

LAKEHURST PRESS

# BITTERSWEET

Tales of Forgotten Innocence



TECHNICOLOR VISIONS  
VOLUME ONE

# *Technicolor Visions*

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# *Suspender Stockings*

Tracy Lane 2002

## **PART ONE: THE HOLY GRAIL**

Angie stepped into the changing booth, laying her purchase over the chair. Cheeks flushed with girlish pleasure, she shut out the busy hum of the showroom, reaching back to unzip her bright red sun-frock. A trim young girl with wavy blond hair trailing down past her shoulders, she smiled with the vaguely guilty expression of a child caught with her hand in the candy jar.

Dropping the dress down to her tiny waist, she began to shimmy it over the curve of her hips. A faint crescent touched her lips; the *Fever* had been raging through her system for more than three weeks now. It was like one of those tunes that spiraled endlessly around at the front of your mind, despite your firmest efforts to push it away. Well, the fire would be quenched today, her yearnings finally satisfied. She looked back into the mirror, admiring the lithe flow of her petite figure.

Like most girls her age, Angie loved wearing pretty underthings beneath her day clothes - it was a delicious secret she could hide from the rest of the world. Her brassiere was a pastel-pink wonderbra, thrusting her full, pert breasts up to form a deeply divided cleavage. One of the straps looped off her left shoulder; it was covered with a delicate white trim. Her flesh was as smooth as alabaster, having only the barest touch of a suntan.

Long hair hanging over her face in blond arabesques, she wriggled her bottom out of the dress's slim waistline, gradually exposing her scanty, high-cut briefs. They were a pair of pink satin bikini panties, decorated with tiny bows and white lace fringes. Gleaming like molten silver against her creamy skin, they looked as if they'd been airbrushed onto her body.

She stepped gingerly out of the dress, careful not to catch her stilettos on the red fabric. She'd ruined one too many expensive outfits with a careless turn of the heel. Hanging the frock over the door hook, she swept her hair back from her face, feeling a warm, moist blush rising through her tummy. Angie had good reason to feel excited. She'd found what she'd been looking for.

*Finally.*

Stepping across the booth in her undies and high heels, she leaned forward to inspect her purchase. She'd spent close on a month browsing her way through Chamberlain's Westside, visiting every boutique and lingerie store in the Fashion Quarter, cruising her way around the plazas and the malls. Searching for just three shreds of intimate fantasy, remnants of a forgotten decadence.

Grinning a radiant smile, Angie picked up the dainty lace garter belt, marveling at its fragile and complicated beauty. A magical wisp of lace, lycra and shimmering liquid satin, it was as complex and as insubstantial as a dream. The suspenders trailed in long, ornate streamers of floral elastic. Stretching the straps between her lacquered fingertips, Angie felt a thrill of pure feminine allure strafe through her entire body.

She laid the garter belt back on the chair, imagining how it would look clipped around her waist, then picked up one of the stockings, smoothing it out with her left hand. The jet black denier whispered enticingly between her fingers. Sheer and gauzy and almost completely transparent, it was a genuine silk stocking, the kind with a reinforced toe and a seam down the

back.

Angie squandered a few moments admiring its gossamer perfection. The barest touch raised gooseflesh along her arms and shoulders. It felt unspeakably feminine, a thing of dreams and unspoken desires. A long, delicious shiver raced down the length of her spine; the very thought of drawing that nebulous material along her thighs made her ache with anticipation.

Kicking off her high heels, Angie bent down to slide the stocking over her right foot. The naughty-little-girl smile stole across her features again.

## **PART TWO: POLITICALLY CORRECT**

Garter belts and suspender stockings were rather difficult to come by these days.

You could still find exotic, sensual underwear around the "bohemian" districts and recycling centres, but the larger retailing chains seemed to stock only the most utilitarian garments. Pedestrian, plain, unimaginative. Some women referred to them as "Passion Killers," recalling the silk-ration shortages of the war years. Dull, colourless and boring.

The end of the twentieth century had unleashed a virtual torrent of conservative values, a return to the political Right surpassing even the lethargy of the Reagan years. Picket Fence lifestyles had sprouted across the continent like a furious, virulent weed; traditional principles had steamrolled their way through urban society, erasing the bright, shining multi-cultures of the nineties.

It had been a bloodless revolution, one in which the Good Ole Boys had triumphed without firing a single shot. Nevertheless, these were difficult time for those who wavered at the periphery of society; those living on the outer rim of the acceptable and the 'norm'. No laws had been passed, no witch-hunts mounted against the 'pink stain,' and yet sexual diversity had virtually disappeared from the public eye, even in former 'Pride Capitals' such as San Francisco or East Village. Invisibility was the safer option, far preferable to the isolation, loneliness and constant surveillance suffered by the Visible.

Fortunately, Angie had very little to worry about. She was already invisible. No one would have guessed, even for a second, that she had *not* been born *female*.

## **PART THREE: EXPOSURE**

*"Are you okay in there?"*

Angie glanced around with a gasp, a vague blush touching her porcelain features. The door to her cubicle had been flung open, allowing the world outside a generous view of the booth's lavender interior. A tall, thirty-ish saleswoman stood by the doorway, smiling in at her. Virtually paralyzed with surprise, Angie looked self-consciously into the showroom, frozen in the act of slipping her long, tapering leg into a silk stocking.

Embarrassment blossomed in the warm depths of her belly. Angie was young and strikingly beautiful; a willowy adolescent on the edge of maturity. Her eyes were twin pools of late November sky; huge and innocent and glowing with child-like wonder.

She crossed her hands modestly over her cleavage, stepping back from the open doorway.

"Oh, I'm sorry," the sales assistant apologized, brow furrowed in genuine concern, "did I

startle you?" She was a tall, elegant woman with beaming, elfin face. Her ID tag read JEAN, the sort of name that sounded inexplicably appropriate when attached to women of her generation.

"No, no - not at all," Angie replied, her face reddening to the tone of a maraschino cherry, "just a little jumpy, I guess. I'm... I've been looking for..." her sentence trailed off into the endless limbo of the unfinished statement. It was ridiculous – *ludicrous* really – she still grew as coy as a ten year-old whenever she went shopping for underwear.

Jean stepped into the cubicle, absently forgetting to close the door behind her. Angie opened her mouth to say something, but couldn't quite get it out.

"Do you need a hand with *that*?" Jean asked, indicating the garter belt.

Angie blinked several times, flustered almost beyond words.

"Well, I... yes, I suppose so. I mean..."

The assistant nodded, her smile almost comically sympathetic: *it's okay; I know exactly how you feel.*

"They can be a little difficult, especially if this is your first time trying one on," Jean told her, picking up a handful of lace corsetry and stepping into the narrow confines of the changing space. Taking Angie gently by the shoulders, she turned the blushing young girl towards the mirror. She stood in her bra, panties and stockings, flushed to the tips of her eyebrows.

Jean passed the garter belt around Angie's waist and hooked it into place, her fingers moving with the expertise of long practice. Excitement poured over Angie's body like some thick warm fluid, her breathing quickened to swift, shallow spurts.

"It's sort of like putting on a *bra*, except lower down," the older woman was saying, "the *tricky* part is attaching the *stockings*."

Angie could only nod her assent, feeling the belt constricting her waistline by at least three inches. The satin was stretched taut against her rosy flesh; the garters dangled against her bare thighs.

Out in the salesroom, heads were craning about on flexible stalks. It was Saturday morning, and this was the only store this side of the city to stock European underwear. Evidently half the population of Chamberlain was in the showroom at the moment, and every single one of them wanted a better look. Well, at least the saleswoman's presence was blocking their view for the most part.

*Thank heavens for small mercies*, Angie thought to herself, a tiny giggle rising to her lips. Taking a deep, calming breath, she pushed the laughter back into her belly, shifting her centre of balance to her left hip. Her eyes literally danced with feminine mischief. Her heart was pounding in her throat, she felt almost delirious with exhilaration.

"There, that's done," Jean said, turning the girl around by the elbows so they were standing virtually face-to-face, "now, let's get those *garters* hooked up. Could you step forward on your right leg for a moment?"

Angie thrust her knee slightly forward in the classic pose while Jean began adjusting the suspenders. She fumbled with the clasp for a few seconds, fussing over the garter-strap and drawing the stocking up a few inches. Translucent denier stretched against Angie's lean, white haunch.

Jean clucked under her breath, hitching up the stocking-top with some difficulty in the claustrophobic space of the changing booth. She released the clasp after a brief struggle, then

straightened up with an oddly skeptical look on her face.

"Here; come out into the showroom," Jean said, taking Angie lightly by the wrist, "there's not enough space in here for the two of us."

A two second pause. Then:

*What?!*

Angie's cheeks flared like a pair of wild strawberries.

"Come on out," Jean repeated, smiling placidly, "it's a little too cramped in here. There's plenty of space in the showroom."

"The *showroom?!!*" Angie gasped in surprise, "but...but I'm not... I'm not wearing *anything.*" Her tummy swarmed with hummingbirds, a wave of panic surged through her entire nervous system. She felt herself stepping into her stilettos, her mind suddenly slipping into autopilot. Her lips parted in shock, eyes bulging from their sockets.

*What was she doing?!*

"Oh, don't worry about *that,*" Jean replied amiably, leading her forward by the right hand, "we have pretty young girls like you in here all the time. It *is* a lingerie shop, after all." They were at the very threshold now: in a few seconds, Angela would be exhibiting her lingerie before the entire store.

*But there are MEN out there,* Angie tried to say, though the words never actually left her mouth. The store was literally crammed with ubiquitous males (or so she thought); husbands and fathers, silvermaned patriarchs in dark smoking jackets, little boys in baseball caps clinging to their mother's skirts. Angie strutted forward on her impossibly high heels, her head spinning with a mixture of shock, embarrassment and pure, breathless delight.

"...anyway, you need to see yourself in the three-way to get the full effect," Jean was prattling on, oblivious to the girl's crimson-faced reluctance, "those change-room mirrors just can't give you the distance you need for a full-length view."

*I must be dreaming,* she thought wildly as they stepped through the doorway into the brightly lit salesroom. Time seemed to pause as she was led towards the central display, weaving a trail through a small forest of gaping mouths and goggling eyes. The store was absolutely bristling with customers, and most of the clientele seemed to be of the masculine persuasion.

