound to a rack. Robin was lightly paddling another woman who was bent over a piece of apparatus. Peter was tying up Adele, creating lovely, complex patterns with the ropes and knots. I noticed my beloved Hunchback-of-Notre-Dame stocks were sitting in the center of the dungeon. I wondered if I would get a chance to use them before the night was over.

I took off my trench coat, revealing my outfit for the first time. Lou happened to be standing next to me, and he gave me a thorough looking-over as I pulled on my black opera gloves.

"Very nice!" he said. He seemed to be studying my legs, with their red fishnets. He gestured at my skirt and said, "May I have a look?"

That's something I don't get every day, I thought. *Guys asking if they can look up my skirt.* But I knew all would be revealed as the night went on, so I didn't see any reason to be coy.

"Help yourself," I said.

Lou lifted the front of my tiny leather skirt and took a good gander at my crimson garter belt and panties.

"Marvelous!" he murmured. I was glad he approved.

I spotted an attractive trans woman so I went over to her and introduced myself. Her name was Charity. We looked so much alike, we could have been sisters. She was tall, thin, and wore her red hair in a bob, similar to a wig I used to wear in a past life. Like me, she had accented her long, shapely legs with fishnet stockings and boots with unreasonably high heels. On closer inspection, it turned out they weren't boots, but black pumps and a pair of black rubber calf-high stockings. I resolved to try that trick myself some time.

Charity was friendly, but shy. I wondered if she was a cross-dresser or was planning to transition (or had already transitioned), but I didn't ask. It wasn't important, and asking seemed a bit rude. I thought I wouldn't mind making out with her later in the evening!

I wandered over to examine a piece of furniture that was like my slab, but vertical, and padded. Lou happened to be laying out his toys on a nearby bench. He asked if I would like to try out the device. I said, "Sure!"

Lou helped me step up onto a little ledge at the bottom. I faced the padding and leaned against it. The whole thing was tilted at a slight angle so gravity helped me keep from falling off. I raised my hands beside my head, where a couple of large eyebolts were conveniently placed for binding of wrists.

Lou appeared with a pair of padded wrist cuffs and asked me if I'd like to use them.

"You'd better put them on me," I said, "or else I might get away!"

Lou buckled my wrists one at a time into the cuffs, and then clamped them with climbing carabiners to the eyelets. I was bound to the slab.

Lou disappeared again, presumably to fuss with his equipment. Harry, the spanking guy, wandered over, looking pouty. "I guess you don't want me to spank you after all," he said. *Oops*, I thought. *Was my comment at dinner a commitment that I would do scene with him?* A scene was what they called a BDSM play session.

"Oh, but I do want you to spank me!" I cried. Harry perked up.

"Have you seen one of these before?" He held his right hand up near my face, displaying a large, black leather mitten. It was his spanking glove. "See," he pointed out, "it's smooth on this side, and ..." flipping his hand over, "... rough on this side."

"Oh, that's nice," I said.

"Would you like a spank now?" he politely asked.

"Yes please," I said, being a good submissive.

Harry disappeared behind me. I couldn't see him from my vantage point strapped to the gurney. But I heard his voice.

"May I lift your skirt?" he called, following the BDSM community practice of always asking permission before touching anyone or doing anything intrusive.

Everything Nice

“Yes, you may,” I called back. Not much point in getting spanked *over* my leather skirt. And not much point in wearing a red garter belt and satin panties if they’re not going to be seen.

WHAP! My whole body jerked upward on the slab.

“OWWW!” I howled. Oh, lord, that was swat! I wasn’t expecting it to be that hard. Usually a dom eases into it, building up the tension and pain throughout the scene. Not Harry. Maybe he was punishing me for letting Lou dom me instead of him.

“Would you like another?” I heard Harry ask.

“Please, sir, may I have another?” I requested meekly, echoing Dickens.

WHAP! Another one. WHAP! Another. WHAP! And another.

That seemed to satisfy Harry for the time being.

Another little guy in full leathers, including a leather cap, wandered over. He was pretty cute, I thought. A well-used 50, a full head of shiny, short black hair, pretty good little body. His perfectly round Charlie Brown face and 5 foot 4 height made it difficult for me to believe he could do any harm. He asked if he could give me a swat.

“Go right ahead,” I invited. He lifted my skirt, and caressed my thighs a little bit — especially high and on the inside, just skirting the strike zone. It felt nice! Then, Whap! I got a swat. Painful, but not as bad as Harry’s smacks had felt. Leather cap guy didn’t have a spanking glove, just his bare hand. He caressed my butt a little bit, calming the sting of the swat. The he swatted me again.

Lou was finally ready to get started. Leather cap guy deferred to Lou, my primary dom, and moved over to my side where we could talk a little and he could hold my hand or caress my body. I let him do what he wanted, because I was enjoying it.

Lou began hitting me lightly with some sort of small paddle. It was nice. It didn’t hurt a bit.

OW! Then it did hurt, when he really let loose. But then he went back to soft. Then HARD! He played with me a little while using that implement, teasing and hurting me.

Lou retired to get another tool, and I relaxed for the moment. WHAP! Whoa, leather cap guy decided to give me another wallop. In as nice a tone as I could muster, I called to him, “Ummm, why don’t you let Lou run the show now? I think he’s got a plan.” LC

guy was fine with that, and was just as happy to stand by my side fondling me from time to time.

Lou laid into me with another implement. Oh, it stung! It was some kind of a rod or cane, and it felt like bee stings. I yelped as he applied the wicked instrument, and a succession of other toys. As he repeatedly struck me, he joked that my butt was becoming the same shade as my scarlet panties.

I knew I looked hot up there on the slab being beaten. Guys — and girls — outside the dungeon's chain-link fence stopped to watch the show. Our comrades inside the dungeon were also oogling. My exhibitionist streak was stoked. I yipped and yelped, but my cries were involuntary only when Lou hit me especially hard.

Why did I let this torture go on? For one thing, I loved the attention. I most certainly didn't find pleasure in the pain, but I liked the feeling of being out of control when it got too hard to stand. I also felt challenged to see just how much I could take.

I heard Lou say that he hadn't brought his heavy flogger, and maybe he could he borrow one from another dom. One was quickly handed over.

My leather hat guy asked me if I'd had enough. I later realized he was hinting that maybe I shouldn't subject myself to the heavy flogger. But I was the star of the show, so I said I was doing all right. I joked, "Just as long as you guys stop short of welts."

But LC guy didn't take it as a joke! He said, "Oh, did you tell that to Lou?"

"No!" I exclaimed. I hadn't realized it needed to be said. LC guy relayed my desire to Lou.

Now Lou began with the big, heavy flogger. I never actually saw the scourge, but I knew it would have a leather-wrapped, wooden handle about 10 inches long, topped by a couple dozen thick leather thongs adding about two feet to the malevolent implement's overall length. The thongs would surely not be the soft deerskin used for wimpy floggers, but rather tough cowhide, or possibly even bullhide, bison, or moose. I was pretty sure the thongs wouldn't be knotted or metal-tipped, as they might have been on a cat-o-nine-tails used for punishment in Napoleon's navy.

Oh lord! It felt like Harry's spanking glove, but worse. It was heavy, as advertised, and it jolted my body when it hit. Lou seemed to deliberately strike me with an upward motion toward my lower

Everything Nice

buttock, because my body was physically lifted up the gurney with each stroke. I cried, “OWWWW!” for real, every time he struck.

A bystander asked if that was all I could yell, so I tried to be a more entertaining.

“MOTHER FUCKER!” I yelled.

“SHIT!” I screamed.

“GOD DAMMIT!”

“That’s more like it!” somebody laughed.

I tried to remember Harry Carell’s outrageous cursing during the chest waxing scene in the movie, *The Forty Year Old Virgin*, which I had recently watched, but nothing came to me. It was too much of an effort to think. I went back to simple OOOWWWWW!s.

Lou found he could get a really loud, violent sound if he flogged on my leather skirt, so he did that from time to time. It was all for show, because those slaps didn’t hurt me at all.

Finally it got to be too much, and I told Lou I needed to take a break. I had been on the slab for about 45 minutes.

Lou put down the flogger and came over to sooth me. He stepped up on the ledge behind me and snuggled against my body. I was whipped, and anything that wasn’t painful was welcome. I let him cuddle against me, dirty-dancing style.

After a few minutes, Lou climbed down from the slab. He released my wrists from the cuffs. I stepped off the slab and stood there, smiling and a little shaky.

The show was over. I wasn’t the center of attention any more. Awww. My little leather cap guy was standing next to the cement wall that formed the back side of the dungeon. I walked over to him and said, “I feel a little weak, but I can’t sit down.”

“Why not?” he asked.

“Because my ass hurts! Duh!” It burned like I had sat on a hotplate.

“You can lean on me,” he said in the friendly, half-joking tone of a guy who doesn’t expect his come-on to be accepted.

I took him up on the invitation. I leaned my full weight on him and relaxed. We started making out. *Oooh, this is fun!* I thought.

We kissed and bantered and teased each other for a while. We talked about the contrast in our heights, and he said he didn’t mind, because it put him right at boob level — a circumstance of which he took full advantage.

He said he was interested in what I had down lower, and I granted him permission to explore. He sunk below my line of sight and lifted my skirt. I expected to be the recipient of cunnilingus, over my panties or with them shoved to one side. But no, his head soon rose back to boob level. I wondered if I had stinky pussy.

After a bit, I wandered off to use the bathroom. I left the dungeon area and walked past the porn room, where a couple of wide-screen televisions ran continuous hard-core porn movies. I passed a door with a small window like a peep-hole. A group of guys crowded around peering in. I took advantage of my height to get a peak inside myself. The room behind the door was filled with a big mattress thrown on the floor. On top of it, I could see a pair of spread legs and a guy between them with his head in the crotch. Somebody was receiving cunnilingus, or possibly fellatio. I thought it must be the former, because the dude's head wasn't bobbing up and down.

The women's room was right next door to the cunnilingus room. I went in and took one of the two stalls. Uh-oh. Just as I started going, I noticed the stall's paper rolls were bare. I heard a couple of women come into the bathroom, chatting, so I called out, "Help! Can somebody reach me some paper? It's out in here."

"Just a sec!" a sweet voice with a southern drawl replied. A hand with a wad of tissue appeared under the wall separating the two stalls.

"Thanks so much!" I said, taking the paper from her. Cool! I'd heard that this good Samaritan act was a common occurrence in ladies rooms, but it was the first time it had ever happened to me.

I finished up and went to wash my hands at the sink.

"That's a cute outfit," said a voice from behind me. *Was she addressing me?* I wondered. I turned around and saw a tall, attractive woman touching up her makeup at the mirror on the opposite wall. Her straight, dark hair framed an oval, but unfortunately acne-scarred face. She appeared to be about my age, but an undernourished thinness and thrift-shop wardrobe bespoke of a harder life than mine. We were the only ones in the room, so I said, "Thank you!"

It dawned on me that this was the woman who had helped me with the toilet paper, and we struck up a conversation. She said her name was Loretta, and she was from Nashville. She'd only been in San Francisco a short while. As I learned more about her, my admiration for her grew — as well as my gratitude for my own easy

Everything Nice

life. She'd had a rough time in Nashville because she couldn't really explore her feminine self. (I thought she was transsexual, but she may have been a cross-dresser.) She'd finally taken a Greyhound bus across the country to join some friends here in San Francisco, but they didn't show up at the bus station. Loretta didn't have any way to contact them, and so she found herself all alone in a strange (very strange!) town. But rather than turn tail and jump back on the bus to Nashville, she made her way in the city. She lived on the street and in shelters for about six months, finally finding work and getting her own place. She was so happy to be living as a woman, and getting a life started in San Francisco. What a strong woman; what a lot of spunk!

I wished Loretta the best of luck, and went on my way. This time, I took the long route around the porn room. I peeked into another room at the other corner of the basement. I had spent many hours on the room's two couches in the past. Nothing nasty, just chilling after long evenings of dancing, remnants of Ecstasy still effervescing in my brain. The most memorable incident in that room was one time when a guy offered me a foot rub. That old line, but I let him come in. The foot rub didn't last very long. Before I knew it, the guy was asking me to rub something of his. I didn't have any interest in that, but a couple of my girlfriends did. I just moved to the other couch and watched.

Around the corner, I made my way through the dark room that housed "Blow Job Alley." BJ Alley occupied one side of the room, partitioned off with a tarpaulin hanging from the ceiling. Behind the tarp, I was told, was a long bench. Guys sat on the bench and girls — primarily transgender girls of one stripe or another — knelt before them and administered that eponymous treat. I never went inside Blow Job Alley. Blow jobs were not my favorite thing even in the best of circumstances, and the idea of doing strangers was, well, yuck!

I walked through the last little barren hallway leading back to the anteroom at the bottom of the staircase, and my circumnavigation of the PE basement was complete. (Except for the low-ceilinged corridor behind the back wall of the dungeon area, where I always bumped my head. At one end of that corridor was the room where pros — mostly Filipina women to my observation — plied their trade all night long, despite PE's strict ban on money changing hands on the premises. At the other end was a room protected by another

chain-link fence, with another one of those big mattresses thrown on the floor. In one corner of the room, a haphazard jumble of televisions showing porn resembled a work of modern art. I recalled some fun trannie-piles I'd participated in on the mattress in that room.)

I went back to the dungeon area, where my munch group was still in full swing. Peter had Adele bound to a rack with countless multicolored ropes. He and a young black cisgender woman with a hot, firm body in a skin-tight, tiny dress were lightly whipping Adele. Young Paul, who had introduced himself to me at dinner, held a leash attached to a spiked leather dog collar worn by a pretty, young woman who was bound, gagged, and clad only in a scanty leather harness. The artful flogger had his plump sub lying naked, face down on a table, a vibrator humming away at her crotch. She had a dreamy, satisfied, far-away look on her face. A series of a dozen little globes, like tiny fish bowls, were inverted on her back, and I knew that meant some fire play had taken place. Earlier, while I was being flogged, I thought I noticed some edge play (knives and razors) going on between those two. I said hello to a sweet, obese woman in a wheelchair. I was glad that she still indulged her passion despite having only one eye and one leg.

I noticed that my Hunchback-of-Notre-Dame stocks were being used as coat check and a settee. I saw my new friend Charity sitting on the circular platform of the stocks and I decided to join her. I seated myself gingerly, testing whether my sore butt could take it. It felt all right now, just a little stinging sensation.

I greeted my doppelgänger: "Hi Charity! I saw you being flogged before. You looked hot!"

"Thanks," she said. "You too. You had quite a workout there."

"Yeah. My ass hurts! They said it got as red as my panties."

"I can believe it did."

We chit-chatted about this, that, and the other thing. Clothes, jobs, and eventually, boys.

"I'm bisexual," Charity offered, "but mostly I prefer guys."

"Me too," I agreed. "Gosh, we're so much alike, it's spooky."

"I'm tri-sexual," chimed in a guy who was standing next to us. I hadn't noticed him before, but now I surely did. He was 30-something young and good-looking: tall, thin, and fair-skinned, with short, curly blond hair. I wondered what he meant by his comment.

Everything Nice

Did he mean he liked men, women, and transgenders? Or was he making the stale old joke, “I’m tri-sexual — I’ll try anything!”

I didn’t ask him directly. I just said, “Hi there! I’m Lannie, and this is Charity.”

“Hi. I’m James.” We included James in our discussion, but he and I dominated the conversation. Charity wandered off, leaving James all to me.

I decided find out more about James’s tri-sexuality. “What,” I challenged James, “is the most adventurous sexual thing you’ve tried?”

James scratched his head. “I don’t know, there are so many things ...”

“Come on, just pick something!”

“OK. I guess double-penetration is about the most exciting thing for me. It really turns me on.”

Wow! He really was adventurous! I’d never heard of double-penetration on a guy, but I supposed it must be mouth and anus. James was starting to get my attention.

We talked some more, and soon James said, “Wait a minute, are you telling me you’re trans? I thought you were a regular girl!” That’s always pleasant to hear.

“Yes, James, I’m trans. I’m post-op.” Well, it turned out Mr. Try-sexual had never met a post-op before. His curiosity was piqued.

“You’ve had sex as a man and as a woman?” he asked with a sense of wonderment.

“Yes.”

“How is it different?” he wanted to know.

“It’s hugely different,” I told him. “It’s different in a couple of ways, physically and emotionally. Physically, of course, I’m getting penetrated instead of doing the penetration. Emotionally, I’m in a very different space. To put it broadly, now I get to just lie there and let you do all the work.”

“I like doing all the work,” James said. *Oh, that’s good*, I thought.

“I supposed,” I continued to pontificate, “I didn’t have to change my sex just to be a submissive lover. But somehow being submissive is a lot more comfortable for me as a woman than I think it could ever have been as a man.”

I went on to expound on a pet theory of mine, which I found rather amusing. Nobody else ever did, but I kept trying.

“There’s another thing that’s different. I’ve traded performance anxiety for freshness anxiety.”

“What do you mean?”

“For guys, sex is all about performance anxiety.”

“What’s that?”

“You know, worrying about getting it up and keeping it up.”

“Huh? That’s never been a problem for me.” Ah, young men!

“Well, I date a lot of 60 year old codgers,” I told him, to help him get the picture.

“You do? Why?”

“I’m 50 you know.”

“No way!”

“Way! Anyway, as a woman, I don’t have any performance anxiety. Instead, I have freshness anxiety — worrying that I smell nice down there. You know the old joke, that a woman always knows if a date is going to end with sex, because she shaves her legs? There’s an element of truth to that, but there’s more to it. We also make sure we’re clean and fresh downstairs. I worry about it, and that’s funny, because I know guys don’t give a damn how stinky my pussy is. They just love pussy.”

“Ewww! I hate stinky pussy!” Oh, great, and I was already worried about my pussy being stinky.

James had one more question for me.

“So, do you want to go around?”

“Umm, it depends. What do you mean by go around?”

“You know, have sex.”

“Oh, I see. Well, I don’t know about that. But we can go somewhere and make out, and see what happens.” I was still feeling pretty vulnerable and frisky from my beating, and I thought James was cute.

“OK. Let’s see, where should we go...” James pondered this weighty question for a few moments. I wondered if he might take me to one of the upper floors. The two floors above street level had always been reserved for gay guys, but I’d heard that one of them was open to hetero couples now. But that was not where James’s plan led.

Everything Nice

“I know! Why don’t we use the private room at the top of the stairs upstairs?” He meant The Bates Motel, which I had noticed on the way in earlier that evening.

“Oh, yes, that’s a good idea.” I grabbed my coat and purse and followed James out the dungeon, up the big staircase, past the astronaut, and through the slings-and-spider-web room. In the back of the room was the stairway to The Bates Motel room, and it looked unoccupied. We headed up the stairs. James latched the chain across the bottom of the stairs to claim the room as our private love-nest.

The Bates Motel room looked exactly as I remembered it from years before. Under the low ceiling, the room was just big enough for the queen-sized bed which was covered with the ubiquitous rubber sheet. On top of a low cabinet along the wall by the entrance was a bowl full of condoms. I tossed my coat and purse onto the cabinet and stepped onto the bed. I knelt in the middle and stretched my arms up to place my hands flat against the ceiling, making myself available for ravaging.

James sat on the side of the bed, leaned over, and began caressing my waist.

“That feels nice,” he said.

“That’s good!”

“I’m glad you feel like a woman, because I’m not really turned on by guys.”

“Oh, I know what you mean,” I babbled. “In the swinger scene, a lot guys say they are bisexual, but they don’t really want to do anything with guys. They just mean they won’t freak out if they happen to touch another guy accidentally during an orgy. And a lot girls say they’re bisexual,” I continued, prattling on for no accountable reason, “but they’re mostly interested in the guys. Someone told me a girl is not really bisexual unless she eats pussy, and a guy is not really gay unless he takes it in the ass.”

“Ugh!” James grunted. “I’d never take it in the ass. It sounds horrible!”

Wait a minute, I thought. *What happened to the double-penetration?* Oh, I guess he meant *participating* in double-penetrating a woman. I was beginning to get the picture: Mr. Try-sexual wasn’t so adventurous after all.

James became interested in exploring me further. He reached under my skirt, and felt my vulva under my satin panties. He moved

my panties aside, and pushed a finger into my vagina. I sucked in my breath and enjoyed the feeling of being penetrated.

“Wow, you’re really tight!” James observed.

“Yes, I am. That’s a good thing, isn’t it?”

James got a package of lube from atop the cabinet and squeezed some onto his fingers. He returned to me and I could feel him finger-fucking me with two fingers.

“Does it feel natural?” I asked, as this was something we had discussed earlier.

“It’s a little bit different,” he said. “It’s not as slick.” That was probably true, but then, the same could be said of most women my age.

I was making up my mind that I was going to let James fuck me, even though it probably wasn’t a good idea. Sure, we would use a condom, but still, I didn’t know this guy from Adam.

Just about that time, James withdrew his fingers and stood up.

