

Hero

by T.G. Cooper

As soon as Officer Peter O'Malley walked into her office, Dr. Mildred Brinkman could tell that he used to be a man. The walk, the posture, so at odds with the delicate little female body, the flashing masculine defiance in the big, pretty green eyes and the hard set of the full, pouty lips— it all read not just masculine, but imprisoned masculinity, masculinity shackled to a womb. She'd never seen it before, but she knew it the moment it walked into her office.

She stood and held out her hand, "Officer O'Malley."

He looked up, reaching out with a small, soft hand and did his best to put some strength and confidence behind his grip as he said, "Doctor" in what was clearly a self-consciously lower chest voice, but still came out of him as soft and feminine despite his best efforts. He was wearing a pair of baggy gray sweat pants and an equally baggy blue t-shirt all smothered under an oversized hoodie.

"Take a seat," Dr. Brinkman said. "Mind if I call you Peter?"

"That's my name." Peter sat down, his legs spread wide, and he put his hands behind his head and tilted his head to the side, staring at her defiantly. "Even if the department doesn't really believe it." He probably thought it made him look tough the way it had when he'd been, according to his file, a 6' 2" 230-pound precinct boxing champion, but with his feminine features and narrow little wrists, he looked like a little girl dressed in her dad's clothes trying to play act at being a man, and Brinkman's heart went out to him.

"I don't want to be here," he said. "I've never believed in shrinks."

“Most cops don’t,” Brinkman. “Do you want some coffee? Water?”

“How about some scotch?”

“The city doesn’t pay me enough to provide an open bar.”

“Mind if I smoke?”

“Yes.”

“Well, so? Let’s say you just certify that I’m fine and clear me to get back to active duty.”

Brinkman sat down. “It doesn’t work that way.”

“I figured.” He covered his face with his hands, then looked off at the corner of the room. “Listen, doc, I’m dying to just get back to work, okay? It’s the best thing for me. Sitting around all day, I’m going nuts, thoughts running around and around in my head, going stir crazy.”

“What kind of thoughts?”

“Mostly just...” he stopped and looked at her with a smirk. “You almost got me there, doc. Almost had me talking about my feelings. Tricky.”

“I’m not trying to trick you. I would like to know what kind of thoughts you’ve been having, though.”

Peter didn’t answer. He shifted position, crossing his arms, crossing his legs- like a man, but still a defensive posture. He turned his body half away from the doctor, averting his eyes.

“Nothing you say leaves this room,” Brinkman said.

“No. Nah. No thanks.”

“Then, tell me why you don’t want to tell me.”

“Because... why do you think?”

Brinkman admired his long slender neck, his face in profile—the upturned little nose, long curly eyelashes. “I would never speculate.”

“Take a guess. I’ll tell you if you’re right. How about that?”

“You’re worried I’ll send you to a mental institution.”

Peter looked at her, his eyes wide. “It’s that obvious?”

“Just about every cop who ever has or will walk through that door is worried I am going to send them to a mental institution.”

Peter frowned. “So that means I’m normal, I guess.”

“Normal,” Brinkman answered, “for a cop.”

Peter chuckled despite himself, but quickly looked away, still wary. “How many cops you sent to the looney bin over the years?”

“Just two.”

“How come?”

“Mostly because I didn’t like them.”

And this time Peter actually laughed, a pretty young girl’s laugh, and his eyes lit up for a moment. He even allowed a smile to flicker across his face for a moment, and Brinkman held

her breath—my God, she thought. He is stunning. The smile only lasted a second before Pete felt embarrassed, self-conscious about that high-pitched laugh, and he pulled down the mask of ambivalence once again and said, “I better stay on your good side.”

“It’s not a bad idea.”

“I may be crazy, but I ain’t stupid.” Peter slipped out of his hoodie and once again spread his legs, his hands dangling in his lap—sitting like a guy. “You seem all right, doc.”

“I try.” She looked him in the eyes and smiled, struggling to keep her eyes up. The outline of Peter’s breasts could be seen even as baggy as his shirt was, and in her mind she found herself imagining him naked, big young breasts with full, brown nipples. The file said the body he’d been switched into was a 19-year old female, but she’d had the curves of a 25 year old woman, with the face of a 16 year old girl.

This is going to be hard, Brinkman thought to herself, taking a sip of her cold coffee and forcing herself to think about baseball for a minute. “Can you tell me what happened? From the beginning?”

“Don’t you have some kind of file about me?”

“Dates. Reports. I would like to hear your story. Or, if you don’t want to talk about that, we can always talk about something else.”

“Like what?”

“Anything you want.”

Peter stared off into space for a minute, sighed and still staring off, clearly losing himself in the memory, he began to tell his story, still keeping his girl's voice down in his chest, trying to sound like the man he'd been.

“I come from a family of cops. My dad. His dad. Both of them lifers at the NYPD. My grandfather and father both made detective. All their friends were cops. So, I grew up around cops—softball games in the park, barbecues. At my first communion half the church was full of cops and their wives. I always knew I wanted to be a cop, and I was a guy—they were all guys, men, like old fashioned men, tough guys, and I played football and worked on cars and did all the stuff I could to be just like my old man.

"I even got a scholarship to play football at Hofstra, picked up a criminology degree and I was a stud, I could get any girl, and..." he paused for a second, his face pained shifted in his seat, and then focused, continued on.

“Anyway, I got on the force, and you always start as a beat cop, and I didn't want any special treatment on account of my dad or anything, so I was out on the beat and they put up in the Bronx, up where it is still pretty rough with drug dealers and low-end criminals and lots of junkies and domestic violence, so I did my time and showed I could handle myself, and then they moved me up to South Harlem, which is pretty gentrified but still has some shit going down all the time.

“Anyway. I heard, I mean we had heard, about the Switchers. It sounded like crazy bullshit, right? But there had been reports about cops in Montreal being switched into the bodies of women—guy cops. It got onto the news, but it was played off as joke news, or tabloid bullshit, and we got reports, from our international organized crime and terrorism units saying it

seemed like this shit was real—that there were these high-end prostitutes claiming they had been cops, and that these broads had stolen their bodies, and even though it seemed like on the low down the Canadian law enforcement was taking all this shit seriously, we all laughed about it. I mean, right? It sounds like science fiction bullshit.

“Then, it happened. To me and my partner. What the fuck, right? It was September. One of those perfect New York fall days: cool, breezy, the leaves starting to turn, and the air smelled like I could almost smell apple cider. Me and my partner left the station house, grabbed some coffee, made an arrest of a homeless guy who was walking around on Shabazz street naked and drunk, and we’d scrubbed down and sanitized, which we always do after an arrest, then we’d gone back out to walk our beat for another hour or so before lunch.

“The call came in-- disturbance at 1200 Marcus Garvey Drive, and that address caught my attention right way. Right away.”

“How come?” Brinkman asked.

Peter smiled ruefully, a bitter, angry smile. “Prostitution. Like most strip clubs. All strip clubs. But we’d seen the girls going in and out—and not your regular street hookers, either, but these girls...” he stopped again, clenching his jaw. “Well, they were just better dressed, let’s say. And all young. And we’d seen the traffic-- Mercedes. Audis. People who had no business being in that part of town with so much regularity.”

“So when the call came in you knew already it was a, um, house of ill repute.”

“A whore house. You can just say it”

“A whore house.”

“Yeah. So, we both got excited because the call gave us an excuse to go in there and probably get a good bust for our promotions.”

Brinkman almost made a joke about getting a good bust, but stopped herself. It was too soon, she knew. And the fact that he was talking at all was good, and she didn't want to say anything that might make him skittish.

“But at the same time? I swear to God. I thought about those reports from Montreal. The high-priced call girls. The Swappers. Something went off, some warning in my mind, and I even said to my partner Joey – hey, maybe we ought to be careful about those Switchers, and he laughed and I felt like a dumbass for even saying anything, but fuck me. I knew. I fucking knew.”

“Do you blame Joey?”

“Joey? No. Not so much. Well, just a little, maybe. I mean, the thing is, he got it even worse than I did.”

“How so?”

“Joey is married. A wife and a kid. And he got switched with this Russian broad— blonde hair and a body, well, a looker—his wife won't believe it's even him. Kicked him out of the house.”

“Do you two talk?”

“No. Not much. I can't stand being around him really. Not anymore.”

“Why not?”

“Because when I see him, what he is now? His face. It’s like the face of a model. He has huge boobs, too, and he reminds me of myself, of what I’ve become. It makes me sick. You know, fuck this shit.” Peter stood then, pulling his sweat pants up, and he turned and walked to the back of the room, punching the wall. “Can I fucking leave now? I don’t want to do this shit anymore.”

“Sure,” Brinkman said. “That’s enough for today. But I need to ask you to respect me and my office. Don’t ever get violent in here again.”

Peter turned sheepishly, his head down. “Yeah. My bad, doc.”

Brinkman smiled. “I’m going to give you a prescription. It’s something that will help you slow down your thoughts, calm your mind.”

“Thanks,” he said.

Brinkman stood and they shook hands. “Good work today, officer.”

“Thanks, doc,” Peter said, pulling a pair of aviator sunglasses out of his pocket and slipping them onto his cute little face. With a little smile, he punched Brinkman lightly on the arm and said, “You, too.”

Brinkman watched him leave: small frame hidden under all his baggy layers of cotton armor. But even under all those clothes should could imagine the outline of his round hips, his young, high ass, and again that long, slender neck rising so prettily out of the collar of his hoodie gave her a little thrill. Switched into the nubile body of a high-class female prostitute. How that had to be fucking with all sorts of things in his macho cop brain.

Careful, Brinkman, she said to herself as she imagined him in a bra and panties. Careful. You need to keep this thing professional. She took a deep breath. The idea of having sex with a male cop trapped in the body of a young woman was lighting up all kinds of secret kink.

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Peter headed home. The appointment with the shrink hadn't sucked as much as he expected, but it had sucked enough. He'd never liked shrinks. His desire to talk about his feelings was zero back when he was in his real body. Now it was less than zero.

Less than zero, he thought with a chuckle, walking past the basketball courts on his way to the subway, hearing the shouting, the rattling of the chain-link nets. Hadn't that been some kind of shitty movie with Robert Downey? He could remember it vaguely. He'd been a kid and had come into the living room, and his sister, Kate, had been watching it, so he'd plunked himself down on the couch and watched with her, half-interested and mostly annoyed—a bunch of rich kids so bored with their easy lives they were going out and making trouble for themselves with a lot of drugs and dumbass decisions, and when it ended his sister had cried. “Why are you crying?” He'd asked.

“Because it's sad.”

“But it isn't real.”

“I know, but it's still sad,” she'd said.

“So why did you watch it?”

“Sometimes girls like to feel sad.”

“You’re weird,” he’d said, getting up and tossing one of the couch pillows at her.

Females. Girls. He’d never understood them, and he still didn’t now even though he was one.

Down in the subway he stood with his back against one of the subway poles—big, iron girders with peeling paint that looked like they were 2000 years old. He felt small, was small, and he didn’t like the idea that anyone might come up behind him, so he was always on guard, always standing in positions where he could have a chance to defend himself if someone messed with him. He pulled his Iphone out of his pocket and checked his email, hoping to see something from his lawyer or else the guys down at the precinct. They had an APB out for his body, his real body, so at least if they could find his body there might be a chance one day he could get switched back.

Every day he worried that he’d get a report that his body was dead—an drug overdose or just found washed up on the Jersey shore of something. So far, none of the bodies of the six cops who’d been switched had been found, and some people speculated that maybe they had all fled the country. He didn’t like to think about it. Because if his body was dead, this insult to his manhood would be his—for life. There would be no escape. And that thought—that thought? Well, he didn’t even want to think about it.

Bored, waiting for the train, he called Adrian Lopez, one his old buddies at the precinct. Adrian picked up immediately. “What’s up, bro?”

He held the phone to his ear, started to speak, thought about his voice, how he sounded, and then disconnected the call shoving the phone back into his pocket. Fuck it, he thought.

What the hell do I have to say to anyone now anyway? The phone buzzed. Lopez calling him

back. Pete shoved the phone back into his pocket and fought against the urge to hit somebody, anybody.

He didn't like to be outside anymore, and yet he was reminded of his new body, his new sex, at home more than anywhere else. Everything seemed too big, too high, and when he had to use the bathroom, to sit down on the toilet just like a girl, he couldn't ignore what he was, what he'd become, and it made him sick. He was a man, and he wasn't supposed to have a hairy gash between his legs, wasn't supposed to have to sit down to pee, wasn't supposed to be what he was now.

He glanced in the mirror at that face, saw a look of fear in those big, girly eyes, and he turned away in disgust, still feeling sick when he saw her, saw that face, and remembered...

He pushed the thoughts away, sat down on the couch, legs spread wide, and turned on Sports Center. His phone buzzed. He pulled it out of his pocket. Lopez again. A text floating on the rectangular screen with an image of Yankee Stadium behind it—and the message made Pete sit up with excitement. "Possible lead on your body."

Fuck. His hands trembled slightly. He had to call now. His body! His real body. What if they could find it? Catch one of The Switchers or put an ad in the paper, offer to pay them to switch him back? Then, he could put all this behind him, forget it just like a bad dream. He called. Lopez answered, this time just saying, "Thought that would get your attention."

Pete let his voice drop as low as he could, hoping he at least sounded like a boy. "Yeah, Lopes. You got my attention all right."

"Everything good? I been trying to reach you, bro."

“Yeah. I know. Sorry about that. It’s just weird, you know?”

“Yeah. I can’t even imagine. Your sister told me you been just sitting inside all the time.”

“Kate? She called you?”

“I called her. I was getting ready to come over there and bash your door down since you wouldn’t answer my calls.”

Pete felt a lump in his throat and a rush of emotions. Took a breath. Decided he needed to deflect all this shit before he embarrassed himself. “You trying to prove you really are Superdork after all?”

“I never denied it.”

“So what about this lead on my body?”

“Well, I ran the fingerprints on that body-- I mean the one, the girl, the one who stole your body?”

“And you got a hit?”

“Yeah I got a hit. She’s in the system. So I know her name, and once I get permission we’ll run her through the FBI database and see if we can find her family. Her name is Salome Sofia Aragon.”

“Can you send me whatever you get? I’ll see what I can dig up on my own.”

“Sure thing. I’ll email the stuff I found. Just...”

“What?”

“Just be careful.”

“Don’t be an asshole.”

“I’m not, but, you know.”

“I can take care of myself. Don’t worry about me.”

“Yeah. Forget it. Hey. We should get together. Watch a game or something.”

“Yeah. Yeah. I’d like that,” Pete lied. “We’ll set something up.”

“Good talking to you.”

“Yeah. Later.” Pete’s insides were churning. His thoughts jumbled and confused. He felt grateful for a friend like Lopes, someone who cared, and he’d even kind of appreciated him saying be careful, but it also pissed him off and he wondered—were these feelings of gratitude some kind of girly thing? Girly emotions? Were the tears he could feel pooling in his eyes, but which he refused to allow to come out of him, pushing them back with a surge of rage and hate part of an inevitable decline into feminine weeping and hysteria? Or were the normal reaction for a man who had lost his identity, his body, maybe even his job?

Was he acting like a girl, or would he always have felt grateful for a friend who had his back?

Am I still me, he wondered? Are these just my normal feelings given my situation? Or am I changing? Becoming what my body tells me I am?

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Why did they have to pick me? What did I do to deserve this?

He needed to do something. To get his mind off it all. He looked over at his weight bench, barbells. There were 225 pounds on the bar, left there from before. He looked at the barbells. The thought of lifting whatever tiny weights he could manage now made him cringe with shame, and he thought, why bother?

Instead, he got on the Internet and he figured, why not? He opened the email from Lopes, and he saw the name of the person, the soul that should have been in this little girl's shape instead of him: Salome Sofia Aragon. Salome. Not much in the email. Most recent known address—Steinway Avenue in Astoria, Queens. Place of employment-- Imperial Entertainment Services, but he'd known that already: it was the LLP that ran the strip club and whore house where she worked. She had no priors, and no birth certificate on record, no bank account, no credit cards, not even a cell phone, at least not in her own name. But none of that was too surprising.

He typed her name into Google, figuring, why not? Do a search. See what comes back. But he didn't press Enter. He sat there at his computer, staring at the screen, decided he needed a beer and after he went to the refrigerator, he wandered back to the couch and turned on Sports Center.

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“So, you were telling me you were excited about the call?” Brinkman said. It was Pete's second session. They'd gotten past the niceties. Pete had shown up dressed just like the last time—baggy sweats. A hoodie. The day had turned warm-- Indian Summer—and she'd been fantasizing that he might show up in just a tank top or a t-shirt, let her get more of a glimpse of his little body, but she'd known it probably wasn't going to happen.

“Yeah. Right. That day.” Pete frowned and looked away, crossing his arms over his chest.

“If you don’t want to…”

“No. It’s fine. I don’t give a shit. So, me and my partner got all excited and hot-footed it down there, thinking we were going to get a big bust. As we approached the building, we saw a squad car rolling down the street, and I just said, “Fuck. That’s blown,” because, again, I was a little nervous—nervous about The Switchers, but Joey said, “nah. This is still us. Follow me.”

We cut down the street and came around from behind the building, up a little alleyway, and Joey figured we could just go in the back door. There was a report—like a gunshot—and a scream. We both pulled our weapons, and a cat jumped out of a dumpster—a black cat of all things—and it screeched and ran down the alley, and then the back door to the club swung open, and out ran two of the whores—the girls—and they looked terrified, and I had my gun in my hand and the girl saw me and said, “Pete,” and I said, “Stop right where you are! Some police shit like that.”

“What were they wearing?” Brinkman interrupted, a little too abruptly, wanting to know what the girls had been wearing, wanting to imagine Pete dressed as a stripper.

“What?” Pete asked.

“What were they wearing?” Brinkman repeated, looking away and adopting a disinterested tone. “I mean, did they look like they were making a run for it or something?”

“A run? I don’t know, really.” Pete’s eyes got a faraway look as he strained to remember. “No. It looked like they’d been working. They were wearing those things-- almost like a bathing suit but tight...”

“Corsets?”

“Yeah. I think that’s what they are called. Corsets. High heels and those old fashioned straps that hold up the pantyhose—it was like they’d been working the floor maybe, or sitting there for clients during a cattle call. This one,” he glanced down at himself. “This one was wearing green, a kind of deep green and black. I remember thinking...” He stopped and covered his mouth.

“What?”

“Nothing.” He’d been thinking he would like to fuck her, but he didn’t want to admit it to the doctor. It just seemed wrong.

“These blocks, the things you don’t want to talk about, that’s where you will need to go, Peter.”

“I don’t know.”

“If you’re afraid...”

“Afraid? No. Never. I’ll tell you. I looked at her, at her tits, and her hips, her long brown legs, and the wet lipstick, and I remember thinking that I would love to fuck her.”

Brinkman nodded. Beneath her desk, outside Pete’s sight, she had her knees squeezed together. She knew he was being unethical, getting Pete to talk about it, manipulating him, but he --- he was her living breathing fantasy mangirl, and it got her off in all kinds of ways to think of

him ogling a beautiful young girl, looking at her tits, feeling a stirring in his pants, thinking about fucking her right before he became her.

The blonde ran right for Joey, and Joey lowered his weapon and said, “Hey, hey... calm down...” and I saw her throw her arms around him, and then they both kind of just slumped to the ground. It looked weird, like all the bones in the blonde’s body just turned to jelly and she just went all limp in Joey’s arms and he lowered her to the pavement, and then suddenly the other one, this one, had her arms around me, and I looked down at her in surprise, and I was about to say something when she got this look on her face, a vicious look like an animal, and she said, “Bitch!” and then I felt myself falling, dropping to the ground, and then I was on my back, looking up into... my own face.”

“You had switched bodies.”