Angie simply couldn't believe this was happening to her.

Although she'd harbored fantasies of this kind for years, she'd never - *NEVER in her wildest dreams* - imagined she'd find herself parading her gleaming satin underpants before a roomful of startled (and somewhat admiring) onlookers. Her luscious, teenaged body was bursting with the ripening fruit of dawning sexuality. A rare, fine color was stealing up her torso, tinting her red from chin to belly button.

*This can't be happening,* Angie thought once more as the crowd parted before her.

## **PART FOUR: DISPLAYS**

It had been a black day for all humanity when tights came into fashion. Supposedly, panty hose were more comfortable, more convenient and much cheaper than stockings – but they were *nowhere* near as sexy, at least as far as Angie was concerned. Worse still, corsetry had become a (rather expensive) fashion accessory, way beyond her price range.

For a while, it appeared that all of her hopes would come to nothing.

Fortunately, all was not lost. Following a number of promising leads, she eventually began checking out local second hand dealers in the Westside. There she stumbled across numerous items of interest – corselets and panty-girdles, convertible brassieres and bodyliners. Some places even had unopened stock in the back room - donations from hosiery stores with outdated inventory. That was always a rare treat, Angie would practically squeal with delight at the sight of them.

The trail had eventually led to this mid-range boutique on the west side of the tracks. Angie had been drawn in by the rich, continental décor, with its art deco lamps, crushed velvet draperies and leather bound armchairs. Lavish, for a place this close to the Red Zone, which made it all the more intriguing. The idea of a "Fitting Salon" conjured up visions of pampered luxury straight out of a 1930s musical comedy; a plush wonderland full of sofas, divans and ottomans, where semi-clad women lolled about in regal splendor. The reality didn't quite measure up to Angie's expectations, but *Contessa Lingerie* possessed considerable charm nonetheless. The staff were polite, the furnishings opulent and there was indeed a private Fitting Salon at the back of the store.

Of course, she hadn't realized until much too late that it adjoined the Display Center at the front.

## **PART FIVE: MIRRORS**

A sizable crowd had gathered inside the boutique. People seemed to be wandering in off the street at random. There must have been close to forty in all; men, women and children (though mostly men, Angie noticed ruefully) enjoying the rare spectacle of a pretty young girl stripped to her unmentionables. It was like one of those awful nightmares where you suddenly found yourself back in your old classroom wearing nothing but your bra and panties. Except this particular dream was coming true!

*How can this be happening?* Angie thought for the third time, hands pressed firmly over her breasts, how could she be standing here with her pink satin lingerie on show to the world? All she'd wanted was a garter belt and a pair of stockings. Now she was the star attraction of an unscheduled striptease.

"...now, if you'll just walk this way," Jean was saying. The older woman led her through the growing throng, directing her attention to the three-way with a light pat to the bottom. Angie's eyes widened in surprise; for a moment she forgot the leering mob around her.

*Oh.*

The girl in the mirror was quite beautiful.

Large blue eyes lent her an innocent, child-like appearance, framed by a sweep of shining blond hair. She stood frozen in the glass, her nubile figure on full exhibition. Her bra and panties were glaringly pink against her pale flesh, her legs impossibly long and slim in their gauzy black stockings.

The Fever was back, coursing through her system with a vengeance. Her breathing had shallowed; she felt delirious, faint, light-headed. She had literally dreamt of this for years, but never imagined it would be so...

Angie felt the saleswoman's fingers on her bare shoulder.

"All right – take a few steps around the showroom," Jean said, standing to one side, "let's see how you look."

"What?" Angie started, putting a hand to her mouth, "No, no ... I couldn't..."

"Oh, of *course* you can," Jean retorted with a dismissive laugh, "you need to move around to make sure the outfit fits properly."

"But..."

"You don't want any nips and tucks as you walk down the street," Jean smiled, then cast a twinkling eye towards the milling crowd, "anyway, I think you owe them a little *favor* after keeping them in suspense for so long."

Angie glanced around once more. The store was crammed to capacity now. The clientele appeared to be composed almost exclusively of young males – odd, considering it was a women's boutique – each of whom regarded her with expressions of avid fascination. They'd been waiting here at least fifteen minutes, and were determined to get their money's worth, so to speak.

*What am I going to do now?* Angie asked herself. There was no escape, no way to avoid her obligations. Jean was right, she'd already revealed her bra and panties, now she had to model her suspender stockings. There was simply no alternative. Lowering her face to conceal a naughty grin, Angie sniggled her assent.

"All right. I'll do it."

A wave of approval swept through the crowd as Angie stepped forward.

## PART SIX: PROPOSITIONS

*Later:*

"Are you all right? You're practically trembling from head to toe."

Jean handed Angie a long, cold draught of *medoc*. She was sitting out in the staff room with a diaphanous pink negligee drawn about her shoulders in a kind of naïve modesty. She accepted the drink gratefully, knocking it back in a single shot.

"I'm ... OK," Angie stammered, cold flushes swirling through her tummy. It was the Fever, raging like an uncontrolled bushfire. Now that the adrenaline rush had passed, she was ready to collapse.

"You did very well out there," Jean remarked, absently lacing up the girl's negligee, "did you hear all the applause? Most of them thought you were a professional model."

"I'm not. I've never done anything like this before."

"Really? You seemed so composed out in the showroom, right up until the very end. Have you thought about applying to an agency?"

"No," Angie replied demurely, "I've always been too...*shy*."

They looked at each other for a few seconds, quietly bonding in their mutual silence.

"I just realized..." the older woman began, "after all that, I don't even know your name."

"It's Angie. Angie Hastings." She neglected to mention she'd been born male, had cross-dressed since the age of five and changed her name by deed poll only a few months before.

"You local to the area?"



"Yeah, kind of." She had a small studio apartment in Ascott Valley, over on the north side of town.

"What do you do for a living?"

"Student at Chamberlain Uni. Design major."

"And you've never done any modeling work before? Honestly?"

"No. Never." Not in *public*, anyway.

Another lengthy pause.

"You know, I haven't seen the store this *full* in years," Jean mused thoughtfully, her eyes roaming up and down Angie's trim silhouette. She'd rarely seen a girl with such exquisite proportions...and that was frankly amazing, considering how many fittings she'd done over the past fifteen years.

Out in the display center, the crowd was chanting for an encore. More importantly, cash registers were buzzing in unison. The showroom was a hive of activity; shop assistants scrambled from booth to booth as stock practically flew off the shelves. Jean would have bet her eye teeth that suspender stockings had just come back into style. The implications were obvious, visions of dollar signs danced through her head.

Jean leaned in closer, lowering her voice to a rather conspiratorial level.

"Angie...I have a *proposition* for you..."

The two women spoke in hushed tones, and a deal was struck.

## EPILOGUE

...and *that* was how Angela Hastings of Ascott Valley became a lingerie model in her eighteenth year.

Naturally, there was some resistance to the idea of a respectable business establishment running what amounted to a weekly burlesque show – the *Christian Citizens' Monitor* objected most strenuously – but such protests were immediately dismissed as puritanical zealotry. There was no ordinance against modeling underwear in a private venue, and the majority of people viewed it as good, clean fun.

Jean scheduled the events for Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings (an arrangement tailored to Angie's university timetable), frequently inviting the local press to cover the latest trends in 'undercover' fashions. The free publicity drew increasingly larger numbers, sending profits through the roof.

Within six months, the store was expanded to accommodate the influx of visitors, anxious to get a glimpse of the stunning blond teenager all the papers were talking about (rumor had it that Angie would occasionally drop into the boutique on the way home from classes, casually modeling her undies for anyone fortunate enough to be on the premises. These impromptu stripteases added an element of suspense to the proceedings).

As the weekly performances gained popularity, Jean laid down a strict regimen for Angie to follow. In spite of her matronly persona, Jeanette McArthur had the instincts of a *shark* when it came to financial matters. Strong-willed, self-disciplined and uncompromising, she was determined to use Angie's talents to her full advantage.

Each performance was rigorously mapped out in advance, right down to the choice of

underwear. Angie would arrive at least an hour in advance, at which point she'd be stripped to her panties and taken to the fitting salon to prepare for the next ordeal.

Once the make-up ceremonies had been concluded, her wardrobe would be chosen from the most recent inventory – bras, pants, torsolettes, bustiers and whatever else was in that month's catalogues. Naturally, she was required to wear suspenders, stockings and high-heels. These had become her trademark in the public consciousness.

Finally, Angie was zipped into a dress (usually an elegant cocktail gown or a tight-fitting mini, depending on the season) and sent out to the Showroom, where she would assist the staff and welcome customers at the door. It was important she be seen fully-clothed beforehand; Jean believed it made for a more thrilling entrance later on.

Once the crowd assembled, Angie would disappear into the fitting salon while everyone settled down to enjoy the show. There was always a large number of men seated in the audience, but Angie didn't mind; most were doddering old grandpas from the local retirement village (few of whom even recalled why they'd been brought here in the first place).

When Angie emerged from the salon, the atmosphere took on the tone of an old-fashioned cabaret. Louisiana horns played in the background, wolf-whistles and cat-calls shrilled about the room. It was a fun, light-hearted affair with lots of faux lechery from the male contingent. Reveling in the attention, Angie would strut around with her hands on hips, flaunting her knickers and blowing kisses to her "admirers."

There seemed to be no limit to their success. Five years into the decade, *Contessa Lingerie* was Chamberlain's most prestigious retailer of women's undergarments and Jean McArthur had been promoted to regional manager of the ever-expanding chain. Although she didn't retire on her commissions, she became one of the city's wealthier entrepreneurs, eventually running for president of the Chamberlain Business Consortium.

By contrast, Angie Hastings kept a somewhat lower profile than one *might* have expected, given her pre-eminent position on page three of *PICZ Magazine*. It wasn't through lack of opportunity: she'd had numerous offers from casting agencies and fashion companies – all of which she politely declined in favour of her regular stints at *Contessa's*. As she frequently explained, she'd only taken up modeling to pay her tuition fees, and had set her sights on graphic design years ago.

That was the *official* cover story, anyway. The truth was somewhat more complicated. Angie had no desire to be hounded by the paparazzi. Like all tranzies, she was hardwired for privacy. She understood from the very beginning that a small town university student would attract comparatively little attention if she kept her head down. A recognized celebrity, on the other hand, would be subjected to the worst kind of scrutiny conceivable. As every facet of her life was probed and dissected, her true identity would be dragged into the light, her darkest secrets revealed. And *that* would be an unqualified disaster.