“I think that satisfies my curiosity,” he declared. *What? He doesn’t want to fuck me? What’s up with that?* Yet again, I wondered if I had stinky pussy.

Whatever the reason was, James was done. It was over. I suspected that trying a post-op trans woman was simply too much for Mr. Try-sexual. We gathered up our stuff, said our goodbyes, and that was the last I saw of James.

I wandered into the big lounge room and got a cold bottle of water from the vending machine. I noticed Lou sitting on a bar stool, mesmerized by a gorgeous, naked woman pole dancing on the little stage. Peter was tying Adele to the other pole with another series of elaborate knots.

I strolled back downstairs and hung out with spanky-Harry for a while, chatting, chilling, and watching the passing parade. A youngish, not-at-all passable cross-dresser joined us and gossiped with Harry for a bit. She told Harry, “Seven so far.”

“You’d better get going if you want to make forty,” Harry advised.

“I’ll never hit forty,” she laughed. “My record is thirty!”

After she left, I asked Harry what the numbers were about. I got the answer I was afraid of: “Blow jobs.”

Lou came back down to the dungeon a little later and told me, “It’s 12:30. I need to get going.”

Everything Nice

“I think I will, too,” I told him. “Would you walk me out to my car?”

“Sure.”

Lou gathered up his gear and said his goodbyes. We made our way back upstairs and Lou helped me on with my trench coat before we stepped out into cool San Francisco night.

Lou’s car was parked on the street right in front of the PE. I said he could watch me go across to my car from there, but he was a gentleman, and insisted on walking with me the whole way.

We talked a little as I sat in my driver’s seat with the door open. Lou invited me to come to another play party at the nearby Citadel dungeon on Saturday night, and I said I just might. He also encouraged me to join his Friendster network and keep in touch with the munch group. I said I’d look into it, but I had no intention of doing so. I didn’t have the time or, frankly, the interest.

We finally said goodnight and I drove back home to straight, conventional San Jose, and a terrific night’s sleep.

The next morning I got naked and looked in the mirror at my butt. Oh my goodness, it was bruised black-and-blue — huge bruises! It looked horrible! I was amused, not alarmed. I’d seen pictures of asses that had taken serious beatings before. I knew I was in the major leagues, but I also knew the bruises would disappear before long. I had no welts, and now I was glad I had specified that instruction to my doms.

I had been flogged three or four times in the past, before my transition, but I had never wound up bruised the next day. I wondered if this proved that women have a higher tolerance for pain than men. However, my trans girlfriends told me they’ve noticed they bruised more easily since they went on hormones, so that was probably the true explanation.

I was so amused, I took a digital photo of my ass and posted it on my Web site. When I looked at the photo, I was stunned. Not by the bruises, oh no. I was stunned to see that I had a great waist and hips! These hips clearly did not belong to a male body. I knew the hormones had been working on my body for four years, and that it was certainly feminized, but I had never seen myself from behind before. I was very impressed.

I e-mailed the photo to my friend Bernie, was heavily into being spanked himself. I asked him how long it would take for the

bruises to heal. He telephoned immediately and we had a great chat. Now, we had something else in common to share — the joy of severe beatings! He told me my bruises would be gone in a week. Remarkably, he was quite right.

I enjoyed my adventure at the munch and the play party, but I didn't plan to do it again, at least not soon. The best part of it was simply the novelty, that it spiced up my life a little bit. If I began doing it all the time, I had no doubt it would quickly become boring for me. I also liked the snuggling and making out, and even the sex, such as it was. But if that was the best I could do for a sex life, I would be in real trouble. No, it had been a fun night in fantasyland, but I needed to find love in real life.

Wham, Bam, Thank You Ma'am, Eh?

The e-mail was a typical semiliterate cold-call. It arrived from out of the blue at 8:30 on a Thursday night:

Brad Yeager to me

hi iam brad iam bored lol just wanted to say ur hot iam
a pro hockey player iam in san jose for a week with the
sharks email me back

I normally ignored such semi-spam, but something caught my eye. *Did he say pro hockey player?* I figured he was probably scamming me, but just maybe he was a player on a team visiting our town for a game. I decided it was worth a quick reply:

Lannie to Brad

Hi Brad. Welcome to San Jose. Please take it easy on
our Sharks!

Regards,
Lannie

A new message arrived momentarily:

Brad Yeager to me

no iam with the sharks silly hahhahah what r u up to
tontie

With the Sharks, huh? I thought. My correspondent may have made a tactical blunder, because that fact ought to be easy enough to check. I did some quick googling and replied:

Lannie to Brad

You don't seem to be on the Sharks roster. Are you sure you're not still with the Bakersfield Buzzards?

Brad Yeager to me

hahah i got called up today iam just practicing with the sharks till the main guy is back from the olympics iam in their farm system
do u have yahoo or can I call u iam so so so so bored

I decided my correspondent was probably for real. I wanted to believe! Google had filled me in on Brad Yeager. He was 23 years old, a hot goalie for the Bakersfield Buzzards, a team in the ECHL minor league. He stood a mere 5'10" tall (oh well, he'd be taller than me when he put on his skates) and weighed in at 190 pounds. He looked really cute in his picture. I wanted the mystery man e-mailing me to be that guy.

I told my Brad that I didn't instant message, and I sent him my cell phone number. (I didn't give out my landline number, because anyone could do a reverse-lookup on the Web and get my address from it.)

I ran into my housemate's room and said excitedly, "Guess what, Tony? A San Jose Shark is hitting on me!"

"What do you mean?" Tony asked.

"I just got this e-mail from a San Jose Shark player. He's hitting on me! I just sent him my phone number!"

"Wow!" Tony exclaimed. "Go for it!"

Music started pouring from my cell phone, and I knew my Brad was calling.

"Hello?" I said, in my cutest, sweetest tone.

"What's up?" a deep, tired-sounding voice rumbled.

Everything Nice

“Hi Brad!”

“Is this Lainie?” He mispronounced it, making the A long, but that happened a lot. “Yes, this is Lannie,” I replied, emphasizing the correct pronunciation.

“Oh. Hi. What’s up?”

“Not much.”

“What are you doing?”

“I’m just getting ready to go to bed,” I said. “I’ve got to get up at 5 a.m.”

“Oh. I was hoping to find someone to show me around San Jose.”

“Sorry. It’s too late for me.”

“That’s too bad,” he said. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah,” I said, thinking to myself, *Heck no, I’m not sure!*

“I’m staying at the Hilton downtown,” Brad told me.

“Oh. That’s a nice hotel.”

“Yeah, it’s pretty nice.”

Silence. I left the ball in his court — or the puck on his ice. After a moment, he resumed.

“I just ordered a big dessert. I’m not going to be able to eat it all. You should come and help me eat it.”

“Oh I should, should I?”

“Yeah, you should.”

I changed the subject. “So where did you find me?” I asked.

“I forget. Ummm, was it on MySpace?”

“No, I’m not on MySpace.”

“Oh. Let’s see. Was it ... do you have a Web site?”

“Yes, I do.”

“That must be it. I found your Web site.”

This left two obvious questions hanging in the air, but I didn’t ask either one. The first question was, how did he find my Web site? Did he find it linked from urnotalone.com, or maybe from one of the other transgender-related sites that linked some of my essays? The second question was, did he find my trannie Web site, or my normie one?

Fortunately, Brad’s next comment answered the latter question anyway, without my having to ask.

“So, are you a transvestite, or what?”

I was glad to hear this query, because it told me that he knew I was trans. I definitely wanted that out in the open before I let things go any further, not wanting to be burned that way again. So I was completely open and honest. Besides, I didn't think this would go anywhere anyway, so why not?

"I'm a post-operative transsexual woman."

"Oh. You're hot."

That's always nice to hear!

"So, do you want to come over for dessert?"

"Brad, do you have any idea how old I am?"

"Wha ... no. How old are you?"

"I'm 50!" I told him. "I'm twice your age!"

"So what?" he grunted. "You're hot. Come and have dessert with me."

"OK," I relented. "I will." If this young stud was hot for a fifty-year-old transsexual woman, how could I refuse? Besides, for some time I had been toying with the idea of having a fling with a young 'un; why not start with a professional athlete?

"What room are you in?" I asked.

Brad seemed a little surprised that I had given in — or perhaps that I had given in so quickly and thoroughly. After a moment's hesitation, he replied, "Room 1725." Then his brain moved into phase two.

"What are you going to wear?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. "I've got to look in my closet."

"Oh." Then he asked something peculiar. "Do you have — I think it's called — ummm, pantyhose?"

"What?"

"I think they call it pantyhose or something like that. Do you have any? I don't know what they are."

I thought that was odd. How could a 23-year-old professional athlete, one who obviously got all the booty he wanted, not know about pantyhose? In fact, didn't pro athletes wear pantyhose when they played in severe cold? I remembered Joe Namath had famously posed in a pair of pantyhose for a television advertisement back when I was a kid. I wondered if Brad had a pantyhose fetish and he really wanted some to wear.

"Yes, they're called pantyhose, and of course I have them. I'll bring some with me."

Everything Nice

“Will you wear them?”

Maybe he didn't want to wear them himself. Maybe he just had a thing for women in pantyhose.

“I don't really like them, but OK, I'll wear them.”

“What color?” Brad was a curious boy.

“What color do you want?”

“What colors do they come in? Oh, isn't there one that's tan and shiny? Can you wear those?”

“Yes, Brad. I'll wear tan, shiny pantyhose for you.”

“Do you want me to change? I'm just in my sweats now. Do you want me to put on something nice?”

“I want you to wear your hockey jersey, of course!” I admonished.

“Can't. It's not here.” I guessed that meant it would be out of the question to expect to be paddled with his hockey stick. Or for him to wear the goalie mask.

“Oh. Well, just be comfortable. It's your home, your hotel room. Just stay in your sweats.”

“So are you far away? How long will it take for you to get here?”

“I'm up by the airport. I can be there in about twenty minutes.”

“OK. Hurry up.”

We said goodbye and hung up.

I ran to the bathroom and did a quick touch-up on my make-up. Fortunately, I had been to the gym after work, so I was freshly showered; and my hair, which I had rinsed, was in decent shape. I popped in my contact lenses, shaped my eyebrows with an auburn pencil, and freshened my eye-liner for sexy eyes. I was moving quickly, but I realized it would take more than twenty minutes to get ready and make it downtown.

My cell phone symphony began again. I knew it was Brad.

“Hello!” I chirped.

“Where are you?”

“I'm getting ready!”

“I'm bored.”

“I'm sorry.”

“What are you doing?”

"I'm getting dressed." As I was talking, I was putting on lipstick.

"What are you going to wear."

"I don't know, I haven't decided yet."

"What are you wearing right now? Are you naked?"

"I'm wearing sweats. No, wait, you're right, I'm totally naked!"

"Cool. When are you going to be here?"

"Real soon. Fifteen minutes. Now let me go get ready."

"OK. Hurry."

What to wear? I carefully pulled on my best, sheer toe, sheer-to-waist pantyhose as I mentally inventoried my wardrobe. Maybe my short denim halter dress, it was always a hit; but it was awfully summery, and this was a cold California winter's evening. Clad only in what we call "pantyhose," I looked through the contents of my walk-in closet. I had some cute sun-dresses, but they were too dressy and too summery for a booty call. My skirts were either too long or too short. Finally I hit it — my shiny, turquoise, faux snake-skin slip dress. Yes, that would be about right. The hem was short, but not too short. It was tight, but not too tight — practically a tube dress with spaghetti straps. And I wouldn't need to wear a bra; one less thing to take off!

I debated whether to wear the turquoise low-heeled sandals that matched my dress, or to go for the CFM black pumps with five inch heels and ankle straps. Heck, I was going to see a 23-year-old professional hockey player! I went with the CFMs, and accessorized with black plastic hoop earrings and a delicate turquoise necklace.

I grabbed a little black disco-purse and stuffed in a few dollars, some tissues, and a small tube of lubricating gel. I asked Tony for a couple of condoms, which he was glad to supply. I'm not saying I was planning to go to bed with Brad, but a girl wants to be prepared!

I was moving fast. Only about ten minutes had elapsed since I had agreed to share dessert with Brad. The phone played its familiar tune. I was amused. Brad was impatient, but what would you expect from a 23-year-old boy?

"Hello!"

"Where are you now?"

"I'm just leaving."

"Oh. Hurry."

"OK. Gotta go. See you soon."

Everything Nice

I pulled my old, reliable pleather trench coat from the closet by the door leading to the garage and jumped into my Mustang. I drove carefully, because working the pedals was tricky in the CFMs. I didn't need to take any freeways to get downtown; I just headed south on Oakland Road.

The phone played again.

"Hi Brad."

"Where are you now?"

"I'm on Oakland Road."

"Oh. Where's that?"

"It's by the airport."

"So you're really far. The San Francisco airport?"

"No, Brad, San Jose. It's not far at all."

"What are you wearing?"

"You'll find out soon."

"No tell me."

"Overalls. I'm wearing overalls, Brad."

"Overalls?"

"No, I'm just kidding."

"Are you wearing a dress?"

"You'll see soon."

"You can't walk across the hotel lobby in a short skirt."

"Why can't I?" Did Brad think I would be dressed like a hooker? Well, I actually kind of was. But I had the trench coat on for that very reason. "And what makes you think I'm wearing a short skirt?"

"Are you?"

"You'll find out soon." A girl likes to have some surprises. I just loved seeing a guy's face light up when he first got an eyeful of me all dolled up.

Brad paused, and meandered down a different conversational path.

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"Yes," I lied, not wanting to seem like a loser.

"Does he live with you?"

"No, it's not that serious. Do you have girlfriend back in Bakersfield?"

"No."

"I'll bet you have lots of girlfriends back in Bakersfield!"

“Yeah,” he kind of laughed, and I wasn’t sure if he was agreeing or wishing.

“Did you grow up in Bakersfield?”

“No, I’m Canadian. I’m from Vancouver.”

Duh. Hockey player. Canadian. Of course. But he didn’t have an accent. He didn’t end any sentences with “Eh?”

“Vancouver is beautiful!”

“Have you been there?”

“Yes, once, on a business trip.”

My curiosity was killing me on another issue, and I decided to see if I could extract some information from my tight-lipped par-amour.

“Tell me something, Brad. Have you ever been with a transgender girl before?”

“No.” He didn’t have anything else to say on the subject, and I couldn’t think of anywhere to go with it, so I let it lie. But I was suspicious. What were the odds of his stumbling across my Web site if he wasn’t searching for transgender-related matter? *Chances are he found me through my urnotalone.com profile*, I thought.

“Can you see downtown yet?”

“No, I can’t see it yet.”

“So you’re really far.”

“No, I’m not. Downtown isn’t very tall. We don’t have sky-scrapers. I won’t see it until I’m there.”

“Oh. My food just got here.”

“OK. Why don’t you go ahead and start eating. I’ll be there soon.”

“OK. Hurry.”

“Bye.”

“Bye!”

I didn’t get far before the phone demanded my attention again.

“I’m bored.”

“I’m sorry. Hold on, I’ll be there soon.”

“Where are you now?”

“I’m on Fourth Street.”

“Where’s that?”

“It’s almost there.”

“Can you see downtown yet?”

Everything Nice

“No, not yet. Soon.”

“The ice cream is melting.”

“Well, you eat the ice cream. Just leave me some cake.” I didn’t want my pretense of innocence to disappear down Brad’s gullet. After all, I wasn’t a total slut.

“OK. Hurry.”

Right after Brad hung up, I saw downtown. Darn, too bad I hadn’t been able to tell him. Oh well, he’d be calling back in a minute.

“Where are you now?”

“I’m downtown. I’m right where I thought your hotel was, but it’s a different hotel.”

“The Hilton is on Almaden and San Carlos.”

“That’s just the next block over. I’ll be there in a minute. I have to hang up now so I can maneuver.”

I went around the block and came up on the Hilton. It was the hotel that was actually attached to the San Jose Convention Center. They shared a big parking garage underneath the facility. I drove in, taking a ticket from the machine. I found a space near a hotel entrance in the mostly-empty garage. The phone played.

“Where are you now?”

“I’m parked in your garage. I’m coming in.”

“Can you see the hotel?”

“It’s just in there. I’ll be there in a moment.”

“Hurry. I’m bored.”

In addition to my little black disco-purse, I had brought my regular purse with my driver’s license and my various necessities of life. I opened the trunk of the Mustang to stash my big purse, and I noticed some copies of my book, *How To Change Your Sex*. I decided I would bring one in for Brad. Who knew what might be going on in his head?

I went through the crash doors, leaving the scary, empty parking garage behind. I found myself in, not the hotel, but the vast entrance hall of the convention center. It was a healthy walk down to the end where the hotel was, especially in my five inch heels.

I made it most of the way down the hall when Brad called.

“Where are you now?”

“I’m almost there.”

“Can you see the hotel?”

"Yes, it's right here. Let's see, I have to go up these steps ... this is a little tricky with my hands full."

"Why are your hands full?"

"I've got the phone in one hand and a present for you in the other hand."

"What's the present?"

"You'll see. I don't know if you'll like it very much."

"What is it?"

"You'll see." My, oh my, the boy was impatient!

"OK, I'm inside the hotel now," I reported. "I need to find the elevators. Oh, here they are."

"What's happening now?"

"I'm waiting for an elevator." *Bing!* "OK, it's here. I'm getting on."

"Are you alone?" I was startled by that question. Was he going to ask me to do something kinky?

"Uh, yes, I am."

"Oh." Nope, no luck on the kinky.

I called out the floors as I passed them.

"4 ... 5 ... 6 ... 7 ... let's see if there's a 13? 11 ... 12 ... 14 ... No 13! 16 ... 17! I'll be there in second. Bye!" I snapped the phone shut and dropped it into my little purse.

I exited the elevator. The signs on the wall said 1726 — 1755 in one direction and 1701 — 1725 in the other. So Brad's room would be at the end.

I had once last conversation with Brad as I approached his door.

"Are you excited?" he asked me.

"Yes, I am," I replied, mostly to flatter him, but with a grain of truth.

"Are *you* nervous?" he asked. I checked my vitals.

"A little bit," I confessed, honestly. I wasn't too nervous, though, because I thought the situation was pretty safe. He was a nice Canadian boy, and I knew his name and where he worked. My housemate Tony did, too. And Brad knew about my sex change already. It would surely go OK — and if it didn't, there would be consequences for Brad. I tried to recall what I knew of the on-going Kobe Bryant trial, about him allegedly molesting a girl in a hotel room, and I

Everything Nice

worried a little about my rectum. (The rumor was that Kobe anally molested the girl.)

“Why are you nervous?” Brad asked.

“Are you nervous?” I asked in return, dodging his question.

“A little bit.” That was interesting. I wondered if it was true. It seemed to me that Brad had all the power on his side. Maybe I had some, due to my age? Or my sex change? Or just the power women have over men? Funny that the woman thing should have been the last one that occurred to me.

“I’m here!” I announced into the phone, simultaneously tapping on the door. *Was I in the right place?* I thought it was peculiar that he hadn’t greeted me at the threshold.

The door swung open and we faced each other, our phones still ridiculously at our ears. We both smiled and clicked our communicators shut.

Brad was cute, but different from what I expected. He seemed shorter than 5’10”. I guessed he was really 5’9”, but I could have been fooled by being up on my five inch heels. He wasn’t the fresh-faced babe with fluffy blond hair I had seen on the Web. His hair was black and cropped short, and his face showed a day’s growth of stubble. I found him attractive in a manly, rugged way. He had on sweat pants and a T-shirt, but his attire wasn’t important.

He seemed to like what he saw, and he told me I looked great. But his face did not light up in the way I liked. Nor did he give me the head-to-toe (and hem of my skirt) once over that I usually got from males. I guessed that he was used to getting all the beautiful women he wanted, and he had grown a bit jaded with it all. Jaded enough to want to try a trans woman, perhaps?

Brad plopped back down on the king-sized bed in the dim hotel room and resumed (presumably) clicking through TV channels. I dropped my purse on a desk and took off my trench coat. I didn’t seem to attract Brad’s attention as I revealed my skimpy dress and strode across the room in my CFMs. Clearly this was a different type of male animal than I had ever dealt with before!

I held up *How To Change Your Sex* and said, “Here’s a book I wrote in case you’re interested.” He didn’t seem to be. I dropped the book on the desk.

Brad grunted, “There’s the desert,” and gestured at a tray beside his legs on the bed. The tray was adorned with a beautiful yellow rose

in a small crystal vase. The thought jumped into my head that Brad had gotten the lovely flower especially for me, but then I decided it was just a standard room-service amenity.

The desert plate held a puddle of melted ice cream and scant remains of a chocolate cake. I laughed to myself, wondering how much of an effort it was for him to have left those few crumbs for me.

I sat on the bed, legs curled up at my side, and used the spoon I found on the plate to scrape up a bit of chocolate. It was rich and delicious, like a Godiva chocolate truffle. I hovered over the plate to scrape up another bite, making sure my butt would be displayed to maximum advantage. Not that it seemed to get a rise out of my bed-mate.