“Yeah. I didn’t know it yet. I just found myself looking up, confused, and looking at my own face, and just thinking, ‘this is impossible.’ My face looked down at me-- I could feel hot breath against my cheek, feel the rough cotton of the cop’s uniform against my bare legs, but I still couldn’t figure out what was happening.

Pete covered his face with his hands, and Brinkman realized she’d been holding her breath, and she let a breath out and said, “We can stop now if you...”

“No. Just give me a minute is all. I never told this to anyone, doc.”

“Take your time.”

Brinkman took a deep breath leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling with those big green eyes, now haunted as he remembered, and Brinkman’s heart went out to him even as it

raced in her chest. “He, she, smiled and laughed, and I felt him put his hand on me, and the feeling, it made no sense, because I could feel her hand on my chest, on my nipple, and yet it felt like my chest was out to here—away from my body, and it was soft like jello, and she squeezed it, and all these strange feelings went through me, things I never felt before, and then she slid her other hand down along my belly...”

He paused, closing his eyes. Remembering. His voice had become softer and higher, prettier, rising up and getting breathy and more like a girl as he forgot to keep up his act and remembered what it had been like “and he kept squeezing and messing with my chest, pulling down the top of that thing until both of my, both sides of my chest were exposed to the air, and my nipples were getting hard, and I started to realize what had happened, and he laughed, and his hand was down now on my abdomen, and sliding down toward the space between my legs, and I remember saying, “No. No.

“I knew he had been one of the switchers. That he had taken my body, and I was now in the body of that girl, the one who’d just run out of the club, the one in the green with those wet, red lips, and I felt shocked sick and I said “no, no” but it wasn’t my voice anymore, it was a little girl’s voice and then he slipped his hand underneath my... into my underwear, and I felt him push his finger inside me.”

Pete made a sound, an angry sound like an animal, and then he looked at Brinkman and barred his teeth. “That was when I knew, when I had no more doubt, when I knew I had become a woman.”

That had been enough, all that Pete could manage. He’d retreated then back into his shell, and Brinkman had renewed his prescription. She’d wanted to hug him, to hold him, to let

him cry in her arms, but she could see by his rigid posture and clenched fists that he was trying to reassert his masculinity against the memories he'd just relived, and she knew better than to do anything that might make her little fawn skittish.

When Pete left, Brinkman had locked the door to her office and gone into the bathroom, feeling her own conflicting waves of shame and ecstasy. She pulled her pants down, her panties, and closing her eyes, she pictured Peter on his back, on the ground in a dirty alley, dressed in an emerald green corset, his pretty green eyes going wide with shock and terror as he was violated, as the woman who stole his body stuck her finger into his vagina, and then she began to masturbate as she imagined it was her on top of the pretty little man, and she was the one teaching him all about his new sex.

IV

Peter felt sick and angry when he got home. He tried not to think about—that. Whenever the memory had come up he'd pushed it out of his mind, but now it was all there, raw, that feeling of humiliation and powerlessness, that body on top of him as he lay there helpless and impossible new feelings passed through him, through breasts he should have, through his gash, through this HER he'd become.

He slammed the door to his apartment shut, picked up a floor lamp with both hands and slammed it against the wall, sending shards of glass flying everywhere against the glossy hardwood floors, and then he screamed, an animal scream, and he kicked the wall, busting a spidery hole in the drywall.

There was pounding at the door and Peter stopped, standing stock still, breathing hard.

“Hey? Hey? Is everything okay in there?”

Pete didn't answer. He just stood still, feeling suddenly nervous, wanting whoever it was to just go away, hoping they would, but then the dull old brass handle began to turn and Pete rushed to the door, planning on locking it, but before he could the door started to open and Gil, his neighbor, poked his head in even while Pete threw himself against the door trying to push it shut.

“Ow!” Gil said, but he had his foot wedged between the door and the doorframe, and he pushed his head into the room and looked down at Pete. “Wow,” he said, his mouth dropping open. “So, it's really true.”

Pete felt himself blushing. There was no use denying it. He concentrated on lowering his voice as much as he could. “Hey, Gil.”

“Pete?”

“The one and only.”

“I saw it in the paper, but it didn't seem possible.”

“I wish it weren't. Anyway, I gotta go and do some stuff, so how about getting your fucking foot out of the way so I can slam the door?”

“Wow. I mean, you sound just like you, only...”

“Get the fuck out of here.”

Gil frowned, glanced behind Pete at the shattered glass on the floor. “You gonna be okay? It sounded like you were in trouble.”

“I’m fine, okay? I just need some time alone.”

“Well, listen, I got kids, so...”

“You won’t hear another sound out of me.”

“Are you sure you don’t need some help? I could call someone.”

“No! Please!” Pete said, slightly panicked. The last thing he needed was for some kind of call to go in. That would put him in the nuthouse for sure. “I just freaked out, but I’m fine. Really.”

Gil looked uncertainly at the young girl. He’d seen the face in the papers after the supposed switch, had maybe even seen her around the neighborhood, but he’d never really believed that his neighbor Pete the Cop had been turned into a woman, and now here he was—she was?—talking just like Pete, the Queens accent, the cadence, but only in a girl’s voice, and it had sounded bad, really bad, like she had been on the verge of something terrible. My God, he thought looking at those wide, green eyes, the innocent looking young female face. If that really is Pete in there, God help him. “If you need anything, you know? Just come on over and knock.”

“Okay,” Pete said. “Thanks. See ya.”

“You have my number, right?”

“Yup. I won’t hesitate.”

“Goodnight then.”

Pete pushed the door closed, flipped all the deadbolts, and leaned against the door with a sigh. Fuck. He hated seeing people he’d known before, watching their reactions, seeing the pity.

He hated those looks of pity. Suddenly exhausted, he went into the kitchen, took two of the pills the doctor had given him and laying down on the couch, fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

He woke hours later. The sound of a siren down on the street, the flashing lights tracing patterns on the ceiling. There were always sirens in the city. Always lights. He wondered why these had woke him, then realized he'd been sweating heavily in his sleep, and his sweats were damp, and he smelled and felt disgusting. He was going to have to shower, something he now did only every few days. It was another of those things, like going to the bathroom, that made it impossible for him to ignore this thing he now wore as a body, the disgusting flabby weakness of it.

But it had to be done. Leaving the lights off, he stripped out of his sweatshirt, stepped out of the sweatpants, then pulled his Jockeys down his round, soft legs, and finally unwrapped the ace bandage he'd wrapped around his chest to hide his breasts. Free of the bandage, they swayed freely—two huge melons on his chest, and the feel of them tugging at his collar bone, the soft weight of them swaying made him feel sick. He cupped them in his hands to keep them from bouncing around, feeling his wide, rubbery nipples against his soft little palms, and walked to the bathroom, turning on the shower and stepping into the steaming water, feeling it pour down the strange new contours of his female shape-- his wide hips and high, firm round ass, down his belly and between his legs. He lathered up with some Irish Spring and began to rub it onto his soft skin—he couldn't believe how soft his skin felt—just like a baby's, and yet he did nothing—NOTHING- to keep it soft. It always felt—disturbing—to soap up his breasts. So much of him, his old male self, wanted to feel aroused by the idea—hell, did feel aroused by the soft bouncing weight of a big, firm young pair of breasts in his hands, and it brought back memories of past girlfriends and nights sticking his hands up their shirts, slipping them out of

their bras, the feeling of triumph and excitement the first time a female let him see her tits, suck on her nipples.

And then at the same time this body, this new body tingled with pleasure, and the nipples stiffened, and he felt the most emasculating tremors of pleasure pass through him and right down to the wet hole between his legs, and he felt sick and confused and just wanted to forget that it ever happened to him as he found himself wanting to have what he'd now become and lost at the same time.

He felt some pride and pleasure at the bristling hair on his legs, in his armpits. It made him feel a little like a man again, stood as a testament to his pride and refusal to be what this body told him her was, and so he finished showering, ignored the sensation as he toweled off his jiggley body, and then wrapped the ace bandage around those stupid melons again before slipping into some nice, baggy guy clothes and once again hiding from what he'd become.

Time to do some research. Get serious about finding his body, The Switchers, taking control of his life again. He sat down at the computer and checked his work email. Nothing much. Just the usual daily reports. Domestic violence. Drunk and disorderly. The day to day shit behavior that made the city go. Nothing on The Switchers. He checked his Gmail. His old AOL email. Took a quick look at CBS Sportsline checking out the lines on the weekend's games, forgetting why he had even sat down in the first place. He got up, stretched. Scratched his butt.

There was a football game on, so he grabbed a beer, popped the lid and took a drink. He wasn't supposed to mix alcohol and whatever the dock had given him, but he liked the way it made him feel—kind of fuzzy and detached from this body. Right before a commercial break,

they cut to a shot of the cheerleaders on the sideline—kicking and shouting in their short skirts, their flat, smooth bellies exposed, bright smiles on painted mouths. Looking at their long, tan legs rising so high in those short skirts, he could feel it again- that finger, in and out, probing, and he looked away and chugged his beer. Stop thinking about it, he thought. Just stop.

But his mind had other ideas, and he couldn't shake that terrible feeling of being violated from his mind, and also the question. The big question.

V

Back at Brinkman's office. Pete slumped in his chair, safely hiding under his layers of baggy clothes. "I almost didn't come today," he said.

"Why not?"

"The last time... it kind of fucked with my head remembering all that shit."

"How did it fuck with you?"

"I kept thinking about it, kept replaying it in my mind, just like right after it happened, and then I couldn't sleep, and I kept remembering how it felt when she ... put her finger in me."

"How did it feel?" Brinkman asked maintaining her detached tone, but her mouth went dry.

"I don't want to talk about it..."

"You don't have to."

“But I need to. Or, I think I need to.”

“I agree.”

Brinkman waited. Pete looked around, finally settled back and stared at the ceiling.

“It seemed like it went on forever. It was probably, what? A couple of minutes? But, she kept going, and then it felt like she shoved more fingers, her whole hand in there, and she was so close to my face, breathing on me, her eyes hard and cold, and she whispered, “You have a tight little pussy.”

“It was like she was taunting me, talking to me the way... some guy had maybe talked to her, but hearing her say that, it—I felt terrified, and angry, and yet....”

He stopped, clenching and unclenching his jaw.

Say it, Brinkman thought, trying to will him to say whatever it was he needed to say, what he was afraid to say. Say it!

But he shook his head, probably not even realizing he was physically manifesting his own refusal, and said, “Then she left. She got up and walked away, leaving me there on the ground in that filthy alley, and I lay there for a awhile, stunned, and then I saw—the blonde girl looking down at me, and it didn’t occur to me at all that she was my partner. She looked down at me, then out toward the street, and she yelled, “Hey! Hey!” And she went out of my sight, and the next thing I knew the alley was full of patrolmen, and they were helping me to my feet, and it was all wrong—like waking up in a strange room. There’s familiar stuff—a bed, a ceiling, a dresser, but they are all wrong. I knew these guys. They were patrolmen from my precinct, and I was looking up at most of them now, even Cheryl. I could feel the cool air on this body—it

was half naked, and I caught guys checking me out, and it felt so creepy and wrong and yet I had these huge boobs, and their eyes kept dropping to my chest, and I was ashamed and confused, and they passed me off to Cheryl, who got me a blanket to cover up, and when she asked my name I said, 'I don't know.'

"You're not in trouble," Cheryl said. "And don't worry about immigration. I just want to know what to call you."

"It was just another kind of strange. I knew Cheryl, had known her since she was a rookie, and here she was talking to me like a complete stranger, like she'd never seen me, and I was too ashamed to tell her, so I just shook my head and said, "I hit my head. I can't remember my name."

"How old are you?" She asked. A lot of times if you can get a person to tell you one thing they'll open up about the rest, but I shook my head becoming more and more aware of the wrongness of everything-- long hair swaying on my back, hoop earrings brushing against my cheeks, and I said, "I don't know."

"Listen," Cheryl said, adopting a harsher tone. "I can't help you if you won't talk to me. And what's going to happen is you are going to be arrested, and you will be thrown into holding with a lot of really tough, really mean women, and I'm telling you know things can get ugly for a pretty little girl like you, sweetie. Real ugly."

"A pretty little girl like you. When she called me that—I just felt so alone and defeated, and dirty and ashamed and lost and I don't even know. I remember looking down at those big breasts, feeling all that hair, and I knew that if they processed me, I was lost, and so I looked at Cheryl and swallowed my pride, and I said, 'Cheryl. It's me. Pete. Pete O'Malley'"

“That was a big moment,” Brinkman said. “It took a lot of courage.”

“Well, at the time it felt like fear.”

“How did she react?”

“She did a double take. Like a cartoon character. Her face kind of squished up- I mean, she’s talking to this stripper who suddenly claims to be a dude she knew? So, she said, what? And I repeated it. “I’m Pete. I got switched, just like we heard about from Montreal.”

“What’s the code word?” She asked.

“Do you really want me to say it?”

“Yeah.”

“Sucks and swallows.”

“That was the code word?” Brinkman interrupted.

“Yeah. I know. Cops can be assholes.”

“So, you find yourself trapped in a woman’s body, and the way you identify yourself to your fellow officers is by saying something sexist and demeaning?”

“It was stupid, but honest to God, doc? None of us really thought it would ever happen.”

“It’s still stupid.”

“I know. I always did. I just didn’t care all that much.”

“Cops,” Brinkman said, shaking her head. “Anyway, go ahead. I didn’t mean to interrupt, well, I did, but I shouldn’t have.”

Pete laughed. “You’re more upset about that than you are about the fact that some crazy broad stole my body and finger-fucked me.”

“Don’t make this about me now.”

“You’re the one that made it about you, doc. I’m just, for some reason I find it kind of funny. That’s all.”

Brinkman just smiled and shook her head. “I am not doing a great job maintaining my professionalism right now.”

“I know, and I love it.”

“Well, I am glad you’re able to have a sense of humor about the whole thing. This is the first time I have really seen you smile.”

“Well don't get used to it.”

Brinkman so badly wanted to tell him he was pretty when he smiled, but of course knew better, so she just nodded and templed her fingers under her chin. “Duly noted. So, getting back on track, what did Cheryl do then?”

“She shook her head. Did more cartoon dog double takes. Said something like, Pete? Really? In there?”

“Yeah,” I said. “I know. I can hardly believe it myself.”

“And then she called it in. They put me in an ambulance still with the blanket over my shoulders, feeling small and confused and mostly just—like an asshole. People would come by the ambulance and walk by trying to act casual, but they were glancing in and checking me out, and I knew word was spreading that there was this stripper claiming to be Pete O’Malley, and I

was sick with the thought that everyone would know about this thing. It seemed like I sat there for hours. They had stationed a couple cops next to the ambulance, and at one point I tried to ask one of them what was going on. I stuck my head out and said, “Hey, Craig. What’s happening? I’ve been sitting in here forever.’ It was weird to hear myself talking in that voice, and I just tried to ignore it and talk deeper, like my old self.

“Just be patient, miss,’ he said. ‘We’ll get you moving as soon as possible.’

“I hadn’t been called ‘miss’ before, and it irked me—not just the word but the way he said it, something like he was talking to a child, and I started to say something, tell him to call me Lieutenant O’Malley because I outranked the prick, but then I saw him look down at my—at these boobs—and I felt weird, and anyway the other cop said, “You want something to eat? Some coffee or something?’

I realized I was hungry, thirsty, so I nodded. ‘How ‘bout some coffee and a sausage sub?’

“He exchanged a glance with Craig, and I realized my mistake—asking a couple cops for a sausage sub now that I was in the body of a woman was a huge mistake, and I felt disgusted just thinking about what they were thinking.

“Maybe we should explore that,” Brinkman said. “It’s come up a couple times today now.”

Pete shook his head and glanced at his phone. “Looks like my time is up,” Peter said, fishing his glasses out of his pocket and slipping them over his eyes. “I gotta rock and roll.”

“Good work today, Peter.”

“Yeah? Well, am I getting any closer to being judged as fit for duty.”

“Yes.”

“How soon?”

“I can’t say. I’ll let you know when it’s time.”

“Is there something I need to do or so? Some magic thing that will convince you I’m fine.”

“No,” Brinkman answered. “But when I feel you actually are fine, I’ll inform HR.”

“When?”

“When I feel you are actually fine.” Pete walked out of the building mumbling those words. When you are actually fine. So, she didn’t think he was fine. She knew he wasn’t fine. He knew he wasn’t fine. But sitting around in this stupid body was not doing anything to make him better! Work. Work. All his life he’d responded to stress by working more, working harder, and now all he could do was sit around and wait for something to happen, for other people to make decisions about his life.

He left Brinkman’s office and walked into the street in his hunkered down, embattled mode-- hands in pockets, hunched over, dark sunglasses on, just doing his best to ignore the world. As he cut through a plaza between two buildings with a small courtyard featuring a large statue of Atlas holding up the sky, he heard a woman call, “Pete!” He felt a shock of embarrassment and kept walking, but then she yelled, “Peter!” and he felt her grab his arm. Peter stopped and turned around, looking at the oddly familiar blonde hurrying after him. There was a hunky guy with her he recognized instantly as Anthony Toriccelli, a cop from the South Harlem precinct he’d always, thought was a little soft.

But the blonde? Where did he know her from? She was pretty—really pretty, with those bright gray eyes like a Siberian husky and--- “Oh my god,” Pete said as the shock of recognition hit him. “Joe?”

“Hi, Pete,” Joe said, wrapping his arms around his former partner in a sisterly embrace, and Pete felt himself surrounded by a sweet cloud of his partner’s flowery perfume.

“Pete,” Anthony said, holding out a hand, which Pete shook, feeling his own tiny, soft little hand seem to almost disappear inside the big man’s grip. Anthony looked around, obviously a little uncomfortable.

“Can we have a minute?” Joe asked, smiling up at Anthony, who stood over six feet tall.

“Sure thing,” Anthony said, and then Pete watched in shock in a scene that suddenly seemed like slow motion to him. Joe smiled gratefully and tilted his head back. Anthony put a hand on Joe’s hip and another to Joe smooth, soft cheek, and the two kissed, briefly, and then Anthony put a hand on Joe’s back and said, “I’ll be right over here.”

“Thanks, honey,” Joe said, and Pete felt like he was watching a boyfriend and girlfriend interact, which didn’t seem possible because he knew the blonde woman standing in front of him had been a straight man with a wife and two kids just a couple weeks ago. It all seemed so wrong, and so impossible, and it also terrified him because he realized now why he hadn’t recognized Joe—it was the light pastel make-up emphasizing his full lips and high cheeks, the little diamond studs flashing in his ears, the form woman’s jacket that hugged his full breasts and displayed them to the world, tapering in to draw attention to his tiny waist, and the skin tight jeans that hugged his wide, round hips, the knee high leather boots with slender heels that had made Joe taller.

“You’re wearing heels?” Pete mumbled, looking at the other man’s tiny feet perched on those slender, feminine heels.

“Yeah,” Joe giggled, doing a little girl pose with his toes together. “I know, right?”

“Are you and Anthony? I mean, you two, are you...?”

“We’re dating,” Joe said with a smile, seeming to enjoy his former partner’s shock and surprise. “And it’s getting kind of serious.”

“What the fuck?” Pete said.

“I’m just as surprised as you are, or I was,” Joe answered with a cute little shrug that was feminine, but a little stiff, kind of like a tomboy trying to girl it up and still not getting the hang of it. “I mean, when I first found myself in this body I swore I would never give in and act like a woman.”

“We talked about that,” Pete said.

“Well, I see you’re still fighting the good fight,” Joe answered, gesturing down at Pete’s baggy ensemble.

“How did this happen? What about your wife and kids?”

“Pete, I don’t know. I don’t know much of anything anymore. Jean kicked me out of the house, and I don’t even have visitation rights with my kids because the law says I am actually Anastasia Kasparov and not their father. Anthony was there for me, and let me stay with him, and I felt safe around him, and I didn’t feel safe in this body otherwise. I was terrified and alone, and he didn’t look at me like a freak or treat me like I was weird, and we hung out and he made me laugh, and then one night I kissed him, and then he kissed me, and the next thing you know

we were lovers, and I wanted—I wanted to be his woman and to please him, and he told me he loved me, and so here I am.”