As mentioned above, these were dangerous times for those who those who wavered on the edge of acceptability, and while Angie *might* be considered naïve, she could never be described as a fool.

Once her studies were concluded, Angie allowed herself to fade from the public eye, choosing the more prosaic career of "visual communications" as it was termed back in the day. Art had always been her first love, and it was more than enough to sustain her through the lean

times ahead.

So... did anyone ever guess that Chamberlain's premier Lingerie Queen had actually been born a *boy*?

Well, *that* - as they say in the classics - is a story for *another* time.

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## *Palais Royale*

Tracy Lane, 2002

### 1.

Standing in a pool of moody backstage lighting, Charise Granger drew her t-shirt slowly over her head, revealing a shining white satin bra, the kind with detachable straps and tiny lace trimmings around the cups. She paused a moment to shake out her strawberry blond hair and moisten her full, crimson lips, stealing a glance at the mirror. A tall, delicately built young woman with alabaster flesh and liquid blue eyes looked back.

Hanging her t-shirt over a nearby chair, Charise began to unbuckle the belt of her stone wash jeans, listening to the restless murmur of the Friday night crowd. The *Palais Royale* was perhaps the most popular adult venue in the Red Zone; the main bar would be swarming with nightlife by ten. In less than fifteen minutes, the lingerie parade would begin, and Charise would be sent out along the catwalk wearing little more than a whisper and a promise.

She was almost feverish with anticipation.

Charise had been working at the *Palais* for just over two months now, and still felt a little nervous before every show. Barely eighteen, she had little experience modeling outside a couple of down-home mannequin parades and amateur reviews (and certainly not in her bra and panties; such activities had been confined largely to her bedroom). By contrast, the *Palais* was a place of satin radiance and neon ecstasy. Stepping onstage in her impossibly tall stilettos, she felt a wonderful shiver of embarrassment fill her trim, firm tummy. She was young, she was beautiful, and the questionable nature of the 'entertainment' made her delirious with excitement.

There was, of course, another reason for her mounting anxiety.

Adjusting a wayward bra-strap, she began unbuttoning her jeans, progressively revealing the lacy tops of her high-cut white briefs. In a matter of minutes, every inch of those skin-tight lycra panties would be visible to every person in the bar. She could feel a subtle flush rising to her cheeks, tinting her flesh with a warm, carnation glow.

*What am I doing here?* she thought, working the levis slowly over her hips, enjoying the gently sinuous movement of denim down her thighs.

Peeling her jeans down to the floor, she stepped lightly out of them, brushing her hair back from her face. Her snowy white panties shimmered with a satiny radiance as she walked barefoot across to the clothing rack. Gleaming like quicksilver, they seemed to have been airbrushed onto her body, filming her hips like a second skin.

Her fingers played with the elegant French lace trim encircling the waistband; touching that sheer strip of floral gossamer made her ache with longing. She wanted to be out on stage as soon as possible, her long, slender legs absolutely bare, her lingerie on display to half the town.

*What am I doing here?* Charise asked herself again, running her hands down the length of her torso. How could she explain this sultry, breathless desire to place her underpants on full inspection for a room full of faceless strangers? She might have spent years wading through the mountain of literature devoted to her unique psychology (indeed, she'd started already), but her reasons were deceptively simple in the final analysis:

Parading her underthings made her feel beautiful.

Voguing across the catwalk in her scanties was an experience both thrilling and sensual; her state of dishabille always made her feel gloriously feminine. Having recently turned eighteen, she loved wearing pretty lingerie, and the opportunity to reveal her flimsies beyond her bedroom rarely presented itself under normal circumstances. The panty shows appealed to her sense of fun; like all teenaged girls, Charise enjoyed testing the limits.

Charise was young and pretty and she enjoyed parading around in her bra and panties. It was as simple as that. True, the money was good, but it wasn't her primary motivation for working at the *Palais*; Charise would have been perfectly willing to do it for free. She wasn't even particularly concerned about the style of lingerie she wore, just so long as it made her feel leggy and lovely and *unforgivably* naughty.

In short, wearing lingerie made her feel like a *girl*.

## 2.

She'd been amazingly lucky.

Few would have described it as luck, but it had been luck nonetheless, a type of luck relevant only to Charise herself, fortune of a magnitude that only *she* could truly appreciate. How many of her kind were born with a face which spanned the gulf between the male and the female so perfectly? A body so completely androgynous, poised at the very cusp of human gender, needing only the barest hormonal nudge towards the feminine?

*Not many*, she'd come to realize since she'd left home twenty-eight months before. Her transition had been crystal smooth, the drift of a feather through some flawlessly blue sky. She'd begun her metamorphosis shortly after her eighth birthday, back when *She* had been a *He*.

*A boy.*

A boy with tiny wrists and huge misty eyes and a voice like fine autumn rain. Missing his cue and entering the stage too late for puberty, he was constantly mistaken for a girl, a delicate, ivory tomboy attempting to hide her femininity behind short hair and Nike runners and those ungainly black duffle coats so popular a few years ago.

She'd known, even then. In a way, she'd always known; her earliest childhood memories involved aprons and lace and bright yellow ribbons; the innocent, dawning fantasies of a transgendered child. The knowledge had been abstract and hazy, like the blurring lens of a unfocused camera, but the understanding had been there all along. Over the years, it had grown into a certainty, a conviction profound enough to bring about the reconstruction her body, her identity and ultimately, her entire being.

All set in motion by a single sentence, uttered at the age of five:  
*I'm really a girl.*

### 3.

Backstage traffic was relatively heavy Friday nights; waiters, barhands and security staff passed through the changing area in an endless stream. Make up, dressing tables and clothing racks had been provided for the girls, but their employers saw no need for privacy. Girls who modeled their underpants for a living had no use for dressing rooms, as far as the management was concerned.

Charise glanced self-consciously around the changing area. Beautiful young girls were disrobing all around her, slipping out of blouses, stepping out of skirts and frocks. Not a single one over the age of nineteen, they walked about in their prettiest underwear carefully oblivious of the activity around them.

She often wondered about the other girls; did they feel that indescribable silken thrill that preceded clipping a suspender belt around a tiny waist? Did they enjoy the same moist, gasping fantasies she experienced whenever she slipped a wisp of black denier along her thigh? Charise believed there was nothing more sensual than stepping into a pair of *Doir* stockings, feeling the silk whisper along her cool, marble-smooth skin.

She hung her jeans over a hanger on the clothing rack, then wandered back to her table to check her costume (such as it was) for the evening. The show was about to begin; all around the changing area, the other girls were adding last minute touches to their make-up; fourteen aching pretty young women stripped to their knickers, bending over their mirrors and displaying their lush, ripe bottoms to the world.

Charise joined them, pausing to step into her glistening black stilettos. Heels were absolutely essential to the job. No girl was permitted to set foot on stage without them. High heels gave her legs that sexy, tapering appearance the patrons admired so much. She turned her back to one of the full-length mirrors, appraising her curvaceous figure, eyes narrowed self-critically.

She stood with her hands on hips, looking back over her shoulder, shifting her weight from foot to foot. The stilettos were the only outerwear she would retain during the performance; ironic that they could add so much to her innate feminine sensuality.

The parade catered to a diverse range of tastes; in the first ten minutes of the performance, the audience would be treated to expensive Italian corsetry, high-class Victoria's Secrets, outrageously frilly *petite culottes* a la Francais; even good old-fashioned Playtex cross-your-hearts. And that was just the warmup.

Charise's personal favorite was the girl-next-door sequence of the program, with its adorable selection of full-briefs, control panties and plain, pretty lycra: the comfortable, sensible underthings that women wore in their everyday lives. She loved walking onstage flashing her underwires and cottontails; the very same undies she might have worn while shopping out at Chamberlain Plaza. She couldn't explain it; maybe she just felt more accessible striding the catwalk in her nylon hipsters.

Clicking back to her table, Charise gave her face a final check, tinting her cheeks with a soft carnation glow. She'd need a dab of powder before she stepped out into the spotlights. Just

enough to take the edge off her breathless, rosy blush. Like most of the girls here, Charise favoured the 'natural' look. Not that she needed too much sugar-frosting at the best of times; her complexion was as close to perfection as her unique biology could provide.

#### 4.

Charise just had finished her final preparations when the stage assistant bustled into the dressing alcove, calling for the girls' attention.

"All right ladies, time to go," he babbled in his thick Gaelic brogue, "everybody take your places please."

A burst of excited chatter followed this announcement as the girls deserted their dressing tables and flocked towards The Grande Stage. The atmosphere was tense with expectation. Tonight, they'd be doing things differently; tonight was going to be *special*.

The management had decided to spice up the festivities with a change to their normal routine. Each girl would enter the stage fully dressed and exit in *nothing* but her high-heels and stilettos. It would still be a lingerie parade, complete with a trip down the runway into the audience, but their skimpy little 'underwears' would come off over the course of the entire evening. It would be an extra treat for the audience, an unexpected thrill for the male contingent.

Charise slipped quietly into the leggy throng, heart slamming into over-drive. Her body seemed to tingle with a kind of frigid heat, the way it always did before the show began.

Out in the auditorium, ambient noise gave way to rising cheers of the crowd. Glaring spotlights dazzled her eyes, and Charise had to bite her lip to reign in her excitement. In a matter of minutes, she would be standing on open display with only a flimsy pair of satin *knickers* to hide behind.

#### 5.

Contrary to popular belief, a classic *Spectacle Érotique* requires far more than walking around half-naked. There were certain protocols to follow, procedures to be observed. Fortunately, Charise had committed all of them to memory.

First, the girls would line up on the stage, resplendent in their svelt black minnies, sheer midnight stockings and six-inch stilettos. With their hair professionally styled, they'd be the very definition of elegance, as befitted the occasion.

Of course, looking beautiful was only half the job. The rest involved taking their clothes off, one piece at a time. And *that* was nowhere as easy as it first appeared.

At the beginning of the set, each of the girls had to walk down the catwalk, where they would shed all of their "inhibitions:" first an earring, then a broach, then a deliciously long black glove. Next, they'd discard their outer clothing, placing their tantalizing figures on public display. Only this time, they'd be taking it one step further: *everything* had to go: corsets, suspenders and bustiers would be cast aside with barely a second glance. By the end of the session, they'd be left standing in nothing but their high-cut lace panties.