“Are you done?” Brad asked. “Can I put the tray outside?”

“Not yet!” I scolded. “It’s fantastic.”

I had a few more bites before I acquiesced.

“OK, I’m done now. You can move the tray.” I got up off the bed. “I’ve got to use the bathroom.”

“What are you doing?” Brad asked, sounding impatient once again.

“I’ve got to go potty!” I said, moving toward the bathroom.

I went potty and wiped thoroughly, making sure no little bits of tissue clung to my labia, as it often did. I wanted to be tidy because, well, you know!

I came back to the room and it seemed as if Brad hadn’t moved, except that the tray was nowhere to be seen and the lights were all turned off. Again, I was surprised. Didn’t he want to check out my sexy bod?

I stretched out on the bed beside Brad, sitting propped up with pillows, and looked at the TV. Some celebrities were ballroom dancing. I asked Brad, “Do you dance?”

“Huh!” he grunted. “No!”

“You ought to,” I half-joked. “It would help your coordination and grace. I’ll bet all the best hockey players are ballet dancers!”

“Are not,” Brad said. Not only did he seem tepid about my body, but he really didn’t get my humor.

Ever intrepid, I decided to try another joke.

“That reminds me, I thought you told me you’re a hockey player. But you’re just goalie, right?” I gave it a beat, but he wasn’t getting

Everything Nice

it, and I didn't let it sit long enough to sting. "Is that good hockey joke?" I asked, innocently.

"No, it isn't." He didn't sound offended, just nonplussed.

"Oh. Sorry. I thought it might be like the old joke about rock and roll bands. You know, what do you call a person who's not a musician but hangs around bands all the time?"

I wasn't going to wait for a guess, but Brad jumped right in.

"A groupie."

"A drummer. Ha ha, get it?" Brad actually chuckled, thank goodness. I continued to explain, "They're always making jokes about drummers. I thought maybe hockey players might make jokes about goalies."

"Actually, they do," Brad confessed.

As all this frivolity was going on, Brad had begun gingerly touching me. He had his hand on my tummy, rubbing it lightly. That was good sign, I thought. Then he got interested in my legs. He sat up a little bit and reached over to my thigh.

"These are the pantyhose?" he asked, stroking my leg.

"Yes."

"They feel so smooth!"

He ran his hand up my thigh until it was under the skirt of my dress.

"They run way up, don't they? How far up do they go?"

I took his hand out from under my dress, and put it on my waist where he could feel the roll of the top of the pantyhose through the slick material.

"Oh, they go up really high! Do you like wearing them?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"In the first place, I'm so tall, they don't really fit well. The crotch doesn't quite ... uh ... reach. And the other thing is that they're a bother to take up and down when I go potty. I have to be careful or I'll put a thumbnail through them. They're very delicate."

"Oh." Brad felt my pantyhose a little more. "Can I see how they look back here?" he asked, indicating my ass.

"OK."

"Would you roll over on your front so I can see?"

"OK."

"Can I push up your dress?" Now we were getting somewhere!

"Yes, you may." He pushed up my dress and took a long look at my ass. I wondered if I was going to have to explain why my cheeks were bruised black-and-blue, which was because this was just a few days after the munch, but it was dark enough that he didn't notice.

"Can I see how they fit in the front?"

"OK." This was kind of weird, but I was going with the flow. I turned over and hiked my dress above my waist. "See, it makes me look like a Barbie doll, like I have no genitals at all!"

"Ummm. That's interesting."

I pulled my dress back down and that was the end of the pantyhose episode. Peculiar! I wondered if he was making sure I didn't have a penis. Or was he really as innocent as he seemed?

Brad lay back on the bed and began clicking through channels again. "There's nothing on," he commented.

"I know," I responded. "If there were, I wouldn't be here with you."

"Huh?"

"I'm joking!" Pearls before swine.

"You can take off your shoes," he invited.

"No," I said, "but *you* can take off my shoes." That gambit again. Would it work with Brad?

"I don't know how," Brad said.

"You can figure it out," I encouraged him. He leaned over my legs and had no trouble undoing the buckles of the ankle straps and taking my shoes off. He casually tossed them to the floor. He didn't seem excited by it.

"Do you like to snuggle?" he asked.

"Yes!" I said, and snuggled up next to him. He smelt very good. Clean and fresh. He certainly hadn't dressed up or shaved for me, but at least he had showered recently. For that, I was grateful.

He started stroking me a little bit, and I starting touching him here and there. *Here we go*, I thought.

But no, we didn't go. We lay next to each other for a few minutes, very lightly petting. I was trying to figure out what was going on. Brad had been so assertive on the phone, talking me into coming to his hotel room. Why wasn't he being assertive now? I felt sure that if I took the lead and started getting into something heavier, he would be glad to let me. But I didn't like to lead. Besides, I wanted to see him run his game.

Everything Nice

After a bit, Brad mumbled, "I have to tell you, I'm getting really turned on. Is that bad?"

"No, Brad, that's good," I reassured him. *Would that be the permission he needed to move things to the next level?* I wondered. But nothing changed.

A few minutes later, we repeated the exchange:

"I'm getting really turned on. Is that bad?"

"No, that's good."

And we repeated it again a short time later ... Finally, Brad made some progress. "Do you mind if I take off my pants?" he asked.

"It's your hotel room," I said. "Make yourself comfortable."

Brad removed his sweat pants. He had, of course, a raging hard-on. I examined it out of the corner of my eye, acting uninterested. His penis was long and slender, remarkably like my second-largest dilator. I could tell that it would fit in me quite nicely, although he would surely bottom out, because my vagina was only 3-1/2 inches deep at this time, having continued to experience shrinkage. I hoped that wouldn't be a problem. Brad's cock was very straight and clean, cut and helmeted. I even imagined that it would be nice to put my lips around.

I took my silver Wal-Mart wrist watch off and put it on the end table. I snuggled back up to my honey and started seriously feeling him up.

Oh my, what a hot body he had! Solid, not an ounce of fat anywhere. His arms were muscular and firm. His chest was smooth and firm, with sparse coarse black hair. His breasts were astonishing to cup in my hand, nicely shaped but not spongy or yielding like a woman's. His stomach was hard and flat, like it had been carved from a block of oak; not a sculpted six-pack, but all muscle nonetheless. Best of all were his thighs: thick and round, and as hard as steel. It was such a pleasure to feel them! For the first time in my life, I was seriously turned on by a man's body.

Brad's breaths began coming short and hard. In a soft voice he mumbled, "Would you touch me?" I knew what he meant, and I knew better than to joke, "I am touching you!"

I eased coyly into it. Continuing to caress his thighs, I let my hand move up higher and more to the inside. When there was nowhere higher to go, I found his testicles and cupped them in my

hand. I applied light pressure and rolled them around in my palm like Humphrey Bogart rolled those steel balls in his palm in *The Caine Mutiny*.

After a few moments, I reached up to touch Brad's cock. My hand barely grazed its side when Brad sucked in his breath and said, "Ooh, it's so sensitive. Would you just touch my balls?"

And so I fondled Brad's balls with my left hand, snuggling up to him with my body and kissing him here and there with my lips, while he proceeded to rub one out. That's right, he masturbated. It only took a few minutes.

"Oh, oh oh! I'm going to cum! Where do you want me to cum?"

Huh? *Was he suggesting I might want him to cum in my mouth*, I wondered. It seemed a little late for that.

"You can just cum right there, I guess," I told him. So he did. He squirted on his tummy, and it was not enough to fill buckets.

"Oh, look at that mess," I joked gently. But he seemed to really think it was a mess.

"I'll clean it up," he said. He got up and went into the bathroom.

A moment later he came out, tummy shiny clean, and got back onto the bed.

"I feel so tired!" he yawned.

"So I guess the party is over?" I smiled.

"I'm so tired. I'm sorry, but I get so tired after that happens."

"I know why that is," I told him.

"Why?"

"Because you're a man!" I laughed.

"But why?" he persisted.

"Ummm, ummm ... because you used up all your energy?" I mumbled.

I could finally see clearly what the picture was, I decided. When Brad first e-mailed me, he was ready to go to bed. No doubt he'd had a long, hard day of hockey, playing against the real pros. He just wanted to get his rocks off before he went to sleep. Why masturbate with a magazine when it was easy enough to get a live woman to come to your room? No wonder he was so impatient for me to get there — he wanted to get to sleep! Why was I wasting time putting on make-up, and eating chocolate cake, and going potty?

Everything Nice

I'd never before been in a sexual situation where it was so much all about him, and not at all about me. I didn't mind, but I didn't think I would be doing a lot of that in the future. I liked it when it was all about me, me, ME!

I put my shoes back on, and my coat, and gathered up my purse. My heart was light and I was laughing inside. At least I had survived my adventure without any difficulties. *So that's how the pros do it*, I thought. Now I knew what they meant when they said, "He got game!"

I gave Brad a little goodnight kiss and told him, "It's been fun. You're a really, nice, polite kid. Good luck with the hockey."

He asked if he could call me tomorrow, but I never heard from him again.

I took the elevator back down to street level. I felt a little bit sleazy as I strutted through the lobby in my CFMs, past an Indian family with a sweet little girl and a darling little boy. But I was smiling. So that's what they mean by, "*Wham! Bam!*" Thank you, ma'am!" — although I hadn't gotten the *Bam!*, really. I figured I'd just made my first genuine booty call. I was glad I had. It was fun. Brad's body was a revelation, and I had a story I would dine out on for weeks to come. Best of all, I was safely back home snuggled into my own warm bed by 10 o'clock. The whole adventure had spanned only an hour and a half, and all it had cost me was one dollar for parking and my twelve-dollar Wal-Mart wristwatch, which I'd forgotten to fetch from Brad's end table.

As to why Brad didn't actually fuck me, my girlfriends and I came up with lots of possibilities:

Safe sex. God knows what you could catch from a skank like me!

He was super-cautious so I wouldn't go all Kobe Bryant on his ass, and sue him for rape.

He was used to his groupies being all over him, and he expected me to take the lead.

He felt awkward about me being old, or trans.

He wanted to get to sleep, and it was just less trouble this way.

He was saving it for later in our relationship. (Yeah, like maybe for after we're married. Ha!)

But who knows? It really didn't matter, did it? I just hoped that it wasn't an indication that I was into another dry spell of sorts, cud-

Wham, Bam, Thank You Ma'am, Eh?

dling with Lea notwithstanding — one where I couldn't find a guy to fuck me. Was I to be the queen of the dry spells yet again?

Two Dates

I was in heaven. Everywhere I looked, people taller than me. Even the women!

I was at the annual dinner-dance of the united Tall Clubs of the greater Bay Area. I was there because someone had mentioned the Tall Club to me one day, and it got me wondering why I'd never looked into it. So I looked them up on the Web, and there they were. A club was in my area, and the annual dinner-dance was coming up shortly. I'd decided to attend, and here I was, at the Crow Canyon Country Club in Danville, a 30 minute drive from my home, on a beautiful clear October night.

Picking up my name tag at the reception desk on the way in, I met a tall, friendly, balding gentleman who turned out to be the president of one of the clubs. He graciously offered me his arm as we walked down the hall to the restaurant. I was happy that I didn't have to enter the room alone, as I did all too often.

A couple of tall ladies latched onto me immediately, welcoming me and asking about me. What a friendly group! Everyone was standing around having cocktails, so I could easily size up how tall they all were. The club rules were that women had to be at least 5 foot 10 inches, and men 6 foot 2. *I wouldn't have qualified before my transition*, I thought.

When I found myself alone, I noticed a particularly tall and good-looking woman chatting with a couple. I joined them and introduced myself.

"Hi. I'm Lannie," I said. "I'm a new prospect."

"Welcome, Lannie. We're glad you came," replied the good-looking woman. "I'm Barbara. This is Melanie. And this is my husband, Nick."

"Oh, your husband," I joked. "Well, it was nice meeting you. I was looking for single guys."

They laughed, but Barbara took the hint. "Let's see, single guys ... There's Buddy over there, and I think Joe is single."

"I was just kidding," I giggled. I hadn't actually come to the event with high hopes of meeting a guy. I just wanted to make friends. Not that I would mind if I did meet a nice, tall guy!

A nice, tall guy came over and joined our group. "Hi Barry," Barbara greeted him. "It's good to see you again."

"Hi Barbara, Nick, Melanie, and..."

"This is Lannie," Barbara filled in. Turning to me, she said, "Barry is single."

"Barbara," I stage whispered, "not so obvious!" Barry was youngish — for this crowd — probably late fifties, I thought. He was good-looking, in a square, suburban way. *Probably a salesman*, I thought. I would definitely keep an eye on him. I liked my men clean-cut, employed, single, and tall. Barry looked to be about 6 foot 8. I hoped he knew how to dance.

A short time later, people began to sit for dinner. I found an empty chair next to a couple of interesting-looking women at one of the round tables that accommodated eight people each. Before I sat down, I took off my little shrug sweater, exposing my shoulder blades in my orange silk, floor-length halter gown. I adjusted the collar to a sassy up position. From out of nowhere, Barry appeared, pulling out my chair for me. He took the seat next to me.

Everything Nice

It was immediately obvious that Barry was putting the moves on me. I didn't expect it to go anywhere, so I jostled playfully with him, teasing, mocking, and flirting. He, however, was attracted to my wit and intelligence. My \$700 silk dress with its low-cut bosom was surely doing its part, too.

When the entrée was cleared and the band began rocking, Barry asked me if I wanted to dance. My ears perked up. Dance? If he was a ballroom dancer, too, then all my prayers had been answered.

Alas, it was not to be. He danced enthusiastically, but not formally. Nevertheless, I had a marvelous time dancing almost every dance with him for the rest of the evening. I even let him hold me close for a couple of slow dances. It felt marvelous to actually be able to put my head on a guy's shoulder for the first time in my life, and to have to go up on tip-toe when I whispered in his ear.

The night was magical for me. My "belle of the ball" fantasy had just about come true. In this fantasy, I was at a fancy dress ball, and all the gentlemen were lined up to dance with only me. That night, there was just one gentleman, but he was plenty.

The party ended before midnight and Barry walked me to my car. "Can I take you to dinner some time? Like next weekend?" he asked me. I loved that he was self-confident enough to come right out with it, and not beat around the bush. I was a little surprised that he didn't want to go somewhere else right then, as the night was still young. He could have got me to bed if he had played his cards right. Maybe. But I guess neither one of us were spring chickens, and we were getting tired.

"Yes," I said, accepting his dinner invitation. "I'd like that. Here, I'll write down my phone number." I got a pad from my car and gave him my the number of my cell phone.

We had two goodnight kisses. It was wonderful kissing upwards for a change.

Barry called me the next afternoon, and we made plans for the following Friday evening. I persuaded him to let me come to his place, which was in San Ramon, arguing that I could get there easily from work and save both of us the drive to San Jose. Besides my normal tactic of wanting to check out how nice his digs were, another reason for wanting to do it this way was that I didn't want him saying, "It's your neighborhood, you pick the restaurant." I liked to be

taken care of on dates, not to have to do the planning. I had enough planning to do just picking an outfit.

The next evening, Barry left two messages on my cell phone. The evening after that, he left another. Uh-oh. Was he a clinger? It wasn't a red flag, but perhaps a yellow one.

I finally called him back and we had a nice chat. He wanted to pick up a conversational thread from the dinner-dance. At dinner he mentioned he'd heard of a Tall Club once having an outing to a BDSM club, and he thought that was incredibly kinky. I'd let on that I knew a bit about that, but I wouldn't divulge any details. On the telephone a few days later, he pumped me for more information.

"OK," I finally conceded. "I'll tell you one kinky thing I've done, but that's all I'm saying until our date."

"It's a deal," he said. "Tell me."

My mind raced, trying to think of just the right thing — something that would intrigue him, but not scare him off.

"OK, here it is. I've been to swingers parties."

"Swingers parties?" he chirped. "Like group sex? Did you participate?" I had him hooked.

"Sorry. That's all I'm saying for now! One thing, that's what I promised." Try as he might, he could get no more from me. I, however, got from him that he was open and adventurous, and willing to try anything I might like. *Yeah, yeah*, I thought. I'd heard that before. I doubted he would be willing to go as far as I would undoubtedly push him, as I planned to disclose about my sex change on our very first date.

Saturday arrived and I dressed in a cute skirt and jacket and headed up to San Ramon. Barry's house didn't impress me. It was about the size of my own, and had a definitely lived in, cluttered atmosphere. Not bad, but nothing I particularly wanted to have in my life.

The next test was his vehicle. Would it be a Ferrari? A Porsche Boxster? At least a Lexus? No, it was an SUV. I hated SUVs — because of the environment, but even more because they blocked my damn view on the road. But I decided Barry got a pass on the SUV because, after all, he was 6 foot 8 inches tall. I doubted whether he would fit into a Boxter.

Everything Nice

When we'd made plans, I'd asked Barry to choose a nice restaurant in his neighborhood. Nevertheless, when I got there, he asked me, "What kind of food do you feel like having?"

I sighed, and resigned myself to participating in the date planning. I knew that the proper social etiquette was for me to reply, "I don't know. What do you feel like having?" Then we were supposed to go back and forth like that at least three times. But I didn't have the patience for that game, so I just said, "How about fish? Do you like fish?"

A sad look came over Barry's face. "Gee, I don't think we have any fish restaurants in this area. Let me think."

"We don't have to have fish. How about Italian?" We'd both agreed we liked Italian when we'd talked before, so I thought it was a safe route to take us down.

Barry's face brightened. "OK. I know a great Italian place. It's right next to a little club where we can go dancing afterwards."

He took me to a surprisingly nice family restaurant in a strip mall in the vast light-industrial-suburban wilderness of San Ramon. The food was good, but the conversation was poor. I heard a little bit about Barry's failed marriage and lovely teenage daughters, but mostly he kept throwing the ball to me: "Tell me more about yourself. I want to know everything." I felt really dull, because I wasn't ready to reveal the secret of my sex change just yet, and that left me with very little to tell.

As the meal dragged on, I began getting nervous because I was determined to do the disclosure over desert. I couldn't understand why I was nervous, because I really didn't care which way it went. I guess just because, however it went, I knew it would feel like a personal judgment on me.

We ordered desert and I excused myself to go to the restroom. I didn't want any interruptions later. I also wanted to give Barry another chance to look at my ass before I told him its history.

When I got back to the table and desert arrived, I broached the subject.

"Barry, you told me you are interested in experimenting with kinky sex, right?"

"That's right. I'll try just about anything. I'm very open-minded."

“OK then. I think you’re doing the kinkiest thing in your life tonight.”

His line was supposed to be, “What do you mean by that?” but he didn’t take the bait. He just looked at me with mild curiosity. So I soldiered on.

“Because, you see, you are out on a date with a transsexual woman.”

Barry’s expression didn’t change, and he didn’t miss a beat. “I’m not surprised,” he said. “I suspected something might be going on. I even told a friend last week, ‘What if she’s had a sex change?’”

My first impulse was to ask, “What made you suspicious? What was the give?” But I didn’t ask it. I knew the answer wouldn’t do me any good. It wasn’t like there was some trick I missed, and if I could just fix that, I would pass perfectly. Besides, when I did discuss it with people, they couldn’t articulate what it was. It was just an accumulation of subliminal signs that all added up to a vague feeling of, “Something’s not right here.” I’d even stopped caring about it. I was what I was, and people could accept it or not. That was the reality.

What I did ask Barry was, “So what if this woman you were seeing had a sex change? Which I have.”

“I’m not sure,” Barry responded. “I’ve never been in this situation before. I’ll be honest with you. I still like you and I’m attracted to you. We can definitely be friends. I’m just not sure I could be intimate with you, if we ever got that far.”

“That’s fair, Barry. Thank you for being honest with me.”

He had some questions for me and I explained about my story and transsexualism as openly as I could. At one point he blushed. “Oh God! I just realized how stupid I was when I brought up strap-ons. No wonder you don’t like them!”

I just laughed. “Oh no, it’s not a problem, Barry. That is why I don’t like them, but I know lots of trans women who do. In fact, I even know some who still have their penises but they like to use strap-ons!”

As we talked, things became more relaxed. Barry even began touching my arm again. He still took me dancing at the little disco on the corner, and invited me inside when we got back to his place.

I went to the bathroom and used my cell phone to call Lea and give her the all clear. I’d had her queued up and ready in case I got rejected and had another emotional breakdown.

Everything Nice

When I came out of the bathroom, Barry was on the couch in cuddle position. I sat down next to him and leaned into his arms. We relaxed for a little while, with desultory chatter.

Barry asked me if I would like a massage.

“No, I think I should give you a massage,” I replied. “You’ve been so nice and you took care of everything this evening.” Actually, the truth was that I didn’t want him massaging me because I had decided that my clothes were going to stay on that night, given that he was not ready accept me as a woman. Besides, I knew from our dinner discussion that he liked to be taken care of in bed. I sized him up as a big bottom, though he insisted he liked to switch and be equals.

“OK,” he said quickly. “Where should we do it? Here? Upstairs?”

