

Acting as a Cleaning Lady

By Susannah Donim

Circumstances force Dave to take up a humiliating new career, but it turns out to suit him better than he expected.

Prologue

“I’m not a maid, I’m a cleaning lady,” I insisted.

My wife laughed. “What the hell’s the difference?”

“A maid is a *servant*. She has to do everything her mistress says. She’s *servile*, submissive, at her employer’s beck and call. A cleaning lady is a freelance contractor. She’s a *professional*, engaged to provide specific services for a predetermined number of billable hours – just like a lawyer! She doesn’t have to do anything she doesn’t want to.”

It struck me that this was a ridiculous conversation for a man to be having with his wife. And it didn’t help that I was dressed from head to toe as a maid.

Chapter 1 – Two French Maids

Sally and I met at university, through amateur dramatics. I was president of the club in my third year and had had enough success to dream of a career as an actor. At medium height, and with fairly bland features, I could turn my hand to most roles – young or old, leading man or character. This was especially good for revue-style shows and we were planning to take our summer end of term production to the Edinburgh Fringe that year.

The committee was struggling with the logistics though. Fortunately our leading lady brought in one of her flatmates to help out. Sally was a natural organiser. She sorted out the venue, the accommodation, the transport for the actors, crew, props, costumes, the lot. She happily spent all the club’s funds but left us thespians with nothing to worry about except getting the show right.

My other concern that summer – my parents reckoned it should have been my *only* concern – was my final exams. I was – am – a computer scientist. Information Technology was my other great love and had been my life for more than a decade. The exams were painless for me; what would be more of a challenge was the dissertation. This would make the difference between a strong Upper-Second and a rip-roaring First, and I was keen to do something original. Eventually inspiration struck: an app for trading digital currencies. Who knows – if the acting proved to be a dead end, maybe an IT career in banking would beckon?

Between working flat-out on my dissertation project and sweating to get our Fringe production into shape, I somehow failed to notice that Sally Jenkins, our marvellously competent Tour Manager, was a bit of all right – *quite* a bit of all right. By the time I realised that this girl was beautiful and sexy and brainy and funny, she had more or less given up on me noticing her and had convinced herself that would be no loss.

The first time I asked her out was in Edinburgh in the week before we opened. She laughed in my face. The second time was when we were part of a small group on a walking tour of the city. She turned to me and asked why.

“Why what?”

“Why do you want to go out with me?”

“Well, I... er...”

“That’s what I thought.”

I realised I would have to think it through if there was going to be a third time.

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I thought about it for what seemed like ages. Did I really need the hassle? I wasn’t an accomplished ladies’ man by any means, but no one I’d asked out before had ever refused outright, or put me on the spot like that. Why on earth did she *think* I wanted to go out with her? Because she was gorgeous, and because I fancied her rotten, and... And I began to see what she was on about.

“Because I think you and I would really hit it off,” I announced the next time I saw her. “We like the same things; we have the same sense of humour; and we complement each other. Strengths and weaknesses, you know? Well, I don’t actually know your weaknesses, of course, but I’d be very interested to try and find out...”

She interrupted me. “Well, OK then. Dinner after the show tomorrow night, I think; just the two of us; somewhere nice, but not posh. I’ll make the arrangements, ‘cause you’re rubbish at that, as we know. Come and find me when you’ve changed out of your last costume.”

And she walked off, leaving me with a perplexed feeling that has lasted to this day.

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The show was a moderate success, and just about broke even. We all enjoyed ourselves, even got a couple of mildly enthusiastic reviews, but we didn’t set the world of show business alight. Still it was a once in a lifetime experience. For me, easily the most important thing that came out of it was my relationship with Sally. She made all the running, of course; she had the organisational skills and she knew what she wanted. I had no such sense of direction and just found myself going along for the ride.

The first couple of months felt like an extended job interview. Anyway at some point I realised I couldn’t imagine life without her, and perhaps foolishly said so.

“Yeah,” she said without looking up from her book. “You’ll do, I suppose.”

By now I understood that for her that was the equivalent of “*I’m head over heels in love and will stay with you forever*” from anybody else.