In short, the whole affair was a thinly-veiled excuse to strip a group of pretty young girls down to their bare essentials. Once the bras came off and the breasts were bared, they would

gather up their clothes and tip-toe backstage to prepare for the second set, where the entire process would begin all over again.

Standing backstage amongst her twittering co-workers, Charise felt her pulse quicken with a mixture of outrage and expectation. It was the most gratuitous exploitation she could imagine.

And she could *hardly wait* to get started.

## 6.

*OK, Charise – you're up next.*

Charise felt a light hand slap her bottom. A few of the other girls giggled as she stepped forward. It was mild, good-natured laughter; most of them knew how embarrassing she found these public spectacles. The dice had been cast, the moment was nigh. *Too late to back out now.*

The laughter was drowned out by a welter of applause as she strutted onto the catwalk. A stunning young girl with porcelain skin and blue eyes, Charise was literal show stopper.

Walking with a graceful, feline stride, her stilettos clocked loudly on the polished wooden floor boards. There was an art to walking in high heels, an art very few women ever truly mastered. Charise was one of the very few.

Reaching back over her shoulders to loosen her zip, she arched her spine and thrust her belly gently forward. The applause began to escalate as she drew the zipper slowly down the length of her back: they'd been waiting to see this all night.

And this was only the *first step*. Before the night was over, she would be almost completely naked, her bra, suspenders and stockings strewn in casual disarray around the floor.

Flashing the audience a brilliant smile, Charise slipped the dress off her shoulders, lowering the hem slowly to her waist. The view was literally breathtaking. The shiny satin brassiere adhered to her body by some force unknown to modern science; her breasts were absolutely magnificent, barely constrained by the cups.

Charise continued to lower the mini, exposing more of her pristine white underwear. Blushing from toe to hairline, she shimmied the tight material over her wide, curvaceous hips. Her face approximated the hue of an autumn sunset. She was struggling with sheer, helpless embarrassment. She bit her lip to hold back the giggles, knowing that once she began, she'd never be able to stop.

Stepping carefully out of the dress, she straightened up to allow everyone a heart-stopping eyeful of her lingerie. She'd chosen to wear a virginal white ensemble beneath the black mini: it was her prettiest outfit, and she'd known it would be an added surprise for the crowd. Her high-cut g-string panties shimmered like quicksilver against her lightly tanned flesh. They glimmered beneath the bar's glaring fluorescents; soft blue shadows flowed across the glistening material whenever she moved her hips.

The garter-belt and stockings had been inevitable: she'd been given no choice in the matter. The *Palais* had a long association with exotic corsetry. Literally every show featured dozens of college girls in suspender stockings, proudly displaying their long, tapering legs for the patrons. It was practically law, all of them were required to wear frilly little garter belts beneath their clothing. No panty hose, NO thigh-socks, and definitely NO leg-warmers. Garters were an absolutely necessity, no exceptions to the rule. Beautiful women should *always* wear exciting

lingerie, and suspenders added that touch of sophistication that the *Palais'* crowd would be expecting.

This evening, Charise had selected an intricately designed bridal number; a magical wisp of lycra, lace and 'liquid' satin. It somehow appeared both decadent and demure, the kind of thing worn by a virgin on her wedding night. Long, white, adjustable garters were clearly visible below her underpants, clipped up to sheer midnight stockings at mid-thigh. Feeling indescribably naughty, she reached down to tug gently at one of the reinforced black tops. The cheering escalated to a roar. There were few things as truly captivating as the sight of a pretty girl adjusting her hosiery.

Charise straightened up, planting a hand on her hip and shifting her weight to her left heel. As a final treat for her howling admirers, Charise put a hand to the back of her neck, removing a clasp and letting out her glorious mass of platinum hair. A blond avalanche swept down her shoulders; the luxurious, wavy tresses trailing to her hips.

Flash bulbs exploded all around her as the Paparazzi seized the moment (Charise was almost caught by surprise; local papers and "lad's" magazines frequently traded photoshoots for free advertising. This time next week, her panty-clad figure would be gracing the pages of *PICS Magazine* and *Chamberlain View*).

Raising her right hand to her rosebud mouth, Charise saluted the crowd with a 1940s air-kiss, then turned on her left heel and walked further down the runway, her luscious young bottom turning cute little circles in its glistening satin sheath. Her suspenders stretched and shortened along her thighs, matching tempo with each clicking step.

## 7.

Charise suppressed an almost irresistible impulse to cover her cleavage. In a few moments, she would discard her flimsy white suspender belt. The mounting tension was all but excruciating (paradoxically, she was no stranger to this kind of dishabille; she'd modeled *swimwear* several times over past year or so. Of course, there was a vast difference between a two-piece bikini and a matching set of intimates! OMG this was *so* embarrassing).

Standing before the mob in her glimmering white underwear, Charise felt small and naked and unspeakably feminine. Her tummy seemed to be swarming with tiny, tickling fingers; the audience fell silent as she bent from the hips and unclipped her suspenders one teasing clasp at a time.

Her heart skipped a beat as she felt the hooks give at the back of her garter belt, releasing her waist from its silken restraints. Moistening her lips with a flickering pink tongue, Charise arched her back and removed the belt with sensitive, precise fingers. Palming elastic with her left hand, she slipped the garment off her body in a single deft movement. There was not an instant's hesitation in the manoeuvre; she'd had months of practice to hone her technique. Slinging the garter belt over her shoulder with saucy precision, she turned back down the catwalk as the crowd roared their appreciation.

## 8.



Charise posed on the runway with her cleavage thrust into the air. An odd, nervous tension fell over her as she waited her turn. Technicolor visions danced gaily through her pretty head; closing her eyes, she could see herself modelling her bare panties before the entire bar-room. The moment she'd dreaded so much was rapidly approaching, it was almost time to fulfill her exhibitionistic responsibilities. She was practically *trembling* with anticipation.

She'd been given no choice in the matter; the baring of the breasts was an absolute necessity. Refusal was out of the question: *nobody* argued with the *Palais'* management. It was grossly unfair of course, but the administration had been most specific on this issue.

Sweeping her gaze across the bar, Charise walked sleekly down the middle of the runway. She reached back and unhooked her satiny white underwire, allowing the shoulder-straps to glide loosely off her shoulders. There was always an instant of speechless, shivering tension whenever she took off her bra in public. She was a large, busty girl possessing a Jane Mansfield figure - '*A regular D-Cup Delight*' was how the local papers often described her. Her lush, enormous breasts bounced and lolled as she removed the tight, satiny constraints.

Charise was almost dizzy with arousal. She felt utterly vulnerable, completely subject to the voyeuristic whims of the wildly cheering audience. Her first impulse was to place her fingertips over the dark, sensitive tips of her nipples, but she paused in the act, allowing the crowd a generous view of her assets. Her hands twitched nervously as she tried to decide where to place them. She was blushing all the way to her hairline by now.

A storm of approval burst forth from the audience, literally shaking the rafters in their enthusiasm. Whistles and catcalls reverberated across the room; glasses clattered on table tops as heavy bootheels stomped the polished floorboards.

Tingling in near-ecstasy, Charise finally covered her hard, pointed nipples, teasing them gently between her splayed fingers. A dozen flash bulbs flared simultaneously; the crowd gaped in wordless appreciation.

If there was one thing more captivating than a beautiful teenaged girl adjusting her hosiery, it was the sight of one trying to hide her breasts from public exposure – and not *quite* succeeding.

With that, the *opening* session was brought to a close. Two more were scheduled over the next four hours, and Charise wondered if she would survive the ongoing humiliation.

## 9.

If the evening's revenues were anything to go by, the lingerie show had been an overwhelming success. The administration had been pleased enough with the final earnings to hand out a healthy fifty pound bonus with the standard paypacket. Like all of the *Palais'* modeling staff, Charise was paid in cash, allowing the Club to avoid certain financial inconveniences (such as health care and pension plans). She'd been getting changed backstage when one of the barhands came round with the money, clearly dumbstruck by the presence of all those bras, panties and smooth, naked tummies. Charise concealed her share in the depths of her shoulderbag, then slipped back into her jeans and t-shirt. She always said she would have stripped for free, but there was no denying the satisfaction of having a little extra to burn. With tips from the clientele, she might rake in close to £500 this weekend.

Charise gave her hair a quick brush then gathered up her belongings. It was long past midnight, and her friends were beginning to drift off in murmuring groups. Two of them offered her a lift home, but she politely declined, saying she could take a taxi.

*Really? It'll be no trouble, Charise.*

*No, I'll be fine, thanks. I live in the opposite direction, anyway.*

It wasn't an outright deception. She'd *always* lived in the opposite direction, as long as she could remember. That was one of the downsides to being a tranzie. She could walk the same paths chosen by many genetic girls, but never take a parallel course. Truth be told, she couldn't afford to.

The *Palais* wasn't a cheap, backstreet clip joint. It was a five-star venue with a reputation to uphold. She'd lose her job if her secret was discovered. The repercussions would be catastrophic, she could easily find herself blacklisted by every club in the Red Zone.

Charise had no intention of ever letting that happen. This job was the fulfillment of all her deepest fantasies.

She'd been all of seven years old the first time she'd performed a striptease before her bedroom mirror. Some might reason this was nothing unusual, most little girls stripped in the mirror at one point or another. The problem was, of course, that Charise had been a *boy* at the time. An extremely pretty one, no argument there, but a boy nonetheless. And the world wasn't particularly kind to children of any description, especially those who yearned for something totally unacceptable.

No matter, that was the past long buried if not forgotten. She'd weathered the storms of anger and prejudice for close on thirteen years, finally coming to accept *herself*, which was the only thing that truly mattered. It was probably why she was able to pass so well. In the two months she'd worked at the *Palais*, nobody had suspected she was anything other than biologically female, not even the girls who shared her dressing table. That was something of a miracle, considering how often she'd stood nude amidst the naked, so to speak.

Charise hoisted her shoulder-bag and started towards the exit. The general hubbub was dying down as the girls left the alcove, but the main topic of conversation hung stubbornly in the air.

Apparently, the management had been impressed by audience's reaction to this evening's "strip parade" – impressed enough to make it a regular event, as a matter of fact. The rumor mill was already operating at full capacity: if the punters had their way, the girls might be required to go topless from next week on.