“I think the bed would be good,” I said. “This couch would be pretty awkward.

We went up to his bedroom, which I’d already seen on the house tour before dinner. (I don’t know why people always do house tours. I’ve seen houses before. Please, only take me on the tour if your house is something special.)

I sat down on the bed to pull off my boots. I turned at the sound of Barry’s voice to see his shirt coming off over his head. “Should I take off my shirt?” he asked.

“I think so.”

“Should I take off anything else?”

“It’s your house. Whatever makes you comfortable.” My assertive guy was turning out to be rather a baby. He even looked like a big baby when he stood there in his tighty-whiteys.

“Should I take off my shorts?”

“If you want,” I encouraged him.

He took off his shorts and lay down on the bed, face down. I confess I stole a glance at his cock on the way, and was relieved to see that it was not a monster. That possibility had been a worry for me given that he was such a big guy and my pussy was so tight and shallow.

I straddled his back and began massaging his shoulders, using the massage oil he provided. It was actually sex lube. I was glad he had lube around, in case we ever got down to it — which was not going to happen that night, I was still determined.

I gave him a nice long massage, working my way down to his toes and back up to his shoulders. I skirted around the intimate bits. After 45 minutes, I whispered in his ear, “I’m going now. You just relax.”

Barry turned over and whined. “Don’t go! Can’t you stay a little longer? Come on. Stay for bit. Here, come lay beside me.”

I didn’t really want to, but I couldn’t stand to see a man cry, so I cuddled into his left shoulder.

He sighed and relaxed. Then he felt for the lube, squeezed some into his hand, and began stroking his cock.

Oh no, I thought. *Not this! What is it about men masturbating in front of me these days? Doesn’t anybody fuck anymore?* Not that I wanted to fuck just then, but it was the principle of the thing. Was this acceptable first date etiquette these days? I wanted to believe he would have behaved the same if I had been a cisgender woman, but who knows? At least he wasn’t asking me to do it, or, worse, to do it with my mouth.

But he did ask me to do something. “You’ve got to talk to me,” he said. “Help me along. I need your encouragement.”

What was I supposed to do? It was still possible that I wanted to date this guy, even though things were not moving in the kinds of directions that would be likely to win me over. But he was clean-cut, employed, and tall. And single — did I mention single? Besides, I hadn’t had a date with a man in a year.

So I played along. “Do it, Barry. I know you can. Ooh, you’re so big. Ooh, ahh, make it spurt Barry. Should I get a bucket? Come on, Barry. Go, go go. Paint the ceiling with it. You’re such a man, Barry, such a man.”

Spoot! The tip of his penis burped, and creamy white cum trickled out. Barry sighed with contentment. I went home.

* * *

My fabulous weekend had only just begun. I had another date lined up for Saturday! It never rains, but it pours, as the old saying goes.

My Saturday date was with a trannie chaser named Nathan. He’d found me on urnotalone, where I still had an ad, though this was the first time in a long time any guy had contacted me through it. Nathan was from Virginia, he was going to be in my area, and he’d love to meet me. Would I consider seeing him?

Everything Nice

I checked out his urnotalone ad. He seemed like a perfectly average, older guy, probably in his early sixties. His height was average, 5 foot 10, his hair was average, brown and balding, his build was average, neither athletic nor going to pot. I thought, *Sure, why not give the guy a thrill?* I liked meeting people, and besides, at least he would appreciate me for being trans, rather than despising me.

We agreed to meet for a drink on Saturday night when he got finished teaching some sort of class. When he contacted me on my cell phone a couple days prior to the date, he asked if I was interested in making it dinner. "I'd love to!" I told him. The truth was, I had considered angling for a dinner myself, but I'd decided not to be pushy.

Nathan said he didn't know San Jose, so I should pick my favorite restaurant. *Sigh.* Yes, I would be happy to plan the date. I picked a new, very expensive steakhouse named Alexander's that I had been wanting to try.

My beau showed up at my front door exactly on time. He was a shlubby little guy in black jeans and a plaid work shirt. He definitely did not exceed my low expectations. At least he had on loafers, not sneakers.

I didn't mind. This was strictly social. I wasn't even hoping that anything might develop from this date.

We went to Alexander's and began talking. Oh. My. God! He was a CIA analyst! He had a doctorate in history! He was an expert on the Soviet Union! He was also a great conversationalist and a perfect gentleman. I was swept away. Here was my fantasy fellow. Looks really didn't matter. I could see myself spending a lot of time with this guy. And I didn't have to worry about telling him about my sex change.

We had a fascinating evening discussing politics, the war in Iraq, science, and our personal lives. I felt intelligent and charming. Where was that dull girl from the night before with Barry? She was nowhere to be seen. I realized I had felt bad about myself when I was out with Barry, and I decided then and there that I would not go out with him again — assuming he even asked me to.

There was one small, eensy-weensy, itty-bitty problem with Nathan. He was married, of course. One of the reasons why he liked trans women, he said, apologizing for what he knew was something girls like me really didn't want to hear, was that it didn't feel so much

like he was cheating on his wife when he was with one of us. He'd had a regular trans girlfriend in the San Jose area who he'd been seeing for some time, but she'd just found a girlfriend of her own, and couldn't carry on with Nathan anymore. I was being auditioned for the new mistress position. *Except*, I thought, *you're not really a mistress unless the guy pays your rent.*

Nathan was quite taken with me, and I seriously considered having an affair with him. But I couldn't do it. My life was all about being open and honest and true to myself. I couldn't become someone's dirty little secret.

In the end, I chose not to see either Barry or Nathan again. In fact, I decided to forget about men altogether for a while. I wasn't going to go on another date unless somebody at least as interesting as Nathan came along. And he'd better be single, too.

Barry called a few days later to say he had come to the conclusion that he was not open to a relationship with me. I thanked him for at least calling and not simply disappearing, like most men did.

A couple days after that, Nathan sent me an e-mail message. I replied that I was not open to a relationship with him.

Several months later, Barry had the nerve to call me up and ask if I'd like to see him again. I told him pleasantly, "No, thanks."

More Family Reunions

Vaya Con Dios

Five years after my transition, my mother finally called me by a girl name. Unfortunately, it wasn't my name. It was in a telephone conversation that went like this.

"Hello."

"Hello. Janet?"

"No, mom, it's me, Lannie."

"Oh, Eddy!" My mom sounded startled, then emitted an embarrassed laugh. "I thought I was calling your brother. I guess I dialed you by mistake." Janet was my little brother's wife.

"Yes, I guess you did."

"How are you doing?"

"I'm fine, Mom. How are you and Dad?"

"We're ... I guess I might as well tell you what I was going to tell Michael. I've been having a lot of pain for the last few months, mostly around my abdomen. Last week I went to see the doctor, and

Everything Nice

he thinks I might have cancer again. I have four tumors on my liver that they want to check out.”

“Oh, no, Mom!” I moaned. Three years earlier, she had been diagnosed with colon cancer. She’d underwent surgery, and they said they “got it all.” It wasn’t as bad as they had feared, they told her — as bad as we all had feared. They didn’t even have her do chemotherapy. Now I wondered if that had been a wise decision.

“I’m so sorry! When will you know more?”

“They scheduled me for a liver biopsy and an MRI next week.”

“How agonizing the wait will be!”

“It’s OK, honey,” she reassured me. “It’s in the Lord’s hands. God is good.”

God may be good, I thought, *but He’s being pretty hard on you right now*. But I bit my tongue. However, I couldn’t resist saying, “Now I’m glad you mis-dialed the phone. I wonder if I would have ever found out.”

“I was going to write you an e-mail,” she said. I could here the AOL voice in my head; instead of *You’ve got mail!*, it was saying, *Your mother has cancer!*

“I see. Well, be sure to let me know as soon as you learn anything more.”

“I will, honey, but don’t worry. God will take care of me.”

“I know He will. I’ll pray for you Mom.” I didn’t agree with my mother’s spiritual outlook, but I was glad she had her faith to see her through her coming ordeal — whatever the outcome might be.

I called my mom as soon as I got home from work the day she was scheduled to get her test results.

“Hi Mom!”

“Oh, hi, honey.”

“Did you get your results?”

She hesitated. “Well, yes. I sent an e-mail.”

“I didn’t check my e-mail yet. Why don’t you just tell me.”

“OK. I’m afraid it’s not good, honey. The tumors on my liver are all malignant, and it’s spread to my lymph nodes and all over my body.”

“Oh, Mom! That’s terrible! I’m so sorry.”

“It’s OK, honey. God is good. If He wants to take me, I’m ready. I know where I’ll go.”

“What did the doctor say? Is there anything they can do?”

“They can’t operate because it’s spread too much. He said they could start some chemo and see how it goes, but they’re not optimistic. I think it would just delay the inevitable, so I’m not going to do it. The chemo would probably be too hard on me anyway.”

“Oh my God. So what happens? Will they put you in the hospital?”

“No, I don’t think so. He said they would just send hospice to our house to keep me comfortable and try to minimize the pain.”

“Oh Mom, I’m just so sorry for you.”

“Don’t be sorry, honey. It’s my time to go be with the Lord. I’m not worried at all.”

The truth of the matter was, she had been ready to meet her maker for the last fifteen years. She always seemed vaguely disappointed that she kept on living. Whenever we talked about the future, she would say, “I won’t be around to worry about that,” and I would respond, “You’re going to live to be 100, Mom. Get a hobby!” Born the month of the big crash, October 1929, it now appeared that she would be lucky to make it to 77.

Now I said, “Mom, that’s great that you’re OK about going to Jesus, but I’m still sorry about the pain you will be facing.”

“I’m used to pain,” she said. “I’ve had this arthritis and other things for so long, I can face a little more pain. Don’t worry. God is good.”

“Yes, God is good, Mom. God is very good.”

So this was it. My mother was really dying this time. I checked my feelings. Did it hurt? Not really. Was it scary? A little bit. Would I miss her? Not much, I thought, brutally but honestly. I barely spoke with her anymore these days, and she had no interest in my life. Was I a horrible, unfeeling person? No, I wasn’t. Before my transition, I would have worried about that possibility. I *was* an unfeeling person back then. But by this time I had experienced enough true emotion — compassion, love, despair — that I knew my feelings were present and accounted for. I just wasn’t very connected with this woman anymore.

I was concerned for her. I wished she didn’t have to undergo the ordeal that was awaiting her. But there was nothing I could do about that.

Everything Nice

I felt confused about what part I was supposed to play in the inevitable drama that had now begun. I'd never had anyone close to me pass before. What was my role? I thought I should visit my mom and dad as often as I could in the time remaining, but I couldn't think of anything else I should be doing. Perhaps I would invite my father to live with me if he wanted to — but I knew he wouldn't want to live in crowded, busy San Jose. I offered my help to both of them, but I doubted that they would ask for anything. They'd always felt so strongly that they never wanted to be a burden on their children.

I called my sister.

"Mary, what do you think about all this?"

"I'm devastated, Lannie!" she said, and she sounded like it. "I've been talking to Mom every day. It's just terrible."

"She seems all right about it when I talked to her," I said. "She's ready to be with her Jesus."

"Yes, she's happy to be going to her reward, but she's scared about the process of dying. It's going to be rough."

"I agree. It's going to get sad and ugly, isn't it?"

"Yeah. And I'm worried about Dad, too. He's really taking it hard. Mom says he's been crying a lot."

"Dad?" I asked, incredulous. "Crying? Our father?"

"Yeah. What is he going to do without her? They've been married 55 years."

"That's true. Boy, Dad crying. Come to think of it, imagine all the emotion he's been holding in for all these years. If it's finally breaking through, wow! I'll just bet he's crying."

"That's right. He certainly never let any emotions show before."

"Are going out to see them?"

"Yes. We're going next weekend. How about you?"

"That's one reason why I'm calling. I thought we ought to coordinate our visits."

"Yeah. I talked to Bob, and he said the same thing. He thought we should all go at different times so we have someone there as much as possible."

"Oh! I guess I see his point. That would be good for Mom and Dad. But I was thinking the opposite. I want to be there with somebody else."

“You think?”

“I guess it’s different for you guys, because you go with your spouses. But I don’t want to be stuck there all alone. That’s hard enough when nobody is dying. Besides, I want to see you.”

“OK, that makes sense. It would be easier if more of us are there at the same time, now that you mention it. So let’s coordinate.”

“Good. I was planning to go next weekend, too. I’ll do that, and meet you there?”

“Great.”

I booked a room at Carson Station, a small hotel and casino in town, because I didn’t want to be any kind of burden staying at my parents house. Truth be told, I was relieved to have an excuse to have a refuge of my own.

Saturday came, and my Mustang and I once again made the five-hour trek to Carson City. It was a beautiful, sunny November day, and no snow had fallen yet this season so road conditions were pristine. I listened to podcasts the whole way and had a wonderful drive.

In the late afternoon, I arrived at Armory Street and was relieved to find my parents looking much the same as always. To my delight, my dad greeted me with, “Hello, Lannie,” and he even gave me a hug. God bless him, he was trying his best to support me in my new gender at last. I was so grateful, I didn’t even correct his pronunciation of Lannie. (He had said “Lane-ie” with a long A instead of instead of “La-nnie” with a short A, as people often did.)

Mom looked frail, but no more so than usual, and she was standing on her feet. I’d had visions of seeing a skeleton wasting away on the couch. However, when she spoke, I could hear the weakness and pain in her voice.

Mary and her Randy were already there. She was delighted to see me, he not so much. Lea and I had flown up to Oregon one time and visited them, and I knew he didn’t understand or approve of my sex change. I gave him major credit for at least being civil to me anyway. I stayed out of his face as much as possible.

We visited for a few hours and had a small spaghetti dinner that Randy and my dad put together. We tried to keep my mom from doing anything, but we couldn’t keep her down; she insisted on doing some chores anyway. I was happy that she felt well enough to

Everything Nice

help out, but sad that she couldn't accept being waited on, not even now as she was dying.

We let my parents retire early, and us "kids" repaired to the hotel. Randy disappeared to the poker machines while Mary and I adjourned to her room where we talked late into the night. It had been many, many years since we'd been able to chat in person like this, one on one, and we had a wonderful, intimate sharing.

Mary was quite broken up about our mother's situation, and she was distressed about what she should be doing, like I had been, but much more so. "I don't know what to do!" she wailed.

"You're already doing it," I reassured her. "You're here, you're reaching out, and you're helping. You've thought it over, and you're doing everything you could think of. That's exactly what you should be doing."

"You're right, I have thought it over. Sometimes when I get off the phone with Mom, I just stare at the wall for six hours. I'm just overwhelmed."

"I know, I know. I felt the same way. But I talked it over with my therapist, and she helped me see that what I'm doing and what I'm feeling is just fine. She says there aren't any rules for these situations. Everyone handles grief in a different way. We just need to do what we think is right."

"I guess you're right. That makes me feel better. So you're still seeing a therapist?"

"I just started again. I had another pretty bad bout with depression."

"What happened? Did something cause it?"

"Yes, there was a trigger event. A few months ago, out of the blue, Erin, my ex-wife, contacted me."

"Really? When was the last time you spoke to her?"

"It's been like fifteen years; I haven't seen her since the divorce. She didn't know anything about my sex change. She'd run across my Web site, and she was stunned. But she read some of my articles, and said she could begin to understand what I went through. So she gave me a call."

"That's nice, I guess."

"Yes, I thought it was great. I hadn't thought I ever wanted to talk to her again, because things weren't very good when we split up. But I was surprised to find we had a wonderful talk. She was very

nice, and interested in my story. She even said she wanted to come to San Jose to see me.”

“What did you say?”

“I said I’d love to see her. I told her it was really good to hear from her, and I felt I was reconnecting with a piece of my past that I’d thought was lost. So we made a plan for her to visit me in a couple of weeks.”

“And what happened?”

“She canceled at the last minute. She left a message on my answering machine saying she couldn’t make it. She still wanted to see me, she claimed, but I never heard from her again.”

“That’s too bad.”

“Well you know, I didn’t think it would really matter to me, but surprisingly, I was felt quite hurt. It plunged me into a depression that I couldn’t shake. It wasn’t about not seeing Erin in particular. I didn’t really care if I saw her again or not. It’s just that it resonated with all the other rejection I’d been experiencing for the past few years. I just wasn’t a priority in anyone’s life. People liked me, but they didn’t have time for me. Why couldn’t I be number one in someone’s life? Even in dear Lea’s life, I was number three after her wife and her job. I felt so alone. Worst of all, it felt like I was back exactly where I was before my transition — the life of the party, but no one cares to go home with me.”

“That sucks.”

“Yes, it sucks. I wished I was dead. But I recognized that I was in depression, and I went to see my shrink about getting my meds adjusted. She added an SSRI to my Wellbutrin, and suggested I should do some therapy too. So that’s why I’m doing therapy again. But do you know what? As soon as the new anti-depressant kicked in, my black mood just lifted. It was a miracle. I was carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders, and it just lifted. So I’m doing great now.”

“Good! I’m glad to hear it. I know what you mean — I don’t know what I’d do without my meds.” She suffered from depression too, and my little brother had attempted suicide in his late teens. My therapist said it sounded like my mom and dad might suffer from depression, too, and I realized how right that was. It explained so much. Poor things, fighting depression all their lives, and too proud to seek medical help for it.

Everything Nice

At one point, Mary and I got onto the subject of Mom still calling me Eddy and using male pronouns.

"It doesn't bother me anymore," I told Mary. "I mean, I would certainly like it if she called me by my name, and it makes it harder on me that she doesn't. I have a difficult enough time holding on to my female identity, especially when I'm with the parents who always knew me as a male, and having Mom not supporting my new identity doesn't help. But I'm not mad at her for it. I realize that it's just the way she is, and she's never going to change. Especially not now, while she's so near the end."

"I talked to her about this one time," Mary said. "You know what the problem is. She says she would be betraying her religious beliefs if she called you Lannie. She's sure it's against the bible."

"Oh, I see. I didn't realize that. I mean, I knew that she thinks Jesus doesn't approve of my sex change, but I didn't know she felt she needed to enforce Jesus' displeasure. Like God would send her to hell because she had the compassion to comfort her child by affirming my chosen identity. But I guess I can see how that works in her system of logic. That makes it even easier for me to accept that she treats me this way."

"That's what it is."

"Yeah. You know, I'm just noticing how incredibly inflexible her thinking is these days. I mean, even when you guys were talking about changing the table around so more people could sit at it, she insisted that the place settings remain on table all day, because that's the way she liked it. No flexibility at all, even on little things. It must drive Dad crazy."

"I don't know about that. He's the same way. Remember how he always used to tell us, 'A place for everything, and everything in its place?'"

"That's true, isn't it?"

We looked through some old photographs Mary had gotten from Mom that afternoon. Mostly we found ourselves saying things like, "I think that's Uncle Jim, and I don't know who the rest of those people are." Nevertheless, we were finally connecting slightly with our lost past, and it felt good.

A very old picture showed a beautiful, dark girl dressed in veils. "Who is that?" I asked.

“That’s Nanny,” Mary said, referring to our maternal grandmother, who was from Hungary. “Mom told me we have some gypsy blood in us.”

“Gypsy blood!” I exclaimed. “How cool! So that explains my fiery nature!” I was joking, because my nature was not fiery, it was reserved and rational. But I was intrigued to discover I had gypsy blood. I’d always felt like the whitest of white people, with my other grandparents being English, Scottish, and Irish. I’d overlooked my Hungarian heritage.

The next day when we were reassembled at my parents house, I told about how much Mary and I had enjoyed going through the pictures. “I’ve got my camera,” I said, taking my little digital Pentax out of my purse. “Why don’t we take some pictures for posterity.”

“No!” My mother cried. “Not me! Take the kids’ picture.”

“Not me,” Mary yelled.

“Come on,” I tried to persuade them. “It’s not for me, It’s for you great-grandchildren. They’ll love seeing these pictures.” But they were having none of it. My family, I swear.

Later that day, I heard that my little brother was bringing his family out from Indiana to visit on Monday. They’d had their second child, a girl, recently, and they wanted her grandparents to meet her. I’d planned to go back home on Sunday, but I thought I might stay over another day to see them. However, I was worried about whether they wanted to see me, since I knew they were uncomfortable about my sex change. Rather than speculating, I decided to be an adult and simply call Mike and ask him how he felt about it. I called a couple of times on Sunday morning, but there was no answer. So I decided to err on the side of caution and stick to my plan of returning home on Sunday. There would be other chances to see them in the coming months, I thought.

Back home and into my routine again, I found myself to be very much at peace with my mother’s impending death. I was comfortable with the idea of death, I decided, whether mine or my loved ones. Perhaps it was because I was used to people leaving me. Perhaps because I had longed for my own death so often, and I still looked at it as a pretty positive step in my spiritual growth. In any case, I wasn’t going to force myself into grief just because it was the right thing to do. I would be open to grief if it showed up, but I

Everything Nice

would enjoy life in the meantime. Maybe my anti-depressants were just doing a good job.