“Well, wow,” Pete said. “I mean, who am I to judge?” But he was thinking, what a pussy. I can’t believe he’s letting another man fuck him. “But what if you get your real body back?”

“I’ll worry about that when the times comes, if it comes, but right now I don’t want to be alone, and Anthony and I are together, and that’s all the matters.”

“Which one of you is on top?” Pete said, immediately regretting it, feeling it seemed kind of ugly, but Joe just smiled and reached down, running his hand over Pete’s bare skull.

“We take turns. Have you had any thoughts about it?”

“Hell no,” Pete said. “I’m never going to be a woman. I’m a dude, and not to judge you or anything, but—no. No.”

“It’s getting close to time for the movie,” Anthony called.

“Kay,” Joe called back. “I have to get going, but I’d love for us to stay in touch, be friends.”

“I’ll text you, and we can set something up,” Pete said, and then he waved by as his former partner walked away, and Pete saw how hot Joe’s ass looked in the jeans, and he felt angry and ashamed at what had happened to his partner, to both of them, and he was also super pissed because now he felt more alone than ever.

That poor fucker, he thought, watching Joe walk away in his heels, his ass swaying. His lost it. Lost it all. Turned into a woman, showing off his tits and ass. I’ll never fucking do that.

Never. Maybe those assholes stole my body, but they didn't steal my balls. I never thought Joe would be such a pussy, he thought to himself as he walked away, vowing once again that no matter what his body said, he would never be a woman.

VI

Days passed. Things only seemed to get worse. Legally speaking, his lawyer told him the same thing Joe had found: he was Salome Aragon, or else he didn't exist. There was as yet no legal precedent for someone who'd been switched to reclaim his identity. As far as the NYPD was concerned, he was just a horrible nightmare they wished would go away—they didn't know what to do with him, and even if the shrink said he was fit for duty, the NYPD hadn't decided yet who he was and whether he could return to work as Pete O'Malley even though he now looked like a high class stripper. Thankfully, he had direct deposit, and the institutional stupidity of the department meant they hadn't even considered yet whether to keep paying him or not, which was good for now, but he worried about that, too, because if they decided he wasn't him he would have no income and have to go out and find work in a world that considered him a 19 year old Latina girl.

Maybe I should kill myself, he thought. What's the point of going on anymore? He would never get his body back, never be a man again, and he couldn't, wouldn't accept this life as a girl. It didn't make much sense to go on because it seemed like the NYPD would eventually stop paying and then what? Take up pole dancing?

He stopped by the store and bought a 12 pack of beer, a box of Swisher Sweets, and he headed up to his apartment, his skinny little arm straining with the weight of the beer, and hoping to avoid seeing anyone he knew, get inside and escape from the world, from life, just drink and

watch sports and forget about it all, and so when he opened his door and saw his sister, Kate, sitting at his kitchen table, he sighed and said, “How did you get in here?”

“The landlord.”

“Asshole.” He plunked the beer down on the table. Kate stood up and opened her arms. He reluctantly accepted the embrace, hugging her back, feeling the strangeness of it as he was now shorter and skinnier than her. He separated and got away from her as fast as he could, grabbing a beer and tossing it to her, then cracking one open for himself.

“How’s Mom and Dad?”

“The same as always: miserable.”

He smirked. “Well, thanks for getting me up to speed.”

“How are you?” Kate asked, sitting down on the couch next to her brother, now an impossibly pretty young woman.

Pete shook his head. “You know, I just can’t. I don’t want to talk about it.”

“I do.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re my brother.”

“Am I? Still your brother? I mean, look at me.”

“Pete, you will always be my big brother. I don’t care about.... That. You always took care of me, and you were always there, and now I want to be there for you.”

“What does that mean? Should we hug and cry together and eat some chocolate or something? I’m not a girl. I don’t do that stuff.”

“I’m not asking you to. I’m just asking you to let me help you.”

“I don’t need any help.”

“Then how come your neighbor told me you were going crazy, smashing stuff to pieces the other day?”

“Fucking Gil. I knew he wouldn’t keep his fucking mouth shut.”

“He cares about you.”

“He’s worried I’m going to blow up the building and kill him and his snot nosed kids.”

“He told me he was worried you were going to kill yourself.”

It hit Pete like a punch in the gut. Was it that obvious? He found himself shaking his head, feeling that cold sense of panic again, and he said, “No. No way. The thought never even crossed my mind.”

Kate looked at him, and the tears started to pour down her face. “Oh my God.”

“I’m telling the truth.”

“You’re still a terrible liar, Pete. Oh, please, don’t treat this like some kind of joke. Don’t. I couldn’t live with myself if you killed yourself, Pete. Please.”

The fear and stress in Kate’s voice got through to him, he felt her emotions in his whole body and tried, but couldn’t ignore it. He sighed. “I thought about it. But not seriously. Not yet.”

Kate started to cry. Pete felt his lip tremble, the sting of building tears, but he fought back the feeling, refused to give in, and instead found it in himself to put his arms around his sister, to hold her and comfort her, and there in her arms, at least for that time, he had no wish to die, couldn't even imagine it.

They ordered pizza. Talked and drank some more beer. It was like old times, but at the same time not. The dynamic between them was not the same, though they tried to ignore it and mostly succeeded. Finally, Kate passed out, just as she always did, and Pete blearily got his extra quilt out of the closet and lay it gently over her, propping her head up under the couch pillow. Luckily, she'd fallen asleep on her side. He wasn't sure if he had the strength anymore to move her.

He looked down at her calm, sleeping face, saw the small little wrinkles that had grown at the corners of her eyes. She was getting older. Starting to look older. Less and less like a girl, his sister, and more and more like their mother. He thought about her spending her nights in her dark apartment, alone, and his heart went out to her. Why hadn't she ever found a guy? Gotten married? She was pretty enough, and nice.

Fuzzy headed, tired, Pete wandered off to his own bed and collapsed onto the mattress, falling, falling, falling into a soft, warm and restful sleep.

VII

Days passed. Days passed. Pete felt more stir crazy than ever, more trapped in this body, in the state of legal limbo in placed him into. He couldn't watch most television shows. Sleepy Hollow, The Blacklist, Agents of SHIELD—one way or another guys and girls would start

flirting, kissing, jump into bed together, and his strange new body would react in strange new ways, and he would turn the show off feeling angry and confused.

He didn't have any books. Had never been much of a reader. And he took one look at the cover of the latest Maxim, with a girl on her hands and knees, staring at the camera, licking her lips, and the headline: five guaranteed ways to get her wet, and he tossed it aside. That wasn't something he would be needing to worry about for awhile. He still didn't feel comfortable out in the world with people—those who knew him or those who didn't. He was small and weak, and he was someone he was not supposed to be. He found himself worrying that someone from HER life might recognize him—an old boyfriend or something.

Lopes texted him about getting together, but he kept putting him off, making excuses. He and his sister talked every day—just keeping in touch, but then a day before his next appoint, he woke up with a rash on his breasts, an angry red rash which he would have ignored but for the fact that it itched like crazy. He'd put on some lotion, wrapped them up in the bandage, but they itched like crazy, and he couldn't stand it, so when Kate called and asked him how things were he just burst out, “These boobs are super itchy!”

“What?” Kate asked.

“I woke up this morning with some kind of stupid rash, and now I am going crazy, and if I scratch much more I'm probably going to start bleeding!”

“Are you still wearing that bandage?”

“Of course.”

“Take it off and let them breath. I’ll come over on my lunch break with some better lotion.”

“Let them breath?”

“Yes! You can’t keep your breasts all wrapped up like that! It isn’t healthy.”

“These are not my breasts, I…”

“Okay. Okay. Just do as I say, and hang in there until I come over.”

“I can’t…”

“Do you want to stop itching or not?”

“Fine.”

“I have to get back to work. See you in a little bit.”

Peter groaned. Her advice hadn’t surprised him—the breasts got itchy and sweaty all wrapped up beneath the rubbery bandage—just like any skin would—and so naturally he’d developed a rash of some kind. But—let them breath? He hated even the thought of it. But the itch, that terrible itch, had already won, and so he went into his bedroom and pulled off his sweatshirt, tossing onto the bed. Then, he looked down at the tan bandage wrapped so tight around his chest, the soft flesh pooling at the top, and reaching down he undid the metal clasps that held the bandage in place and then unwound it, round and round, and when he finished he felt those huge mounds of soft flesh sway free, the weight pulling down on his collar bone, and he straightened his shoulders against the weight and thought-- fuck.

He had been keeping the temperature in his apartment warmer since the change, but even still the air felt cool and his big, fleshy nipples began to harden, so with a sigh he grabbed the

bottle of Neutrena lotion from his night table, squirted some into his palms and then rubbed it into his breasts before grabbing his sweatshirt and pulling it back over his head. Now, the breasts were swaying free, pushing out the front of his sweatshirt impressively, and he could feel the rough material brushing against his hardening nipples. Pete squirmed uncomfortably, hating the total—womanliness of what he was experiencing, but he didn't feel like he had much choice, so he just went into the living room and turned on the television, Sportscenter, but one of the hosts was Kelli O'Hara, and she was wearing a low cut top that showed off her breasts, and looking at them made Pete extra conscious of his own breasts, and so in disgust he flipped off the television and sighed, getting up and going over to his computer.

I have to get out of this body, he thought, sitting down. I have to find a way. Somehow. He checked his work email. Nothing on his missing body. He picked up his phone and texted Lopes: Any news? And then he looked back at his own computer and again typed the name of this body into Google, and he sat tapping the desk, tapping the desk. I need to be able to get into the NYPD crime database, he thought, or the National Database, or else why even bother?

He started to go to CBS Sportsline, but then he realized: I'm afraid. I'm afraid to find out who she was before she stole my body. Why? He wasn't sure, but some part of him felt that it was a mistake, a terrible mistake, to go down this path. Was it his gut? Feminine intuition?

He wasn't sure. Couldn't tell anymore.

Finally, looking at HER name in the search box in Google, he felt his breasts pressing against the edge of the desk, so soft and so annoying, so wrong. I have to get out of this body, and I have no other ideas, he thought, and so he hit Enter. The first hit was a Facebook Page—a page with her full name-- Salome Sofia Aragon. Pete paused, feeling nervous, but then he

clicked on the link, and her page opened up, and he thought—she should really have been more careful with her privacy settings.

The picture was of her dressed in a cheerleader uniform—that pretty young face all painted. It reminded him of the first time he'd looked in the mirror after the switch. She was surrounded by other girls in some kind of gym, all of them smiling. The letters on the red and black uniform read AAA: Astoria Arts Academy.

Her wall was smothered with posts that had been placed there over the last few weeks—friends wondering where she'd been, people just saying hi, then more and more worried and concerned posts, and then messages from people he guessed were family members, and a picture of a poster on a telephone poll: Missing.

Pete felt sad looking at all the posts, all the pictures. Hadn't anyone talked to the family? Told them what had happened? If so, why was the picture of him—or rather why wasn't it of him? Did her parents even know about the switch?

I should tell them, he thought, sitting back and crossing his arms—but as he started to cross them they squeezed those huge boobs together, and he felt like he had a huge balloon between his arms, so he tried crossing them on top of the boobs, but that felt weird, so finally crossed his arms under the breasts and let them rest heavily on his slender little forearms. Damn these things are annoying, he thought, but he was too focused on the Facebook page, all those images, and suddenly more worried about her family than he was about himself.

It would be strange. So strange. To contact them. What if they wanted to see him? Meet him? But didn't they have a right to know? Why wouldn't the NYPD have told them? The story had been in the newspaper, and...

Then it occurred to him. Maybe they thought she, Salome, might try to contact her family, or maybe one of the other switchers, and he leaned forward, excited, his breasts swaying, and he began scrolling through, looking more closely for something that might be a lead, going back in her timeline and then-- wait. She had a link to her “professional” page—her career as an exotic dancer, and her stage name: Princess Sweet.

Shitty name, he thought, impulsively clicking on the link, and there was a picture of her in nothing but pasties and a g-string, stiletto heels, her back against a glittering gold stripper pole, her arms raised, hands buried in his long, curly hair, her full, perfect breasts thrust forward, her tiny waist and wide, round hips, those long, long, tone legs...

That’s me, Pete thought, his mouth going dry as his hand crept to his cheek. That’s who I am now. He remembered that night, about a week before the switch, when she’d seen him in the street, looking at her, and she’d smiled back over her shoulder as she passed and gave her ass a little shake, and he’d looked at those full, wet red lips—his lips—and thought I would love to have that mouth wrapped around my cock...

He looked at those full, soft lips now even as he licked them, at those wide green eyes, that pretty little nose, and it was his face now, his body, his full breasts and narrow waist, his vagina...

The buzzer sounded, and he jumped. What? Who? Had someone caught him looking at himself? But then he snapped out of it, looked at the time display on his computer and realized it was probably his sister, and he slammed the laptop shut even as he realized that his nipples had gotten hard again, and they were running against his shirt and it felt—good—and he was getting

a little wet between his legs, so he hurried over to the intercom and pushed it, saying, “yes,” and his voice sounded husky and wet.

“It’s Kate,” he heard his sister call back in a crackly voice.

“Come on up,” he answered, his voice cracking on the word come, and then he buzzed her in and hurried to the bathroom, pulling down his sweat pants and underwear and wiping himself dry, then shoving a wad of toilet paper into his underwear, because he still felt—wet--and worried he might start leaking, then he waved his hands at his breasts ridiculously, ashamed of the hard points of his nipples pointing through the fabric, and he whispered, “Go down! Go down! Stop!”

But his stupid nipples wouldn’t listen, and they just seemed to if anything get harder, so he as soon as he let Kate into the apartment he wrapped his arms around his breasts, ignoring the uncomfortable feeling he was squeezing a couple balloons between his arms, and then he just stood there while Kate looked him up and down, picking up that something was weird in a new weird way, but she just shook her head and said, “Everything okay?” Glancing down at the arms her brother had wrapped so defensively around his breasts.

“Yeah. Just letting them... breath... as you said.”

“It’s better, right?”

“Yeah. At least when it comes to the itching.”

“Well, I got some calamine lotion that will help even more with the itching. So, that should help.” She reached into the bag from Duane Reade, a bag that seemed a little bigger than

it needed to be for a single tube of lotion, and Pete felt himself flush as he caught a glimpse of a delicate white strap.

He jumped away like he'd seen a snake, keeping his arms over his breasts, though. "No! No! Come on!"

"Pete..."

"No! I am not wearing one of those things."

"Okay. Okay. Fine. Forget it." She tossed the bag onto the couch behind her, held out the white tube of lotion. "Here."

"Don't try and turn me into a girl," Pete said, keeping one arm across his breasts while reaching out for the tube with the other.

"I won't say another word about it."

"All right, then."

"You coming home for Thanksgiving?"

"No," he said, standing awkwardly at the kitchen counter, his arms wrapped tightly around the soft abundance of his breasts, looking up at his sister, still feeling the terrible wetness between his legs.

"I'd like you to come."

"How about mom?"

"She's still having a hard time, but I think I could talk her into it."

Pete shook his head. The thought of seeing all the cousins and aunts and uncles, the nieces and nephews—no. Not like this. Not in this body, and he couldn't stand the thought of facing his father and mother again. Not after the last time. "It's too soon."

"It's a month away."

"No. Try and put yourself in my position. Can you imagine me going to a family function like--- this? Half of them won't even believe it's me."

"I know."

Pete didn't even realize that as they were talking he had his knees together and had been idly rocking up onto his tip toes and back down, up and down, squeezing his thighs together. Kate noticed—it seemed like such a girlish habit, very unlike Pete, and she wondered if being in that body was changing him, and how fast.

"Why do you?" Pete asked, suddenly curious and also eager to change the conversation.

"Why do I what?"

"Believe I'm me."

Kate shook her head, looking at the beautiful nineteen year old girl across from her, looking for all the world right like a nervous teenage girl, but then she looked into those big, pretty green eyes and she saw him in there, and she shrugged. "I don't know," she said. "But as soon as I saw you in the hospital, as soon as I looked in your eyes, I knew it was you in there. I just knew it."

Pete bit his lip. "Then why can't mom see it?"

“I think she does,” Kate said. “But she just doesn’t want to believe it. I gotta get back to work.”

“Thanks for coming over.”

Kate went over and reached out, and Pete didn’t feel he could refuse the hug, so he looked down and opened his arms and he and his sister embraced, their soft breasts pressing together, and it felt different and scary to Pete, more intimate than any hug he’d ever shared with his sister.

As they separated, Kate looked down at them and said, “You do have huge boobs, Pete.”

“Asshole,” Pete said, embarrassed but kind of glad just to have it—them—out there.

“Use the lotion,” Kate said, shaking her head as she let herself out. “And think about Thanksgiving. You know how much our family loves breast.... Meat.”

Pete threw a pillow at her as she slammed the door closed behind her.

Now I have to put up with my sister making boob jokes about me! Pete thought, shaking his head. Maybe I have it coming after all the hell I gave her when she was 12 and started getting hers, he thought, and then he took the new tube of lotion and rubbed it into his firm, heavy breasts.

VIII

“I feel like someone should tell her family,” Pete said. “I mean, I was looking at all those posts, feeling so terrible. They think she just disappeared.”

“Why don’t you tell them?” Brinkman said.

“I don’t know. That’s why I thought I would talk to you about it.”

“I think it is normal for you to feel some anxiety about it.”

“Yeah.”

“Have you ever had to communicate with the families of crime victims before?”

“Was it difficult?”

“Yeah.” Pete shrugged. “Okay. I get it. It’s not that much different, especially if I just think about it like I’m a cop doing his job.”

“Which you would be.”

“They don’t even need to know I’m in the body of their daughter.... Child.”

“Not if you don’t want them to.”

Pete put his index finger in his mouth and chewed idly on the edge of his finger nail. Brinkman hid her reaction, but it struck her as a very feminine of the kind she was not used to seeing from him. “I should probably check with the captain.”

“Is that what the rules say?”

“Yeah.”

“So, let me know what you do next time.”

“Right.”

“Now, you were telling me about being in the ambulance, and you asked the men for a sausage sub?”

Pete closed his eyes. “Yeah. I wish I hadn’t told you that.”

“Why not?”

“Because now you’ll want me to talk about it.”

“You know you don’t have to.”

“But I need to. So, I had been in shock a little—or probably a lot. Even after what she did to me, I was still in shock, not really registering completely that I’d lost my body, my life, and that no one would see me the same way as before, or treat me the same way as before, or, anyway, I said ‘sausage sub’ and they both grinned and exchanged a glance, and I could see them smirk and one of them looked right at my tits, and I felt it. I wasn’t one of them. One of the guys. Not anymore. And I could see them thinking about making a comment, and I am a guy, and I knew exactly the kind of thing they were thinking, and it made me... mad. I was so mad because I’m a dude, a guy, and I’m not... I’m not supposed to have to put up with that kind of shit.”

“Did they say anything?”

“No. But they didn’t have to, it was all there on their stupid faces. Assholes.” He punched the arm of the chair with a little fist. “I was so ashamed that I pulled the door of the ambulance shut, feeling myself flush, and my hair was all around my shoulders and in my eyes, and I brushed it away, and I felt my breasts rise, and became—how can I describe it? Like—super self-conscious... I felt the tightness of the corset around my body, became aware of the

weight of the breasts, their every little bounce, of the hair on my bare shoulders, those earrings, the weight of them pulling on my earlobes, and the feel of them brushing against my cheeks... even the feeling of the gunk on my face—all the makeup, the feeling of my legs in those silk stockings. Every inch of that body, and it was all wrong. It wasn't right. It didn't fit me—too bog in some places, too small in others... and I saw there was a mirror—the rearview mirror at the front of the ambulance, in the cab, and I walked forward feeling the sway of those wide, round hips, the boobs, and I looked in the mirror, and I saw... HER.”