What would they demand next?

Pole sliding?

Lap dancing?

*Nude* shows?

That might conceivably present a few problems...*if* she hadn't taken care of that little matter nearly a year ago. The expedition had been a costly and dangerous venture. She'd burnt through most of her savings during that covert vacation in the tropics, seeking out an unnamable specialist said to haunt the fleshpots of South East Asia. Fortunately, her instincts had proven accurate once more. The operation had been a success, the final results virtually seamless. Nobody outside of the medical profession could have seen the difference. To all intents and purposes, Charise Grainger *was* female.

## 10.

She exited the building via one of the staff entrances, then made her way round to Royal Avenue to hail a cab. A faint plume of mist curled from her lips, the air outside was cooler than she recalled. She glanced up and down the road, wishing she'd brought a sweater. It was nearly three AM, the street all but deserted. Above and behind her, the *Palais's* neon signs strobed away in silence. The music had ended hours ago, leaving the Club empty and spectral the pre-dawn gloom.

*What am I doing here?* Charise asked herself for the thousandth time. Why had she run away from her life back in Ridgewick, severing all of her closest ties with barely a backward glance? Over the past few months, she'd lived out her wildest fantasies, but had also paid a tremendous price to satisfy her desires. Her parents had become remote, distant strangers. Her mother refused to even take her calls. Had it been worthwhile? All the sacrifice, all the pain, all the loss?

Sometimes - just sometimes - she thought *yes*.

Lights were approaching from east. Charise raised a hand to signal the driver, then stood by patiently as the taxi pulled over beside her. Charise opened the rear passenger door, settling into the back seat with a weary sigh. Felt like she'd been on her feet since last Thursday.

"So, where you going then, luv?" The cabbie asked. He was a large, stocky man with twinkling eyes and pink, jovial features; the kind of face Charise associated with elderly, good-natured tradesmen.

"Lamington Terrace, please," She replied, making herself more comfortable.

"That over by Coronation Drive?"

"Yes, that's the one."

"All right, then." Blinkers flashing through the fog, the taxi pulled away from the curb, gradually accelerating along Royal Avenue. The lights of the *Palais* faded behind them.

"So – you work at that club?" the driver enquired, glancing in the rear view.

"Yes, I do."

"Oh?" the old man raised his eyebrows somewhat humorously, "and what do you do there?"

Charise granted him a small but *extremely* cheeky smile.

"Walk around in my bra and panties."

The Cabbie considered this answer thoughtfully, then replied, "Sounds like my Missus in summer. Don't suppose they have any vacancies?"

Charise laughed, feeling the pressures and frustrations of the previous night's escapades draining out of her. The cabbie joined in, chuckling under his breath as he switched gears.

The taxi turned left at Crown and vanished into the chill morning air.

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## *Carmine Nights*

Transfemme, 2002

## 1.

Tessa Greenhart unbuttoned her cotton blouse, her face flushed with a heady cocktail of embarrassment and excitement. The dressing room was literally bustling with movement. Neon-lipped models stepped gracefully through clouds of make-up and perfume, assistants rushed costumes from rack to shoulder, while the floor manager waded through the chaos barking orders like a drill-sergeant. Tessa smiled to herself, breathing in the rich scent of Red Door and adrenalin.

Narrowly avoiding a gaggle of dressmakers making for the door, Tessa walked across the room blouse in hand, looking around for the clothing rack. The rest of the cast had already been zipped into their outfits – mainly miniskirts, camisoles and designer jeans – ready for the first take. Filming was about to begin; she had to get into costume as well; although this would involve dressing down rather than dressing up.

They were making a television commercial for Carmine Nights Lipstick, a relatively upmarket cosmetic with a racy girlfist image. CNL had pulled out all the stops with this advertisement, aiming at a young professional female demographic. Glancing through the doorway, Tessa could see the technical crew running last minute checks over the video equipment. The set was a fluorescent retro seventies mock-up, soft edges and liquid day-glo colours contrived to suggest a large group house in the burbs. Seemingly imbued with a life of its own, it buzzed with a glaring neon radiance.

She hung the blouse over a nearby chair, almost delirious with anticipation. Very soon, she'd be called out to present herself to the camera in her underwear; a girl of barely eighteen with flowing platinum blond hair and liquid blue eyes so deep you could drown in them. Undoing her tiny black mini, she slid the skirt over her slender, tanned thighs, then let it drop to the floor, forming a lycra pool at her feet.

Her high-cut lace panties were so sheer that they seemed to have been airbrushed onto her body; the tender hues of her flawless, ivory flesh were plainly visible through the gossamer fabric. She suppressed an urge to place a slim hand over her cleavage. This was her first time before the camera, the dressing room was full of strangers, and she felt agonizingly self-conscious.

Still, she had no reason to complain. A new life was opening for her. She was going to be a model. Maybe not a star like Elle or Claudia or Naomi (let's face it; Chamberlain Studios were hardly the *Pret a Porter*), but the thought of being on TV was thrilling nonetheless.

Besides, even if she never froze the traffic at Times Square, she would live out a fantasy she'd had since she'd been a little girl. She was utterly breathless, thinking on it now. Small local advertising companies notwithstanding, the commercial would be broadcast via ECN; the EastCoast Communications Network.

The thought was virtually intoxicating.

When she stepped in front of the video cameras, she'd be parading her underwear throughout the entire north eastern region. Which meant that literally millions of people were going to see her in absolutely *nothing* but her bra and panties.

Stepping through the human tide in her flimsy pink undies, Tessa glanced in the mirror,

checking her Alpine blond hair and adjusting an errant lock spiraling over her left cheek. She nodded, smiling faintly to herself: the illusion was perfect.

So perfect, in fact, that it was no longer an illusion.

## 2.

How long had she been a girl?

All her life.

How long had she *lived* as a girl?

Six years; since her eleventh birthday, in fact.

She'd always had a rather feminine appearance, a softness and a fluid grace which simply couldn't be hidden or disguised, regardless of what or society or genetics had to say on the matter.

Of course, image was nothing, as the soda commercials had told an entire generation of teenagers back in the nineties. Image alone hadn't made her a woman, nor had the gradual reshaping of her adolescent physique during more than half a decade of endocrine therapy. In the final analysis, such factors were largely irrelevant.

Tessa Greenhart had entered the world biologically male, an insignificant Y-chromosome carelessly tacked onto the end of her DNA, but events since that moment had confirmed that biology did not equal destiny; at least not for her. Tessa's body had been a template, a blank page on which sex and gender could be written. The essential truth had been inscribed on her flesh in chemical signifiers, (albeit *a posteriori*):

Quite simply, Tess had *always* been a girl.

## 3.

The commercial was based on the universal belief that pretty young girls inevitably fall out of their clothes as soon as they're left alone together. Tessa had loved the idea as soon as her agent had described it to her: five beautiful girls sharing a house in the suburbs, preparing for an evening out on the town. Running from shower to bedroom, borrowing hairdryers and stockings, swapping dresses hand to hand and making up in the mirror; the myriad little things women do before the big night out.

Towards the end, the girls are shown in their bedrooms, glossing their lips with Carmine Nights, while the stereo blares out the *GirlPower* jingle written especially for the advert. It was the only mention of the product; the rest of the commercial was made up of pretty girls decked out in stilettos and lycra slip-dresses as they hurried about brushing their hair and ransacking each others wardrobes.

Tessa had been snared instantly: the treatment was fun, the soundtrack boppy. It was exactly the kind of shoot she'd wanted to do since she started modeling and (best of all) the script required that she appear in her bra and pants. This had been the major drawcard, as far as Tessa had been concerned. She had to run through the house flaunting her dainties while the gyro-cam followed her from the bathroom to the stairway, and thence to her bedroom, where she'd be shown doing girly-things: blow drying her hair, dancing in the mirror and making up her lovely face – exactly what she did at home when she was planning a long evening's nightclubbing.

It was completely gratuitous, of course: there was absolutely no reason why she had to film the advertisement in her bare essentials; it was a lipstick commercial, not a lingerie parade. She could just as easily be shown glazing her lips fully clothed. Not every woman makes up in her underwear, regardless of what the majority of men would like to believe. But the undisguised *naughtiness* of the idea appealed to Tessa. It was as if the part had been written just for her.

#### 4.

It all had to do with *DDT*.

Her mother had explained it to her on several occasions during her frantically careening adolescence: she was the product of a global interaction of nature and science. Her immaculate femininity was a fragile arch spanning human biology and industrial technology, a bridge constructed before she was even born.

Her physical development had been influenced *in utero* by artificial hormones - synthetic oestrogens, the scientific journals had called them. Mainly insecticides, their chemistry mimicked the effects of natural female hormones when assimilated into the human reproductive system.

The United States (along with most of Europe and the Asia) had been literally inundated with these complex molecules since the middle of the twentieth century; researchers only noted their impact on the biosphere in the nineties, when ecologists began to notice declining male populations amongst certain environmentally sensitive species - mainly frogs and salamanders.

Of course, no one was too concerned over the disappearance of a few creepy crawlies at the bottom of the pond, and the effects of the synthetics had been largely ignored. At least until the fertility levels of the West had taken a sudden, and quite significant down turn. Then everybody had become concerned for the well-being of *all* kinds of creepy crawlies.

To say nothing of the rising numbers of sexually ambiguous children being born throughout the industrialized nations.

Of which Tessa had been one.

#### 5.

Walking to the doorway, Tessa looked out to the set once more. Lights were being dimmed and brightened, remotes tested for whitenoise. CNL had spent a small fortune on this production; no expense had been spared in terms of design, personnel, and hardware. They were even shooting a portion of the commercial on film, so as to capture the cinema crowd.

*Things look as busy out there as they do in here, she thought*, watching a tekkie running a white balance on one of the steadycams.

Feeling a light tap on her forearm, she turned and found herself eye to eye with the director's assistant. She was a small, bright-faced woman in a blue pants suit, carrying a clipboard full of names and publicity stills. Her name tag read Lois.

"You're ... *Tessa*?" she asked offhand, consulting the clipboard. Her voice was brisk but otherwise pleasant.

"Yes, Tessa Greenhart, Chamberlain Studios."

"And - *that's* what you're wearing for the shoot?" the woman enquired, indicating Tessa's flimsy lace scanties.