I called Mike to see how he was feeling and how we would coordinate things as the process moved forward. He seemed to be in a similar mental state as me, in terms of accepting what was going on. I found out that he wasn't very close to Mom these days anyway; he only spoke to her a handful of times a year.

I brought up the issue of my sex change. "Mike, I need to ask you this. How do you and Janet feel about seeing me now? What if I show up in Carson City the same time you are there?"

"Ummm, I guess it would be all right."

"You're hesitating. What's going on? What is your reservation?"

"Would it be OK if I asked you, ummm, to dress kind of conservatively around us?"

"What have you heard?" I inquired, puzzled.

"Mom said that, when you were out visiting last time, you were wearing a really short skirt."

"I was?" I asked, confused at first. I had very carefully planned my wardrobe, and excluded anything that might be considered provocative. Then I figured it out. "I was wearing cut-off jeans!" I said, "Shorts! I didn't wear any skirts at all!" *Great*, I thought. *Mom so cannot see the real me, that she imagines clothing I'm not actually wearing.*

"Well, OK," Mike said, disbelief in his voice. "But is it OK for you to dress conservatively?"

"Sure, no problem. That's a reasonable request. So how does Janet feel about it?"

"Janet's OK," he said. "Mostly we're worried about the children."

"What about the children?"

"I think they'll be all right. They're too young to know what's going on. But I don't think I'd tell them you used to be a boy."

"Of course not. Why would you? Don't worry, kids are fine with this."

Sheesh. If only they had let me educate them a little bit about transgenderism over the last five years, they wouldn't have to be so fearful and ignorant, I thought.

One Sunday afternoon, I somewhat reluctantly called my big brother to discuss the same issues. I was already disappointed that I

needed to call him. Shouldn't the big brother be the one to organize the siblings when a tragedy befalls a family? But such was the way it always seems to be with our crazy clan.

My call went through to the answering machine, so I left a message: "Hi. This is Lannie. I thought we ought to talk about Mom's condition and all. Would you please give me a call when you can?"

I didn't get a call back, so I tried again Tuesday night. The phone rang a few times, then it sounded like it got picked up, but the line went dead. Had he seen my number on Caller ID and hung up on me? No, I was determined not to be paranoid. I called back, and this time it went through to the machine. I left another message. "This is Lannie again. I'm still trying to get hold of Bob to talk about Mom. Would you please call me?"

Again, no call came. Then it occurred to me: Maybe he doesn't have my number. Granted, it wouldn't be hard to get it from Mom or Mary, or from Information for that matter, but maybe he didn't think to go through the trouble. The next time I called, I would leave my number.

On Thursday evening, I tried again. It rang three times and then, to my surprise, it picked up.

"Hello." It was Bob's wife.

"Hi. Marie?"

"Yes."

"This is Lannie." I paused a moment, but Marie didn't say anything. I thought about saying, "How are you doing?" but I thought the better of it, and came straight to the point. "Is my brother there?"

"He's here," Marie responded, sounding rather cross. "But he doesn't want to talk with you."

"I beg your pardon? He won't talk with me?"

"That's right."

"Why not?"

"He just won't. I didn't want you to keep leaving messages, so I picked up to tell you."

"Oh. Ummmm, well, are you guys going to Carson City for Thanksgiving?"

"No, it doesn't look like it. Bob can't get the time off."

Everything Nice

“OK. I was just asking because I was thinking of going, and I didn’t know if you guys were OK with seeing me. I guess you’re not, if he won’t even talk to me.” Silence. “Well, goodbye then.”

“Goodbye.” Click.

I was stunned, hurt, and angry. That asshole! He wouldn’t even talk to me on the telephone? What were we, like ten years old? He hadn’t seemed to mind talking to me when I called him a few times back when I transitioned. I thought a moment and realized that we hadn’t talked since then, almost five years earlier. Had he been stewing about this the whole time, and now he wouldn’t even talk to me? What an jerk!

As I thought about it, the angrier and more hurt I got. I reviewed my family situation: My big brother wouldn’t even talk to me on the telephone. My little brother was “OK” with seeing me, although he feared how he expected me to dress. Thinking back, I realized he never actually said he would *like* to see me again, or that he would like his children to meet their Auntie Lannie.

My mother couldn’t bring herself to call me by my legal name, and she hallucinated micro-mini-skirts on me. Moreover, she told my sister that she was worried about what I would wear to the funeral, because it might upset her church lady friends. Would Mary please be sure I wore something conservative? Can you imagine?

My Dad, God bless him, was trying, but I sensed he was still uncomfortable with me.

To the best of my knowledge, none of our extended family knew about my sex change, because one time I brought it up and my mom had said, “Oh no! We wouldn’t tell them!”

Only my sister appreciated me.

I made a decision. My life had become all about being true to myself and staying in touch with my emotions. Well, these were my emotions now: I was fed up with my family. *Screw ‘em all!* I thought. Why should I keep bending over backwards to reach out to them, if they were determined to remain annoyed with me? I would just stop being a thorn in their sides. I wasn’t going to visit Carson City anymore. Not unless somebody reached out to me and told me they really wanted to see me. And not my sister — she wasn’t the problem.

I would not even attend the funeral. They’d all be happier without having to deal with their feelings about me, so I would just stay

away. The idea of missing my mother's funeral didn't even bother me. Why would I want to be in presence of people who didn't want me to be there?

In short, I decided I did not have a family anymore. (Just a sister.) I was done with them. Period. From now on, my family would be my LGBT friends.

My anger dissipated. It was OK. It was just the way things were. *Vaya con Dios*, my family. Go with God. *Vaya con Dios*, my mother.

The Big “C”

I stopped calling my family, and things got awfully quite. Sometimes it was difficult to put my mother’s suffering and impending death out of my mind, but I just kept reminding myself it was no longer any of my business. Six weeks later, in the middle of December, my sister called me.

“How are you doing?” she asked. “Mom said she was worried about you. No one has heard from you in a while.”

“I’m fine,” I replied nonchalantly. I wasn’t about to tell her that I had disengaged from the family. Why bother? They weren’t my family anymore, and they didn’t seem to care. “How are you?”

“Not too good. I talk to Mom every day on the phone, and it’s very draining on me. She’s on morphine, and starting to get a little out of it. I’m just exhausted when I get off the phone with her.”

“I’m sure it’s hard on you — on both of you. I’m sorry.”

"You really ought to call Mom. She's always asking if you're all right."

She could always pick up the phone and call me, I thought to myself. But that wasn't reality. C'est la vie. Since I was not bearing grudges, I took Mary's advice and called my mother. She was glad to hear from me, but she sounded quite weak. I was glad I had called. I realized that my family did want a relationship with me — but a distant relationship. That was all they could handle. all right then; I would take what I could get.

I called again on Christmas day. Things were the same.

I heard nothing more for another six weeks. Then I got an e-mail message from my dad. That's right, an e-mail message.

"Your mother is in very bad shape," it read. "She's an invalid in bed at this point. They tell me she'll be gone in two or three weeks. I'm sorry to do this by e-mail, but I can't talk without crying."

"I'm so sorry," I wrote back. "Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help." Apparently there was nothing I could do to help, because all I heard back was silence.

As the days and weeks went by, I watched my e-mail account for a "You've got mail! Your mother is dead" message. I tried calling my sister, but she wasn't home. She was probably in Carson City with my parents.

Why wasn't I more upset about my mother's condition? I wondered. It wasn't only because I had emotionally detached from the family, or that I wasn't very close with them in the first place. That was more of an effect, not a cause. I decided the real reason was that I had no fear of death; indeed, I considered death to be a friend. All my life, death had seemed the only solution for my unease and lack of social relationships. Now that life was actually feeling OK to me, I still welcomed death. It seemed a very natural part of life, our final task. I was the type of person who, if I had an assignment due on Friday, would take care of it on Monday to get it out of the way. I knew that death would be my final assignment, and I would have liked to start on it. I practically envied my mother her opportunity to get her final chore done.

In the meanwhile, there was no escaping the big "C". My houseguest, Tony, was diagnosed with cancer, a non-Hodgkins lymphoma. *Oh lord*, I thought, *what will come of this?* I liked Tony, and I considered him a friend, but I wasn't responsible for him. Really,

Everything Nice

he was just some guy I was doing a favor for, letting him live in my house. If he started to need nursing care, I didn't know how far I was willing or able to go. Besides, he'd had so many ups and downs with his health in the time he lived with me, I simply wasn't prepared to be emotionally invested in it. I figured I was doing my part by giving him a roof over his head and letting him share my food when he wanted. (Not to mention the satellite plasma television, high-speed Internet, washer and dryer, water for showers two or three times a day, heat, and so on. Not that I was counting.) Well, one thing I'd learned at my alcohol recovery program was to take things a day at a time, and I decided that was just what I would do. So far, Tony had been really good about taking care of himself and not being a burden, so I would let it ride and see what happened.

* * *

My sister called me a week later.

"Hello? Lannie?"

"Hi ... uh ... oh, Mary. What's going on? Can you speak up? I can hardly hear you. OK, that's a little better."

"I'm exhausted, Lannie. I've been with Mom for the last two weeks. She's totally incapacitated. We have to do everything for her. We need to get up every two hours and carry her to the toilet, and clean her up. We have to give her sponge baths. It's sheer hell."

"It sure sounds like it."

"I just couldn't take it anymore. I had to come home."

"I guess so. You sound totally wrung out." I was thinking it was worse for her emotionally than physically, but both of those things can gang up on a person.

"Yeah, it's terrible. Bob and Marie are out there this week. But Mom won't let Marie help like me. She'll only let Dad do anything. Poor Dad is ready to drop. Marie located an LVN to help out. The nurse says she is willing to do as much as Dad wants, even stay 24 hours, but he's only letting her come a couple hours a day. You've got to help us talk Dad into accepting more help."

"I don't know about that, Mary. It seems to me that if Dad wants to do it all himself, then let him knock himself out."

"I'm afraid he's going to stretch himself 'till he drops, and then we'll have two invalids to take care of!"

"Yes, I guess there's that."

"Listen, Lannie, do you think you could go out next week and help them? Bob has to get back to work, and Michael was out for a few days last week, but they can't get away from their jobs that much. Do you think you could help?"

"Gee, I'd be delighted to help. I just don't know that they want to see me."

"It's OK. Last night Dad told Bob that it would be nice if you could come out next week."

"I see." However, I didn't really see. Why was I getting this request third or fourth hand? How sincere was he about wanting to see me? What had the original message actually been, before it went through the family telegraph? I told Mary, "I'll give him a call this weekend, and see what's going on. If they want to see me, I'd be happy to go out."

"You would?" Mary asked, sounding very surprised. It annoyed me that my willingness to help surprised her.

"Of course I would. I've been offering my help all along."

"That would be really good if you went out there. Mom asks about you every day."

"OK. Thanks for calling, Mary. I'll see what it looks like come the weekend."

On Saturday morning, I called. My dad said "Hi" and handed the phone to my mom. I hadn't realized she could still even talk on the telephone at all. She barely could. Her voice sounded feeble, and she lost track of her thoughts before reaching the ends of sentences.

"This is the first day your dad and I have been alone here," she told me. "That's how it should be. He's taking good care of me."

"Mom, Mary told me I should come out next week and help. Is that right?"

"Oh, we don't really need any help. You kids have your lives to live. You shouldn't worry about us."

"*Mo-o-om*, you're the most important thing in my life right now. Everything else can wait. Listen, would you like to see me?"

"Oh, yes, that would be wonderful, Eddy."

"Then that settles it. I'll be there Monday."

"That would be nice. You don't have to stay long."

"OK, Mom. I'll come out and we'll just see how it goes."

I got the same general message from my father. We'd like to see you, but we can take care of ourselves. Sheesh, they absolutely

Everything Nice

couldn't grasp that I ached to be part of the process. It would have meant a lot to me if they would let me in. But I realized again, as I had at Christmas, that they simply could not do intimacy. I would have to settle for being a bit player in my own mother's death scene. My eyes were brimming with tears as I cradled the phone — out of compassion for my mother's suffering, or because of my longing for intimacy? I couldn't say for sure which it was.

Early Monday morning, in beautiful spring weather, I headed out to Carson City.

* * *

Well, I got my intimacy. I spent a week with my parents, and we were all as loving, caring, and close as could I ask for; more so than any time since I was a child. This time, however, my mother was the child. The cancer had caused her red blood cell count to drop, and as a result, less oxygen was being carried to her brain. She found it difficult to complete a thought, and she mixed up names. However, she was actually better off than I expected. I thought she was totally bedridden, but when I walked in the front door, she greeted me from a wheelchair.

My parents had fallen into a routine, each day much like the one before. Mother slept in a rented hospital bed in the spare bedroom. She would awaken about 9 in the morning, and Dad would help her into the wheelchair. He would wheel her to the bathroom in the their master bedroom, where my Dad still slept, and he would help her clean up. If she wanted, he would help her onto a seat in the shower stall and hold her while she washed herself. This could take a couple of hours.

Then it was back into the chair and out to the dining room, where Dad served her a sandwich and chicken noodle soup. Mom was still able to feed herself, although with a little bit of dripping and spillage. By the time she finished eating, she was exhausted, so she would go back to bed at about 1, where she'd sleep until 4 or 5. As she slept, a machine pumped oxygen to her through a nose tube, like I had seen so many times on hospitalized patients on television. Dad put a baby monitor in her room so he could hear her movements and breathing from the living room.

A volunteer from the hospice program came by for a couple of hours in the late afternoon to give my dad some relief. He usually took the opportunity to go for a long walk. Sharon, the hospice

nurse, offered to do chores like washing clothes or vacuuming, but Dad wouldn't let her because that would disturb Mom's sleep. She did cook dinner for them, though, before she left. I filled in for Sharon as cook while I was there.

In the evening, Mom and Dad went through the routine again, eating dinner this time, followed by a little bit of pie and vanilla ice cream, and it was back to bed around 7.

Mom needed to go potty two or three times during the night, so she had a remote control button she could use to summon Dad. His hearing wasn't good, so the remote turned on a lamp next to his bed. Nighttime potty was accomplished with a potty chair in the bedroom, not a trip to the bathroom.

My heart melted when I saw Dad helping Mom in and out of the wheelchair. He stood in front of her and grasped her around her torso, just under her arms. She would push on the chair with her feeble strength to help lift herself, and up she came into my Dad's embrace. He would say, "Let's do our little dance," and they would shuffle about in a quarter circle until he could let her down in her new destination. It did look like a dance, actually.

Thank goodness Dad was totally fit and able to perform this task, although at 78, he wasn't strong enough to actually lift her. In the future, when Mom became too weak to even assist, they would be forced to rely on a nurse to move her, and a bedpan for her bodily needs.

Dad seemed to be in pretty good spirits. He told me he had broken down for a while when Mom first became invalid, but after a couple of weeks, he found acceptance and got on with it. No doubt he would break down again when she passed, but I was convinced he would be OK.

Mom, on the other hand, suffered greatly. She said the physical pain wasn't so bad (she had as much morphine as she wanted for that, but she was using very little) but emotionally, she was devastated. Once or twice an hour she would be overcome by her feeling and start crying piteously, though she tried to resist it.

"Don't cry," my dad told her.

"Cry as much as you want," I told her.

I thought that a lot of the emotion was simply physical, with her body deteriorating and her hormonal system surely being out of whack. However, she was also tortured by a feeling of being a terrible

burden. One time, when my dad was helping her into bed, the baby monitor forced me to eavesdrop on their conversation: “You can’t do anything except take care of me,” I heard her moan to my dad. As if he would rather be out bowling?

“Dee, I’ve always taken care of you,” Dad told her. “It may not have always been this visible, but everything I did, I did for you.” Such love! I began to change my opinion about my father. Maybe I was wrong about him not being in touch with his emotions. Perhaps it was just that he wasn’t good about expressing them — a stereotypically male trait, if you believe in gender.

Mom’s other source of anguish was her humiliation at not being able to care for herself, especially for her intimate needs. Apparently she had let my sister Mary help her, but when my older brother and his wife were there the previous week, she was not comfortable with them. Nor would she allow nurses to assist with these duties. Only my Dad could help her. (Funny how she felt so bad about being a burden, but she made things more difficult by her fussiness.) I assumed I would fall into the “not allowed” category, since I was still her son Eddy as far as she was concerned, so I initially held back. But as the week went on, I stayed with her more and more, and she seemed quite comfortable with me. I found that very gratifying. I wasn’t totally surprised, however; despite being her son Eddy, she had felt free to discuss her period and yeast infections with me since I’d been living as a woman.

Mom longed to be done with it. She told me she was disappointed every time she woke up, because she hoped Jesus would have come for her in her sleep. She couldn’t understand what was taking her Friend so long. But I don’t think the idea of doing anything to accelerate her transition ever occurred to her, nor would she have permitted it if it had been suggested. Jesus would take her in His time, not hers. Even when her brain was fully capable, she wouldn’t have been able to see the logical inconsistency in that she was taking steroids to shrink her tumors and keep up her appetite, thereby artificially prolonging her life. She had become extremely narrow minded and inflexible in her old age and evangelical Christianity, and these traits were amplified in her disease.

I felt good during the week I spent with my dying mother. I was sad she had to suffer so, but I was still in acceptance about the whole process, and I felt good about playing a useful part in it. My

folks were happy to have me there with them, and I was happy to be there, right where I belonged at the time. I smiled a lot around them, because it was so wonderful to see their love for each other, and because being with my mother was like being with an innocent little child. As a matter of fact, when I was around children, I sometimes felt sad for them, thinking of all the tough times that lay ahead for them; but I knew my mother's job was complete and she would soon go to her reward. (I should add that since my transition, I found I could envision the good times that lay ahead for children, and I knew that bad times didn't need to be so bad if they had the right tools. It was sad that my mom's tools weren't quite up to the job just then.)

I went home after a week. I would have stayed longer if my mother's demise had seemed imminent, but the way she was eating, I thought she might well hang on another month or two. I planned to return in a couple of weeks.

* * *

The next contact still wasn't the dreaded, "You've got mail! Your mother is dead!" But it was almost as bad. The e-mail message on a Friday afternoon read, "Mom has taken a turn for the worse. The hospice people say she won't make it through the weekend."

I knew my sister was back on duty in Carson City, so I called her cell phone right away. Her husband answered and confirmed that Mom was looking very bad indeed. He told me she was turning blue at the extremities and her breathing was stopping and starting. She'd also been in terrible pain with a bowel blockage for the last day. It certainly sounded like Jesus was finally ready to take her.

"Are you coming out here?" Randy asked.

"Well, I'd like to, but I wanted to check what everyone's plans are. I mean, if my brothers are going to be there, maybe I shouldn't."

"Listen," Randy said, "you've made up your mind to come, so come. If your brothers give you any trouble, I'll take care of them." I considered this to be a particularly gallant offer, because Randy was not very comfortable with my sex change himself. But he made a good point, and more importantly, made me feel wanted. So I said I would be there by noon on Saturday.

I left work a little early. As I crawled through the afternoon commute traffic on the 101 freeway, my cell phone warbled. It was

Everything Nice

Randy. “I’m sorry to have to tell you this, but your mother just passed,” he informed me.

“I’m not too surprised,” I replied. “She sounded pretty bad.”

“Anyway, you don’t need to rush out here, I guess.”

“That’s OK. I’ll still come out tomorrow.”

“Good. I’m sure Mary and your father will appreciate it. Me too.”

As I clicked the phone closed, an odd feeling came over me. It wasn’t as strong as a kick in the chest, like other people told me they’d felt when their moms died, but it was an unpleasant, hollow feeling — a sense of emptiness and finality. So that was that. She was gone.

I felt sorry that I hadn’t been there for the final curtain. I realized that even if I had jumped in my car and started driving the minute I saw the e-mail message, I wouldn’t be in Carson City yet. I wondered if Dad had called rather than e-mailed, would I have known soon enough to have gotten there on time?

I noticed I was entering Palo Alto, where Lea lived and worked, so I flipped the phone back open and dialed her.

“Can I drop by and see you, right away?”

“Of course. What’s up?”

“My mom just passed.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Thanks. I’ll see you soon.”

I zipped off the freeway and into Palo Alto, meeting Lea on California Avenue, where we often ate our regular Wednesday-evening dinners together at one of the many little restaurants that lined the street. She hugged me and held my hand while I related the events of the day and how I felt. However, she was already running late for a date with her wife — they were going to a Buddhist teaching in Berkeley — so we only spent ten minutes together. She walked me to my car and encouraged me to call her at any time.

Back on the freeway — now on the beautiful 280 in the rolling hills east of Palo Alto and Stanford University — I phoned Dish, but she was out of town. I was still feeling poorly and thought it would be a bad time to be alone, so I rang up Kelli and Loe, a trans couple who were my good friends. They invited me over, and I spent the rest of the evening with them. I felt better by the time I went home at midnight.