“Her?”

“The stripper. The girl. I saw those wide, innocent eyes, all painted up and the long eyelashes and the lips... that face, and it was me. I was looking at myself, and no. It couldn't be real. I was looking in the mirror and seeing someone else, and not just someone else but a girl.”

“It must have been... terrible.”

“It was... I can't even think of a word for it. It seemed impossible. Impossible. And yet I was seeing and feeling it all, so I just sat down and kind of checked out. I just kind of went into like... a zone.”

“You probably had to. That kind of change? It's impossible to process. We were never meant to switch bodies.”

“You can say that again.” Pete frowned. “So, for a time it was like a dream. Eventually, they took me to some kind of hospital and a nurse helped me out of my... her clothes and then I was in the bed with monitors hooked up to me, and I didn't think I was sick, but I had no better idea, so I just lay there and stared at the television.

“Doctors and government types came and went. Later, I found out they wanted to study me, figure out what had happened, whether if it was even real. I think I would probably still be there, a lab rat, because they really wanted to know all about what was going on in my brain.”

“How did you get out? NYPD?”

“Haha. You obviously don’t know anything about the NYPD. No. Something better. It was the union.”

“The union?”

“Hell, yeah. They heard a cop was being held, and they came down there with guns blazing. Politicians know better than to fuck with the union, so they busted me out.”

“Good for them.”

“Yeah. I think they didn’t really realize the whole deal. When they saw me, saw this body, they were confused as hell, but once they had started to process they weren’t going to back down, so they got me out.”

“How long were you there for?”

“A couple days.”

“How did they treat you?”

“Horrible.”

“Really?”

“Well, from my perspective, because they treated me like a woman. The doctor came in to give me a ‘physical’—some beady eyed old dude, and he tells me to put my feet in the stirrups, and I was like—what the fuck?”

“He looked at me like I was nuts. Asked me hadn’t I ever been to see a doctor about any female issues? And I said hell, no, I’m a dude, and he looked at me like I had three heads and I asked him if he’d even read my case file, and he asked me to just tell him, so I told him who I was and what had happened, and he says, well, I still have to look at your vagina.”

“What?” Brinkman spit out some of her coffee.

“Yeah. He looks right at me and says, ‘Well, Pete,’ and he says ‘Pete’ all sarcastic and condescending like I am full of shit, ‘you may be a man, but I still have to look at your vagina. I was so pissed I started to get up. I was going to punch him right in his stupid face, kick his ass, but the nurse grabbed me and held me down-- that cute little red-haired nurse. I couldn’t believe she was stronger than me, but she held me down, and then they sedated me and tied me down with restraints, and I lay there and the doctor took my feet and put them into the stirrups, and there I was with my legs spread, tied to those cold, metal things, and my arms were tied down, and the doctor kind of gave me a little smile and he has some kind of metal thing in his hand that was flashing in the light—I could see it in his glasses, reflected there over those cold, grey eyes, and he smirked and said, “This may be a little cold, but just be a good girl, and we’ll be done soon.””

“He told you to be a good little girl? Even after you’d told him you were a man?”

“Well, he didn’t believe me.”

“So what? Even if you were delusional, suffering some kind of post-traumatic stress after being raped, he shouldn’t have...”

“Raped?” Pete shook his head. “I wasn’t raped.”

Dr. Brinkman sighed. “You were violated, Peter.”

“But that was her fingers. She didn’t put her thing in me or anything like that.”

“Peter. It doesn’t matter. He...”

“She.”

“She... engaged in sexual contact with you against your will. You’re a cop. If you got a call with those details, what would be the legal definition?”

Peter shook his head, slipped on his sunglasses and said, “I can’t talk about this shit anymore.”

“Peter. This is not the time to walk out. You need to confront this.”

“Stop yelling at me!” Peter shrieked, his voice sliding into its naturally high-pitched, girlish register. ‘I can’t. I’m not. I wasn’t ever.... No. No. No!’ He spun awkwardly, his arms out, hands bent at the wrists.

“Peter! Wait.”

Peter felt like he couldn’t breathe, like there was a 20 ton weight on his chest, crushing him. He felt like the office closing in, and Brinkman seemed to have grown to 20 feet tall had become a threat, a danger, and he ran, he ran from the office, down the hall and out into the cold, grey afternoon. His phone started vibrating. He ignored it.

It was past four o'clock, and the setting sun was low and the light slanted through the buildings, a warm, red color that only made the frigid breeze seem colder. Peter hurried down the street feeling chased, pursued, his heart racing, and that word huge in his mind: RAPE.

No. Not that. Not him. It wasn't true. Couldn't be true.

The feelings came back. Helpless. Confused. That MAN on top of him, her hand on his breasts while another slithered down his belly, down under the elastic of his panties, to stroke a vagina he couldn't possibly have because he was a man, and RAPE.

No. No. No.

Cars honked, he heard brakes squeal and spinning he realized he was in the middle of the street, a whoosh of air blowing against him as a car swerved past and another, and Pete ran, not even sure if he was running back the way he'd come from or toward home, but just running, running because he could remember being pinned on his back, her body so big and heavy, her fingers sliding into his vagina, and no.

He slowed to a fast walk, hurrying down the sidewalk, catching concerned looks from people who shifted to get out of his way, and he felt dirty and sick, radioactive, like a leper, and a thought lodged itself into his mind-- they all know. They all know I was raped. That I'm filthy, unclean. That's why they're looking at me like that, avoiding me.

Rape. I was raped. How could I not have realized?

He looked up and around. The bridge. Yes. He would jump, just like he should have in the first place, because he was supposed to be a man and he wasn't supposed to get raped just like a... woman. The thought crystallized, it felt good, felt right, and he smiled and grabbed his

cell phone and threw it into the street so he couldn't call someone, have any seconds thoughts, someone shouted, "hey" and...

Oh. My. God.

He stopped, suddenly, his heart racing. There, behind a storefront window, he saw her-- the man he used to be-- his old face, the face of the woman who'd raped him. He, she, was sitting at a small table, sipping from a paper coffee cup, staring off into space... and Pete suddenly felt panicked that she might see him, and he hurried past the store and pressed himself against the stone wall just to the side of the glass.

It didn't seem possible. I must be imagining things, he thought. I'm hysterical, panicked. I think I see her because of all this shit in my head and it doesn't change anything because I'm going to kill myself anyway and even if it is her then no but it can't be it's just that I'm going crazy.

Pete took a couple deep breaths. Look, he whispered to himself. Look. But he was terrified to look. What if she saw him? What if she came out and grabbed him? He saw himself being bent over in an alley, her behind him as she yanked down his sweat pants.

But no. She wouldn't. Couldn't. He could scream if she tried anything here.

Biting his lower lip, Pete peeked around the corner and into the coffee shop, and he saw the back of her head-- she hadn't shaved her neck in a while, and it was looking pretty shaggy, as was his usual high and tight haircut, but he was sure that was him-- his body. The head started to turn, and Pete pulled away, reaching into his pocket, and--

Shit. His phone.

He looked out and saw it there in the street, somehow having not been hit by any of the oncoming cars, and taking one more glance into the coffee shop he saw her standing now, greeting a woman, and Pete's eyes narrowed. The bastard; she wouldn't get away with another rape. All his old instincts kicking in, Pete hurried to the edge of the curb, watched the oncoming cars zipping past, tires racing so close to his phone, and he waited, all thoughts of suicide gone, now laser focused on a new task-- bringing his rapist to justice-- and as soon as there was a little gap and raced into the street and grabbed his phone, two yellow cabs zipping by him, their horns wailing, and then he ran back to the sidewalk, and people were staring at him, shaking their heads, and he swiped his phone on ignoring the texts from Brinkman, hurried back to the coffee shop, glancing in the window and... she was gone.

No. No. No. He scanned the room, all the quadrants. Nothing. Just a paper cup sitting on the table where she'd been sitting, the chairs pushed back at odd angles. Fuck. Pete stomped a foot in frustration, looking up and down the sidewalk for any sign of her, but he was shorter now and couldn't really see that well over the crowd, and he spun around and stomped his foot again.

"Yeah? Pete?" He heard Lopes' voice coming over the phone.

"Oh, hey," he said.

"What's wrong?"

"I think I just got away."

"What?"

Pete went back to a spot against the building out of the bustling crowds and leaned against the wall, told his friend the story. "Get the cup," Lopes said.

"What?"

"Get the cup. We can find out if she was you. I mean..."

"I know what you mean," Pete said, hurrying into the coffee shop. A customer was just about to sit down at the table and was reaching for the abandoned cup so Pete summoned up his cop tone of command and barked, "Stop!"

Even in his small, girl's voice it worked, and the customer froze, looking up at the woman who'd come barging into the room in surprise. "Back away from the table," Pete said. "I'm a cop."

"My English is not so good," the man said in a German accent. "Did I commit some sort of crime?"

"No. Just sit someplace else." Then, Pete brought his phone back to his ear and said, "I got the cup."

"Good deal. Where are you?"

Pete told him even as he noticed a napkin sitting on the chair where she had been sitting. "I'll be right there," Lopes said, disconnecting.

"Okay," Pete said absently, looking down at the chair, at the napkin. It had writing on it-- a black pen, and the letters read, "Hey, Pretty Girl."

Lopes pulled up in his squad car, and they used an evidence kit to gather the cup and the napkin. "You think this was for you?" Lopes said.

"Yeah. She must have seen me. Damn it."

"It's a bitch," Lopes said, then shrugged awkwardly and said, "sorry."

"Why, because you said bitch? Lopes, I'm still me."

"No, I meant because she got away, but now that I remember I'm in the presence of a lady I'll be more careful with my language."

"Fuck you."

"Let's go drop this shit off at the station and get a beer."

"Oh, well, I'm not sure..."

"You're coming and that's it."

"I'm just not comfortable going out-- like this."

"Then we'll go to your place. I'm not taking no for an answer."

"Lopes," Pete answered, shaking his head, feeling strange, the adrenaline wearing off and some of the emotional turmoil from the day returning. "I had a really crazy day today, and the shrink, and I just don't think I'm in the right frame of mind for this right now."

"Well, let me drive you home at least."

"Okay," Pete said, feeling bad. "Thanks."

They didn't talk much as Lopes maneuvered the cruiser through traffic and up to the station in South Harlem. Calls crackled through the radio, and Pete settled into the passenger seat, feeling that good old sense of the comfortable and familiar settle in. This was where he belonged. He was a cop. He was still a cop.

What had happened? He would have to deal with it, and one way he now knew was not to kill himself, but bring that asshole to justice whether he ever got his body back or not. He waited in the car outside the station, sliding down in his seat, sunglasses on even though it was dark now, not wanting anyone to recognize him. He didn't feel ready to face them. Not yet. Of course, once Lopes drove him back to his apartment, he parked the car and followed Pete right to the door.

"You're going to insist, aren't you?"

"You know it, bro."

"Just one beer."

"Or white wine if that's what you're drinking these days."

"Fuck you."

They got in the elevator and Pete found himself pressing himself into a corner. He felt uncomfortable being in such a small place with a man, and there were so many emotions in him he doubted he could have gotten into the elevator with a guy right now-- any other guy. It made him feel angry that he had become so skittish around men-- just another item on the long list of reasons he had to get HER.

He felt the same anxiety as he fumbled with the keys to his apartment door, Lopes standing behind him-- a little close, almost close enough to touch, and Pete opened the door and hurried in, eager to put some distance between the two of them. "You're the first person whose been here other than my sister."

"I been a bunch of times," Lopes answered, plopping onto the couch and grabbing the remote.

"I mean since... you know."

"Oh. Yeah. Beer me."

Pete got the beers, handed one to Lopez, took a seat on an easy chair away from Lopez, who was smart enough to both understand and not comment. He clicked around and found an episode of Big Bang Theory, then raised his beer.

"To old friendships."

"Slainte."

Pete drank his beer, sort of wanting to tell Lopez to put on some sports, but he decided to let it slide, and then Lopez kept flipping around from show to show, idly talking about work while Pete sipped his own beer and got aggravated.

"Why can't you just pick one thing and watch it," Pete finally said, getting up and walking back to the kitchen.

Lopez smiled, watching his old friend walk away, his hips rolling, his hour glass shape hinted at even under all those layers. He almost said, 'my girlfriend says the same thing,' but it didn't feel right, was maybe a little closer to home than his jokes about white wine, so he just swallowed down the rest of his beer and said, "beer me."

Pete turned. "Um, Lopes? I'm really tired, and I kinda need some space?"

Lopez nodded and stood up. It had been a huge step for Pete, just spending this much time with him, and he didn't want to push it. "I should get home," Lopez said. "Great to see ya, buddy."

"You, too, bro," Pete said, managing a smile.

Lopez felt himself getting a little aroused at the sight of that pretty smile on that perfect little face, and shocked, he gave his old friend a thumbs up and let himself out. The image of those big, green eyes and that bright smile-- the little dimples on the soft, smooth cheeks-- lingered as he rode down. Shit. He was starting to get horny for the little woman Pete had become-- and it made him feel guilty and confused. He thought about the pictures they'd run in the Daily News -- pictures of the girl in stripper mode-- the full breasts, long legs.

Poor Pete, he thought, not for the first time. Jesus. To go from being a dude, a guy, a man's man-- to that? It was amazing he hadn't killed himself. Lopez got into his squad car, imagining his friend slipping out of his sweat pants, his round, firm ass and those long, toned dancer's legs, and he shook his head again and got out his phone. He dialed Kate and let her know about the visit, that Pete seemed to be doing pretty well.

He didn't mention to Kate that he was sitting in his squad car getting a raging hard on imagining Pete on his back, his legs spread revealing his wet slit, his big, naked breasts pooling on his chest, a dreamy smile on his face as Lopez climbed between those soft thighs and got ready to fuck him.

There was a beep on the line, and Kate interrupted. "That's him right now."

"Who?"

"Pete."

Lopez felt himself flush with guilt and said, "Okay. Good night, then."

"Thanks for being there for us."

"Yeah."

Kate switched to the call from Pete and said, "Hey" as brightly as she could manage.

"Hey," Pete answered, his voice sounding muffled, conflicted.

Kate frowned. Lopez had made it sound like things were good, but her brother sounded--
off to her. "What's up?"

"Can you come over? I really need to talk to someone right now."

"What's up?"

"I realized today that I was raped."

"You going to be okay until I get there?" Kate said, her heart going out to Pete even as
she felt terrified for him.

"Yeah. I think so."

"I'm on my way. Text me if you need to."

"Thanks."

Pete collapsed into his easy chair as Kate hung up the phone, his mind a swirling storm of
conflicting feelings. On top of everything else he had to deal with, he was pretty sure the Lopez
had been thinking about fucking him. There had been something in his eyes right before he left,

as they were calling it a night-- a hard, glassy look, and it had sent a shiver right through Pete's slender shape, but no. Lopez wouldn't do that, and whatever.

He texted Brinkman back, finally. She'd sent him five texts since he'd run out of her office. "I'm good," he typed. "Gonna talk to sister."

Then he added, "About THAT."

He set the phone on his thigh, and it buzzed back immediately with the message, "Good. I'm here if you need me." It made him feel good-- to know someone cared, someone else cared, that she cared and wasn't just drawing a paycheck.

When Kate arrived they drank beer and talked about what had happened to him, about his session with the doctor, about how dirty and ashamed he felt. He found himself holding hands with his sister, the two of them sitting close, their legs touching, nodding and looking right into each other's eyes, and the next day he wouldn't remember much of what she'd said, but only that she had not looked at him as dirty or filthy at all, but with her eyes full of love and compassion, and she has told him it wasn't his fault, and that she loved him.

"So what next?" She asked.

"Keep working with my therapist. And, also, I am going to nail her ass for what she did to me."

"That's my big brother," Kate said, giving his soft little hands a squeeze.

The next morning Pete woke up early, his head a little fuzzy, thick both from the beer and the emotional hangover. He stumbled into the bathroom, pulled his underwear down to his knees and sat on the cold toilet seat, looking up at the ceiling as he felt the warm urine pass through the lips of his vagina. Then, he wiped himself, went into the kitchen and brewed a pot of coffee and carried it and a steaming bowl of oatmeal over to his work desk and sat down ready to work. His breasts were swaying freely under a t-shirt that was too tight, and he had slit the collar to provide more space. He'd taken Kate's advice and stopped keeping them bandaged down all the time, and he hoped he would get used to the feeling of them always so heavy and constantly swaying on his chest.

He felt focused, more focused than he'd been since the switch. He knew that he had a mission now, and that mission was to get a creep off the streets.

He went back to Salome's Facebook page. Fugitives usually went back to familiar places, and though it seemed clear from all the posts that she hadn't been in touch with her family, he wanted to check out friends, co-workers, other people on her page where she might be taking shelter. The girl had a lot of friends-- 987. He scrolled through pictures to see which ones seemed to have been tagged more often, and as he looked through her life, her friends, her posts, something started to bother him.

He was looking at pictures of her at ballet recitals, standing on her toes, arms raised over her head gracefully, as Maria in the school production of West Side Story, then Juliet, sweet and innocent looking with flowers in her hair. More. She and her friends laughing for a selfie on the street with a caption saying they were about to see Magic Mike. Prom pictures-- she looked gorgeous in a shimmering emerald dress, clinging to her boyfriend. And there she was, a glittering tiara nestled in her thick, curly black hair, a bundle of roses in her arm as she was

named homecoming queen. Again, he felt the strange sense of vertigo looking at the face that he now saw each morning in the mirror, the body he showered and fed-- his body, but living a life he'd never known, the life of a vivacious and sweetly feminine girl.

A seemingly happy, joyful girl.

Well-adjusted, Pete wrote on his yellow legal pad, beneath all the notes he'd taken on her life. He underlined it three times, tapping his pen while he bit his lip.

It didn't add up.

Everything about her said that she was a very happy young woman, and there was nothing there to indicate she was unhappy with her sex, that she would want to be a man, that she fit the profile of a rapist. The profiles for rapists-- female or male-- were narrow and predictable, but he didn't see anything there that would put her-- on top of him-- with her fingers inside him. He remembered that face, that angry, leering face.

That wasn't Salome inside him. He knew it. There was no way the girl who'd left this imprint in social media had stolen his body- No way, which meant she had been switched as well. But when? Had the Switcher been the one who'd taken this sweet high-school girl and turned her into a stripper and likely a prostitute?

Pete idly reached up and scratched his soft, round breast as he went back to her professional page, looking at those pictures again, that long, lean, body, that face now all dolled up and displayed for sex. His sister had said that she'd been able to look into his eyes-- his new eyes-- and see him-- and so he looked intently at the pictures, the eyes, the body language, and he found himself shaking his head. No. That was still her. He was sure of it.

But then-- who had stolen his body? And where was Salome?

Pete got up and tossed his bowl into the sink, got another cup of coffee. With each step his breasts swayed and bounced, his nipples rubbing against the fabric of his shirt, and he thought for a minute about putting on the bra his sister had left there, but no. He wasn't going to go girly. He'd just deal with the jiggle factor. And so he paced for a minute, sipping his coffee, thinking. Salome. His heart went out to her. She was so young and sweet and innocent, and she'd just wanted to be an actress and dancer, a dream so many young girls had, but she'd ended up working as a stripper, and then someone had stolen her body, her life.

Where was she now? Dead? Imprisoned in some freak's basement? That poor girl. Just one more reason for me to keep going, Pete thought. Just one more reason to work. But what now? He sat down at the computer and started to scroll through the pictures again, the friends, the life, but nothing. Nothing. How was he supposed to find her? To save her? To save himself?

I'm a piece of shit, he thought, and he felt her again, on top of him, the feeling of her finger and then her hand sliding between the lips of his vagina, the terrible feeling of helplessness as she squeezed his breasts and breathed in his face, her breath hot and damp. I'm not a man anymore, just a stupid slut, a dumb bitch who got raped by a woman. I can't do this. I can't catch her, or him, or whatever. Damn it.