"Yes, it is," she replied, putting a hand to her mouth to hide her smile. She could feel a giggle fluttering around the top of her throat, trying to escape. "My agent told me to wear my prettiest undies today."

"Nice choice," Lois remarked, indulging her with an admiring glance, then snapped back to her more business-like protocol, "we're ready to start filming. You ready?"

Tessa took a deep breath. The others were already filing towards the door, gossiping like schoolgirls out on the town. Tall and leggy and beautiful, they had nothing to feel nervous about; *they* got to keep *their* clothes on.

*I wish*, Tessa thought, and the giggle finally escaped.

## 6.

Conceived in an environment literally swimming in synthetic oestrogens, Tessa had been unique, even amongst the thousands of children born into the twilight light zone between male and female at the end of the twentieth century. The reason had been deceptively simple: by the time she'd turned six, Tess had voiced her desire to be a girl. In effect, she wanted the right to choose her own gender. While Tessa's story hadn't made the front page of *Time*, it had caused a small hurricane of controversy amongst the pediatric specialists handling her case.

They'd wanted to flood her system with steroids before she entered puberty, adamant that this was the most logical course of treatment: he was a boy, he'd been born with a male organ (tiny though it was), biology dictated that he had follow his chromosomatic destiny. Tessa's wishes were, of course, completely irrelevant, *he* was a child, he had no idea what *he* wanted, and certainly, no concept of what was in *his* best interests.

This was precisely how they'd talked; emphasis on the masculine pronouns. They'd rambled on in this manner for some time, employing the authoritative, slightly patronizing tones that medical professionals retained for the ignorant: yes, his reproductive organs were completely atrophied: they'd never secrete the androgens he'd need to achieve manhood. But while he was incapable of producing his own testosterone, small daily dosages of the male hormone would ensure that he'd progress as God and nature intended.

He *had* to become a man.

Tessa's mother, Eva Greenhart, was a sole parent and liberal feminist from way back; she'd been thoroughly unconvinced by these arguments. She'd read enough constructionist theory to know that a child's gender was not automatically determined by her sex. Gender was simply the product of culture and socialization, not an immutable law of physics dictated by anatomy and chromosomes.

Besides, why was masculinity considered the only option in this (or any other) case? Was femininity so undesirable? If they could change Tess into a man by boosting *his* testosterone levels, couldn't they just as simply employ oestrogen to transform *her* into a woman?

The endocrinal team had found the suggestion laughable (if not down right criminal) in its *naïveté*: synthetic oestrogens were the cause of Tessa's condition; by what stretch of the imagination did she conclude that the female hormone could be used to treat the boy's

pathology? It's time you faced reality, Ms Greenhart: your son is suffering from an illness; his development has been arrested by foreign agents, his DNA damaged by toxic chemicals. From a medical perspective, he's no different from a victim of heavy metal poisoning.

Basking in the pompous, lilac glow of utter contempt, Eva listened in patient, nodding silence as they dictated her child's future, dismissing her (Tessa's) childish aspirations as totally unimportant. One of them had actually said that in his 'sexually unresolved' state, Tessa was no better than a neutered dog. Putting him on oestrogens would produce a sexual anomaly, a mutant neither male nor female, shunted to the periphery of 'normal' human society. Is that how you want your son to go through life? Are those the only choices you're willing to offer him:

*Eunuch or freak?*

And it had been this one statement, delivered in the offhand tones of complete insensitivity, which had made up Eva Greenhart's mind regarding Tessa's 'treatment'.

## 7.

Ten minutes later Tessa was standing on the set with her face flushed the colour of a ripe strawberry. The only girl in the cast to be stripped to her bra and panties, she felt wonderfully vulnerable - her tiny lace remnants covered so little that she felt almost completely naked. The other girls milled around in their minnies and high heels, listening to the director's opening spiel.

Exhibiting a subtle pink flush from ankle to hairline, she crossed her hands over her pink satin wonderbra in a vain attempt to hide her deep cleavage. It was an impulse she was totally incapable of resisting: the director, the floor manager and most of the technical crew were men. Worse still, the set didn't appear to be closed; people seemed to be wandering in all the time, and she had immediately become the focus of all the attention of the masculine quarter.

She was almost *swooning* with pleasure.

It was strange: she had dreamed of this moment for years; since early high school in fact, but now that she was actually facing a battery of video cameras with her underwear on full display, her embarrassment was almost as vast as her delight. She'd never imagined how much she could actually enjoy being a public spectacle.

Anticipation washed over her in a warm, pulsing cascade. Her tummy was tingling with suspense; anytime now, the cameras would start rolling (or blinking or whatever it was that videocams do) and she'd be told to take her position for the first take. She was being overwhelmed with feelings and sensations, almost all of them drawn directly from childhood experience. This was hardly surprising in itself; she'd been only twelve years old when she had discovered that delicious blend of joy and humiliation which accompanies public exposure.

It had taken place during her first year of junior high school; she'd been living as a girl for about twelve months. Tessa and her older sister Zenia been conscripted as flowergirls at their cousin's wedding, and her mother had taken them into Chamberlain for the fitting. They'd gone to a bridal store called Something Blue, where the attendants had made an enormous fuss over her, utterly captivated by her long blond curls and huge cloud-blue eyes.

Being only thirteen (and looking about ten) they hadn't bothered taking her into the fitting room; opting simply to undress her in the showroom right down to her underthings. She'd been too surprised to even protest her disrobing; within seconds, she had climbed out of her jeans and



t-shirt and was being led by the hand to the middle of the floor with her white cotton underpants on full display.

Tessa had been *completely* embarrassed: they were treating her like a little girl; standing her on a leather-bound footstool in her bare panties while they took her measurements. She was in high school now, almost a teenager; she didn't walk around in her undies like a six year old. Worse still, her sister wasn't made to bear her panties in public; Zenia got to have her fitting in private!

Strangely, she had experienced another feeling, hot and bright and skin-tight, a sense of pleasurable vulnerability she'd never known before. It was an emotion for which she had no word, something trembling and deep, poised halfway between bliss and ecstasy. She'd felt utterly and incomparably beautiful, like the princess in the fairy tale.

## 8.

The same feelings of exaltation and arousal coursed through Tessa's thighs and belly while she waited patiently for the filming to begin. She was having difficulty keeping still; she had no idea where to put her hands. Hiding her cleavage left her panties exposed; so much of her body was on exhibition.

She'd been standing on the set for nearly twenty minutes while the director held a confab with the assistant and the FM; her embarrassment and sense of dishabille increasing to an intolerable degree. She would have given virtually anything for a brief robe to cover her modesty, but her pleasure at being forced to wait in her bras and panties was undeniable. Her breasts were straining at their tight satin restraints, throbbing gently at their pert pinkish tips. She looked over to the director's committee. The creativity conference seemed to be going on forever! How long were they going to make her stand here like this, the only girl in the studio stripped to her knickers? It was so *unfair!!* Did they actually think she had nothing better to do than show off her underwear to a hundred perfect strangers? Tessa thought about the script (such as it was), trying to distract herself from her semi-nudity. She'd seen the storyboard that morning, so she had a good idea what she was expected to do. Her first scene is an extreme close-up of her face as she opens the bathroom door, her platinum blond hair moist and gleaming.

Grinning a naughty little-girl smile, she looks both ways to make sure no one is watching, then scampers along the passage way, tossing aside her towel to reveal her brassier and briefs. The camera then follows her on a hundred yard *flash* through the household. Darting into the living room where one of her roomies is ironing a blouse, she pauses to glance at herself in the mirror over the mantle-piece, before flitting out to the central hallway waving to her friend as she goes. Glancing at Tessa's panty-clad figure, the girl laughs and shakes her head.

Heading for the staircase, Tessa passes another one of her flatmates, this one holding an animated discussion on her cell phone, who gives her a friendly slap on the tushie as she rushes up the stairs, damp hair flying. Still grinning wide – but eager to hide her undies from public scrutiny – she turns right at the top, dashing through her door with a silvery laugh.

Her second scene, which appears later in the commercial, takes place in her bedroom. Dancing before her full-length mirror – brush in one hand, blow drier in the other – she allows the camera a generous view of her nubile young body: her lean, slender legs and shapely round bottom; her curvaceous hips; tiny, waspish waist and perfectly sculpted breasts.

Tessa imagined it would be the best scene of the commercial: a pretty teenaged girl bouncing around in a tight satin bra and pink, gossamer panties, her hair flailing around her broadly smiling face. The sequence ends with Tessa colouring her lips cadmium red with a stick of Carmine Nights, winking cheekily at the camera: *I knew you were there all along!!*

"Tessa?"

It was Lois, the director's assistant. Evidently, the creativity conference was finally over.

"Are you OK? You're looking a little flushed."

"Just a touch of backstage nerves," Tessa smiled, "this is my first time before a TV camera."

Lois patted her hand sympathetically.

"You'll be fine. Come on, the shoot's underway, and you're up first."

Butterflies began dancing in Tessa's tummy as she felt herself led by the hand across the set in her lingerie. Her cheeks flared like a pair of valentine roses, and her heart slammed into overdrive. The time had come: the lights overhead flooded the set with brilliance, cameras were trained and focused.

*It's happening*, Tessa thought breathlessly.

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## *A Fear of Falling*

(Renata Gayle)

A storm was coming.

Standing on the balcony, Renata watched the thunderheads cycling up from the east, rifting the evening sky with brilliant, twisting arcs. She hugged herself against the crosswinds, feeling the approaching gale whipping at her clothes. The air was charged with the electric tang of cold rain, she could taste it in the dark breath of the night.

Her hair flailed about her face in a tangled, blond cloud. At this elevation, the breeze became a freezing jetstream. Westside Tower was not the tallest building in Chamberlain, but the view was spectacular nonetheless. Lurid neon fire cascaded through the streets, fissures of light fractured the skyline almost as far as the eye could see.

Shivering with a melange of cold, fear and excitement, Renata placed a hand on the thick, steel tube of the safety rail, glancing tentatively over the edge. Her gaze plumbed the gulfs between the skyscrapers. She pushed back after a second's hesitation, her heart cantering in her ribcage. Too close, as always. Heights hadn't really bothered her since childhood, but she'd never completely conquered her fear of falling.