A Tale of Two Soldiers

My dad was so cool! In the days immediately after my mother died, while I was in Carson City waiting for the memorial service, I spent hours talking with him, because I didn't want to leave him by himself any more than necessary. We talked just like in old times — meaning, like before my sex change. I knew it was a good time to ask my dad about Mom and family, because it had been soothing for me when my friends asked me to tell them about my mom. It worked. My dad talked freely and openly. To me, it seemed he was even more free than when he spoke with me before, when Mom was in the room, but maybe it was just the circumstances.

In any case, my dad told me how his father had been a Londoner and a soldier in the London Scottish regiment during World War I — kilt, sporran, the whole bit. At one point Robert, my granddad, was in a forest in Germany when he suddenly came upon a German soldier. They both raised their weapons and fired. Grand-

Everything Nice

dad got lucky: The German boy was hit in the chest and died, but the German bullet only shattered Granddad's left wrist. Luckier still, he was right-handed.

When Granddad was recuperating in the field hospital, he was tended by a pretty Scottish lass named Mary. She became his wife, and my Grandma.

After the war, they escaped Europe's devastation by emigrating to the land of opportunity, America. Their names were recorded in the logs at Ellis Island, and I could go see them any time I want to.

Granddad had apprenticed as a carpenter before the war, and was quite adept at it, but for some reason, he didn't want to make a career out of it. Settling in New Jersey, he tried some other lines of work, and eventually decided to take some accounting classes. He turned out to be a whiz at arithmetic — he could add up the grocery bill in his head faster than the checker could ring it up — and so he found his niche in accounting.

Initially, Robert traveled around the East and Midwest doing the books for various companies. He would be on the road for perhaps a week, followed by a week at home. After a few years of the itinerant life, he took a position with an automobile manufacturer based in Ohio, and moved his young family to Philadelphia. However, he didn't get along with his boss, and a year later they returned to New Jersey. There, he found a position with Troy shipyards, and stayed with them for the rest of his life.

Robert moved up rapidly in the accounting department, but his career plateaued because only college-educated men made it to the executive suite. Nevertheless, Robert's skills were good enough that he would train the fledging executives! My dad remembered caddying while his father played golf with many a young man who would soon disappear into the executive suite. Granddad didn't mind, however. He was content to work and raise his family.

Much later in his career, my granddad finally became an executive. Then one year, when undergoing the annual executive fitness check, a spot was discovered on his lung. A lifelong smoker, he had contracted lung cancer. After a painful, gruesome illness, the cancer took his life. My dad asked his mother for his father's kilt, which, as a child, he had enjoyed trying on. But his mother replied, "What would you want with that old thing? I threw it out."

Like all of his friends, my dad couldn't wait to get out of high school and march off to World War II. Unfortunately, the war ended just as he graduated. So, although he joined the Air Force, he didn't see battle. (Twenty-five years later, his eldest son — my brother Bob — would draw a low number in the draft, but the Vietnam war would come to a sudden end and he would not be called up.)

Bob (the elder, my dad) wanted to be a truck mechanic, but his military aptitude tests slotted him for mathematics or radio. Thinking, "What the hell would I do with mathematics?" he chose radio. Besides, he already knew Morse code.

But the Air Force screwed him royally. He heard about a new specialty: They were starting a radio teletype. It was going to be an especially difficult course of training, but those who graduated would be jumped five grades to the rank of Major, and given their choice of assignment. My dad wanted to go to Europe. He worked like hell, studying 12 hours a day, and made the grade. In return, they advanced him a single grade to Private First Class, and shipped him to Alaska.

And that's not the worst of it, either. They did indeed have radio telegraphs in Alaska, but they were run by the Army, not the Air Force. Dad was assigned to work on radios instead, but since he had the wrong classification for that job, he could never advance. Try as he might, he was never able to straighten out his classification, transfer to the Army and the radio telegraphs, or get reassigned.

On the other hand, my dad loved Alaska. The rivers were packed bank-to-bank with spawning salmon, and the men spent all their spare time fishing and hunting. They grabbed a salmon from the river with a gaff, split it open, and use the eggs to fish for trout. Upstream, they saw brown bears swiping salmon right out of the current — fishing bear-style. My dad shot a small black bear and had it made into a rug.

Another nice thing about being in Alaska was that it was not yet a state, so they received overseas pay — thirty dollars a week instead of twenty!

When Bob's three-year hitch was up, they promoted him and his buddies to corporal, and encouraged them to sign up for inactive reserves. It was a smart move, the recruiters claimed, because it guaranteed that if they were ever called up again, they would retain their rank. My dad was disgusted with the service and didn't trust them at

Everything Nice

all, after the way they'd treated him with the radio telegraphs, so he refused the offer. His buddies accepted it.

A short while later, the Korean conflict broke out. My dad's buddies were reactivated, but my dad didn't have to go. So the whole Alaska debacle worked out well for him in the end, although he never did see Europe. In fact, he never saw Alaska again, either, because his buddies were shipped off to Korea just as they were planning a return trip up the Alaskan highway in a 1940 Ford. Their plan was to get jobs on the Alaska Railway, but it never came to pass.

So my dad found himself back in Newark, New Jersey. One evening, he and a friend dropped into a small, working-class bar, attracted by the music they heard playing on the juke box. They noticed a couple of pretty girls at the end of the bar, sisters as it turned out, and they flipped a coin to see who got the redhead. My dad lost, and got my mom.

After dancing all evening, Bob asked Dolores if he could take her out on a date. She said yes. My dad's friend was not so lucky. My mom's sister told him that she already had a boyfriend, and was only in the bar that night because they'd had a fight.

Bob and Dee dated off and on, with the main trouble being that Dee was from a large Catholic family, and Bob was Presbyterian. It seemed like an insurmountable obstacle. But somehow they got past it and were engaged about six months after they first laid eyes on each other.

Bob was never comfortable with Dee's family, not because of the religious differences, but because Dee's father was a terrible Irish bigot. He hated the niggers, and the wops, and just about anyone who wasn't Irish Catholic — except, I guess, for the Hungarians, because he married a Hungarian girl with a touch of gypsy blood. (My Hungarian great-grandfather was a locksmith who built the locks for St. Peter's Basilica in Budapest, as I wrote about in a sixth-grade report.) Moreover, my mom's large family — four girls and two boys, with Dee being the baby — was very close, and every weekend Bob and Dee found themselves visiting with one relative or another. In contrast, my dad's parents were very open-minded and accepting, and my dad was not very sociable. So it turned out that the true underlying reason why we moved to the West Coast when I was a child was because my dad wanted to get away from my mom's family.

* * *

During those long conversations with my dad, I naturally fell from time to time to speaking of some subjects touching on my sex change and LGBT culture. I trod carefully, watching to see if Dad was becoming uncomfortable. To my relief and delight, he appeared to be completely at ease with everything I talked about. I become so confident that I dared to ask him point-blank, “What was it that changed your mind about my transition?”

“It was your surgery,” he told me. “I knew you wouldn’t go that far unless you had thought it through very carefully. Your mother never could see it that way, but I never bought her idea that you were just persuaded by those goofy San Francisco people.” I was amazed. It was so simple, so logical. I had always believed my dad was intelligent, open-minded, and fair; it felt great to have that belief reconfirmed.

And if that wasn’t proof enough, my dad — always a die-hard conservative — was also now disgusted with George W. Bush and the Iraq war! I didn’t, however, think my surgery had anything to do with that particular change of heart.

Truce

On the day before my mother's memorial service, my brothers were due in town with their wives. I was curious — and a bit apprehensive — about how they would react to seeing the female me for the first time. I decided to try to soften the blow: I would take my sister for a spa day to give the others a chance to settle in without me present. Besides, Mary had been working so hard and was so stressed out, she needed a spa day. As it turned out, she had never been to a day spa before. She almost bowed out, thinking it might be unseemly for us to be pampering ourselves at such a time, but in the end she agreed to go. We had a wonderful sisterly bonding experience, and it meant a lot to me.

Later that afternoon, after the spa and a stop at Starbucks, we returned to my dad's house. The other two couples had arrived, and everyone was standing around the kitchen talking. Michael greeted me with a hug. Then came the moment of truth ... Bob walked up

to me, smiled, hugged me, and said “Hi!” as if nothing out of the ordinary had ever come between us. *Whew!* OK, I could accept that.

Bob’s wife hugged me and said, “You look nice.”

“Thank you,” I replied. “You look nice too,” which she did. I was grateful for the compliment. My sister was the only other family member who had ever told me I looked nice.

My dad took us all to dinner at a good steakhouse in the Nugget casino in town. I sat next to my younger brother and diagonally across from my older brother. At one point, I overheard Bob saying that his two sons didn’t get along well with each other; in fact, they weren’t even on speaking terms. I remarked, snidely, “Imagine that, Rhodes brothers who can’t get along!”

Bob looked over at me, stung, and simply said, “Truce,” making a T with his fingers. I smiled and said, “OK.”

A little while later, Bob excused himself to go to the bathroom. As he returned to the table, I observed his executive-style, razor-cut, salt-and-pepper hair, his wire-rim glasses, and his considerable paunch, and commented, “I don’t think I would have recognized you if I ran into you on the street, you’ve changed so much.”

“I could say the same about you,” he shot back, without hesitation.

“*Touche!*” I cried, cracking up. We were an amazingly laughing, joking bunch, considering the solemn occasion that had drawn us together that evening.

After dinner, as we walked to our various cars to head back to our houses and hotels, I said quietly to Bob, “Thank you for the truce.”

“It’s all good,” he replied. And it did seem that all was good between me and my family at last.

* * *

The first day I had arrived at my dad’s house, I’d heard a strange grinding noise from the back room. “What’s that?” I asked my sister.

“Dad’s shredding,” she replied. “I think he’s shredding the hospice literature.” My dad was the opposite of a packrat, and he couldn’t wait to start getting rid of “unnecessary” things around the house. Not just my mom’s things, but practically everything. He said he anticipated selling the house and moving into a condominium or apartment within a year.

Everything Nice

Mary brought me back to the master bedroom and began going through my mother's pitifully small jewelry collection. "I feel very uncomfortable about this," I told her.

"Oh, no," she explained. "Dad said he was going to throw it all out if we don't take it."

We came across a modest double-banded diamond ring. "That must be her wedding ring," Mary surmised.

"Yes, I'm sure it is," I said. "We'll definitely leave that here for Dad." I placed it on top of the bureau, on a copy of their marriage license that I also found in the jewelry drawer.

A ring that was missing its rock caught my eye. "I'll bet Mom had the stone reset at some point," I guessed. "I'll ask Dad." I took the empty setting and the wedding ring out to the room where Dad was shredding.

"Yes, that's the wedding ring," my dad confirmed.

"And what's this? Did you guys get the stone reset?"

"Yes, that's right," Dad said. "I wonder why she kept that old thing?" He was not a sentimental man.

"I'll leave you the wedding ring," I laughed, "but I'm keeping this setting!"

The rest of the jewelry collection consisted of a few pieces of gaudy costume jewelry she had received as gifts, a handful of cross pendants that she probably got in the mail accompanying missionary donation requests (my dad said Mom always sent them something), a fairly nice set of pearls, and a half-dozen sets of 1950s vintage clip-on earrings. We also found a set of lady's handkerchiefs with crocheted borders; they were in a plastic bag marked with a Post-It note that read, "These were made by my mother, probably around 1940." My sister would only take a single gold cross which was a present I had given my mom many years before. We offered keepsakes to our sisters-in-law; one took a set of simple gold-plated ear hoops, and the other took a piece of pink-and-"diamond" costume jewelry to give to her daughter. So I took the rest, worn wooden jewelry box and all. I thought I would take my sister's suggestion and make a shadow box to display the precious memories, and over the next six months, I did just that. *How ironic, I thought, that my mom never acknowledged me as a woman, but I wound up with her jewelry.*

Mary said she persuaded my dad to go easy on throwing stuff out for the present. We agreed we would all get back together in a few months time and sort things out, but that never happened.

* * *

We had my mother's body cremated, as she had requested. A memorial service was held in her Baptist church, as she had planned. We were assured that the church would be filled with my mother's church friends, but in fact, only about forty people showed up. Still, I thought that was a lot compared to how many people would be likely to show up at my funeral!

The minister said some very kind words about how much my mother was loved. He said she was always the one to visit the sick and pray for the distraught. When the time came for the family to say a few words, I was the only one to take the microphone. Everyone else was too shy. I said some things about what a wonderful mother she was, and how she put up with us bratty kids, and how the church had been such a source of strength for her in the last part of her life. A handful of the church ladies gave similar eulogies.

As we walked from the sanctuary to the fellowship hall for the brunch the church ladies had prepared, Mom's dearest friend, a tiny, ancient woman named Mabel, walked next to me. She looked at me and said, "Your mother told me about you." I was surprised. Did she mean what I thought she meant? I assumed my mother had been so ashamed of the sinful thing I had done in changing my sex, that she would never have mentioned it to anyone at the church. In fact, at one point I had suggested that she talk to some of her church friends about me, because I knew that keeping secrets is painful, but she had demurred.

"She and your father were very upset at first," Mabel continued, "but eventually they came to terms with it." What do you know? She *was* talking about my sex change! Mabel's words brought me some closure by relating the thoughts my mother had never been able to say to me. My sister also told me that Mom had once commented to her, "One thing I'll say about Eddy, he certainly dresses nicely." It felt good to hear that she had noticed, and approved.

My sister had been present when Jesus finally took my mother home. She told me Mom was in terrible pain from the bowel blockage, and Sharon, the hospice nurse, had given her a strong sedative. Mary said that in my mother's last bout of consciousness, she had

Everything Nice

asked, “Eddy? Where’s Eddy?” Also, “Where’s Michael?” Mary was hurt that Mom didn’t ask for her, too, but I speculated, “That’s only because you were already there.”

“Eddy? Where’s Eddy?” Sleep in peace, Mom.

Lannie Takes Manhattan

I have a photograph of me with film critic Gene Shalit — he of the wild frizzy moustache and hair. It's from my trip to Manhattan, and the night I hobnobbed with the literary lions. The occasion was the release of my transition memoir, *LANNIE! My Journey from Man to Woman*, and it was my first trip to New York since I visited my Aunt Ellen, the Easter Bunny, when I was a little boy.

You'll recall that, when I was recovering from my sex change surgery, I'd put together a book I called *Dirty Panties* and began looking for an agent. Over the next year, I received 100 rejection letters, but I finally found an agent who was willing to take on the project. It took her another year and 60 rejections before she placed it with a publisher. The publisher retitled the book — over my strenuous objections — and required me to make substantial structural changes. In addition, about a quarter of the content was cut to make the end result what my publisher considered to be G-rated. I went along

Everything Nice

with these redactions because I figured the publisher knew what she was doing. Besides, I really had no other choice if I wanted the book published by a real publishing house (as opposed to self-publishing it as I had done with *How To Change Your Sex*).

SterlingHouse Publisher took another year to prepare the manuscript for release, and it was finally ready to be launched at the giant Book Expo America booksellers show that was being held in Manhattan at the beginning of June, the summer after my mother passed. Cindy Sterling, the SterlingHouse owner and publisher, invited me to attend the show — on my own dime. I decided to go. I'd been beguiled by the image of Renée Zellweger going to Manhattan to see her new publisher at the beginning of the movie *Down With Love*, and I wanted to be that author. I wanted to live that fantasy. It would be worth the money.

I took a couple of days off work for the show. On Thursday, I flew on United from San Jose to LaGuardia, with a stopover in Chicago. A taxi got me into the great city about 10:30 p.m. I didn't see much on the taxi ride, just blocks and blocks of low-rent urban landscape. I gave the driver my hotel's name and address, The Wingate Inn at 235 35th St. He asked, "What avenue?" I didn't know, so he looked it up. It was between 7th and 8th.

The Wingate Inn was lovely. Very clean and new. I had a large bedroom with two queen-size beds. The bathroom was spacious and had good lighting and a generous amount of counter space. Even a soap dish!

I was astonished to find bottles of water bearing tags that said, "Compliments of the hottest hotel in Manhattan." Not bad for only \$325 a night! Also included was a free hot continental breakfast: omelets one morning, waffles the others. A free USA Today newspaper was outside the door in the morning, but surprisingly, no NY Times.

I was in room 201, and it felt like I had the whole floor, because mine was the only room to the left of the two elevators. The hotel had a small footprint, just 3 rooms per floor, but it was 18 stories tall. The basement held a work-out room, but the hotel didn't have a pool. I'd packed a bikini, just in case.

I asked the guy at the front desk where I could get something light to eat, and he said without hesitation, "The Bread Factory around the corner." Sure enough, at 11 p.m. I was able to walk up

the block to 7th and just around the corner to a lovely little deli where I got a nice broccoli quiche with a little salad. I brought a delicious chocolate mousse back to my hotel room for desert. *I like this city!* I thought. I felt very comfortable walking the streets — even at night. Although I passed a lot of potentially scary black and Puerto Rican folks, they somehow didn't seem menacing at all. I got the impression that people simply did not see race in Manhattan.

On Friday morning, I was pretty nervous. I didn't feel like eating much, so I just had some cranberry juice and half of a dry bagel for breakfast. The bagel was nothing special, more bready than bage-ly I thought. Funny, I'd always heard such wonderful things about New York bagels.

I walked the seven or eight long blocks to the Jacob Javits Center, which was next to the water at the entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel. I made sure to get there a little before nine, when the BEA conference was scheduled to open, because I recalled someone at SterlingHouse saying I had a video interview at ten. I'd been told I would be sent a schedule, but I never got it.

The Javits Center was huge. I thought it was easily twice the size of Moscone Center in San Francisco. (Javits actually has less exhibit space, but Moscone is divided into three separate halls.) It took me three tries to find the line to pick up my badge, but fortunately the lines were very short at the time. I got in and navigated my way to the SterlingHouse booth at location 5127, guided by big signs suspended from the roof of the conference center that indicated the aisle numbers 2000, 2100, 2200, and so on.

As I walked to the booth, I was overwhelmed by the number of publishers exhibiting — row after row after row, mostly with booths unadorned except for racks of books. I immediately got the impression that would stay with me throughout the conference and beyond: With so many, many books being promoted, how in the world could I expect to get any mindshare for my little effort?

The SterlingHouse booth was a classy affair set up out of the main flow of traffic, in a remote corner of the exhibit space. A small bar and some tall stools fronted the booth, displaying not booze, but copies of Charles Pero's *Twisted Killer* mystery, *The Maze Murders*. In the rear of the booth was a nice oak conference table with a half-dozen comfortable chairs around it, and more chairs and high-back

stools were scattered around the booth. One corner of the booth was set up with two stools and a black backdrop for videotaping.

As far as what was being promoted in the booth, it was all Charles Pero, Charles Charles Charles. During the show, I heard that Charles probably had some family money invested in the effort, and I believed that, since SterlingHouse had not given me a free ride on anything. But the stated reason for the all-Charles promotion was that a television producer had picked up the rights to the *Twisted Killer* series; in fact, one poster claimed, “Currently filming,” although Charles told me it wasn’t actually filming yet. I was skeptical that the series would ever show up on my TV, but time would tell.

Cindy greeting me with a hug. She was a short, pretty blonde woman, perhaps in her forties, and all buzz and business. She introduced me to two tall, slender, young girls, Kara and Savannah, who were helping out in the booth and who happened to be Cindy’s nieces. Kara, an absolute knock-out blonde, looked 21 but was only 15. Savannah, a cute brunette with spray of freckles across her nose, looked 17 but was 19. They were both sophomores, one in high school and one in college.

I also met Brad, the graphic design guy, and Dick, the marketing guy. I was shocked at how young they were. I had figured they were young, but they looked like the ink was probably not yet dry on their bachelors degrees. I also met Jason, the lawyer, who was a little bit older but still too young for the bald spot that was already visible at the crown of his head. They were all enthusiastic, and very nice to me. I was surprised that no one said anything to me about the horrible review my book had gotten in *Publishers Weekly*, just a few days earlier. (*Publishers Weekly* had concluded that the book “isn’t quite poignant enough to be enthralling, nor humorous enough to be sheerly entertaining.”)

I met several other SterlingHouse authors. Teena Cahill was a psychologist who’d written a book about helping her husband fight back from a debilitating stroke, and the lessons she learned from it. Teena would be touring with workshops based on the book, an ideal promotional set-up. She was nice, and interesting to talk to, and the book was very well written. I wished her all the luck in the world. Like me, Teena paid for SterlingHouse’s top level BEA participation package, so we had the same interviews and other activities.

I met three other fellow authors who had all written mysteries, all first books, including a medical researcher who wrote a medical thriller and an ex-senior vice president of investments for AT&T, who wrote a thriller based in the world of finance. I marveled how everybody was tossing off these thrillers, and wondered if any of them had any hope of selling.