He started to get up, go to the fridge, grab a beer, but then he stopped, closed his eyes, and folded his hands. He hadn't prayed in years. Not since he'd been a child. Church? He went for family functions. Holidays. But now? Well, sitting there in the body of a young woman, lost, confused, he whispered, God. Please help me. I'm scared and confused and I feel so lost,

but I want to do what's right, to help Salome, and catch this creep before he hurts anyone else, and please, God. Please.

He opened his eyes and on the screen, on Salome's Facebook page, was a picture of her family gathered on the stoop of their brownstone. They were all there, Salome in the middle of the bunch, wearing a Real Madrid soccer jersey, her hair up in a ponytail, and she was holding a little girl, who was pointing up and to the left, right at the street number which hung next to the door, old iron numbers that had grown dull with age: 700K

700K. Look. Pete laughed and shook his head. Thank God. And then, before he could think better of it, he clicked started to type out a message to the Aragon family.

X

"Nobody would believe I was me," Pete said. He was sitting forward, his knees together, elbows on his knees, his chin resting on his little hands. "I called my girlfriend, Anna. Asked if we could meet. She'd seen the story in the paper, had heard through Kate about The Switch, but she told me over the phone she thought it was bullshit. She agreed to meet me, though, and it was a huge, huge mistake. I walked in the restaurant and she stood up-- she's a tall girl-- 5' 10", and I found myself looking up at her as she shook my hand, and I felt small and ridiculous, like her little sister or something. I had been in this body for a week at that point, but most of my contact had been with strangers, and so looking up at my girlfriend, realizing I now had bigger tits than she did, a higher-pitched voice-- I was more of a girl than she was, and it suddenly hit me how much I had lost."

"She didn't believe you?"

"No. Not at all. She accused me of being in on some kind of game with 'Pete'-- told me that if he wanted to break up with her he should be man enough to do it in person and not send his 'little slut' to do the job."

"I am so sorry that happened."

"It got worse. I felt really depressed, weird, my head had been fuzzy, and I was feeling so needy. I didn't want to lose her despite what had happened, I felt like I needed her more than ever, so I started-- well, begging, pleasing with her, and she was listening, I could tell, starting to wonder, and then, as we were talking, I felt like someone had punched me in the side all of a sudden, and I grimaced and put a hand to my ribs.

'Oh my God,' she said.

"What?" But even as I said it, I felt like I was... leaking. And I got another cramp."

"And Anna just got disgusted and said, 'Okay, 'Paul.' Well, you're having your period, 'Paul.' And I am not into dating a guy who's gonna be on the rag once a month just like me."

"You had your first period?"

"Yes."

"Right in front of your girlfriend?"

"Right in front of everyone. I stood up to go after her, and I looked down and saw this brown stain on the crotch of my pants, and I just ran into the bathroom and hid in a stall, pulling down my pants and looking at the blood on my thighs, and I punched the wall and screamed."

"I can't even imagine how that must have felt."

"It felt like shit. I'm a man, or was a man. And one of the things, I mean one of the big things that made me glad I was a man was that I didn't have ever be on the rag. It was something that made girls weak, inferior, part of what made me feel sorry for them, and now here I was having my period, blood coming out of my vagina, and I fucking hated it. I hated it so much, and I was so humiliated because now I couldn't deny that I was one of them, a female, the weaker sex."

"What did you do?"

"What could I do? I cleaned the blood off my thigh. I wadded up a bunch of toilet paper to keep me from leaking anymore. I couldn't do anything about the stain-- of course, I had worn gray sweat pants. And then I ran out of the bathroom, out of the restaurant, and I ran home and I got shit-faced."

"Have you had another?"

"Period? Not yet."

"How long ago was the first one?"

"I don't really want to talk about my periods, doc. It's disgusting."

"It's part of your life now."

"I... know," Pete said softly. "I guess. So, should we bond over our shared menstrual issues? Maybe brain each other's hair while trading tampons? You got any pointers for me, sister?"

"If you don't want to talk about it, I'll drop it. No need to get so hostile."

"I'm just not ready."

"So, your girlfriend didn't believe you. How about your parents?"

"I tried to visit my parents, but my mother called me a lying bitch, and my father kept staring at my tits."

"Is that when you started...?"

"Binding them down? Yeah. I'm surprised it took me that long, but I think I was being a little defiant at first, refusing to even acknowledge that I had them, just wearing my regular clothes, trying to act like I didn't care, but whenever I did leave the house I was getting looks and catcalls, and then when my dad practically splugged all over himself staring at my boobs I finally decided I would keep them hidden as much as possible, and I also started to stay home as much as I could."

"You must have been very lonely."

"I was. My family is close, was close. I spent every Christmas and Thanksgiving with them, even after I got out on my own. And I was at every baptism and first communion. Now, my mother was calling me a bitch, telling me go away and never come back, and my father-- like I said, he just kept staring at me like I was a piece of meat. The only people who believed me were my sister, Kate, and my old buddy, Juan Lopez."

"But you avoided them."

"Yeah. I was ashamed, embarrassed. I was Kate's big brother. I always protected her and took care of her, and now here was in the body of a little girl, a stripper, and I didn't feel like I could protect or take care of anyone, and I didn't want her to see me like this, and I didn't want Lopes to see me like this, either."

"And yet you called the sister after our last session, when you finally confronted the fact that you had been violated."

"That word still makes me feel a little sick," Pete said. "It still makes me feel... I just don't like to hear it."

"I'm sorry."

"I know you didn't mean anything, but, yeah, I called my sister. She'd been reaching out to me, trying to help, and I just knew I needed to talk to her. I needed to talk to her more than I needed to hide from myself."

"And what did she say?"

"She told me it wasn't my fault, what happened, and that she loved me."

"You have a good sister."

"I know."

"Peter, I just have to tell you how impressed I am with you, with how positively you are dealing with all of this. A lot of people in your situation would be falling apart."

"Well, I'm struggling more than I let on. I get nervous around men, very nervous. I'm actually a little scared to be alone with them, and when things don't go right, when I mess up? A lot of times I think about what happened, what she did to me, and I feel dirty and stupid, and I call myself a dumb bitch or a stupid slut, and I know I shouldn't, but it just happens."

"And then what do you do?"

"You know, it may not be modern psychology or whatever, but I have been praying a lot. A lot. And so I pray, and then I feel better."

"Whatever works is good, and just understand that what you are experiencing is part of the recovery process. It will take time, and you'll have days where it all comes back, and it will always be with you, but the women that I have seen do the best are the ones who refuse to be victims, the ones who find ways to use their experience to help others, just like you."

Pete sat back, half sure that Brinkman had just called him a woman, and it irked him, but he decided to let it pass. He had something else he wanted to run by her. "I contacted her family."

"You did?"

"Yeah. I felt it was the right thing to do. Let them know at least as much as I know. I'm a little conflicted because I, well, I have ulterior motives."

"That's fine."

"Sure. Your motives are good. You want to solve the crime, and you may just help bring closure to them as well."

"Yes, well, speaking of that? Her mother wants to meet me."

"She knows you're in Salome's body?"

"Yeah."

"So, how do you feel about it?"

"I think I should do it, both for her sake, and so I can do more investigating."

"Then do it."

"You seem pretty sure."

"Pete, you are the first patient I have had who was a man and got switched into the body of a woman. I say-- follow your instincts. Because the truth is I have no idea what makes sense for you, but just promise me you'll text me if anything gets weird."

"Okay, doc," he said smiling brightly. "I will."

Pete stood up and slipped on his sunglasses, and Brinkman walked him to the door expecting his usual 'peace out' style exit, but he shocked her as he turned, threw his arms around her and gave her a tight, loving hug. "Thanks for everything, doc. I can't tell you how much you've meant to me through all this."

Brinkman smiled and gave Pete a little peck on his smooth cheek. Having him there in her arms, smelling the feminine musk on him, she wanted badly to kiss him, to tilt that pretty face of his back and kiss those big, soft pillowy lips, but she resisted, instead separating, giving his soft little hand a squeeze and then saying, "You're amazing, Pete. Good luck with Salome's mom."

"Bye," Pete said in a high-pitched little chirp, his dimpled mouth in a wide, bright, beautiful smile.

Brinkman shook her head, went back to her desk, pulled out her Ipad and started jotting down some notes. Peter was adapting more and more traits that would fall onto the feminine spectrum of behaviors. The way he sat and moved, when his guard was down, the way he spoke.

It suggested so many things about how much of a person was a manifestation of the physical organism-- not just the brain, but the body.

It wasn't just that Pete now had a female body. No. Brinkman had worked with many patients over the years, and they had fallen all over the scale of masculine and feminine without much regard for physical sex-- most people fell more toward the middle than they realized or wanted to admit, men and women who might be called a muddled collection of mascufem traits, and she had always had patients on the extreme ends-- masculine women and men, feminine women and men.

Pete had landed in the body of a very feminine young lady, and it was the body, Brinkman felt, that was winning out over whatever of Pete had been placed into it--- his brainwaves, and if such a thing existed, his soul. If he'd been placed into the body of a more aggressive, assertive woman, she was inclined to think he would be more aggressive and assertive, but he'd been switched into a physical self that was genetically programmed to be passive and nurturing and sweet and cute, and he was starting to become all those things.

Was it a problem that a big tough cop was turning into a sweet, adorable girl? Not really. Not in Brinkman's mind. It would only be a problem if her patient started to feel it was a problem. When it came to gender issues, in fact, many of her most frustrated and unhappy patients had been ones who had been trying to repress their identities.

As for Brinkman, she still got a thrill from the idea of a big, tough man finding himself in the body of a stripper, and then found himself becoming that stripper. She imagined him in a mini-skirt and fuck me pumps, a matching purse on his arm, hurrying prettily down the street,

and again she sighed and headed to the bathroom while she imagined those long, tone legs and his tight, round ass in a pair of hot, lacy red panties.

If Brinkman's theory was correct, it was only a matter of time before Peter found himself wanting to dress like a woman, a feminine woman celebrating his vulnerability and need to be protected. Was it just wishful thinking on her part? She didn't think so. But in the meantime, picturing him smearing some wet, crimson lipstick on his full, soft lips was getting her wet, and she knew she had to take care of herself before she would be able to focus.

Pete was already struggling with some of the impulses Brinkman had predicted. As he walked home, he passed a Victoria's Secret, the shop windows full of huge pictures of the Victoria's Secret girls in their lingerie, and he glanced at them out of the corner of his eye, their full, firm breasts encased in pretty silk bras in bright, fun colors, and he wondered what it would be like to wear a bra like that, how it would feel. The girls looked so pretty, and he admired their flat, firm tummies. Part of him thought about fucking them, about how it would be to lay them down, climb on top and yet he also imagined himself as them, being gently pushed backward, onto his back, his arms above his head, his breasts in that little pink bra the girl in the window was wearing, and the hungry look in Lopez' eyes as he...

Oh, gross, Pete thought, snapping out of it. I am actually thinking about fucking my drinking buddy. Pete hurried away from the store, but his skin was tingling, and he felt his breasts straining beneath the ace bandage, which he still wore in public, and he sighed in frustration.

Once he got home, Pete unwrapped his breasts, rubbed them with lotion, slipped in an over-sized sweatshirt, sat down and kept thinking about those women in the Victoria's Secret window. What would it be like? He turned on Sports Center. They were talking about the WNBA, of course, and he idly wondered what kinds of bras those girls wore when they trained and played hoops, what kept them from bouncing all over while they ran. He flipped to ESPN2 just in time to catch the end of a commercial for Midol Complete.

It looked like the world was just determined to keep him thinking about girl stuff, so he finally got up and found the bag Kate had left, pulled out the little white bra, feeling it's soft, cool material in his hands. He felt excited and guilty at the thought of putting it on, ashamed, really, but also kind of thrilled at the idea of the shame.

You promised you would never go girly, he reminded himself. No bras. No women's clothes.

But he didn't have a choice. He clutched the bra in his hands, and he knew he had to put it on, see what it felt like to wear one.

He closed the blinds, looking around, feeling like he was being watched, and he pulled off his sweatshirt, his breasts swaying free. He looked down at them bobbing there on his chest, impossibly, and then he lifted the bra and held the cups against his boobs, feeling a thrill as the cool, soft material covered his soft skin, his big, sensitive nipples. How do I put this on? He wondered, having slipped more than a few off of girls over the years, but looking at the cups, he realized it was one of those kinds that opened at the front, and so he slipped the little straps over his slender shoulders, fit his breasts into the cups of his bra and, lifting them, he pulled the cups together and fixed the clasp in place, feeling the weight of his breast now pull down on the little

straps as his breasts were lifted and pulled together, and he felt his cheeks flush with that crazy mixture of shame and guilt and excitement as he adjusted the straps and then shifted his boobs around and settled into his first bra.

My first bra, he thought, feeling ridiculous standing there in the middle of his living room, still with that tingly feeling like someone was watching him. Am I supposed to take a picture and post it to Facebook?

He giggled at the thought, walking into his bedroom, curious how he looked, and he flipped on the light switch and looked at himself there in his bra, and he looked really pretty, so pretty it almost scared him. She, the girl in the mirror, had really large boobs, especially for her narrow frame, and now in that little white bra, his breasts looked even bigger, and the way it squeezed them together gave him a deep, shadowy valley of mysterious, soft and inviting cleavage. The white straps against his slender, brown shoulders, his flat, taught belly and tiny little waist.

That's me, he thought, looking at the stunning young woman in the mirror, her mouth hanging open, her big, green eyes dancing mischievously. That's me in my first bra, and oh my god I look so hot it scares me. He nibbled on his finger nail, raised his arms over his head, watching as his breasts rose, pressed together, getting a thrill from looking at himself, just like when he'd been a man and seen a woman display herself, and then he giggled and got his cell phone, thinking-- just for me, for fun, and he snapped some selfies, his skin tingling, his nipples getting hard.

He tossed himself on the couch and looked at the pictures he'd taken, the smiling, dimpled face, those big, soft, firm breasts, and he sighed again looking at that stunning little

woman, the stunning woman he had become, and he wondered what it would be like if this was it, forever, if this was his body now, and he would be stuck with it.

Because it was one thing to sit in his apartment in a bra and take pictures and giggle and let himself be a little silly, but out there in the world? In this body? What if the legal system finally decided that he was Salome Sofia Aragon, 19 year old female, and he had to really live like this and be this girl?

Maybe I could do it, he thought. Maybe. But he knew he didn't want to. Not forever. His parents still wouldn't accept him, and he missed being a guy, hanging with his dad, talking shop. He missed enjoying watching a girl like him be girly in her bra and panties, giggling and being silly.

And what about sex? Could he make it with another girl? Would he end up sleeping with guys? Or should he just become a nun? Take vows of chastity? He'd always been opposed to homosexuality, had been taught it was a sin, and thought he'd been better than most cops in that he tried to treat everyone with respect, he'd secretly hated gays and lesbians a little, felt they were doing something wrong, and flaunting it.

But now what was he? If he had sex with a woman was he being a straight man or a gay woman or what? One thing he was sure of was that his body wanted it, wanted to be touched and caressed. The need had been so strong he'd thrown himself into Brinkman's arms. He'd needed to be close to someone, to feel a physical connection, and then when he'd lingered there in her arms, looking at her face, he'd been ready, waiting, had wanted her to kiss him, and for a moment he actually thought she would, but she'd just given him a peck on the cheek and even that had made his fingertips tingle.

He went to his computer, thinking about checking the scores, but instead he found himself back on Salome's fan page, looking at a picture of her standing with her back to the camera, looking back over her shoulder. In the picture, she had dressed in that emerald corset, a little pair of green and black lace panties stretched tight across her perfect, firm, heart-shaped ass. Pete remembered the feel of it tightly wrapped around his body, lifting his breasts, and his hand slipped down the front of his pants as he stared at the image.

The phone rang. Lopez. "Hey," Pete said, his voice already a little husky.

"What's up?" Lopez said back, and Pete could tell he was a little drunk.

"Research," Pete answered looking at his ass on the screen, her ass. Am I really that fucking hot? He wondered while he let his fingers slip between his legs, cover the bristly pubic hair on the soft mound of his vagina.

"Is this a bad time?" Lopez said.

"No. I can talk," Pete said, his mind fuzzy. He licked his lips. "What's going on with you?"

"I was just thinking about you, Pete. Wanted to talk to you. Can I come over? Maybe we can hang out, watch a movie or... something."

Pete had been gently stroking himself, but now he paused. There was something in Lopez' voice, his tone, the way he said... something. It made all the female cells in Pete's body tingle, but it also scared him-- and excited him at the same time as he sat there in his bra, looking at a picture of his sweet little ass, and something made him say, "What do you mean by something?"

Lopez paused. "I don't know. You know. Whatever. We could just hang out and see what happens."

"What do you think might happen?"

"Well, you know, I'm a man, and you're a... woman."

Pete smiled, confused and thrilled by the thoughts and images running through his mind, and he giggled. "Tell me what you would do to me?"

"I would motorboat those tits of yours," Lopez said with a hoarse chuckle.

Pete laughed, the strange spell broken. "You're an idiot," he said, letting his voice drop back into the mansetto he'd been using since the switch.

"Hahaha. Fuck. You sounded like you were into it for a minute there, bro."

"Yeah, well, I thought you were drunk dialing me, you asshole."

"I am, but what kind of a creep do you think I am? Wanting to fuck my best friend just because he got turned into a hot little tamale."

"Sleep it off, bro."

Pete hung up. What a prick, he thought, then chuckled. I really thought he wanted to fuck me. Yeesh. I really am starting to turn into an airhead.

He looked back at the picture of her on the screen, his perfect, heart-shaped ass-- HER perfect ass. It was still his unspoken secret. He'd seen her around that club, going in and out, had flirted with her, and she'd told him to come by and say hi sometime, and given him a wink, and she'd seemed older, suddenly, more coarse, less the innocent young girl she'd always seemed

to be, and so he had gone back, and she'd reached down and grabbed his dick, squeezed it, and then he'd turned her around, bent her over, pulled up her skirt, yanked down her panties and pounded her, and pounded her.

After, she'd pulled up her panties and turned around, smiling, and said, "Did you like taking me from behind?"

"Yeah," he'd answered, buckling his pants.

"Have you ever wondered what it's like for the girl?" She asked, as she pulled her skirt down, her eyes drifting dreamily along his chest.

"No," he'd said. "Not really."

And Salome had turned and given him another look at that ass, those long legs, and she'd said, "I think you'd like being the girl, getting fucked by a big, strong man."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" He'd said, annoyed.

But the girl had just walked away singing "Hey, babe, take a walk on the wild side. Hey, sugar, take a walk on the wild side."

He decided it was some kind of code, some way a working girl sounded out a client to see if he was into some certain kind of kinky thing, but now he realized she'd been sizing up her mark, trying to decide if he was the guy she wanted to fuck, and he'd won and now he was in that body, the perfect, gorgeous little body that he'd fucked as a man.

He went to bed, hugging his pillow to his chest, and when he fell asleep, he dreamed he was Salome in the alley, bent over, and she was behind him, fucking him, and he loved it.

Pete thought about maybe wearing some of his normal clothes to the meeting with Salome's mother, but they were all too big in most places and too small where he wanted them bigger, so he strapped down his boobs and slipped into his usual baggy sweats, thought about cancelling, decided against, paced around and thought about it some more. It just seemed like it would be so strange and awkward to step into HER life, to meet HER parents, and then finally he knelt down at the side of his bed and prayed, and as soon as he finished his first Hail Mary, he knew he needed to go for the sake of the mother, Edith, who wanted so badly to meet him, to give her some closure, and for the sake of Salome, too, because he felt certain that he would find the clues that would lead him to her somewhere there in that world of hers.