So what was next? We had both graduated before Edinburgh. Sally got a decent 2:1 in Maths, I scraped my First in Computer Science. We had a number of job applications in but we had both applied for the fast-track graduate entry scheme at the same bank, and had both been accepted. The only snag was that it was a *Spanish* bank and we would have to spend at least two years in Madrid. OK, not a problem, we thought. We can learn a new language; travel broadens the mind, etc, etc. It’s not too far from home, and the money was pretty good for new graduates. Sally would be joining the Investment Banking branch, and I would be in Major Project Support, part of the IT department.

The bank provided accommodation for its new recruits from overseas, and we were able to get a spacious and quite luxurious flat within walking distance of Head Office. We realised that this would

have been impossible in London on our starting salaries. We were very lucky, and we knew it, and we settled down to make the most of our opportunity.

The bank provided Spanish language lessons during working hours, and we both learned quickly. I had never rated myself as much of a linguist at school – I took French and German to GCSE level – but it's completely different when you live there. The incentive to learn is stronger and there are plenty of opportunities to practise. We very much enjoyed our evenings with a Spanish family, the Ortegas, who lived next door to us, and they helped us improve our accents. They were originally from peasant farmer stock, and still spent lots of time with their relatives in the country, but Juan and Consuela had been the first in their families to go to university, and now were middle-class professionals. They had a pretty fifteen-year-old daughter, Maria, who kept throwing herself at me, much to Sally's amusement and her parents' disapproval.

The two years passed quickly and we were easily persuaded to sign on for two more. We were married in the summer of our third year there and things looked great. We loved Spain, but we were already thinking about returning home when the decision was taken out of our hands. Sally's father died suddenly. Her mother was a strong character and determined not to be a burden on her only child, but when tackling probate her solicitor made a very nasty discovery. Henry had invested very badly; so badly that he'd used up their entire pension fund and left Carol in debt and virtually penniless.

We soon realised that she wouldn't be able to cope alone, and that she'd need us to rally round. I was fine with that; Carol was the best mother-in-law a man could wish for. She was just like an older version of her amazing daughter. So we requested an early return to the UK. The Bank was sympathetic. They were happy with our work and we were both promised equivalent jobs at their London headquarters.

It was clear that Carol would have to sell the family home to pay off her debts, and we wanted her to move in with us. It didn't make sense for the three of us to own two houses, and what she had left would help with the deposit on a big enough place, albeit in a less expensive area. She was just able to afford to keep her little car, a five-year-old Ford Fiesta.

We settled on Pinner, a suburb north of London, forty minutes from the City by the Metropolitan Line. The main reason was that my older sister, Anna, and Phil, her stockbroker husband, lived there, and there was a suitable smaller house for sale in their street. I wasn't at all sure we could afford it, but Sally was determined. We weren't in a chain, having no property to sell, which enabled us to beat the price down a little, but we would still need a massive mortgage. Fortunately we got a special package as bank employees, so it was just about manageable.

I had other misgivings. My relationship with my sister hadn't always been cordial. We had given each other a hard time when we were kids. I'd been the typical 'pesky little brother' and she, as the older sibling was always sure she knew better than me – and that had never changed. I wasn't sure I really wanted her as a neighbour. But Sally told me I was being unreasonable; we were both grown-ups now.

As we would still be in Madrid until almost time to move, Anna and Phil checked the place out for us. They confirmed it was in good condition and wouldn't need anything expensive doing to it. So we were able to do most of the transaction from Spain by e-mails, online banking, and so on. In the end it all went quite smoothly. We also leased a new BMW 320i for ourselves.

When we finally returned from Madrid Carol had already moved into our new house. It had four bedrooms, two with *en suites*, and she had taken the smaller of those. We would set out the third bedroom as a guest room, and I would fill the smallest room with my computers and other kit.

Carol had done an amazing job in getting the house ready for us. We had all the appliances – fridge-freezer, washing machine, tumble-dryer, dishwasher – from her old house. The kitchen was immaculate with built-in oven, hob and microwave.

Sally had to start work at the London head office more or less immediately, but I had another week before I had to turn up, so I worked with Carol to finish moving in. We got on very well together. We did a top to bottom spring-clean, and she taught me a lot about house-keeping and cooking. She also tutored me in the finer points of laundry. Before that I knew to separate whites from coloureds but that was about it. Now I knew to identify delicates and what to do with them, although I wasn't sure how Sally would feel about her husband hand-washing her lingerie. Still, I wouldn't tell her if Carol didn't.

Carol and I were sitting over a leisurely lunch at the end of my last free week.