My video interview was at 11:30. Jason the lawyer was doing the interviews, and he did a very nice job. I was only a little nervous, and once the camera was rolling, I felt very comfortable. The interview lasted only five minutes, with five or six questions that I fielded easily. The only problem was, my voice gave out in the middle of taping! It wasn't a big issue; we just stopped the tape so I could have a drink of water, but I had to keep my answers short because my voice kept going out. *Great!* I thought. *Won't it be just dandy if my voice fails when I'm live on Oprah.* I don't know why my voice had a problem; I hadn't been using it much. Maybe I was still a little sick with the bug I'd had recently, or maybe I was more nervous than I thought. I hoped it was the former, because I worried that the latter would bode ill for future publicity appearances.

After the video interview, there wasn't much for me to do around the booth. Besides, we had been instructed that authors were not to hang around the booth, although they didn't seem to mind when we did. So I decided to cruise around the show and check out the book signing area.

SterlingHouse was on the upper exhibit level. A whole other exhibit floor lay below, just as large again. At the back of the lower level was the signing area, 35 tables lined up by the wall of the hall, with long roped-off queues herding in the people who wanted their free books. About half of the queues were overflowing, another quarter were moderately busy, and the rest were nearly empty. I gulped and hoped my queue wouldn't be nearly empty the next day.

I looked for celebrities signing books, and I found Chris Elliot. I snuck up to the front of the line by walking down the exit corridor, and sure enough, there he was signing books and chatting with his fans. He was neatly groomed and looked less maniacal than I'd ever seen him on the small screen. A publicity woman stood steadfastly by his side.

I saw that Heather Graham would be signing in an hour, so I kicked around the floor awhile and consumed a mango-and-orange

smoothie. Then I went back to check out Heather. I hadn't heard that she had a book out, but I'd always thought she was one of modern Hollywood's great beauties. I worked my way up to the front of her line, but she wasn't nearly as beautiful as she looked on the big screen. Mainly because she wasn't Heather Graham the actress at all.

I hung out at the SterlingHooouse booth from 2 o'clock to 3 o'clock, during a social hour with a little bit of food and a beer keg. I expected to see more activity around the booth, what with free beer, but Cindy seemed happy enough, I guess mostly with business meetings she had lined up for the show. My agent showed up with her beautiful adopted Chinese daughter. They were both happy to meet me, but neither one had much to say to me.

At three, they took away the beer keg and the social hour was officially over. I was feeling exhausted from nerves and jet lag, so I decided to head back to my hotel for a nap. On my way out, I found a SterlingHouse author named Eric in conversation with a smiling, balding fellow in his mid fifties. I'd talked with Eric earlier. He was a real sad sack. He lived somewhere in the Midwest and worked as a security guard, but he was turning his life around by becoming an author, so he said. He'd written a book about a young girl's coming of age. I asked him why he chose to write about a female main character, and he said something about having essentially stalked a girl similar to his heroine at one point in his life. I didn't ask, but my impression was that Eric had never been married and had no children.

I joined in the conversation. The balding guy — he wasn't actually balding much, but he had very short, blond hair so it looked very bald — was apparently trying to probe Eric's psychology at some level. I interjected my usual happy-go-lucky type of comments, and Quinn (as the guy introduced himself) became interested in me. He asked what my book was about and I told him. Somehow in talking about me, Eric speculated that I would only be interested in men who were taller than me. I said, "Heck no! That would limit the pool way too much. Besides, I rather like this," and I took Quinn's arm and snuggled up to him. He was about four inches shorter than me in my heels. "See, when we walk into a restaurant like this, it's like he has a supermodel on his arm!" Quinn seemed to like it, and snuggled back playfully.

“But shorter men probably don’t like going out with you,” Eric continued to insist.

“I’d take you out,” Quinn asserted, smiling.

“Oh goody!” I flirted. I realized Quinn was actually somewhat serious, so I added, “but I have the big Publishers Weekly party tomorrow,” hoping he would ask me out for tonight instead. All Quinn said was, “I’m going too. I’ll see you there.”

I walked the mile or so back to my hotel, the hot, humid weather causing me to sweat. The weight of my bag felt heavier and heavier, what with the stacks of brochures and bookmarks I had prepared to promote my book, plus a few books themselves, and a couple of bottles of water I had picked up along the way. Back at my hotel I took a quick shower and hopped into bed for a nap.

Around seven o’clock, I decided it was time to see Times Square and forage for some dinner. As I walked the ten blocks north up 7th Avenue in the pleasant evening warmth, the sidewalks got busier and busier and the lights got brighter and brighter. I had to laugh at the outrageous jay-walking I saw everywhere. Paying scant heed to the traffic lights, people looked for a break in traffic and sauntered across the street. Once the pedestrian flow began, oncoming traffic had to blare their horns to get them to clear a path. I liked it!

When I got to Times Square proper, I was blown away by the lights and the hub-bub. It was so much bigger than I expected — not a single square, but blocks and blocks, all jammed with businesses and sidewalk hustlers thrusting brochures and discount tickets at me. It was unlike anything I’d ever experienced, and on a larger scale than I’d ever imagined. I couldn’t stop grinning, it was so fantastical. And again, despite the dense crowds of multi-ethnic people, I felt completely safe and at home. It was so damn American!

I passed a restaurant called Rosie O-Grady’s Pub, and saw a good looking beef stew on the menu. I decided it might do for dinner, so I went in. It was dark and fairly plush inside, but it was crowded. I hated the experience of eating out alone in the first place, and I certainly didn’t feel like hanging around a bar alone, not drinking, waiting for a table, so I left.

I walked further up the street until I was well beyond the Times Square hustle and bustle. I turned left, walked a short block, and left again. To my surprise and delight, I was now on Broadway! The neon lights were bright, and the George Benson song got stuck in

my head for the rest of the evening. Lo and behold, the Ed Sullivan Theatre, featuring the David Letterman show, was right across the street from me.

I walked down Broadway, captivated by all the theatres with the big Broadway musicals. It seemed they would make a musical out of anything: There was Tarzan the musical, and Mary Poppins the musical — hey, wasn't Mary Poppins a musical to begin with? I also saw musicals I thought long dead, still living happily here on Broadway: *Mama Mia*, *Rent*, and *The Lion King*, to name a few.

I saw a fun-looking little diner on the corner across the street, so I went over to check it out. It was The Stardust Diner, and the sign said, "Featuring the famous singing waiters." The décor was fifties style and the menu fit the décor, but it appealed to me so I went in. A Billy Joel song, "My Italian Restaurant," was playing over speakers as I passed through the little vestibule.

As I walked in, I discovered it wasn't Billy Joel singing on the recording, it was one of the famous singing waiters performing the song. He looked over and caught my eye, and smiled at me. He sounded great and he held the diners in rapt attention with his self-confident command of the material. I suddenly realized that the Famous Singing Wait Staff was in fact composed of Broadway-class performers, probably between gigs, or looking for their big break. I later heard that the Stardust Diner was a famous Broadway landmark, so I was glad I happened to stumble across it.

* * *

I decided I needed to do whatever I could to get some attention at the show, so Saturday I dressed in my tiniest white mini-skirt and a T-shirt that proclaimed "SEX CHANGE No joke. I've had one." I certainly got enough attention walking down 35th Street, and plenty of look-overs at the show — but still no one asking about my book. (I wore a button that said, "Ask me about my book.") Oh well.

In the morning, I did a five-minute BEA podcast interview. It went great. At one in the afternoon, Teena and I had our book signings. For some reason, Teena was scheduled for an hour and me just a half-hour, but nobody was scheduled at my table immediately after me, so I stayed another 15 minutes, as long as people kept coming. I signed about 30 books, and only had an empty queue for a few minutes. I signed the first book, "To Susan, Good luck on your jour-

ney! Lannie Rose” but I decided that took too long, so I fell back to a simple, “To Jane, Love, Lannie Rose.” Half the time I spelled my name wrong, looping too many humps on my n’s or starting my last name with Rh (for Rhodes). Most of my “fans” just gave me their names and took the book after I signed it, but a few had something to tell me. It may have been, “I have a friend who just changed,” or “I work for the Human Resources Commission of Cincinnati, and we’re exploring transgender issues.” I enjoyed meeting the people and chatting with them. A few folks declined to give me their names and asked me just to sign my name, and I knew those books were destined for eBay. That was fine with me!

I went back to the SterlingHouse booth and hung around during the 2 o’clock social hour, mostly talking with other authors and Kara and Savannah. I took some pictures with my agent and signed a book for her. Then I decided to head back to my hotel to get ready for the evening’s activities.

On my way out of the booth area, I ran into Quinn again. He asked if I had a book for him. I did, and as I signed it, he joked that I could include my phone number. So I did. “That’s my cell,” I told him. “I have it with me. See you at the party tonight!”

The party was the big Publishers Weekly bash, said to be the primo party of the Expo. It was being held at The Strand bookstore in Greenwich Villiage. The Strand was a famous second-hand bookstore that was celebrating its 80th anniversary. I wore a cotton wrap dress with dull gray and silver diagonal stripes, and gussied it up with silver Fredericks sandals with four-inch spike heels and ankle thongs.

It was to be an early party, scheduled from 6 to 9 p.m. When I was ready to go, I went down to the hotel lobby and asked if they would call me a cab. The young black guy at the desk was very nice, but he told me, “Where are you going? Downtown? You just go down to 7th Avenue and hail one. If there was somebody else to watch the desk, I could go down and hail one for you.”

“Oh no,” I assured him. “I can hail my own cab.” I was just surprised they didn’t come right up to the hotel. I guess they would have if I had insisted, but I didn’t mind walking to the corner. Heck, I wanted to act like a New Yorker!

Everything Nice

Unfortunately, I couldn't seem to get a cab to stop for me. One slowed down and asked me where I was going, but when I said, "Downtown," he just said, "No" and sped off.

After a few minutes, a silver sedan pulled over and the driver leaned out the window and asked, "You need a cab?"

"You're not a cab!" I replied, fearing that it might be some kind of scam.

"Yes, I'm a cab," he insisted. I decided to believe him, mainly because I was fed up with trying to get a cab to stop. So I hopped in the back seat. The driver showed me a sign that said, "Executive Rides," so I guess it was some kind of car service. I told him where I was going and he took off. After a minute, he mumbled, "It costs twenty dollars." I figured this was about twice what a cab would have cost me, but at that point I didn't care. It was a comfy ride with good air conditioning, and I was happy to pay the price.

I got to The Strand and went inside. It looked like the party must be upstairs, so I headed for the staircase. I got into a small queue on the stairs, where people were checking in. When I got to the table and said my name, the girl said, "Oh, that would be at that table." Then I noticed that the tables were marked "A-M" and "N-Z," so I went to the other table and gave my name. "Lannie Rose," I said.

The girl checked her list and double-checked it. "I'm sorry, I don't have you," she said. "Is there another name it could be under?"

"Try Elaine Rhodes," I said.

"No, I'm afraid not. Who are you with?"

"Oh dear. I'm with SterlingHouse Publishers. I signed up on the website. Here, I got this in the mail," I said, pulling my invitation out of my purse.

"Oh, you have one of those," the girl said. "Go on in." And in I went.

It was a genuine chi-chi Manhattan stand-up cocktail party. There was a large open space at the top of the stairs, and shelves of books throughout the rest of the space. Finger foods and drinks were set up in a half-dozen nooks and crannies. I mingled with the SterlingHouse folks, finally meeting Ken, the grizzled sales veteran. I wandered the room a couple of times, but I didn't get into conversations with anyone.

Back with my publisher, my agent grabbed me. “There’s Gene Shalit,” she said excitedly. “Go introduce yourself. I’ll take a picture.”

I walked over to the mustachioed icon just as he was finishing talking with someone. “Hi,” I said, thrusting my hand forward. “I’m Lannie Rose, a new author. Can I get a picture with you?”

“Sure,” he said graciously, and my agent snapped us. “Good luck with your book,” Gene told me, but I noticed he didn’t ask for a copy. Just as well, since I didn’t have one on me. Apparently he wasn’t actually there for the party, because a little while later I heard someone say they just saw Gene Shalit leaving the store with an armload of books.

My ankles were beginning to hurt from the uncomfortable shoes, but I couldn’t find any chairs for relief. So I finally hiked my butt up on the little stage and crossed my gams. I was having a conversation with young Brad, the SterlingHouse graphics artist, when I noticed NYC’s famous ex-mayor Ed Koch come up the stairs — not a complete surprise, as he was slated to be Master of Ceremonies for the evening. What did surprise me was that he walked right up to me and introduced himself! However, my agent was not handy to take a picture, and it turned out Mr. Koch was simply checking out how he was supposed to get onto the stage.

At 7 o’clock, the little ceremony began. I jumped off the stage and wandered over to a bookshelf that I could lean on during the proceedings. Mr. Koch made a little speech, and then introduced a succession of literary luminaries who each said a few affectionate words about *The Strand*. The speakers included Gay Talese (*The Bridge*), Frank McCourt (*Angela’s Ashes*), Art Spiegelman (*Maus*), Fran Lebowitz (very funny!) and Kurt Andersen (*Spy* magazine). Also Nora Ephron, except she was late and hit the stage a couple of minutes after the ceremony was over. “I just wanted to say I made it, and thank you to *The Strand*,” she announced.

After the hoopla, I found a chair along a wall and ate a cold pastrami finger sandwich. I took another loop around the room, and one man actually talked to me. “Hi,” he said, and introduced himself and his wife. Their last name was DeWitt, and I noticed a bunch of stuff named DeWitt around the city, so I think I may have met some important socialites. The husband was very nice. He said, “I thought

you were in charge of the place, you were such a commanding presence sitting on the stage.”

I wanted to joke, “No, but I’d be happy to boss you around a bit if you like,” but I couldn’t put it together on the spot. So I only giggled and said, “No. My feet just hurt from these shoes.”

“I can see why. And what is your position here?”

“I’m a first-time author.”

“Oh! What is your book called?”

“It’s called *Lannie* — my name,” I said, shyly. “*LANNIE!* *My Journey from Man to Woman*. It’s about my sex change.”

“I see. And a very good job it seems to have been. I hope you have a lot of success with your book. So what did you think of the speeches?”

“I was very impressed seeing these literary luminaries in person,” I said. “And I felt proud to think that when they talk about ‘we authors,’ that includes me now.”

Other than that, nothing was happening for me at the party, so I left and went back to my hotel. I was puzzled that I hadn’t found Quinn at the event — it was small enough that I surely would have seen him if he were there — but I just figured that was par for the course.

Back at the hotel, I took off my shoes and dress, and decided I needed a shower before bed because the humidity still had me “glowing.” But I stopped myself before I took out my contact lenses. *The night is still awfully young*, I thought. It was only 9 o’clock on a Saturday night in Manhattan. Maybe I would decide to do something. Heck, maybe Quinn would even show up somehow. So I showered from the neck down, leaving my hair and makeup intact.

About an hour later, my cell phone beeped. I had a message. Funny that I hadn’t heard the phone ring, but it did that sometimes, going straight to message. I dialed my voice-mail number, but it couldn’t connect. I tried a few more times, and finally connected. To my surprise, the message was from Quinn!

“This is Quinn. I missed you at the party. Did you leave early? Anyway, why don’t you give me a call if you get this message. My number is 520 — *click!*! AAAAAAHHH! The message died before I could get the full number. I was doomed. I thought that maybe there was more to the message, but the phone had just lost the signal, so I tried again. After a half dozen fruitless attempts, I became

frustrated. Then I got a brainstorm. I would go up to the top floor — the 18th floor — and try from there. I did, and it worked. I got Quinn's number.

I dialed Quinn back, and we couldn't figure out how we had missed each other at the party. "So are you tucked in for the night now?" Quinn asked me.

"Not necessarily," I said. "The night is young."

"Do you want to go out for a drink or something? Maybe get a bite to eat?"

"Sure!"

"Why don't I get a cab and come to your hotel? I'll call you from the lobby."

"OK. Do you want me to come out and meet you? I can just jump in the cab and we can go somewhere."

"That's a good idea. I'll call you when I get close."

I frantically tore off my nightie and put on some clothes. I didn't want to get into my uncomfortable shoes again, so I threw on some black pants and a blouse. I checked myself out in the mirror. "Argh! Too boy-like!" I threw off those clothes and grabbed my leopard-print skirt and a peach blouse. *Not great, but it will do*, I thought.

I went down to the lobby and Quinn showed up in a cab after about 10 minutes. I jumped in.

"Do you know anywhere to go?" Quinn asked. "I don't know this town."

"No, I don't know it either."

"Can you take us somewhere we can get some food and drinks?" Quinn asked the cab driver.

"Sure," he replied. "42nd Street should do it."

He drove us north a little ways and dropped us off. I realized we were near Times Square, just a couple blocks to the west of it. The street was humming with people and business, and with plenty of bars and restaurants. I took Quinn's arm and we sauntered down the street. Before long, Quinn spotted a restaurant that looked nice and we went inside.

The place was nearly empty, but the maître d' said the kitchen was still open, "Of course!" and he led us to a booth next to the front window where we had a nice view of the street life.

"Would you like a drink?" Quinn asked me.

“Just sparkling water, thank you,” I said.

“Oh, that’s right, you don’t drink,” Quinn acknowledged, remembering we had talked about that the day before. Quinn ordered a large Pellegrino water for me and a glass of wine for himself. A little later I ordered a tasty quesadilla with Gruyere cheese and mushrooms. Quinn said he would share it, but I wound up eating it all.

We had a really nice talk for about an hour. It turned out Quinn was a Renaissance man who’d done lots of interesting things in his life. Now, he had decided to be a movie producer. He was checking out some SterlingHouse properties, which is what brought him to BEA.

Surprisingly, we also talked a lot about me. Most guys generally didn’t seem to do that, but Quinn was sincerely interested in my story. Not to make into a movie, unfortunately; just person-to-person. I felt funny talking about myself because I usually tried to maintain a certain amount of mystery on a first date, but I’d already spilled my life story in the book, and told him about it, so there was no holding back. It was nice, but peculiar.

Afterwards, we went strolling in the still-warm evening air, and Quinn asked if I was going to invite him up to my room. I hemmed and hawed and said how my room was messy, but I was pleased by the proposition, and pleased by his assertiveness, as well as his politeness.

So I did invite him up to my room, and we were soon making out. He asked if he could touch me here and there, as he did so, and I said yes. I had some trouble relaxing and stopping from giggling, but he was patient with me. “Does this feel nice?” he asked. I explained about how I wasn’t really erotically aroused, even though I enjoyed being touched. I asked if he knew the old Frank Zappa song *Dina-Moe Hum*, and told him I was Dina. (“She stroll on over, say look here, bum, I got a forty dollar bill say you can’t make me cum.”) Quinn was understanding, and willing to take the challenge. I lay back and tried my best to relax and get into it, as Quinn applied his best techniques.

He worked me with his right hand, and touched my anus with his left. “No anal penetration,” I requested, and when he looked slightly taken aback, I added, “I’ve got a hemorrhoid thing going on.”

“Oh,” he said, withdrawing his hand. “I just thought it was an erotic area that hadn’t been tampered with, if you know what I mean.”

“I like being touched there,” I said. “Just not penetration right now.” And he went back to touching me there. “Though actually,” I added, “I was much more erotic there before.”

After a while, Quinn said, “Let’s try something different.” He dragged me to the side of the bed and went down on his knees, putting his head between my legs. I was worried about his bristly beard stubble, but it wound up being very erotic. However, try as he might, he couldn’t make Dina-Moe Hum.

When he finally got tired of trying, I assumed he would probably request a blow job, like most guys did. I decided I was willing, and I planned to crunch up a couple of Wintergreen lifesavers to make it more tasty for me. But much to my surprise, he did not request it. He just lay back and relaxed, and we were done. I was going with the flow, so that was fine with me.

A little while later, he said, “Do you think I should be going? I have to catch the shuttle tomorrow.” I wondered if he was hinting that he might like to spend the night, but I said, “Yes, I guess you’d better.” I was disappointed to hear that he wouldn’t be around for another day or two. But that was that. We kissed goodnight, and off he went.

All in all, a very successful Saturday!

* * *

I went back to the Book Expo on Sunday, but the show was winding down. I hung out at the booth for a hour or so, and then said my thank-yous and goodbyes.

That left me the whole afternoon for site-seeing. I hiked from the Jacob Javits Center over to 5th Avenue, and all the way up 5th Avenue to Central Park. Along the way I passed through Little Italy and saw Rockefeller Center and Trump Tower. I shopped through all eight floors of Saks 5th Avenue, marveling at how high the prices were, and not purchasing anything. I checked out Bergdorf-Goodmans, too, though I felt out of place because all the other women in the store had heavy Jewish accents and I felt quite the goy. I went into the gleaming glass cube of the Apple store just outside the entrance to Central Park, and was impressed by all the iPod speaker

Everything Nice

systems, and all the ranks of PowerBooks with people kneeling in front of them.

By the time I left the Apple store, it was starting to sprinkle a little. Fortunately, I had my red umbrella with me. So I opened the umbrella and took a long stroll through the lovely, legendary Central Park. It was beautiful, but it seemed a little strange to me that people were not allowed to walk on the grass except in a few specific areas. *Isn't grass what parks are all about?* I thought. Remarkably, I read in my tour book that Central Park was entirely man-made, all landfill over a swamp. I walked about half-way up the length of the park, past the Metropolitan Museum of Art and up to the reservoir. Then I caught a cab ride back to my hotel.