He found a seat in the corner of a subway car on the L line, the handicapped area, and sat next to two other women, his shades on, head down. After the LIC stop, a group of teenage boys got on, talking loudly, and they glanced toward Pete and he shifted nervously, trying to ignore them. Groups of young males made him nervous, and they seemed to be talking louder now that they had noticed him, and out of the corner of his eye he thought he saw one of them gesture toward him.

Sure enough, the boys walked back and grabbed the rail above Pete's head, hovering over him, making him feel small, vulnerable. "Hey," one of them said, his legs almost touching Pete's knees. "Aren't you that stripper who says she used to be a cop? From the paper."

"No," Pete said in a small voice, not looking up at the boy. "But I get that all the time."

"I told you, dawg," one of his friends said.

“She’s lying, man. I know that’s her!”

Pete started to get up, to move away, but he came to a grinding halt, and the boys got off, leaving him there, his heart racing. The woman next to him patted him on the thigh and smiled, and he smiled back.

“Boys,” she said.

“Yeah,” Pete answered. “Right?”

They really hadn’t meant any harm. Hadn’t been any threat. They just thought he was someone kind of famous, But he’d felt threatened, and again Pete felt he should probably do some training in this body, get it stronger, learn how to fight in this shape, to whatever extent this curvy little body could fight.

But then he found himself in Astoria, climbing up the subway steps into a bright, brisk Fall day, and he wandered down to the Astoria Diner and walked in looking around nervously for the face of Salome’s mother, but he heard a woman gasp, “Heavens.”

Turning, he saw her, Salome’s mother, Edith, sitting at a booth by the window, her mouth hanging open, tears already in her eyes. He smiled and walked over, and before he got to the table Edith had stood and come out, running toward him, throwing her strong arms around him and pulling her to him in a crushing bear hug. She was short and stocky, like a lot of immigrant women, the result of malnourishment as a child and hard work as an adult, her head coming only to Pete’s chest.

Pete hugged her back, feeling awkward and uncomfortable being held so tightly by a stranger, but he could feel the emotion flowing through her, and let her hold on until she finally pulled back and looked up at him, shaking her head and saying, “It’s you. It’s my Salome.”

“I’m sorry,” Pete answered, shaking his head. “But I’m not your daughter.”

“You told me, but I can’t believe it. My eyes are telling me I am looking into the face of my daughter right now.”

Pete took her hands and led her back to the table. He pulled some napkins from the dispenser and handed them to Edith so she could dab at her tears. “The stuff in the paper was all true,” Pete said. “Somehow, I was switched into the body of your daughter. This is Salome’s body, but now her... well...”

“Soul,” Edith said.

“Yes. Not her soul.”

Pete became aware of people crowding around them, faces all over the restaurant looking at the two of them curiously, and now that he was paying attention he started to recognize some of the faces from the pictures he’d seen. Salome’s family had come along with her mother.

“Is things okay?” A man Pete recognized as Salome’s father, Carlos, asked nervously, looking at the young woman sitting across from his wife.

Pete looked at Edith, and she nodded to her husband. “Yes.”

“Can I join?”

Edith looked at Pete apologetically. She had told him they would be alone, but he just shrugged. “Pull up a stool, partner.”

The owner came over-- an elderly Greek man, and said, "You want, you use the banquet room. So many people."

"Everyone wants to see you," Edith said.

Pete felt overwhelmed, had to take some deep breaths to stay calm, but he nodded. The whole family needed answers, wanted to hear it directly from him, something that would convince them both that he wasn't their daughter, their niece, their cousin, their sister, and that she, the real Salome, would be fine. He owed it to them and to her, and so he stood up and said, "Let's go to the back, and I'll tell you everything I know."

As they walked, two little girls skipped up to him, smiling, and they took his hands, one on each side. "Aunt Sally! Aunt Sally!"

Carlos came up and whispered, "They are too young to understand."

Pete nodded and smiled, letting them hold his hands, and said, "Hey girls!"

The children were left outside, a couple tween cousins gripping that they shouldn't be left outside with the "little ones" and then the group, nearly twenty people, gathered around Pete and listened as he told them what had happened—leaving out the nasty parts—and then his belief that Salome was out there still, in another body, and that he wanted to find her.

There were tears and laments, and after the grief and disbelief passed determined faces as one after another they vowed to do anything they could to help him. Finally, Carlos and Edith asked if they could have some time alone with Officer Pete, and the group broke up.

"Thank you for coming. This must be hard for you," Edith said, taking Pete's hand.

"I felt it was the right thing to do."

“You are good girl,” Carlos said, nodding, and Pete didn’t bother to correct him. “Do you want to take look at Salome’s apartment? Maybe something there?”

“I would really need a warrant.”

“What? No. No warrant. I have key. Co-signed for apartment.”

“You did?”

“Legally can enter.”

“You know the law,” Pete said, smiling.

“He loves Law and Order,” Edith said. “He watches it so much he turns into a lawyer.”

“It’s a good show,” Carlos said with a smile. “I learn English.”

“Let’s go,” Pete said.

“I’ll come, too,” Edith said, taking Pete’s hand. “I like to see the apartment now.”

The three of them walked to Salome’s building. It had gotten dark out during the long meeting with Salome’s family, dark and cold, but Pete felt warm all over. He was so moved by how much Salome’s family loved her, how they’d all come out, and how kind and welcoming her parents had been toward him, and he was glad he’d come out, done the right thing. Salome’s apartment was only a few blocks from her parent’s house, and Pete said, “She didn’t move far.”

“No,” Edith said. “She had big dreams, but she loved her family.”

The apartment was small—a one bedroom with an efficiency kitchen, but even after sitting empty for a month it was still neat and pretty, and it smelled like flowers and vanilla. There were flowers on the little dining table—withered and crumbling flowers.

“Have you moved anything since she disappeared?”

“No. Yes. I came once and cleaned some things out of the refrigerator, took out the trash. That’s all.”

“Okay. Just take a seat and let me look around.”

“Okay.”

Salome’s parents exchanged a nod as the young woman who looked like their daughter seemed to suddenly change before their eyes, the talk, the walk, the way she looked around the room with precision, she suddenly seemed exactly like the cop she claimed to be, and what’s more they both felt it; she knew what she was doing, and she would bring their daughter home.

Pete began reciting the Hail Mary to himself, and then he walked right back to the little closet of a bedroom looked at the neatly made bed with the emerald green quilt and lavender pillows, paused, and—something caught his eyes, the edge of something peeking out from under the bed. Kneeling, he lifted the edge of the quilt and saw it sitting there, an old fashioned diary with a faux leather cover etched with the image of a rose. Just the kind of thing Salome would love. He flipped open the pages, starting at the back. Whoever had switched her was someone she’d met recently, he was sure of it, and was he was also sure it had been someone outside of her normal circle—someone who could switch himself eventually into Pete’s body and take on a new life without anyone Salome knew noticing the coincidental double disappearance.

He flipped, flipped again, and a page caught his eyes because Salome’s sweeping, pretty handwriting had suddenly grown bigger and more excited, and she has written the word Talent Scout in big, bold letters surrounded with exclamation points—the entry was dated a day before Pete had been jumped into Salome’s body. And, there was even a name: Johnny Temp.

Pete felt certain this was his perp, the man who'd stolen his body, the rapist. He'd been trained against leaping to conclusions, warned not to stop looking for evidence prematurely, but he also knew, just knew, that Johnny Temp was the one he needed to find. Before he left, he opened the closet door. It was a small closet, packed with clothes—jeans and blouses nearly pressed and hung, and on one side three corsets a lot like the ones he'd woken up in—all emerald green. Pete touched one of the corsets, let his fingers trace the material, so soft and yet so hard. He took one of the blouses off a hanger and looked down at it—a peasant blouse, he thought it was called, kind of a thing for hippie chicks. He bet she'd looked cute in it, but then she'd looked cute in a burlap bag.

His stomach growled. He felt hungry. Excited to get on with the search, to call Lopes and see if he could run Johnny Temp through the system, so he walked out of the bedroom holding the diary triumphantly above his head. "I think I got something."

Esther and Carlos jumped to their feet. "What? A clue? Can you find her?"

"I found this diary under the bed, and I think it's given me some good leads."

"What leads?" Carlos asked.

"Here I need you guys to trust me. It's better if for now I keep the details to myself."

"Yes," Carlos said, nodding to Esther. "Of course."

Esther hugged Pete again, pulled him down and kissed him on the cheek. "You are the most wonderful girl!" Esther said. "I just know God sent you here to find the diary, to help us, to help Sofia."

Pete smiled. "I believe he did," Pete answered. "I truly believe he did."

“It’s getting late. I have to get back to Manhattan,” Pete said.

“Of course,” Carlos said. “But first you come to diner. At our house.”

“I really can’t.”

“Come. Come,” Esther said, taking his hand. “You need a good meal.”

“I wish I could. I really do.”

“Of course,” Carlos said. “We understand.”

The three walked out into the winter night. It had gotten colder, and Pete saw his breath, a hot, steamy cloud. They walked silently down the street, and when he came to his subway stop, Esther pulled him by the hand, while Carlos put a hand on his shoulder and steered him past. “Um, guys? I mean, I really do have to go.”

“Of course,” Carlos said.

“After dinner,” Esther added, the both of them just pulling him along, dragging him down the street. Pete looked back at his subway stop and then finally just laughed and gave in—it didn’t seem like he was going to be able to get them to let him go, and besides what did he have to look forward to in his cold, empty apartment? He’d call Lopez from the Aragon house and get his to run the name, then he could read through the rest of the diary once he got home.

“You will love Mama’s cooking,” Carlos said. “The best cook in New York City!”

“Oh, Father!” Esther gushed.

“It’s true!” Carlos said. “You’ll see.”

“Can I ask a special favor? One more special favor?” Esther asked.

“Sure.”

“Can I call you Sally?”

“Mama Aragon,” Carlos said, with a tsk.

“It’s okay,” Pete answered without really even thinking about it. “It’s fine. It’ll make it easier for the kids and all.”

“Thank you, thank you, thank you,” Mama said. “It will be almost like having Salome Sofia back in the house again.”

Pete smiled awkwardly as the two dragged him down the street, toward their home, and once he called Lopez and left the info from the diary, he forgot all about it for the rest of the evening, just getting to know the family, talking little, listening a lot, completely lost when people switched to Spanish, but smiling and nodding as if he was following the conversation. They finally gathered at the table and Mama brought out a bowl of steaming shredded chicken and placed it in front of Papa, who dished it out as people passed their plates around.

“Do you want to lead us in grace tonight?” Papa said, looking at Pete.

“Of course,” he answered in a small, nervous voice. They all folded their hands and lowered their heads, and Pete offered the prayer he’d been taught and his family had always recited, from the time he was a boy. “Bless us, oh Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from thy bounty, through Christ, amen.”

“Amen,” the family answered, and Pete looked up to see Mama smiling at him, her eyes once again damp with tears. He felt a catch in his throat and the threat of tears building in his own eyes, but he tamped down the feelings, looking down at his tiny little brown hands and

digging his fingers into his palms. He'd promised himself he would never cry, and he didn't mean to break that promise.

When Pete finally got home that night, he undid the bandage on his chest and let his breasts free, stretching, scratching his butt and then pulling his sweatshirt back on. He felt sleepy from the dinner—some kind of spicy chicken and rice mixture—and was glowing from all the love he'd felt. He'd called Kate and told her all about his amazing day, meeting Sally's parents, the diary, dinner. Then, he grabbed a beer, curled up with the diary and started to read from page one, a yellow legal pad across his thighs to take notes. Sally had started the diary fresh the day she moved into her apartment, and he smiled reading how excited and scared she was to be growing up and getting on her own, but also scared and sad at the same time. She wanted to be a Rockette and had kept taking dancing classes—she'd seen them on television for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade doing their toy soldier routine when she'd been a little girl, and it had become one of her dreams to one day be a tall, pretty dancer just like them.

He came to the part where she's decided to try stripping. One of her friends from high-school had started stripping and was making gobs of money, and Sally had finally decided to give it a try—without telling her parents, of course—because she wanted the money to take more acting classes, and she wasn't making enough working as a hostess. She'd been assured there was no prostitution, that the girls were all treated first rate, and the manager had even told her that “Lots of talent scouts from TV shows come to the club” and many of the girls had gotten acting work through their dancing.

Pete's heart went out to her as he read that last part. She'd been young and naïve, and she's believed that she could get discovered and become famous working as a stripper, and her

excitement at the prospect just made him fall in love with her even more, as did her entry after her first audition for the Rockettes, when she got the news they hadn't picked her.

“Everything happens for a reason. I know if I keep working, my dreams will come true. God is just testing me, seeing how strong my faith is, how much I want it, and I am just going to go back to class tomorrow and work harder, learn more and get so good they HAVE TO CHOOSE ME! Daddy always says, fall down seven times, get up eight, and I will always get up again no matter what!”

Pete closed the diary and hugged it to his chest. Salome Sofia, he thought. You incredible girl. Where are you now? Do you still have your faith?

He believed she did. Everything happens for a reason, she'd written. And maybe it did. Maybe there was a reason he now found himself in the body of a young woman, and there was a reason she was going through her own switch and test of faith. But just thinking about the little miracles that had happened so far, Pete found it impossible to believe that God wasn't acting somehow now, bringing him toward a resolution, a happy ending where he would be a man again and Sally would be reunited with her loving parents and adoring family.

Pete drifted off to sleep clutching her diary to his chest, and that night in his dreams he was Salome Sofia, a young actress pursuing her dreams in the big city, ambitious and pretty, and she was happy to live just a few blocks from her parents because she loved them, and she knew they loved her, and when she walked into those audition rooms in Manhattan in front of all those PEOPLE-- the BIG PEOPLE who made the decisions, she knew that whatever happened there, she, Peter Sofia Salome O'Malley, would always have her family.

Peter woke the next day, stretched and winced. His breasts felt—tender—and he reached down and gingerly cupped one, lifting it and confirming that it hurt a little, felt a little extra sensitive. He climbed out of bed, newly reminded of their ever present swaying and jiggling, the ridiculous weight of them. Did they actually feel bigger? Padding into the bathroom, he pulled his sweat shirt over his head and dropped it to the floor, then inspected his breasts in the bathroom mirror. They did seem a little bigger, and the left one seemed bigger than the right, giving him a lopsided look. What the hell? What kind of new female insult was thing going to be to his manhood?

Sighing, he pulled down his sweat pants and jockey shorts and sat down on the toilet seat, peeing, daintily passing a wad of toilet paper between his legs when he was done and standing up, looking down at his thighs, he thought they looked a little fatter, too. In fact, he felt like his whole body had somehow swollen during the night. Was it all the beer he'd been drinking? Everything felt wrong. His whole body.

He checked his phone and saw a text for Lopez: Got a hit. Check email.

Already? Pete felt his heart leap, and he hurried to check his email, quickly finding the details of what had come back from the National Crime Database on their Johnny Temp. The most interesting thing, and the one that grabbed his attention most rapidly, was the name and contact information for his last known place of employment: Star Makers Talent Agency. It was in midtown, and with trembling hands Pete picked up his phone and dialed the number. It's probably disconnected, he thought. I'm sure they've closed up shop and moved on by now, but..."

“Star Makers,” a woman’s voice answered, “discovering tomorrow’s stars today. I’m Cady, how can I make your dreams come true?”

“Hello,” Pete said. “I’m trying to reach Johnny Temp?”

“Mr. Temp isn’t available right now. May I ask what this is regards to, miss...?”

“He, um, I met him, and he... told me he wanted to talk to me about representation.”

“And what was your name, miss?”

“Oh. It’s...” Pete hesitated trying to think of a fake name, and then Salome’s stage name just popped out: “It’s Princess Sweet.”

“Princess?! Oh my God! Johnny has been talking about you so much. He thinks you are amazing!”

“What? Me? Really?”

“Yes, you. You must be a very special girl because, between you and me, Johnny very rarely solicits new clients these days. I mean, he’s so busy with all the actresses he already represents he will only consider someone he thinks is really good.”

“What? Oh, wow,” Pete said in a girlish chirp, just playing along. “I don’t believe it!”

“You know what? This really is your lucky day because Johnny has an opening at 4:30. I could pencil you in and you could meet with him today.”

“Mr. Temp has an opening today?” Pete was surprised. He’d expected her to tell him that Mr. Temp had taken a leave of absence, or had vanished, or wasn’t available—anything but that he was still working there and would see him today. “I’m not sure about today. It just all seems so sudden,” Pete said.

“The last girl Johnny signed had a guest star role on Orange is the New Black two days after she signed the contract.”

“That’s... well, okay. 4:30, then.”

“Great! Bring a headshot and resume!”

“Thank you so much!”

“Oh, and, remember. This is your chance to impress Johnny, and you need to look like a movie star if you want to be a movie star. Dress sexy, okay honey?”

“Okay!”

Pete hung up the phone. What to do? Could he be wrong? Maybe Johnny Temp wasn’t the switcher, was just another low rent turd who had coincidentally stumbled across Salome’s path around the time she got switched.

It had felt so right, though, starting with the bullshit name. Hell. He didn’t know what to do, so he took a quick shower, trying to clear his head, decide what to do. It seemed, in the end, that this was still his best lead, and whether Johnny was or wasn’t a switcher, Pete decided he wanted to go in and meet the guy. Hell, maybe this could lead to him getting a whole different bust, and what would be so bad about that? There was one big sticking point: dress sexy. He would have to dress as a girl, and he had sworn he would never go girly. It would be the ultimate admission of defeat, the ultimate humiliation to not only have his sex stolen from him, to be trapped in this soft, fat little body, but to dress and live as a woman?

But Salome was out there somewhere, trapped in God knew what horrible conditions, and he owed it to her to do whatever it took to save her even if that meant putting on a dress. Pete

knew what he had to do, knew what he was supposed to do. He would have to swallow his pride and go back on his vow. And he would need help from a woman, a woman who could help him get sexy. He looked at the clock: 8:40. It didn't seem too early, and thinking about his hairy legs and armpits, he figured he might need more than a little time to do what had to be done, and so he picked up the phone and called the only woman he really felt he could trust.

“Buenos Dias,” Esther said.

“Buenos Dias,” Pete answered, letting his voice go higher and prettier.

“How are you, Sally?”

“Good, and you, Mama?”

“Wonderful.”

“So, Mama, I was wondering, can you help me dress up as a girl?”

“As a girl?”

Pete explained the situation without giving out any details.

“Meet me at Salome's apartment. I'll make you sexy.”

“Mama, are you sure you're okay with this? I don't want you to do it if it will upset you to see me, you know, as...”

“I see you as a hero. You are doing this to bring my baby home, and I want to help you do that.”

“Okay. Thanks, Mama. Gracias.”

The call ended, Pete sat for a second, his hands clasped at his chest, his heart racing. “I’ll make you sexy.” The words terrified him. The whole thing terrified him more than he could say. He imagined himself, in this body, dressed sexy, showing off all his curves, his soft cinammon skin. He thought about the pictures of Salome on her professional page, how hot she was, how fuckable, and was he really ready to put that body on display? He thought about the growing fascination he’d been feeling for women’s clothes, for pretty things, and he felt that if he went down this path he might never really come back, that the man he’d been would be lost forever.

Looking down at the big, firm breasts straining against the fabric of his t-shirt and remembering he’d once vowed to always keep them strapped down, he shrugged and wondered if that man wasn’t gone already.

I don’t have a choice, he decided. I have to do this for Salome and any other victims, past or future. I am a cop, and I promised to protect and serve. It’s not about revenge, and it sure isn’t about a guy sitting at home in the body of a stripper trying to convince himself he’s some kind of macho man. I have to find Salome, to help her get her life back, and if that means I lose myself in this soft, pretty life, then I will pay that price.

Because if I don’t? If I let my fear and pride keep me from doing what I believe is right then I am not a man anyway.