"I knew Sally was going to marry you as soon as I met you," she said, smiling. "You're a perfect match. She's well-organised and terribly bossy, but she's not always right. You're easy-going, so she usually gets her way, but you're stubborn when it matters, so you won't let her make any serious mistakes. Perfect combination!"

I laughed, but I knew she had us pegged.

"Now, come on," she said briskly. "I've never met a man who had the first idea about ironing. I'm determined my son-in-law will be the first."

I saw where Sally got her bossiness from. Later that day I reached the conclusion that ironing was the only house-keeping chore I really disliked.

We celebrated the return to England, and new jobs, with our first home-cooked dinner party in our new house. We invited Anna and Phil. (Carol did most of the cooking, but I helped.) Anna was warm and friendly for once, and she and Sally bonded strongly, sharing their experiences of my weaknesses and idiosyncrasies.

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Life was great. And of course that was when it all started to go pear-shaped. It was a combination of things, some unavoidable, some culpable.

We received the first blow when Sally reported to London headquarters for her first day. We knew that the bank had barely weathered the global financial crisis of 2008, but we thought it was over that now and was soaring to new heights of profitability. All the motivating internal newsletters said so. It now seemed that they had been economical with the truth. More 'restructuring' was going to be necessary to control costs. Sally's job with the London Investment Banking team was one of the casualties. It was nothing personal – just the usual 'last in, first out' policy when redundancies were necessary. Not that they were going to make her redundant – they wanted to avoid even that fairly minor expense – so until the Investment Banking arm recovered, they were offering her a job as a humble teller in the closest High Street branch to our new home that had a vacancy. The salary would be barely half of what she had been promised.

This was pretty close to 'constructive dismissal'. We considered taking them to an Industrial Tribunal, but that would have been costly; it would take months; and she wouldn't be earning at all during that time. It would also blight both our career prospects with our current employer and probably across the banking industry. She resolved to lump it but look actively for a better job.

We briefly considered returning to Madrid but that ship had sailed too. Her old position had been filled. We were going to have to find the money for our humongous mortgage payments from a greatly reduced joint monthly income. Carol immediately volunteered to find a job, but she hadn't worked for most of her married life and there were few openings for a widow approaching sixty with no qualifications.

So we urgently needed to find a way of increasing our income, which motivated me to pursue an idea I'd been nursing for a while – my degree dissertation to design an app for trading digital currencies. These were proliferating, as were digital currency brokers, but the concepts were too difficult for the average punter to get their mind around. As a result the market wasn't taking off as quickly as it could. There was huge potential for growth. I envisaged an app which could take in your financial status, make recommendations for buying or selling digital currency, connect to your bank, and make the appropriate trades, monitoring when it was optimal to cash in an investment. It would be quite a complex program, and the security issues would be challenging, but I had already done most of the analysis and research work for my degree dissertation. Coding up a mobile app would be relatively simple.

So I got on with it both at home and at work in any available downtime, strongly incentivised by our shrinking savings, and the worried looks on my wife's and mother-in-law's faces. It took all my evenings and weekends for three months, but the finished product was nearly everything I'd hoped for. There was one area where I was sure I could improve the decision-making, reducing the inherent risk still further, but I couldn't seem to crack the algorithm.

Nevertheless the app tracked the rise and fall of each of the digital currencies and of the market as a whole very well. It was quite good at buying when the price was low and selling at the right moment. I used it to invest a little money of our own, and it nearly doubled in a week, but such trades were inherently risky and we couldn't afford to speculate on a grander scale.

I contacted Danny, an old friend from college who was rising rapidly through the ranks of Atkinson Stern, a national firm of investment bankers and financial advisers. He persuaded his boss to offer the app through their website, in return for a royalty. The firm's name was well-respected, so I was hopeful. I didn't want to sell the rights – and they didn't want to buy them, at least at first – but the advert was prominent on their home page and it generated quite a bit of interest, which they liked as it brought more traffic to their site. Clicking on the link redirected the potential customer to my home secure server from which the app could be downloaded – but the majority of the processing was done on my server.

I charged a small fee for each investment made and a percentage of any profits taken. My client base expanded rapidly and within a couple of months I was generating a very tidy income. My brother-in-law, Phil, helped me to set up J & J Services, a trading company with Sally, Carol and me as directors, to take full advantage of corporation tax breaks and to minimise our personal risk. (I saw the J & J as 'Jackson and Jackson'. Sally preferred to think of it as 'Jackson and Jenkins'.)