The cabby dropped me off on 6th Street because the traffic was pretty nasty. That was when I realized that the Macy's on the corner of 35th and 7th was the original Macy's store. My clue was the big banner on the building that announced, "The Largest Store In The World." I had noticed the Macy's building when I walked from my hotel, but from the back side, it looked unimpressive. From the front, the Herald Square side, it was astounding. I went in to see the place, and to buy some panties, because I had run out of clean underwear due to the unexpected heat and humidity. I also tried on the Maidenform smooth bra I had seen advertised on a huge billboard at 35th and 7th. The real article wasn't quite as nice as it looked on the billboard, but it was pretty nice and fit very well, so I purchased a couple.

Back at my hotel, I cleaned up and rested a bit. Then it was time for the ordeal of dinner again. I loathed eating out alone. It made me feel like such a lonesome loser. But my hotel didn't have room service, so I was forced to go foraging. I'd found that Macy's was open until 8:30, so I thought that if I didn't find something better, I would just drop into Macy's basement Bar and Grille.

When I left the hotel, the weather had become wet and nasty. The rain wasn't too heavy, but a wind was blowing so my clothes got wet despite the umbrella. I decided to walk down to 33rd and over to 5th to see the Empire State Building, which was just a few blocks from my hotel. I hadn't planned to try to get up to the top of the building, because that touristy kind of thing didn't appeal to me. But I vaguely remembered seeing the famous structure when I was three years old, and I was curious to see it again.

I found a little restaurant on Herald Square that looked about right, so I went in for dinner. I sat looking out a window at the busy, rainy street scene, feeling like a lonely loser, and had a delicious Tala-pia entrée. I could see why I'd been such a heavy drinker in the past, because I certainly felt like downing a few glasses of wine to banish the blues.

Then it was back out on the street and my quest for the Empire State Building. Much to my surprise, as I walked down 33rd Street, I realized I was actually hugging one side of the stately edifice, despite the fact that I was in Koreatown. The impression in mind was that the grand old lady was an outstanding landmark in the busiest central part of the city, but now it was an unremarkable office building on the outskirts of the business district. I recalled that one of the authors the night before had made an interesting remark. He'd said that one of the things that made New York so amazing was that it was constantly changing, and you can never go back to a place and expect it to be the same. So I suppressed the urge to feel sorry for the old E. S. Building. When I was directly in front of her main entrance, she didn't look like much of anything, because I couldn't really get an impression of how tall she was when I was right up against her — especially in a rainstorm. Nonetheless, at least my pilgrimage was complete.

On the way back to my hotel, I stopped into a Korean-owned souvenir shop and bought an Empire State Building statue, complete with King Kong on top, for Rosalea. I also got "I (Heart) NY" nightshirts for Kelli and Loe, and a NYPD T-shirt for my housemate. I wondered how I was going to fit all of it into my suitcases for the trip home, as they were already overstuffed on the way in. I certainly wasn't going to be relieved of the burden of 200 *LANNIE!* brochures and bookmarks, as I'd hoped.

I had set aside my last day in Manhattan for sightseeing. Unfortunately, the day dawned still rainy, and the hotel's breakfast had closed before I made it downstairs at 9:30. So I got my umbrella and headed to the corner Starbucks.

Venti decaf latte and bran muffin in hand, I looked around for a place to sit, but I couldn't find an empty table. I spotted a woman of about my age sitting alone at a small table with a spare chair, so I asked her if I could share her table. She acquiesced, and I noticed she had an English accent, so I used that as a conversational gambit.

Everything Nice

It turned out she was visiting from Cambridge, with the excuse of seeing her son who was in town producing some music thing. Her name was Sue and she'd chosen to travel alone so she could see the sights at her own pace. She was trying to figure out whether to take a cab or the bus up to the Museum of Modern Art, the MOMA. I said I wanted to go to the MOMA too, and we could share a cab. She liked that idea, so I had a buddy for a little while. We finished our Starbucks and shared a cab, then stood for 15 minutes in the rain in the queue outside the MOMA. I enjoyed chatting with Sue. However, we split up once we were inside, so we could each do the MOMA at our own pace.

I got one of the audio-tour machines, the first time I'd ever done that at a museum, and I was glad I did. It was fun to hear what the commentators had to say about many of the works, although the commentary seemed pitched at an awfully basic level. Not that I was any art sophisticate myself, but I thought I could have appreciated somewhat deeper analyses. Frankly, I just didn't get art, and especially modern art, although I did enjoy looking at it some.

I was thrilled to see the Big Black Square, for me the epitome of meaningless, any-child-could-do-it modern art. According to the audio commentary, if you looked closely you could see that it wasn't just a Big Black Square, but composed of many different shades of black. I looked closely, but all I saw was a Big Black Square.

Then I saw the logical successor to the Big Black Square, the Big White Square. Apparently it was simply a Big White Square, not different shades of white. So at least I saw everything there was to see about it. A little while later I saw a further development in the Big Monochrome Square school of art, the Big Blue Rectangle. Frankly, I thought it made a mockery of the form.

I saw some Jackson Pollacks, and they did no more for me up close and personal than they had in prints I'd seen before. I saw the Giant Fan soft sculpture, and thought that if they'd just finish inflating it, they could sell it at Cost Plus. I came across some Picassos, and I was relieved to see it was true that he was capable of painting well in representational form before he went totally abstract. I confess I had a nagging belief that most of these modern artists couldn't paint their living rooms when it came to real technique.

I enjoyed my visit to the MOMA, but I still don't get modern art. Oh well, it probably doesn't get me, either.

When I left the MOMA, the rain had stopped and it was a beautiful, warm sunny day. I found a little French bistro and had a Croque-monsieur sandwich for lunch. (The Croque-monsieur had been my default lunch on my one short trip to Paris with Mr. Excitement back in my twenties.) Then I walked back to my hotel via Madison Avenue and Park Avenue. I checked out the lobby of the Waldorf-Astoria — nice, but not very large — and managed to find Grand Central Station. Again, I'd remembered Grand Central Station as an impressive edifice dominating its block, but now it was buried in a tangle of new office towers. It wasn't even called Grand Central Station, actually; its real name was Grand Central Terminal. Anyway, its huge greeting hall was still very impressive. I was surprised that it wasn't filled with benches, though. Don't you need somewhere to sit while you wait for your train?

From there I headed to the New York Public Library. I wanted to meet the famous lions, Patience and Fortitude, who guarded its entry. I wanted to see the grand reading room, and I wanted to get lost in its endless stacks. I didn't expect to find any ghosts, though, because after all, the Ghost Busters had cleaned the place out; but you never know.

When I got to the corner of 40th and 5th, I became confused. Banners on the building proclaimed it to be the New York Public Library, but it was just a modern office building. What was going on? I hiked around some more and found the edifice I was searching for around the corner on 41th and 5th. However, it was closed — I guess they were dark on Mondays, like the Met and a lot of other NY sights — and they were setting up for some fashion awards show. I did get to visit the lions, but they weren't very impressive. They seemed rather worn and crude, not finely detailed like I expected. I read that they were carved from pink marble, but they just looked like granite to me.

That about finished off my NYC sight-seeing. In the evening, I went by Macy's again and picked up a white halter coat-dress I'd had my eye on the day before, and I ate a Cobb salad at the basement Bar and Grille. A low-key ending to a wonderful trip.

* * *

Tuesday was my day to travel back to California. I got up early enough to hit the hotel breakfast, and enjoyed a waffle, a hard-boiled egg, juice, and decaf coffee. I managed to squeeze all my stuff into

Everything Nice

my bags, and caught a car service I'd arranged the night before for the ride to La Guardia airport.

My flight to Chicago was on time, but my flight out of Chicago was delayed an hour. That was fine, because it gave me a chance to eat a sandwich and start writing a trip report for posterity.

I arrived home about 7:30. Tony and Cali were happy to see me, and I was happy to be home again. I hadn't found my Ewan McGregor, and my book never hit the best-sellers list (SterlingHouse turned out to be a vanity publisher, and I found my agent on an Internet list of the ten worst literary agents), but I'd had my Renée Zellweger experience and I felt fulfilled.

Happily Ever After

To my delight and chagrin, a boyfriend dropped into my life. Chagrin, because I had to admit that all those people who'd been telling me, "Just wait, there's somebody out there for you" and "It's when you stop looking, that's when you'll find him" — that they were right, after all, and my skepticism had been unwarranted. But I was delighted, too, because he was a truly wonderful guy.

There was one catch, however: A palm reader at the last LGBT Pride festival had told me the person I would meet that year would be a girl — and indeed, my Misha planned to be a girl by year's end. I wasn't sure whether that would be a problem for me, and it certainly wasn't what I was looking for. Then again, is anyone ever exactly what you're looking for?

I met Misha at one of the monthly dinners Carla still hosted for her trans girls, although they weren't at The Cats any more. I liked to attend the events because it gave me a chance to see Carla and other

Everything Nice

friends, and to meet new people. Besides, it meant I wouldn't have to eat dinner alone that night.

It was just a few weeks after I returned from my wonderful trip to Manhattan. The dinner was held at La Pastaia, the nice Italian restaurant in the De Anza Hotel in downtown San Jose. As I entered the lobby, I recalled attending my first Cal Dreamin' conference there several years before. I'd been jealous because Lea got to meet Felicity Huffman, who was there researching for her role as the trans woman Bree in *TransAmerica*, which earned her a Best Actress Oscar nomination. (Felicity was roundly snubbed at the Academy Awards ceremony, totally ignored except for one rude joke by host Jon Stewart at the very beginning of the show. And Best Actress winner Reese Witherspoon made several pointed and obnoxious comments about playing a "real woman" in her acceptance speech.)

The dinner was a large affair, as these things went. About thirty people attended, mostly transgender girls (cross-dressers and trans women), plus a few cisgender spouses. As the group tramped from the bar to our extended table in the restaurant, I happened to wind up sitting next to a girl I had never met before. She was tall and thin like me, though a bit younger, dark-haired, and quite pretty. It was Misha. As the meal progressed, I discovered she was an editor and, as an author, that interested me. We also shared a wicked sense of humor, and we matched witty repartee all evening. As we left the restaurant after the long meal, Misha asked if she could see me and took my phone number, which I gladly gave her. However, I figured I would never hear from her again.

Fortunately, I was wrong. The very next day Misha called and asked me out to dinner. The rest, as they say, is history. We hit it off marvelously, found we had incredibly much in common, and began dating. Now when I say incredibly much in common, I'm not just talking about our heights, our weights (I was a few pounds heavier!), and our high IQs. No, we even discovered that we had the same first three digits in our four-digit ATM PINs! Jamie Faye Fenton sized up Misha and me and commented, "It's a typical phenomenon, a trans woman pairing up with her mirror image."

I physically abused Misha, but I couldn't drive him away. (I use the male pronoun because he presented as an adorably roguish man as we began dating.) Oh, the abuse wasn't on purpose! But accidents do happen, and Misha happened to be particularly sensitive to pain.

So, when I playfully whacked him on the fanny, it was much too hard. When I gave him an affectionate hip-bump in the kitchen, and drove his testicles directly into the corner of the counter, he nearly fainted. When I scalded him by flushing the toilet while he was showering, he yelped. When I crushed his thumb in the laundry room door while I was kissing him, I thought something had gone dreadfully wrong with my kiss. My cat even bit him. Poor guy! But he forgave all this abuse, because he was a reasonable fellow, and he loved me so.

I asked Tony to move out so I could make room for Misha in my life. Tony's non-Hodgkins lymphoma had mysteriously gone into remission, and he moved out when he was in a fairly healthy state. Unfortunately, his body continued to be assailed by other symptoms of what was finally diagnosed as Behçet's syndrome, an incurable auto-immune disease.

Within a few weeks after our first date, Misha and I were spending all our free time together. After a few months, we were each amazed that the other person wasn't bored and annoyed by us yet. After a year, we moved in together. I felt so happy. It seemed like the last missing piece had finally fallen into place in my life. I was a woman with a great job, close friends (including Rosalea, who sadly but gracefully left my bed to make room for Misha in my life), health, good looks, a sense of belonging with my church and the transgender community, and two somewhat successfully published books. And now, at last, a significant other — a partner who might well last a lifetime. Perhaps, at some point, we might even adopt some kids and start our own family. There was nothing left for me to ask for, except for the opportunity to give back to my community and my lover. This, I resolved to do.

And so, as autobiographies, by their nature, must end while the subject is still making more life, I will speculate on the likely future, and end with this: We both lived happily ever after, for all the many days of our lives.

Epilogue — Sugar and Spice

And that's what it's like now for me. But there's one more thing I want to tell you about. In that tough first year of my alcohol recovery program, I had a worry. It was that damn Serenity Prayer. You know the one: *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

My mother sent me a bible with a bookmark with the Serenity Prayer printed on one side. I called her up and asked, "Mom, does this mean you've accepted my sex change?"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"The Serenity Prayer. You know, 'the courage to change.'"

"That's not what it means!" she snapped at me. "You should have paid more attention to the part about the wisdom to know the difference!"

She had a point, and it really bothered me. If I had come into the program sooner, might I have found the serenity to accept my life as a man? Did I really need my sex change at all?

I eventually found the answer to my dilemma right there in the Big Book, on page 426 in the new edition:

“The discussion meeting was followed by a speaker meeting where I had my first awakening in the program. The speaker said, ‘If you’re an apple, you can be the best apple you can be, but you can never be an orange.’ I was an apple all right, and for the first time I understood that I had spent my life trying to be an orange.”

So it was all about serenity after all. The serenity to accept life as it actually was. To accept the fact that I was made of sugar and spice, and everything nice — and that was something I could never change.

About the Author

Ms. Elaine Rhodes writes and surfs the Internet under the pseudonym Lannie Rose. Her transition memoir, *LANNIE! My Journey from Man to Woman* was published in 2007 by SterlingHouse Publishers. Her self-published book, *How To Change Your Sex: A Lighthearted Look at the Hardest Thing You'll Ever Do*, is a



popular handbook for transitioning transsexual women and men. Both books are available at Amazon.com. Lannie has been a regular contributor to the e-zine Transgender Forum, and she is a member of the Triangle Speakers, an LGBT speaker bureau. Two of Lannie's pieces were incorporated into the Dennis Johnston Award-winning play about gender variance, *The Naked I: Monologues from Beyond the Binary* by Tobias K. Davis.

Lannie lives in Silicon Valley (San Jose, California) with her boyfriend, Misha, and her calico cat, Calpurrrnia. She holds an electrical engineering degree and an MBA, and earns a paycheck as a technical and marketing writer in the high tech industry.

Lannie invites you to visit her personal web site, www.lannierose.com, and to write to her at lannierose@gmail.com.



LANNIE!
My Journey from
Man to Woman
by Lannie Rose

“Ms. Rose captures the reader’s attention through her tale of self-discovery in this humorous and challenging journey from boyhood to womanhood.”

– **Mark Leno**, California State Assemblyman

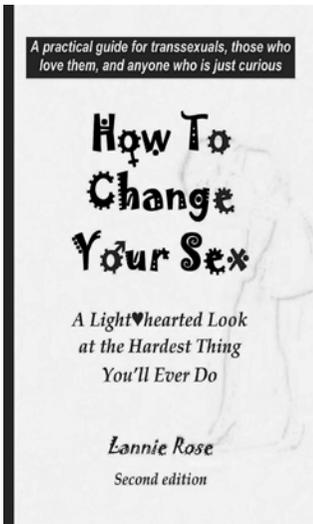
“Stunningly honest and genuinely refreshing...”

– **Jamison Green**, author of *Becoming a Visible Man*

Blam! Crash! Slam! A shocking drunk driving accident totals Lannie’s Buick. Fortunately, she is not hurt. Better still, she is not arrested, because jail is not a nice place for a man in a dress. When he goes out shopping for a new car, he feels compelled to do it in his feminine persona, and he begins to wonder why dressing up as a woman is so important to him. Join Lannie on her funny and extremely personal five year journey as she explores the possibility that she is actually a woman, decides she is, changes her sex, and begins a new life as a woman.

Available at fine (online) bookstores everywhere! Order your copy today by going to

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1585011096>



How To Change Your Sex: A Lighthearted Look at the Hardest Thing You'll Ever Do

by Lannie Rose

Lannie Rose changed her sex and now she explains how you can too! *How To Change Your Sex: A Lighthearted Look at the Hardest Thing You'll Ever Do* is an amusing and practical guide to everything you need to

know for your sex change, from how to tell if you are transsexual, through venturing out in public in your new gender presentation (including which restroom to use!), to hormones and surgeries, to what to expect afterwards. Whether you are seriously considering changing your own sex, or if you have a friend or loved one who is going through the process, or even if you are just curious, you are bound to be entertained and informed by this handy little manual.

Available at [Lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) and fine (online) bookstores everywhere! Order your copy today by going to

<http://www.lulu.com/content/230503>

or

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1411639561>

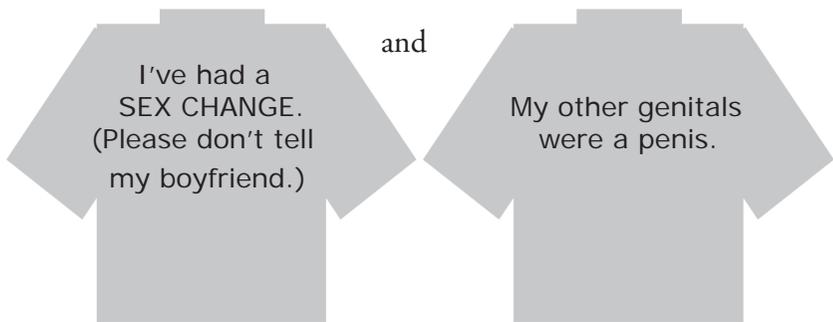
Visit Lannie's CafePress Shops!

Lannie's Sex Change Shop

<http://www.cafepress.com/lannierose>



Why would anyone want to wear a Sex Change t-shirt? Maybe to go to a Pride parade. Maybe for a third date, to break the news to your new boyfriend. Maybe for when you visit your father, who simply does not approve. Or just to wear around the house. For whatever purpose, here they are. Slogans like

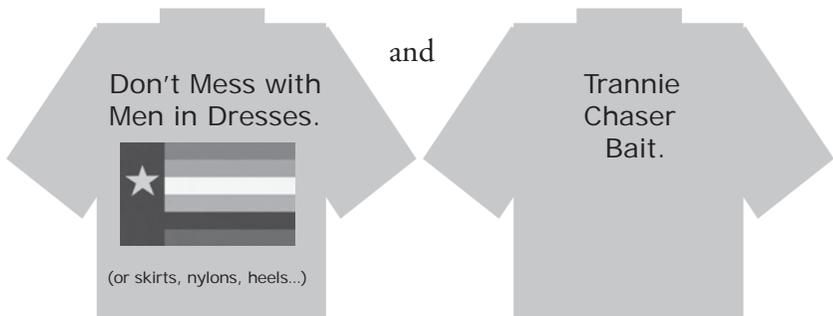


And many more. Order yours today!

Lannie's Drag Shop

<http://www.cafepress.com/lanniedrag>

Hi! I'm Lannie Rose. After I opened my Sex Change shop, I was besieged with requests for t-shirts for those of you who aren't ready for surgery yet. So here you go! With slogans like



And many more. Order yours today!

Sex! Drugs! Transsexuals!

A True Coming-of-Age Story

Most coming-of-age stories are about teenagers, but not this one. Eddy's coming-of-age hardly starts until he's 35 years old, when he discovers a penchant for wearing women's clothes. It takes him ten more exciting and very weird years before he figures out he really should have been a girl all along. After the sex change, Eddy, now Lannie, has to build a whole new life as a woman. The hard part was going to be finding a man to love her.

While *Everything Nice* is YATA - Yet Another Transgender Autobiography - it brings to the genre

- An honesty about relationships and sex before and after gender transition
- A hard look at the dating scene from a transsexual point of view
- The unique sense of humor Lannie demonstrated in *How To Change Your Sex: A Lighthearted Look at the Hardest Thing You'll Ever Do* and *LANNIE! My Journey from Man to Woman*.

If you only read one transsexual autobiography this year, *Everything Nice* is the one you want to choose.

I was dancing solo on a little platform atop a set of stairs at the back of the room. From my high perch, I overlooked the wriggling throng on the big dance floor. At the stroke of midnight, the pounding house music got several decibels louder, the flashing laser lights got brighter and more frenetic, and the packed dance floor became even more crowded. Some of this was real, I knew, and some was the effect of the Ecstasy (the drug, not the emotion) rushing in my head. A roar rose from the mass of dancers. Hands flew into the air and shirts disappeared. As I looked down on the mass of naked, buff, sweaty, grinding bodies, I said out loud, "Now this is GAY!" —from the Prologue

\$28.00
www.lulu.com

Everything Nice
A Late-Onset
Coming-of-Age Story