Closing her eyes, she could see herself tumbling though those endless, concrete depths, her sheer, satin skirt billowing around her tapering thighs. It was a remote and strangely sensual image. Renata frequently dreamed of falling, her clothes peeling away as she spiraled into some everlasting, moonlit darkness. She always woke up trembling like a child in an unfamiliar place, feeling both aroused and terrified; a sweet, moist heat glowing between her thighs.

Leaning hard against the freezing mistral, she looked back into her apartment.

A tall, slouching figure was framed in the doorway; a brooding, masculine silhouette in faded

black jeans and a creaking leather jacket. He was leaning nonchalantly against the wall, watching her with an expression of amused indulgence.

Jason Hirst was an ex-boyfriend and casual lover of five years acquaintance. Moody and restless and brutally attractive, he was an irresistible womanizer who inspired love and sorrow in equal degrees. The sort of infuriating, indomitable stallion a woman returned to long after the initial relationship was finished.

They'd had a string of on-again, off-again liaisons since her university years; brief, passionate sorties spanning the fleeting interludes between 'serious' partners. Renata thought of it as a way of immunizing herself against his overwhelming, charismatic sexuality. Like most men, Jason could be inexplicably cruel in his dealings with women - particularly those who cared for him the most.

Still, they'd made some progress over the past twelve months. He was spending more time with her nowadays, talking through the silent hours of the morning - something he rarely did with any girl outside the bedroom. He'd even been willing to admit that she was his closest (and only) female friend. Renata supposed that this was the highest compliment he could pay a woman; but she couldn't help reminding herself that friends don't normally sleep together.

Struggling to control the waves of tension flooding her system, Renata walked towards him, holding down her fluttering hemline - an oddly childlike gesture of modesty, considering the circumstances. It was one of those inexplicable quirks of her personality; she'd shared Jason's bed too many times to number, and yet his presence invariably left her feeling small and vulnerable - almost defenseless.

Precisely how she felt in her dream.

Renata had discussed her fantasy with him some weeks ago, exposing her soul during one of their periodic post-coital D&Ms. It had taken her two months of procrastination and half a bottle of Tequila to finally broach the subject with him. He'd listened with calm, meditative interest, absently stroking her breast while she'd confessed her desires, her voice faltering with anxious, guilty yearning. She'd talked, he'd listened, and a deal had been struck.

A wave of humid expectation began to surge over her.

Her fantasy would come true tonight.

Stepping out to meet her half-way, Jason moved with the easy, confident grace of a man who can have any woman he wants. Her sight swept down the long wedge of his figure, admiring his lean, sparse proportions. He had huge, clever hands that could encircle her tiny waist in a single span; rough, powerful fingers that could play a woman's body like some delicate musical instrument.

"Looks like a storm ..." she began, unable to think of anything else to say. She wavered in momentary indecision, wondering how she'd come to this point, why she was willing to take such a tremendous risk with a man she'd never entirely trusted. But then, wasn't that the reason why he was here? Wasn't that why she'd chosen him over all the others? She supposed it was: danger was an essential element of her fantasy.

Jason acknowledged her remark with a silent nod, his face running with shadows. His lips curved in a thin, sharp line. It was an easy, careless smile, one which always set her pulse racing like a jack hammer. She despised him sometimes, loathed his jagged beauty and casually disdainful manner.

His blunt, heavy fingertips touched her hand.

A rash of gooseflesh buzzed across her neck and shoulders.

"You *sure* about this?" he asked, speaking over the wind.

Renata hesitated, staring out over the chaotic skyline, feeling the earth rushing up at her with devastating, concrete force.

"Yes", she replied. Her head began to whirl; she suddenly felt small and weak and terribly vulnerable. I must be crazy, she thought. What in God's name was she doing here, tottering at the edge of the abyss while a force-five cyclone thundered down from the merciless heavens? She wet her lips with the tip of her tongue, contemplating the dizzying heights over which they were standing. A vague tremor rippled the length of her thighs.

She was frightened.

Very frightened.

"Jason ..."

"Yeah?"

"Don't let me fall. For God's sake, don't let me fall".

"I won't."

"Promise me."

"You won't fall, Babe"

"Promise me".

Jason brushed her small chin with the side of his hand. Renata flinched at his touch, her gaze darting up as if expecting a blow. He lowered his head towards hers, his eyes dark and serious. All the amusement left his voice as he put his mouth to her ear, speaking in carefully unambiguous tones.

"I promise I won't let you fall", he said, and kissed her on the right temple.

*Good*, she sighed, allowing herself to melt into his chest, taking comfort in his hard, dry warmth. His massive biceps surrounded her, encasing her in ancient black leather. The tantalizing scent of man seemed to smother her from every side; a potent cocktail of Jim Beam, Tuscany and rampant testosterone. Her mind was reeling with anticipation; a nameless, carnal exaltation flooded her consciousness.

Draping her arms around his neck, she glided her lips over his, leaving a moist red smear at the corner of his mouth. His stubble rasped her soft, ivory skin; she lolled her neck to reveal her creamy white throat. His hands slid roughly down her back, roaming the slim arabesque of her waist in search of her lush, ripe bottom. Jamming herself firmly against his muscular, rolling torso, she felt the jutting prong of his masculinity bulging through the black denim.

*Jason ...*

They kissed; her tongue delving into the back of his mouth, flitting and finicking like a tiny rose fish. Fluid, rushing delight deluged her nervous system. His hands roamed up her slender figure and closed around her face. His touch was urgent, insistent: Renata felt herself dissolving in a torrent of delicious lust.

She broke off, moaning in delight as his teeth descended into her cleavage. Her low-cut blouse suddenly felt too tight, too constrictive. The fabric was sheer, nebulous, but now it seemed as weighty as a straight-jacket. She had to free herself, denude her arms and stomach and thighs, force her bare flesh into the press-mould of his body.

Sensing her thoughts, Jason reached down and ripped the blouse from her lithe form; she heard stitches give as the material parted in his hands. An expensive piece; cost her close on a month's salary. It flitted along the balcony like a discarded sweet wrapper, vanishing into the shadows at the far end. She kissed him again, groaning impatiently as his fingers explored further south.

He located the zipper at the back of her skirt; a moment later, her legs were naked in the biting wind. He threw the gleaming satin wisp over his left shoulder; Renata watched it cartwheel over the safety rail and sail away into the night. The image from her dream returned to her: hurtling down from unthinkable heights –

Excitement blazed through her tummy like liquid silver.

She kicked off her high-heels and snaked one of her legs around his denimed shank. She kissed him again, darting her tongue and stinging his mouth with a series of loud, staccato smacks. His sandstone palms wandered across her frail, petite figure, bruising her ribs with a passionate violence. He was hurting her: Jason could be terribly rough in his loveplay. She bit his lip in swift, feline revenge.

He broke off with a low expletive, holding her by the shoulders.

"Want to get started?" he asked, inclining his head towards the railing.

"Yes..." she replied breathlessly, forcing herself not to look over the verge. Her face was damp; a fine, sprinkling rain was sweeping the Tower. The storm had arrived; the furious, dark eye of the night was revolving above them. The fever struck with catastrophic force, Renata was almost collapsing with desire.

Jason's fingers grooved her waist as he lifted her gingerly onto the railing, sitting her precariously on the brink. The safety rail was roughly ten centimetres in diameter. Set slightly higher than waist level, it ran the length of the balcony. The chrome felt cold and smooth under her bottom. Bending lightly from her left hip, Renata looked down over her shoulder.

A frenzied bolt of panic tore through her with the impact of a guillotine. She drove her teeth into Jason's shoulders, snared his hair with her fingers. Adrenalin blazed through her bloodstream; she was wavering at the edge of the chasm; her spine arching back over empty space.

"Jason, *JASON*", she shrieked, "*DON'T LET GO, DON'T LET GO -*"

Lightning flashed overhead, splitting the sky with brilliant, blinding forks. An immense, overpowering concussion followed immediately, shaking the building to its foundations. The deck quivered beneath them; Renata felt the balcony shift and rock, threatening to spill her into the dark. She wailed in absolute terror, her hair trailing out in golden streamers. Jason held her rigidly in position, his body an immovable, granite statue braced against the wind. Tendons bunched and clenched along his forearms like high-tension cables.

"Oh *God* I'm scared", she sobbed into his neck.

"You want to stop?" he asked, his tone astonishingly calm.

"Yes. No. I don't *know*, just hold me for Christ's sake".

He held her.

The storm continued its approach, circling the tower in a thundering, midnight vortex. Ragnarok descended over the Westside, thick obsidian clouds hurtled across the sky. She snuggled herself in the valley of his shoulder, willing her pulse to slow. Reaching down with a

shaking, white hand, she crept her fingers below the waistband of her underpants, furtively probing her femininity. She was wet - incredibly wet.

And she wanted to get naked.

"Hold me tight", she whispered. Slipping both hands behind her, she closed her eyes and leaned back in Jason's arms. She unclipped her brassiere with the ease of long practice, feeling the cups shift and loosen. The straps slid off her shoulders as she removed the lacy remnant, revealing her breasts to the frigid night air. Her nipples tingled and began to stiffen; she flicked one with a gloss-red finger tip, enjoying the way it puckered and popped.

The bra whipped about in her hand like a translucent white flag. Another costly piece: Italian lingerie was *so* expensive these days. Renata released it to the winds, dismissing it from her mind with a flick of her wrist. She looked up at Jason, squeezing her breasts together directly below his gaze. The tips were wide and dark and suffused with blood.

"Touch me", she said, "put your hands all over me".

Jason muttered his agreement, brushing aside her luxurious fall of golden blond hair. Her skin was pale and milky, as faultless as English marble. He nodded in frank admiration; she was an amazingly beautiful young woman. Lightening streaked across the city, illuminating a million points of frozen rain.

He turned his attention to the soft band of muscle immediately below her full, luscious breasts. Raising them slightly in palms, he began to stroke the secretive white flesh hidden beneath. Renata closed her eyes, stifling a high, gasping moan that ballooned up from the pit of her diaphragm. His caress was sweet, maddening torment.

"Uh. Uh uh - yes."

He took her nipples in his fingertips, carefully stretching the dark, sensitive skin. Renata trembled in breathless silence, her pulse racing in her throat while he slid an index finger around each aureole, slowly drawing out the points. She was almost swooning with pleasure; her belly swarmed with teasing, tickling little fingers. Her heart skipped a beat as he turned the engorged nips up with his thumbs, tweezing and tugging with a slow, gentle rhythm.