I kept tinkering with the program to try and crack the risk algorithm, with no success, but our troubles seemed to be over for now. We put money aside to cover our tax bill for the year and had enough left over to pay off some of our mortgage and lighten the load of our monthly interest payments. Carol even decided to use her dividend revenue to go on an extended trip to Australia to visit her brother and his family. She had always wanted to go but Henry had refused, presumably because it would have exposed his precarious financial situation.

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Now we were back in England we joined Pinner Players, a local amateur dramatics society. They were in the middle of rehearsing a production at the time, and I had missed the opportunity to audition, but Sally was quickly recruited to help with costumes and make-up. We also began to renew our old university friendships, particularly with the am-dram club people, a surprising number of whom had settled in the south east. We decided to throw a reunion party – fancy dress, of course. Well, it was a reunion of play-actors.

We raided the society's collection of costumes. It was quite an extensive collection but I didn't see anything that took my fancy. When Sally volunteered to pick something out for me, I accepted eagerly and rushed off to play squash. I knew she had my measurements.

With both of us in full-time employment, and me always working on upgrades to my money-spinning software, organising the party absorbed most of our remaining spare time. So I didn't give my costume any further thought. The next thing I knew about it was the Friday night before when Sally approached me with a razor, a pack of spare blades, and a can of shaving foam.

"OK, Fifi sweetie, let's go to the bathroom and get your legs shaved."

"Huh? Who's Fifi?" I said. "And what's that about shaving my legs?"

"Oh, didn't I say?" she said, innocently. "We're going to the party as French maids!"

"Like hell! Where did you get that stupid idea?"

"Well I found two matching uniforms in the club's wardrobe, one in your size and one in mine. It was too good an opportunity to miss. And you didn't much like anything else they had, so why not?"

"I'll look stupid!"

"Trust me, you won't. I've seen your legs in a skirt, remember, at the Edinburgh review. Anyway, it's quite appropriate."

"How do you work that out?"

"Well, it's *our* party. We'll be doing all the serving – food, drinks, and so on. We'll be working as maids most of the time, so we might as well dress that way!"

This was such abstruse logic I couldn't think of a sensible response.

"Anyway there'll be lots of people from Pinner Players there," she rushed on. "They're thinking of doing an all-male *Anthony and Cleopatra* next year, just like it would have been in Shakespeare's day. This is your chance to show them how good you would be in the leading role," she concluded, triumphantly.

Cleopatra *would* be quite a challenge for a male actor, I supposed. Didn't the great Mark Rylance do it a few years ago – to rave reviews?

"But why do we have to shave my legs? Can't I just wear thick black tights?"

"Oh for heaven's sake stop whinging!"

She grabbed my hand and pulled me toward the bathroom.

"I'll look weird on the squash court..."

But she wasn't listening.

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It turned out she had been quite thorough in her preparations for my performance as Fifi the maid at the party, and mostly without spending any money. She even managed to find a cheap pair of foam breast forms amongst the Actors' props collection.

"OK," she began, "we have a lot to do, and I don't want you kicking up a fuss, so first I want to show you what we're up against."

I was already stripped down to my underpants, my newly-bare legs tingling from the after-effects of her extremely thorough shaving. She dropped the maid's dress uniform over my head. I threaded my arms through the sleeves and she spun me round to look at myself in the wardrobe mirror.

"That's awful!" I said. "I thought you said this dress was in my size?"

"It *is* – well it's in the size you would be if you were a woman." She grabbed the loose material around my chest. "You need boobs," she said, "and lots of padding *here*," she added, yanking at the back of the skirt. "So now that you appreciate the problem, let's get on with the solution."

She went over to her chest of drawers and took out what looked like a huge pile of very feminine underthings.

"How much did you spend on that lot?" I asked, outraged.

"Not a penny," she said, smugly. "They're Mum's. They should fit you perfectly."

"I can't wear her stuff!"

"Why on earth not?"

I struggled. "Well, not without her permission..."

"She knows all about it. I Skyped her in Oz. She said we could borrow anything we liked, as long as I sent her lots of pictures." She picked up a roll of cotton wool. "Now, let's get you into your lingerie, Fifi dear, and pad you out to make you a voluptuous French maid."