Later, it all felt like a dream. Lowering himself into a bath full of sudsy, steamy water, taking the Lady Gillette Razor—pink and white—and drawing it down the length of his round, firm calf, shaving away the brown hairs he’d been so proud of keeping despite his sex. Shaving them away in swatches, seeing the glowing brown skin revealed beneath. Once he’d finished

with one calf he'd run his hand over the skin and had been shocked at how soft and smooth it felt, how firm the dancer's muscles beneath the soft skin, still strong even after a month of neglect. Lifting an arm, the weight of his breasts as he did the same for his armpits, getting his body smooth and hairless, the way the world said a woman's body should be. It's a disguise, he thought, cover, I am just doing this to same Salome, to save everyone.

When he finished, he stood, the water dripping from his body, between his thighs, down off his round breasts, and he toweled off, drying himself, feeling like a new man as he stepped from the tub newly shorn of all his body hair other than the thatch between his legs and his eyebrows and a bit of stubble on his small, round head.

He wrapped the towel around his body and Mama greeted him with a hug. On the pretty quilt of Salome's bed lay a delicate little pair panties—emerald green with delicate black lace, and a matching bra. Pete took a deep breath and took the panties in his small hands, then stepped into them and pulled them up his long legs and over his hips, feeling them snug across his sex, his behind, and then he picked up the bra, much prettier and sexier than the more utilitarian white bra Kate had bought for him. He hated the thought of it, everything it represented to him—his inferiority as a woman, his place in the world now in this body, or the way the world wanted him to be—eye candy, a walking talking sex toy, but yet? Was there maybe more to it? How many times has his old girlfriend told him she dressed for herself?

The bra clasped in the back, and Pete struggled awkwardly for a couple moments, helpless to get his big, bouncing boobs into the little cups while he tried to get the clasp fixed. “Everything okay?” Mama called from the other room, where she'd retreated to give the clearly bashful man some privacy.

“Um... help?” Pete answered.

Mama came in and helped Pete get into his bra, noticing him wince a little and touch his breasts gingerly.

“Is something wrong?”

Blushing, feeling vulnerable and ashamed in front of Mama in this body and the tiny little bra and panties, Pete said, “My boobs hurt.”

“When did it start?”

“This morning. I woke up and they felt—puffy. My whole body felt puffy for some reason.”

Mama laughed and hugged him, again Pete feeling awkward, his nearly naked pressed against her, and he shook his head saying, “what’s funny?”

“I’m sorry,” Mama said. “It’s just that, well, you have the PMS.”

“PM...S? But, I had that already, like, maybe...”

“A month ago?” Mama raised an eyebrow. “It happens every month.”

“Oh,” Pete said, feeling another full body blush coming over him as he self-consciously brought his knees together. “Am I going to...?”

“It’s part of being a woman, Sally.”

“I know, but I mean, do I need a... plug? Today?”

“A plug? PMS usually starts a day before you flow, but maybe just to be safe we should get a tampon for you.”

Pete felt gross and embarrassed, more so than ever, and the idea of going out now while he was on the rag, it just seemed like the final straw, and he was feeling more vulnerable than ever as it was. “Oh, God, maybe this is a bad idea, then. I mean, going on this thing when I am, um,, you know... flowing?”

“I never missed a day of work for 20 years. You can do this to. Just be like a woman and be strong.”

The matter settled, Pete sound found himself wiggling into a little green dress that seemed three sizes too small, and then Mama had him sitting while she used carefully did his makeup. “I did this for Salome when she went to her first prom. I did cosmetology when I first came to New York. And manicures. I made her so pretty!”

“You just did the first?”

“Yes,” Mama said, wistfully. “Just the first. Then, she got sick.”

“What?”

“Sick with disease called teen-ager.”

“Oh,” Pete said, laughing. “Of course. Kids, right?”

“Now stop talking so I can do your mouth.”

Pete sat passively, his hands in his lap as his lips were painted with red lipstick. Mama put mascara on his lashes, eye shadow, eyeliner, blush on his cheeks. “Okay, missy. Now, you are pretty, too, but we need to do something with those nubs you have for finger nails. What are you a chipmunk? You eat your nails and stuff them into your rosy round cheeks?”

Pete laughed and looked down at his jagged nails, which he had been chewing on. Mama went to work, and when she was done Pete found himself looking down at long, glossy red nails with flat, white tips, and Mama had also found Salome's jewelry box and he now had delicate bracelets flashing at his slender wrists, rings on his fingers. Finally, she took a cross on a delicate gold chain and draped it around his long, slender neck, the cold metal nestling in Pete's firm, round cleavage. On his feet he wore a pair a sandals with wedge heels. He had no clue how to walk in heels, and they had settled on this as being the best he would be able to manage.

"Come. Look at yourself."

"No," Pete said, shaking his head. "I don't want to see myself like this."

"Why not? You look so beautiful!"

Pete imagined himself in the mirror, the image of Salome in her prom dress popping into his mind—a gorgeous, glowing, smooth, smiling vivacious specimen of young womanhood—and it terrified him that he might look in the mirror, and see himself as a stunning young woman, and that he might like it. So he shook his head and said, "No. Please. I can't explain, but I think it's better if I don't see myself like this."

"Okay," Mama said. "Now, walk across the room and sit down."

Pete walked across the room and then stopped in front of the chair, looking back at Mama.

"Try," she said.

He plopped down awkwardly and laughed at how clumsy and awkward he felt.

Esther shook her head, covered her eyes and said, "Mama Mia!"

“Maybe I can just stand the whole time?”

“No. I teach you.”

I have to get this, Pete thought. Watching Mama walk, turn and sit as gracefully as a cat, he saw again the resemblance between she and Salome, and he smiled thinking of her when she was a young, pretty girl.

“Now you,” Mama said.

I have to get this for Salome. I have to allow myself to get this, to be that graceful. Because he could feel all the old male impulses in him, all his macho ideas fighting against all of this, his bra and panties, the dress, and now the idea of walking like a girl, sitting like a girl, acting like a girl.

As a boy, it had been one of the ultimate insults to be called a girl, for his dad or the other boys to say, “You’re acting like a girl.”

But now he needed to act like a girl, and that father was gone, had disowned him, and now he had Esther, Mama Esther, who looked at him with so much hope and pride, who’d been so welcoming and made him feel so good, who wanted nothing more to see her daughter again, and he knew, again, that he owed to them all to be the best girl he could be.

And so he walked, letting his hips roll, he walked in little, mincing steps, his arms out prettily, and he turned and lowered himself to the chair, knees together, smoothing his skirt under his behind, and then he put his small hands in his lap and smiled at Esther and said, “Good?”

“So much better! Just like a girl!”

And Pete felt himself blush with pride at the compliment.

Mama handed Pete a purse, and then she helped him into one of Salome's winter coats—a hip length, faux leather jacket with a wide, white belt that emphasized his tiny waist and hugged his breasts. And then he found himself standing there in his dress, holding his purse, ready to head out the door, and he felt—scared. He couldn't deny it. He was scared to go out like this, painted and sparkling with jewelry, his long legs exposed.

“What's wrong?” Mama asked.

“I'm scared,” Pete said. “This is the first time I've ever gone out dressed as a girl.”

Mama took his hand. “Is normal, I think, to be scared when doing something new. I will come with you.”

“No,” Pete said. “That's not necessary. I can't ask you to put yourself at risk.”

“Please,” Mama said. “I used to work the midnight shift at Port Authority. Danger! Besides,” she said, looking up at Pete, squeezing his hand. “What kind of mother lets her daughter go to meet the talent agent alone? I should be there.”

Pete again felt overwhelmed with emotion, at how warm and caring Esther was, how much he needed her and wanted her to come, and so he nodded and said, “Okay, Mama.” And then, jokingly, he added, “Just don't embarrass me!”

“Oh! Now you really do sound like a girl!”

And so Pete and Esther walked arm and arm out into the cold city, and feeling the cold air swirl around his legs and then blow up his skirt, Pete squealed and said, “My legs are freezing!”

“Stop complaining,” Mama said. “You sounds like a boy.”

When they arrived at the talent agency, Pete and Mama found a small lobby crammed with young women—all pretty, some stunning. The faces came from all over the world — a delicate Asian girl, a dreadlocked beauty with a Caribbean flare, Latinas and a golden haired woman who reminded Pete of his old partner, Joe, and was probably Eastern European. Some of the others were there with older women Pete assumed were their mothers, and two sat next to older men. Pete felt the tension immediately, like the tension you would feel at the gym when you saw another guy who might be as strong as you, and he checked out the other girls, taking in their skin and faces, their legs and their clothes.

As Mama helped him out of his coat and he stood there for a minute, adjusting his skirt, he glanced at the girls and saw looks of appreciation or jealousy, and he smiled. “I’ll tell them you’re here,” Mama said, and then watched, pleased, as Pete gracefully slipped into his seat, his legs crossed neatly at the knee. Then Pete, not liking the tension in the room turned to the Asian girl next to him and say, “You look so pretty!”

The girl smiled and said, “Thanks. I love your dress.” And then the other girls joined in, and soon they were chatting amiably even as, one by one, they were called back to their meetings. Pete’s time came, and he stood up, nervously tugged down the hem of his skirt, and followed the receptionist down a narrow, dimly lit hall to a small meeting room—a table and two chairs, a palm tree in the corner, framed posters on the walls of Jessica Alba, Lucy Liu and Rhianna. As Pete sat, once again feeling proud of himself for managing such a ladylike seating, the girl said, “Mr. Temp will be with you in just a moment, Miss Sweet. Would you like something to drink? Wine? A latte?”

What would a girl like Salome want? Pete wondered, and then just said, “A cappuccino?”

“Of course.”

Pete’s heart was racing. Now, sitting in the little room in his dress, feeling half naked and vulnerable, it all seemed like such a terrible idea. What was I think? He looked down at the soft globes of his cleavage, lifted and squeezed and right there for all the world to see. He smoothed his skirt and tried to breath, to calm himself, but the feeling of his breasts rising and falling with each breath, the slender silk straps on his shoulders, made him all the more conscious that he was a young woman, dressed and primped and painted, and what if the man who walked through that door was HIM—the man who had forced his fingers into Pete’s, -- body—and--- It is going to be me, my old body. I know it. He’s going to walk in here, see me, and finish what he started... it all rushed back, the feeling of the man of top of him, the man’s hand on his belly and then sliding down under his panties, down, down between his legs and then into him.

The door opened. Pete turned and saw a man in a black suit, red tie, and as the man circled the table, Pete looked up at the man’s face, ready to scream, but no. It was a face he didn’t recognize at all, it wasn’t HIM. But it also wasn’t Johnny Temp.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” the man said in a vague, hard to place accent, reaching out a hand. “I am Jason Newbody.”

Pete offered his little hand, and the man took it, bringing it to his lips and kissing the back of Pete’s hand, looking up as he did so to gauge Pete’s reaction.

Pete resisted the urge to pull away, instead giggling nervously.

“You look terrified,” Jason said, staring right into Pete’s eyes.

“I am a little nervous,” Pete answered, feeling that it was best to be honest. The man was still gently holding Pete’s hand, and it was making Pete feel even more uncomfortable.

“Where is Johnny Temp?” Pete asked, pulling his hand away.

“He told me to tell you he is very sorry he couldn’t make it, Princess. He was really mad because he really thinks you’re going to be something special.”

“Me? Really?”

“Oh, yes. He called you the next Jessica Alba,” Jason said, pointing to the poster.

“Me?” Pete said, looking at the hot poster of Alba from one of her early roles- Honey in some movie about a dancer his girlfriend had forced him to watch one night.

“But I disagree.”

“Oh,” Pete said, faking disappointment.

“I think you are much, much more beautiful.” And as he said beautiful, he let his eyes drop from Pete’s face to caress his breasts.

Pete didn’t have to fake the blush as the man’s lustful look sent shivers through his female shape. He’d never had a man look at him like that, and that hard, hungry, masculine energy lit up his little body and made him self-consciously squeeze his legs together.

Jason looked back up and met Pete’s wide eyes, and seeing that Pete was clearly a little rattled he smiled, placed his briefcase on the table and undid the clasps. “I know talent when I see it,” Jason said. “I don’t want Johnny to sign you, and you will be much better off with me.”

He pulled a sheaf of papers from the briefcase and slid them across the table in front of Pete, then held up a gold pen. “I want you as my client, Miss Sweet. I am offering you an exclusive

contract for my services, and my personal promise that I will do everything in my power to make you the biggest star in Hollywood.”

“I don’t know,” Pete said, feeling like his chance of getting usable info was slipping away, that once he refused to sign the contract, because there was no way in hell he was going to sign the contract, they would show him the door and that would be it.

Jason just held the flashing pen out to him, staring him in the eyes. “It’s normal to be afraid, Princess. I would be surprised if you weren’t. But it’s the girls who have the courage to take that leap that win in this world, that get what they want. You can’t have your moment in the spotlight if you never get on stage.”

And just then the secretary walked in with two paper cups and placed them on the table, looking at the pen she said, “I knew you would love her.”

“You were so right,” Jason said. “I’ve never been this excited about a potential client.”

“Everyone here is talking about you,” the girl said. “We all want you to be on our team so bad.”

“Tell me what I need to do to get you to take this pen, sign your name and be the star I know you can be.”

“Um,” Pete smiled and shook his head, playing the nervous girl. “I really need to use the ladies room?”

“Oh, just sign the papers, and I’ll take you,” the girl said.

“I need to go right now!”

Jason nodded, and the girl said, “Okay. Let me show you the way.”

The whole way down the hall, the girl chattered at Pete, he responding back with polite sounds to indicate he was listening, but he was actually glancing around, checking out the space, looking for file cabinets or accessible computers, and then just as they reached the end of the hall where the women's room was located, he saw it—an empty cubicle at the back of the office with an open computer.

“When you're done, can you find your way back to Jason?” The girl said. “I have to see to some other clients.”

“Okay,” Pete said.

The girl then smiled and said, “It will just break my heart if you don't sign with Jason. He really is the best, and, well, I like you and want to be your friend! Please tell me you'll sign when you get back.”

“Oh! Thanks! Okay. I'll sign.”

“Omigod! You'll be so glad you did!”

Sucker, Pete thought, as they hugged, his big breasts pressing against the other woman's. Then, he went into the bathroom, waited, peaked out to see that the girl had left and slipped into the little cubicle where he'd seen the computer. He knew he didn't have much time, so he found his way to the company's Internal network and started skimming over the sub-directories even while he once again prayed for guidance. He decided to search for himself, Peter O'Malley, carefully peeking at the board with his long fingernails, but as he started to type in his name, he felt a strong need to search for Salome instead. That was why he was here, after all, to find her, and so he typed in her stage name, Salome Sofia Aragon, and hit ENTER.

Seconds seemed like hours, and the search came back empty. Shit. He glanced around the corner of the cubicle. Nothing. So, biting his lip, he typed in Princess Sweet instead, which immediately began to bring back various hits from the company servers. I should have brought a flash drive, he thought, as he once again just went with that little voice that seemed to have been guiding him all along, and he clicked on a spreadsheet called Poetic Justice. He reached down to pull his cell phone out of his pocket, but instead his manicured hand found only the soft flesh of his hip in that tight little dress, and he remembered, "Shit! It's in my purse!" Which, of course, he'd left with Mama in the lobby.

Skimming over the document, he came across Salome's name, and there was an address as well. Pete recited it to himself three times, trying to drill it into his brain, and then feeling like he'd been there too long, he closed the windows, stood up and turned to hurry back to the meeting room, bumping right into Jason as he turned, stumbling, Jason grabbing his wrist and pulling Pete to him, Pete's breasts crushed against Jason's hard, flat chest. "What were you doing?" Jason said.

"Nothing," Pete chirped. "I just decided to check my email."

Jason pushed Pete back into the cubicle, one hand wrapped firmly around Pete's slender wrist while the other snaked around his waist. "Just checking your email? Do really expect me to believe that you little bitch?"

The b-word was like a slap across Pete's face, and he could tell Jason was not the kind to play games. The feeling of being so powerless in the other man's arms filled Pete with terror, bringing back the terrible feeling he had when he first became a woman, and he struggled weakly

as Jason pushed him back against the desk in the little cubicle. “Stop,” Pete said. “You’re hurting me!”

“I know,” Jason said, “and I’m going to hurt you a lot more unless you tell me what the hell you were doing.”

Pete was now against the desk, with Jason pushing him backward, and Pete lifted one leg, reaching down to grab his shoe. “You better back off,” Pete said, trying to put some steel into his little girl’s voice. “I’m a cop.”

“A cop?” Jason said, putting a hand on Pete’s breast and squeezing. “Since when do they send little 19-year-old girls into a business without a warrant, doll face? Hmmm. Maybe I should smash that pretty little face of yours, teach you a lesson about sticking your nose where it doesn’t belong.”

The feeling of the man’s hand on his breast, the weight of him pushing his way between Pete’s bare thighs, filled him with fear-- the threat to his face filled him with rage, and with his free hand he slipped the sandal off his foot, the sandal with that thick, wooden wedge heel and then Pete said, “Fuck you,” and brought his shoe up and into Jason’s nose, smashing it with all the strength he had in his little body. The shoe connected with a crunching sound and Jason recoiled with a grunted "fuck!"

Pete scurried to his feet, glancing to see Jason with his hands over his nose, blood oozing between his fingers, and then Pete kicked off his other shoe and bolted from the cubicle, racing back toward the lobby as fast as he could in his tight little dress, his breasts bouncing with each hurried step.

Jason recovered, shaking away the stars in his eyes, and he stumbled into the hall, looking to see the girl in the green dress running toward the front door. If she escaped, it could ruin all their plans, and even as he started after her, he yelled, "Stop her! Stop her now!"

Pete ran, the door at the end of the hall getting closer, closer. The doors to a couple of the little meeting rooms cracked open and curious men looked out, but Pete sprinted past them as they looked on, confused. Reaching the door, he pulled it open, glancing back just to see Jason closing in on him, and he screamed and run through the door, hurrying into the lobby crowded now with a new group of women and... no sign of Mama?

"Princess?" The receptionist said, coming around the desk, her eyes now cold and threatening.

Pete ran for the glass doors at the entrance as Jason burst into the room, shoving them open and then awkwardly racing down the hall, his heart racing, and he came to the elevators, pushed frantically on the button but Jason was running toward him, closing in, so Pete screamed again and turned, running toward the stairs, his legs flashing as he got closer, closer and then just as Pete was about to get there, to shove the door open and race down the stairs toward safety, the door opened, and HE stood there in the body of Pete O'Malley.

XIII

Pete slid to a stop and stood there, frozen, gazing up at himself in terror. HE looked down at Pete, a smile creeping over his face. "Hello, there, pretty girl," the man said, letting his eyes drop to Pete's heaving breasts, and then back up to his face. "Going somewhere in a hurry?"

Jason was walking up behind him, and Pete shook his head, his lips trembling. "No..." he said. "Stay away from me...."

The man strode forward, Pete looked around in a panic. There were big, tall men on either side of him, he was trapped, and he screamed even as he felt something warm dribbling down his thigh, and he realized he was peeing himself in terror, and Jason and The Man both started to laugh.

Pete struggled helplessly as the two men dragged him down the hall, but instead of taking him back into the Talent Agency, the opened a steel door with the name "Various Enterprises" on the door and shoved him in, dragging him to a small, dark room and tying him to a chair and then gagging him. "Who the fuck is she?" Jason asked, holding a wad of toilet paper to his broken nose.

"This sexy little girl is none other than Officer Peter O'Malley, whose body I now wear."

"Oh."

"Yes," the man said, pulling up an old, metal office chair and putting a hand on Pete's thigh. Pete made a small, mewling noise, tried to pull away, but he was tied down tight. Helpless.

"Well, fuck her good for me, then." Jason said.

"I'll do that, brother- sister. You can count on it."

With that, Jason left, and Pete found himself alone with HIM. The man's hand was on the inside of Pete's thigh, caressing the soft flesh, and he now slipped it higher, letting it slide underneath Pete's skirt. "You are a very stupid little bitch coming here," HE said. "Very stupid."