Rocking back over the precipice, Renata parted her lips in a long, wordless groan; a searing fireball of ecstatic pain exploded in the well of her belly. She lapsed into a timeless void; the fondling and stroking and teasing went on forever; her mind whirled in a thunderous limbo until she was certain she would implode. Her vision strobed and flared; a low, shuddering vibration rolled through her tummy.

"OOOHHHHHHH Jason ..." she whispered, locating the ghost of her voice. The rain gained intensity, showering her bare flesh with liquid needles. She hardly noticed.

"Jason" she whispered breathlessly.

"Yeah?"

"Take - take them off."

"What?"

"My *pants*. Take them off for me".

Pause.

"OK. Hold on, Babe".

Renata teetered back on the rail as Jason's fingers snagged the fragile lace trceries of her underpants. He began to work them carefully down her legs. His fingers moved with microscopic

precision, as if he was skinning a grape with a scalpel. Renata clung tenaciously to his jacket, her knuckles as white as ice-cubes, squirming her hips over that unthinkable drop.

*Should have done this before we started*, she thought ruefully, wriggling her derriere as Jason drew her panties over the dimpled bulges of her upper-thighs. They should have thought this out completely, anticipated all the problems, prepared for every eventuality. They hadn't, of course. They simply couldn't have treated this as an exercise in logistics; they would have seen the errant, suicidal insanity of the whole venture. And they never would have –

*!!!! Jason !!!!*

Lightning careened past them, close enough to raise the fuzz on Jason's wrists. The rail shook as the voice of the tempest thundered down, and the slick, gleaming leather was torn from her grasp.

*JAAAASON!!!!*

Renata felt herself falling backwards, her arms wheeling for balance in that awful, infinite nothingness. The balcony slipped away: shrieking in utter despair, she clawing hopelessly at the air. Thunder crashed, buildings lurched, the world upended itself. A thousand glittering stars flew by; her mouth stretched open in a rictus of terror:

*I'M FALLING OH GOD I'M FALLING*

Jason dived after her, somehow managing to lock his elbow around her tiny waist. The longest five seconds of Renata's life passed a year at a time, then the world began to right itself. Jason hauled her back from the verge, swearing under his breath, boots slipping on the concrete. He finally placed her back on the safety rail; his fingertips digging into her armpits. Her panties were dangling serenely from her left ankle. She leaned limply on his chest, her face a mask of blank, white shock.

"Mother of *God*," she whispered.

"Yeah", Jason agreed, placing his hands on her knees. He lulled her as he would an unhappy child, soothing her with gentle baby-kisses on her dripping forehead. The rain was sheeting down in vicious bursts, drenching them both. The deck was as slippery as an oil-slick underfoot, a sudden movement would pitch her over the wall again in an instant.

*I'm going to die out here*, she thought.

And incredibly, she didn't care. Thunder was roaring, the apocalypse was imminent, she was about to fall to her death, and she honestly didn't care.

"I'm all right now", she whispered, pecking his cheek.

Jason wasted no time.

Spreading her legs, he disclosed her cleft by gradual, teasing degrees. Her vagina was clenching with excitement, releasing a viscid spray over her smooth inner-thighs. Her clitoris throbbed eagerly; despite the fear and the dark and the driving, arctic wind, she'd *never* been more aroused in her life.

Jason released her knees, leaving the girl swaying on the tube. Renata watched in wordless fascination as he unbuttoned his Levis. It was a ritual she never missed; the unveiling of Jason's manhood was a spectacle of equestrian proportions. His colossal genitalia came into view, the head jutting from the foreskin like a plum. Her breath caught at the base of her throat; she wondered - as always - how she would ever accommodate that monolithic projectile.

All the weight seemed to drain from her body. She felt intolerably light, as if she were no

more than a mist fading before the dawn. Closing her eyes, she floated on a nimbus of erotic bliss. Jason was about to impale her on his long, goading shaft. She felt him stepping in towards her, wedging his slim hips between her thighs. His breathing was husky, shallow. He was impatient to sheath his sword in her damp, yielding passage.

But Renata wasn't ready.

*"Wait ..."*

She laid a restraining hand on his chest.

Jason waited, straining with concentration.

Renata hooked her knees around his waist, then reached down to part the complicated folds of her labia. She touched herself with a small, wet finger, using her natural lubricants to stimulate the nub. An earthquake began to build up within her, she could feel the seismic pressures trembling deep in her belly. She sighed in throaty exhilaration, turning her face to one side.

The hard, rounded knob of his penis prodded the hood of her clit, rubbing back and forth with a vague, undulating tempo. Renata shivered and lowered her hands to the rail. Jason shifted her hips into a new position, taking care not to dislodge her from her perch. His gigantic member was resting against her vestibule, poised to enter. Its proximity was torturous.

*"Jason"*, she murmured between slightly parted lips, *"Jason, yes, mm, yes..."* She rolled her head from side to side, reveling in this sensuous new cruelty. His voice touched her, little more than an arid whisper in her left ear:

"Now?"

*"Yessssss"*.

His erection sank into her, inch by monstrous inch. Renata's eyelids flickered open; her entire frame wrenched in gasping, round-mouthed shock.

*"Jassson -"*

Renata floundered as his shaft filled her tummy. Whipping her head from side to side, she beat her flanks with small, dense fists, shrieking with all the force her lungs could contain. Jason clasped her by the arms to prevent her plunging off the rail. It took all of his strength, but he had prepared for this moment. Renata invariably became superhumanly powerful in the last few seconds. Most women did, in his experience.

Lowering his head into the hurricane, Jason drove his penis into her body. She threw herself back, nearly tearing herself from his faltering grasp. Tensing his entire upper body, he renewed his hold and pushed into her over and over again, grunting with each probing thrust. Her vagina seemed to be sucking at his rod, drawing him in like a vertical, toothless mouth. Thick, translucent girl-juice jetted from her red-lipped opening in a geyser.

Renata's cries peeled out over the city as the first shattering orgasm blasted through her. She thrashed her head about from side to side, panting and heaving with lovepain as his *thing* arched up into her fluid recesses. Her eyes overflowed with thin, salty tears; her body was humping and convulsing in time to the delicious, rhythmic pounding between her legs. Calling his name, she fell into a neon inferno:

*"Jason!! Jason, JASON, OH - MY - GOD ..."*

Her hips bucked and seized as his weapon slammed into her like a mace. Time seemed to have ground to a standstill, she was spiraling through some vortex of excruciating rapture. Her



mind reeled with brilliant white emptiness; she was aware of nothing beyond the waves of delight coursing through her overloaded pleasure centres.

Her consciousness exploded like a supernova. All sense of identity fractured like a mirror, fragments of ego spinning off into the tempest. She ascended through a sirocco of desire, forgetting the storm, forgetting the rain, forgetting the lightning, forgetting even the black, endless chasm which threatened to swallow her into its limitless darkness.

Renata hung three hundred metres over the streets of Chamberlain, her hair dangling towards the Earth and her naked breasts staring at the heavens. The flickering radiance of the city was a luminous pool beneath them. A razor sharp down-draught struck her square in the face; she hardly noticed it in the midst of her epiphany. Gazing up into the living heart of the cyclone, her vision receding to a single point of unimaginable brilliance ...

*Afterwards:*

"That was ... intense," Jason admitted in characteristic understatement, his tone coarse with uncharacteristic humility. They were lying against the wall of the unit in a tangle of bare limbs, watching the moon slicing huge furrows through the indigo clouds. The rain was thinning out, they'd both survived judgement day. Renata was still naked, her body shining with the afterglow of Earth-shiftingly good sex.

"Yes, it was", she replied, nestling her face against the low, curving hillocks of his chest, "you were *magnificent*."

"I was?" Uncharacteristic modesty this time. His hair was plastered to his face in lank, brown strands; he had the fraying, harried appearance of a war-zone refugee.

"Yes, you were. Thanks."

"*Thanks?*" he growled in mock irritation, "That's all I get?"

More like himself, finally. Renata smiled and kissed him on the jaw.

"You're welcome, I suppose", he remarked offhand. His fingers whispered up her arm, teasing the flesh. She snuggled back into his weary embrace, kissing his hands, his chest, his ruggedly chiseled lips. She leaned into him with true affection now: the mindless desire she'd experienced an hour before had left with the storm.

"So - tell me something", he remarked, apropos of nothing.

"Yes?"

"You trusted me to hold you. Trusted me with your life".

Renata nodded, knowing what the next question would have to be.

"How? How could you trust ... *anyone* that much?"

"*You* couldn't have done it?"

He shook his head.

Renata kissed his hand again, recalling how he'd thrown himself over the rail, swinging his right arm around her waist. He could brave the fall, ride the hurricane like a Norse deity, but the thought of committing his life to another – particularly a *woman* – was totally beyond his comprehension.

"I don't think I can explain it to you", she replied.

And she couldn't. He wouldn't have understood. *No* man could have understood. Screw the lightning and the fear and the drop. Sharing her body with *any* man required supernatural

courage. Yes, they'd made a deal; yes, they'd both agreed, both consented. But it was *she* who had taken the risk, *she* who had everything to lose. Divested of all its romantic trappings, the sexual act was the ultimate leap of faith. It was always dangerous.

She smiled up at him, caressing his fuzzy jaw with a soft, feathery stroke. He raised his eyebrows as if asking a question.

"Let's go inside", she answered, "I want to cuddle up with you in bed".

"Yeah, sure", he consented magnanimously, as if conferring a great honour upon her. *I just gave you the best sex in the whole fucking universe and now I have to rock you to sleep like a frigging baby, Jesus Christ, the things I do.* They stood up, stretching their aching limbs, clicking their joints and shaking the rain out of their hair. Jason suppressed a yawn as they turned towards the sliding doors.

She took his hand as they walked through to her bedroom, looking up at him with a sad, forgiving smile.

Five years on, and she was still waiting.

Five years of hoping and longing, five of shattered aspirations and wasted opportunities. Five endless, incessant years of empty sheets, lonely evenings and secret bedroom tears. Five years on, and the words *I love you Ren* had never once crossed the distance between them.

Well, at least he'd kept his promise.

He hadn't let her fall.

And maybe *that* was enough.

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# PUBLICATION HISTORY

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