The next hour started off excruciatingly embarrassing, but I had wanted to be an actor, so I tried to think of it as just another costume fitting for a part. First Sally approached me with a fierce-looking nylon contrivance.

"This is a panty-girdle," she said kneeling down and holding it out for me to step into. "You'll need something to give you the right shape, but you'd find it really hot and uncomfortable to wear panties with a girdle over them..."

I started to step into the strange garment.

"You need to take your own underpants off first, idiot!" she said.

Between us we worked it up over my legs. It was tight round my waist but there was plenty of space around my thighs, hips and buttocks.

“This isn’t so bad,” I said,

“Don’t be silly, we haven’t started yet. It’s riding up, of course, as I thought it would. We’ll put your stockings on next. They’ll keep the girdle at full stretch. Then we can pad you out.”

Sally showed me how to put the black fishnet stockings on without laddering them, and how to attach the garters. She took several photos on her smartphone.

“You do have really good legs, Fifi, you little sexpot.”

Then she began to force cotton wool into all the empty space in the girdle. My nether regions began to take on marked feminine curves – pronounced, *extensive* feminine curves! Her agile fingers pushed the padding all around my posterior, including my wedding tackle. It was *arousing*, to say the least, but between the tight girdle and the cotton wool padding there was nowhere for my budding erection to... er, *bud*.

Eventually she sat back on her haunches, exhausted. She took more photos.

“That’s pretty good,” she said. “I mean, if you look closely you can see it’s padding rather than moving flesh, but it’s great for a party costume. We’ll do your bra next.”

This turned out to be a long-line bra, and it felt like wearing a harness. She slipped the foam breast forms in and stepped back to examine the effect. I now stuck out dramatically in front. My huge breasts imposed themselves into view, however I turned and gyrated.

More photos.

“I’ve added more padding to the outer sides of the bra so it’s forcing a crease in your chest down the middle just like real cleavage. It looks quite realistic, which is a good thing as the dress is fairly low-cut. Your boobs won’t move right, of course. The foam is too light – real breasts are *heavy*, especially at your size.”

“Oh? What size am I?”

“You’re a 42 double-D. You’re quite a big girl, Fifi dear.” I gulped. “I’m going to have to add still more padding,” she continued. “If I can get it under and around the forms without spoiling your cleavage, that should work. You’re going to have to watch your posture though. A girl with breasts as large and heavy as yours would have to lean back slightly when standing up, or she could topple forwards. The cotton wool is much lighter and won’t do that.”

When she had finished and pronounced herself satisfied, she took some more photos. Meanwhile I felt like an Egyptian mummy – no, like I’d been wrapped in two plaster casts round my chest and bum. But I had to admit: Fifi now had a striking figure. We slipped the French maid dress on again, and this time it was tight all over my new proportions.

“Tell you what,” Sally said, taking another photo with a mischievous look in her eye, “why don’t we go out for dinner? I’ll get you one of Mum’s smart dresses and do your make-up and wig. It’ll be great fun! You can practise your posture, voice, female mannerisms, and so on. Then you’ll be perfect tomorrow night.”

I thought about it. It *would* be fun, and maybe I would be a little less inhibited at the party. I wondered if I could fool anyone into thinking I was a real woman?

“Well, OK, but not to a restaurant anywhere near here!”

But she was already heading for Carol’s bedroom, returning shortly with a beautiful two-tone Royal blue cocktail dress.

“You’re a couple of inches taller than Mum, of course, but that just means that a dress that is below-the-knee on her is a little higher on you – and a little sexier!”

She threw me another pair of nylons.

“You’d better change into these. We’ve only got one pair of black stockings in your size, and fishnets won’t go with this dress. Hurry up, I’ve got you a blonde wig and I want to try some make-up styles to go with it. And we should do your nails...”

“Aren’t you getting a little carried away?”

“I certainly am! But I’m having fun. Aren’t you?”

Well, yes, I was.

“*Oui, Madame,*” I said in my Fifi voice. “*C’est tres amusant!*”

* * *

I never usually suffer from stage fright, but that evening I learned what it was like for the first time. Sally booked a restaurant about ten miles away, where there was little chance of seeing anyone we knew. She found an old handbag and purse of her mother’s and they more or less matched my dress, so I put my money and credit cards in the purse. She added my make-up and some tissues. She told me I wouldn’t need my driving licence which was for her husband, Dave, and I could hardly pretend to be him, looking like I did. Fine! That made her the ‘designated driver’ and I could drink as much as I liked.

I was quite confident about my appearance, although Sally was right that the padding was bulky and stiff and didn’t move like it was part of me. Still surely no one would be looking at me closely or for long enough to notice anything amiss?

Also I realised ruefully that my make-up, dress and slightly masculine features made me look a lot older than Sally, more like her mother than her girlfriend. In fact once, when I caught a glimpse of myself in a mirror, I thought I saw Carol. I mentioned this to Sally and she giggled and started calling me ‘Mummy’. I played along.

“Elbows off the table, dear,” I said.

“Yes, Mummy.”

“And don’t talk with your mouth full, dear.”

“Sorry, Mummy,” Sally said, with her mouth full.

Needless to say, she took lots of photos for the real Carol during the evening.

I was terrified of moving or sitting or speaking in a masculine manner and giving myself away. Sally was uncharacteristically supportive, quietly pointing out my mistakes whenever I did anything unfeminine and suggesting how to correct them. I learned to sit with my knees together, and my legs crossed in the women's way.

I had to take smaller steps, though my tight skirt helped there. When walking I had to remember to put one foot in front of the other with my arms bent at the elbow, and my wrists hanging loosely. That all made sense as the feminine posture helped with my balance, given the unfamiliar weight of my bosom and buttocks. Also I was wearing a pair of Carol's sandals. My toes stuck out over the front and the heels were just high enough to cause me to wobble if I wasn't careful.

Sally told me to smile more, and she had to remind me to freshen my lipstick several times. Also going to the Ladies with her was scary. But I wasn't caught out, as far as I could tell, and at the end of the evening I reckoned I could add 'convincing female impersonation' to my actor's bag of tricks. I would definitely try out for Cleopatra if I got the chance.

At bedtime I stripped off all of Carol's clothes but Sally insisted I wear one of her mother's nighties in bed 'to stay in character'. For some reason she was a sexual hurricane that night, roughly taking top position and riding me raw. Not being an especially skilled lover, I sometimes struggled to give her even one orgasm, but now she was firmly in charge. She kept me 'on the verge' for ages while she came three times. When she eventually let me come, I went off like Krakatoa.

"So does this mean you're a lesbian now?" I said, panting, as we cooled down afterwards.

"Don't be silly! How could I be, with what we've just done? It's just that I find dressing you up as a girl is driving me wild!" She paused. "I wonder what that makes me?"

I had no answer to that. I couldn't remember a better night of lovemaking. Even if I had to dress up like this, it was definitely worth it.

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Of course next morning she had me dress *en femme* again, in fresh ladies' underwear from Carol's room. I was allowed to wear a floral top with spaghetti shoulder straps and a pair of bright magenta Capri pants. All padded out again, my bum *definitely* looked big in them, though the bulky padding was even more obvious.

We tried another wig – a long auburn one – for variety, and I stayed that way all through Saturday while we prepared for the party. I was getting used to moving like a woman.

We had ordered most of the food and booze online and it was delivered early in the morning. But needless to say, there were plenty of things we had forgotten, so we had to go to the supermarket after lunch.

We also went to a 'nearly new' shop to look for a pair of sensible black shoes for Fifi to wear that evening. We got lucky. I have quite small feet for a man, but Carol's sandals really weren't very comfortable, and I was dreading standing up all evening.

So at about four o'clock we began to get dressed for the party: one final change of (Carol's) underwear; the usual padding; more photographs of Fifi in her lingerie; the blonde wig again, but in a demure updo with curly bangs; make-up; and finally the full French maid uniform, cap and apron.

I stood looking at myself in the mirror, gobsmacked, but I couldn't pretend I didn't like what I saw.

“Boy, it’s a good thing I’m secure in my masculinity!” I said.

Sally came over to stand beside me. I was about three inches taller, and her hair was dark, but otherwise we could have been sisters.

“Come on, you’re an actor,” she said. “You love to dress up.”

“Not like this,” I said. “This isn’t like putting on a doublet and hose and spouting Shakespeare. This is *extreme*. I think I’m being very brave, appearing in public like this, in front of our family and friends.”

“Yep, you’re my brave little soldier all right, in your frilly bra and panties.”

“They’re not mine, they’re your mother’s,” I began, “and they’re not *frilly*...”

She grabbed me and kissed me passionately, bending me over backwards like Rhett Butler kissing Scarlett O’Hara. I realised I might miss being Fifi after this.

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The party was a great success. Since most of the guests were involved in amateur theatricals to some extent, the costumes were impressive and imaginative. Sally and I greeted everyone with trays of sparkling wine and pretended just to be waitresses. Several guests were asking each other where their hosts were, causing great amusement to us and to those who had already twigged.

Anna and Phil came as Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Typically they had splashed out on expensive hired costumes of course. Phil had the grace to look a little embarrassed but Anna happily ‘queened it’ over everyone, especially me, whom she had recognised instantly.

“You call this a martini, girl?” she thundered, on tasting the drink I had made for her. “It’s like *cat’s piss*! I’ve got a good mind to pull your knickers down and tan your hide!”

Anna tended to drink a little too much at parties, so I had deliberately watered her drink down with a little soda and a lot of ice.

“*Pardonnez-moi, madame,*” I improvised, “*mais je n’ai jamais goûté l’urine du chat, donc je serais incapable de faire une telle boisson.*”

Probably not great French, but it was the best I could do, and a sight better than Anna could manage, I knew. Phil was laughing his head off. He had a much better command of the language because his job took him to Paris regularly.

“*Non, non, mademoiselle,*” he explained to me quite seriously. “*Madame ne veut pas l’urine du chat. Elle veut un martini.*”

“*Ah bon, monsieur,*” I replied cheerily, as though light had just dawned. I curtsied. “*Je comprends. Je cherche.*”

“Well if you two idiots think I’m going to stand here listening to you making fun of me in Foreign, you’ve another think coming!” Anna said haughtily and stormed off.

I went to make her a (slightly) stronger martini as a peace offering.

I loved my maid uniform but I did feel a little *vulnerable* in it. As the midnight hour approached, and people got drunker, the fun turned decidedly ribald. I twice felt hands going up my skirt; one hand belonged to a female Smurf, the other to a male Zorro. At one point an extremely drunk man dressed as King Arthur pulled me down into his lap on our sitting room sofa. I squealed involuntarily, completely off balance in my heels, and wondered how I could maintain my dignity while avoiding being raped.

At that point Anna appeared out of nowhere and grabbed my arm. Hauling me off King Arthur's lap and onto my feet, she said gruffly, "Come here, Fifi love, you haven't danced with me yet."

As we slow danced to *Nights in White Satin*, King Arthur watched us in disgust and left shortly afterwards.

"Thanks, sis, you saved my bacon, or at least my honour," I said into Anna's ear as we revolved.

"Now you know what we women have to put up with," she said, smiling.

Ha! Any man overstepping the mark with my dragon of a sister would regret his foolishness very quickly. His testicles would probably regret it even more. I didn't say that, though.

"You make a very good French maid, sweetie," she continued. "Have you thought of taking it up professionally?"

That was my big sister all over, teasing me mercilessly one moment, protecting me like a tigress the next. I didn't discover till later that Sally had told everyone that her husband was away on business, and that Fifi was a *real* maid hired to help with the catering. No wonder everyone kept trying to grope me and telling me to fetch them food and drink.

* * *

The party started to wind down at about half-past one in the morning. Well none of us were students anymore. Several people stayed over in sleeping bags, on camp beds, mattresses, the sitting room rug, etc. Selfishly we didn't give up our bedroom to our guests, hoping for a repeat of the previous night's passion, but we were both exhausted and too pissed, and fell asleep fully dressed in our maids' uniforms, as soon as our heads hit the pillow.

Fifi's last appearance was at the massive tidy-up on Sunday morning. My make-up was smeared, my wig and cap askew, my apron covered in stains – food and worse – and my stockings laddered. I went round the house amongst supine guests, picking up glasses, beer cans, plastic cutlery and paper plates.

"Pardonnez-moi, monsieur."

"Levez les pieds, s'il vous plait, madame. Je veux... er, Hooverer."

Some people still hadn't realised Sally and I weren't the maids.

Sally took her last photos of her husband, the French maid, for her mother. Finally with her borrowed underwear in the wash and her uniform cleaned and returned to the Pinner Players wardrobe, Fifi retired. It had been a great weekend. We'd seen lots of old friends and made new ones. We looked forward to the next working week.

At which point the second shoe dropped...