Pete struggled helplessly against the ropes holding his arms and legs, trying to get free, even as he felt HIS finger now slipping further along the thing and gently, just ever so gently, rubbing up and down against Pete's vulva.

"No," Pete tried to say. "Please." But what came out of him sounding like soft moaning.

"Oh, I see you remember my friend, the finger. You like it when he plays with your slit, don't you, you little slut?"

Pete shook his head.

"Oh, he denies it, but I remember how wet his tight little pussy got last time we played with him. And look at the way he'd dressed. I'd say this man has become a nasty little bitch who wants to get fucked."

Pete kept shaking his head, terrified, ashamed.

"No? No? Well, how about we make a deal? How about I agree not to fuck you silly, but you have to do something for me?"

"What?" Pete tried to say.

"You give me a blow job. honey. Just like the little slut you are, and I'll leave that pussy of yours alone."

Pete shook his head. No. Never.

So, HE just laughed, took his other hand and pushed Pete's skirt up over his hips, then he grabbed Pete's panties and yanked them down to his knees. Pete squirmed, tried to scream, struggled to get his hands loose, and seeing his panic and fear HE laughed all the more, and then

he stood up and undid his belt, letting his pants drop to the floor, revealing his stiff member poking against his red boxers.

Pete closed his eyes, terrified, still struggling against his bonds, and then he heard a slamming sound, and looking up he saw Lopez charge into the room and deliver a powerful blow to HIM, then another and another, and soon HE was crumpled on the ground, and Lopez hurried over and pulled the gag down from Pete's mouth and said, "You okay?"

"Yes," Pete said, his voice higher-pitched even than usual, his eyes wide, his whole body electrified to be in the presence of such a man. "Oh my god, thank you so much for saving me!"

Lopez put a hand on Pete's cheek, looked at him, feeling the same energy pass between them, the same magnetic pull, and he was confused and surprised as he stared into his partner's big, pretty green eyes, and he wanted to kiss him very badly, but it was wrong, and so he started to pull away, to go around and untie Pete's hands, but Pete whispered, "kiss me," in a pretty little voice full of need and want, and Lopez couldn't resist, so he leaned down and kissed the soft, pillow lips of the young woman his friend had become.

Pete clung to the arm of Adrian Lopez as the two left the building. A team of cops had arrived, and they had taken Pete's body into custody being careful not to let him touch anyone, employing new protocols that had been developed in case they ever managed to corner a Switcher. They'd cautiously gone into the talent agency, but Jason had vanished.

Pete could feel the eyes of the cops drinking in his body, squeezed into that little dress, and he heard occasional comments from people who knew who he was-- comments about how he'd turned into a sissy, or a girl, or that he had gone nuts and started working as a prostitute, but

it all made him even more clingy, and he just wanted to hang onto Lopes' strong arm and feel safe, and as long as he was with Lopes he didn't care what anyone would say about him.

Mama Esther was there, too. It turned out she'd gotten nervous when Pete had been inside for so long, and when she'd asked the receptionist the girl had been cold and there had been something there-- something that didn't seem right-- so she'd gone out and called Lopez, asked him to come over because she thought Pete was in trouble.

And thank God, because he had been in trouble, but he wasn't anymore.

Lopez drove Pete home, and as he pulled the car up in front of the building Pete turned to him and put a hand on Lopez' forearm and in a tiny little voice, he said, "Will you come up with me? Check my apartment? I'm scared."

Lopez couldn't say no to that face, that voice, and so he walked the little female up to her apartment, and he looked into her closets, checked the bathroom, even looked under the bed all while Pete stood there in his little green dress, nervously biting his lip.

"It all checks out, buddy."

"Thanks," Pete said, holding his arms out for a hug.

"Pete, I don't know what's happening between us right now. The kiss, and now, well, you've been through a lot, and maybe..."

Pete felt himself flush with shame, for the way he'd been acting, feeling-- a little-- but mostly because Lopez was rejecting his advances, and he turned away and said, "You have a girlfriend. I'm sorry."

"No, I don't."

"What?"

"We're separated."

Pete stood there, looking up at the man who'd saved him, who'd always been there for him, and he wanted so badly now to be held by him, to kiss him, to be with him and as close to him as possible. He smiled, put his shoulders back, his breasts out, and said, "Hold me. Just hold me, Adrian."

Adrian stepped forward and gathered Pete into his arms, gathered that soft, warm little female into his arms, Pete's big, firm breasts against his chest, and he kissed Pete in the neck, nibbling gently. Pete sighed, lifting one leg and rubbing the inside of his thigh against Lopez, and then Lopez let a hand slide up Pete's tummy and cup one of his breasts even while he kissed his way up Pete's slender neck and found those warm, soft lips. Pete dug his nails into Lopez back, finding the other man's tongue, and they kissed, and kissed again, and Lopez put both hands on Pete's ass and squeezed and Pete saw stars. Lopez lifted Pete off his feet, and Pete wrapped his legs around Lopez waist.

"You're so strong," Pete gasped between kisses, his partner's strength giving Pete a thrill like he'd never felt before, and then Lopez tossed Pete onto his bed, and Pete smiled up between his thighs, looking at the powerful bull of a man and he didn't need to speak because his wide, wet eyes said it all.

Lopez crawled forward, grabbing Pete's wrists and pinning his slender little arms above his head. Pete arched his back and giggled, now loving the feeling of being so powerless and under a man's control, a man he wanted to have on him, in him, and Pete could feel himself getting hot and wet, and then Lopez was reaching behind Pete, unzipping Pete's dress and

peeling it off him, and Pete was there, just in his bra and panties, his breasts firm and nipples erect, and Lopez let his eyes caress Pete's brown, smooth, curvaceous body, and then in one effortless move he had Pete's bra off, and Pete felt a thrill of excitement as he showed his breasts to his lover, and he saw the approval in Lopez' eyes as the other man began to kiss Pete's nipples, then squeezed his boob and began to suck on one, his mouth hot and wet, and Pete moaned softly as his body flashed with pleasure, and he wanted it, needed it inside him.

"I'm ready," Pete said.

"I'm not," Lopez answered, though Pete could feel Lopez hard and stiff against his soft thigh. "I'm going to take you to heaven." Lopez shoved his hand inside Pete's pants then, found Pete's hot, wet slit, and then, probing, found Pete's clit, and when he touched it Pete's eyes went wide, he arched his back and whispered, "Omigod. Omigod! OMIGOD!" Lopez worked Pete's clit while also teasing his nipple, and Pete bit his lip, once again digging his nails into Lopez back, and desperate, Pete said, "Please. Please. Please."

Finally, Lopez pushed himself inside Pete, and Pete gasped as he was penetrated, his whole body tingling with pleasure, and as Lopez began to rock back and forth, sliding in and out, Pete began to thrust his hips, the two finding a rhythm, and Pete cried out "deeper! Harder!" And Lopez responded, getting so deep into Pete that Pete finally screamed in pleasure, tears rolling from the corners of his eyes as he felt his first female orgasm explode within him.

After, Pete lay on top of Lopez, idly making little spirals in the Lopez' chest hair with the tips of his long fingernails. Pete felt so calm and relaxed, so happy. Lopez had one arm stretched out to the side, while his other hand was on Pete's firm ass. "Why did you break up with your girlfriend?" Pete asked in a playful and pretty voice.

"She broke up with me," Lopez said, looking at the gorgeous face of the woman, his woman, his former partner. "Because during sex I yelled out another woman's name."

"Who?" Pete said.

"Yours."

"Mine?"

"Right before I came, I called her Pete."

"Bullshit," Pete said, thinking Lopez was teasing him, but when he tried to roll off, Lopez held him close.

"I'm not lying. I fell in love with you the first time I saw you-- the new you, this you. I started thinking about us, together, and now here we are, you and me, and I just think it was meant to be, Pete. I think this was supposed to happen, so we could find and love each other."

Pete started crying as he cupped Lopez face, feeling the man's stubble, enjoying the musky smell of him, and he let the tears fall as he leaned down and kissed Lopez, because it was okay for him to cry, and to feel, and to need a man, because Pete was a woman now, and it was all just as it had been meant to be.

When it came time for Lopez to head off for work, Peter tilted his head back and accepted a goodbye kiss from his lover. "Be safe," Lopez said, running a finger along Pete's jaw.

"I will."

After, Pete say down to pee, laughing at how terrible he'd once found it, how humiliating that he had to sit down to pee, just like a girl. He, men, made so much of that, like it was such a big deal, such absolute proof of their superiority, when it was really just nothing. They should probably sit down just like us, Pete thought as he wiped himself. Then they wouldn't make such a mess!

He showered, slipped into the white bra Kate had bought for him, and then into his dowdy, baggy sweats, no longer feeling right in them, no longer feeling he needed to hide in their shapelessness. And yet, he wasn't out of danger. They knew he was, knew he was on to them, and he had to follow up his lead as he sought to find Salome. He carried his oatmeal and his coffee to his computer, sat down, and closing his eyes to remember the name and address he'd seen, he sent off a hopeful prayer and typed the information into Google, hardly even aware of his long fingernails.

The address turned out to be an orphanage out in Far Rockaway. Pete emailed the information to Lopez. He didn't feel safe anymore going out alone, especially on this investigation. It wasn't proper procedure even for a male officer, let alone a female. His experience at the talent agency had left him aware of how vulnerable he was now, had forced him to face it, and while he was determined not to live in fear all the time, he was also smart enough to realize that a young woman would be foolish to go after a group of rapists alone, especially when she didn't have to.

No. He would wait until Lopez was free, and then they would go and investigate the orphanage together. In the meantime, he grabbed his phone and called his sister, Kate.

"Hey, Pete," Kate said. "What's up?"

"What's up?" Pete said. "Well, for starters, guess who got laid last night?"

"Laid? What? You? I mean, was it with a girl?"

"Um, no, sister of mine, it was most definitely not a girl. I decided to take a ride on-- how do you girls put it? On the pogo stick, perhaps? And, um, well, I like it."

"Pete, well, I am totally surprised to hear this-- wait, are you fucking with me?"

"No. I am not."

"Well, them, um, details?"

And so the two sisters talked, like they had never talked before, and Pete again found himself feeling closer to someone than he'd ever felt, and he and his sister really got to know each other for the first time as they talked about men and sex and life.

XIV

The moment the little seven-year-old girl walked into the lobby, looked up at Pete and froze, Pete knew it was Salome. She looked scared, and Pete smiled and said, "I'm not the one who stole your body, Salome."

"You know who I am?" Salome said.

"Yes."

Lopez showed her his badge. "We're with the NYPD."

"My hair," Salome said, staring at Pete's bald head and putting her small fingers to her lips. She had big, dark eyes and long dark hair-- she looked like an Indian girl, and was extremely pretty.

"Oh," Pete said, rubbing his nearly bald head. "Yeah. I had it shaved off."

"Why?"

"I used to be a guy."

They showed her the newspaper report, and once he told her about himself, Salome remembered him from the beat, said she felt sorry for him because he'd always seemed nice.

"The other girl is here, too," Salome said. "The Russian. I tried to tell them, we both did, but they both thought we were just little girls playing some game, living in some fantasy."

"Well, your parents have been very worried about you, and they are going to be thrilled that we found you, that we can bring you home."

"Mama and Papa? You can take me to them?"

"Yes." And with that the little girl Salome had become threw herself into Pete's arms, and he hugged her strong little body to his breasts. "I hope I can get my body back soon," Salome said, running a hand over Pete's stubbled skull. "Get my life back! I'm sure you feel the same way!"

Pete and Adrian Lopez exchanged a pained glance, the realization sinking in, and Pete smiled at Salome. "Of course."

"It must have been hard for a guy to find himself in such a pretty girl's body!"

"It was very hard," Pete said, taking Salome by the hand, but she pulled it free.

"I'm 19," Salome said. "Don't treat me like a child."

Salome had been switched into a little Indian girl named Anji, but as soon as Mama and Papa saw her, they knew her, recognized her, and they all hugged and cried together, Pete and Adrian included.

That night, Pete and Adrian made love again-- slow, tender, sad love. Both of them knew it was probably for the last time, that Pete would soon be back in his body, that Salome would be back in hers, and that their love would come to an end. After, they held each other and wept. "Maybe he won't switch you back," Adrian said. "Or, you could stay in this body. The law says, right? That you are your body. You are legally Salome now, and she is Anji."

"No," Pete said. "It wouldn't be right. I promised her parents. I owe it to them. And what kind of man would I be if I tried to steal her body?"

"But I love you. This you. The woman you've become."

"And I love you, too, but I have to do what's right."

HE was in a padded cell, wearing a straight jacket. They'd been careful not to let him touch anyone. He'd tried slamming himself into the walls in the solitary cell they'd put him in at holding, hoping a medic would come, and he could switch bodies and escape. They'd entered wearing their new protective suits and restrained him. Now, he sat on the floor smiling at Pete, Salome, and Adrian, a bandage on his head.

"So, you want me to switch you back, eh? Well, what's in it for me?"

"A new life. Freedom."

"Oh? I switch myself into the body of that little girl, and you just let me walk? Knowing what a menace I am? I don't believe that. As a child, an orphan, I bet the government could just make me vanish, turn me into a lab rat. No. No thanks to that."

"Well, we tried," Adrian said, putting an arm around Pete's waist.

"Wait," Salome said to HIM. "Please. I never did anything to you. Just switch *me* back. Give me back my life."

"Oh," HE answered, smiling. "Now that is interesting. Now that is a proposition I can get behind."

"What?" Pete said, not sure he understood what was being proposed.

"I switch you into that pretty little girl," HE said, grinning. "You become Anji, and Salome drops the charges, meaning sooner or later I walk out of here as Pete O'Malley."

"The government could still turn you into a lab rat," Adrian said.

"I like my chances better, and besides, I want to see if this cop is really the hero he pretends to be. How about, tough guy? Want to rescue the fair maiden? Then you become a little girl."

"This is bullshit," Adrian said.

"Please," Salome said, tears in her eyes. She looked up at Pete and took his hand.

"Please."

Pete nodded. It had all been leading up to this; he knew that now. He'd said he would do anything to bring Salome home, to return her to her parents and her life, and now the time had

come for him to give it all away, his manhood, his womanhood, his lover and his old and new lives, all of it.

"No," Adrian said. "She needs time to think about this."

"Now or never," He said, chuckling. "This offer expires in thirty seconds."

"You fucking prick," Adrian said, punching the wall.

"No," Pete said. "It's okay. This is what I have to do, Adrian. I love you more than I've ever loved anyone in my life, but this is what I have to do. What kind of man would I be if I said no?"

He looked down at the little girl, saw the tears of relief in her eyes, and he hugged her and said, "But I want you to promise me something, Salome Sofia."

"What?"

"That you are going to practice and work and go out there and become a Rockette just like you always dreamed of."

"Yes," she said with a laugh. "Yes. I will."

"Pete, we only have her out temporarily. She-- you-- would have to go back to the orphanage tomorrow. To live there as a child. You know that, right?"

"I know," Pete said. "I know."

"Why are you doing this?" Adrian said turning to HIM. "Why did you do any of it?"

"Telling you THAT wasn't part of the deal," HE answered, still laughing. "Now, are we going to do this or just talk about it?"

"Let's do it," Pete said. "Now."

XV

The next day, Adrian, Carlos, Esther and Salome dropped Pete off at the orphanage. He was wearing a sweat suit, but it wasn't baggy. It was white and powder blue, from Juicy Couture's line of clothes for girls. Salome had bought it for him. The group of them said their goodbyes, then wept as Pete walked up the steps of the building and stopped in front of the big, wooden door. Reaching up with both of his tiny hands, Pete grabbed the handle and pulled with all of his might, slowly, slowly getting the door to swing open. Adrian started up the steps to help, but Pete turned his head, long black hair swishing across his back, and said, "I can do it. I'm not a child."

With the door finally open, he stood for a moment, holding it open with his thin little body, and he smiled sadly, waved and said "goodbye" before turning and walking away, the big wooden door swinging shut behind him slowly, inevitably and finally closing without a sound.

"She's the bravest man I've ever known," Adrian said.

"He's the bravest girl," Mama answered.

The sun was setting, and it was getting dark and cold. Snow began to fall, covering the earth in a soft white blanket, and Salome locked arms with her parents and the three of them walked home together.

Hero Book 2

The entity, man, thing, whatever it was that now occupied the body formerly belonging to Officer Pete O'Malley, leaned back and smiled. He wore the bright orange jumpsuit assigned to all prisoners being held in the New York City jail system, but also a pair of oven mittens that had been strapped over his hands with plastic restraints. "You're going to make a very sexy girl," he said, staring at the mirrored window. "We'll make sure you have huge tits. Like watermelons."

Officer Adrian Lopez stood on the other side of the one way mirror, just wishing he could get a chance to bash the shit head's teeth down his throat. The face, the body, belonged to his friend, Pete O'Malley, a hard working cop who was now living in an orphanage in the body of a little girl. The creep could have given his friend his life back, his body back, but he'd thought it was funny to take away everything the man had ever had.

"Why not switch yourself with Pete one more time?" Lopez repeated. "We'll make it worth your while."

"Let me walk, and I'll make it worth your while, baby doll. That is unless maybe you secretly want to have a pair of tits? Is that your thing, baby?"

Adrian clenched his fist. Being talked down to like he was a woman, a prostitute, pissed him off, and the threats unnerved him. Normally, he would have shrugged off any punk's trash talk.. He'd been threatened by punks before—with violence, beatings, murder. It came with

being a cop. But he'd never been threatened with being turned into a woman by someone who could potentially make it happen. Arian knew better than to show any fear. "Don't you ever get tired of making all these empty threats?"

"You'll start craving men, and sooner than you think," The Creature said. "Just like your friend, Pete, you'll be panting, on your knees, just a desperate little woman who wants a man inside you, who needs a man inside you."

"Knock it off."

"Did you enjoy fucking your friend, Lopez? Did you like seeing him on his back, his legs spread, his big green eyes hot and wet and begging you to take him? To make him your woman? Did he..."

"Shut up."

"...moan, softly, and then when you entered him, he probably..."

"SHUT UP!"

"Made a little noise, maybe like a chirping, as his friend, his buddy, took him, denied him his last scrap of masculinity..."

"YOU SICK FUCK!"

"Me? Sick? You're the one who banged his own best friend, took advantage of him when he felt so weak and vulnerable, so soft and needy and..."

"I'm done here," Lopez said. "Take this piece of shit back to his cell."

“He cried out in that pretty little voice of his, didn’t he? When he came? He screamed like the little woman he’d become. You will, too. In just two days, Lopez. Let me walk or in two days you’re going to have a pretty little voice, and a pretty little face, and you are going to be a woman just like your friend.”

Lopez walked out of the room, went outside, fished a pack of Marlboros out of his pocket and lit one up, hating himself for taking up the habit again, but with all the stress and crazy shit of the past few days? The self-hatred vanished as the smoke hit his lungs and his system lit up with the infusion of nicotine. Yeah. Yeah. This is why I smoke, he thought, his whole body relaxing, the tension flowing out of him.

His phone buzzed. Was it Pete? He thought back on the image of Pete when he’d been a woman—those big green eyes and full, soft lips, those full, firm, brown breasts—but no. It was a text from Maria. “Dinner. 7.”

“Confirmed,” he typed back, taking a long drag from his cigarette, again feeling a certain degree of self-hatred. When Pete had given up his body, agreed to be switched into the little orphan, Lopez had gone back to Maria, even though they were over. Even before he had called Maria “Pete” during sex, they had been just going through the motions, but he’d been sick, depressed, lost, and when Maria had called him, told him she wanted him back, he’d just said yes, and on the way back to her place—their old place—he’d stopped by the bodega and bought his first pack of cigarettes in 7 years.

Since, he’d made it his mission to try and get Pete back in his body, though he actually wanted Pete back as a woman, the woman he’d become, the woman they had both fallen in love with. Jesus, Pete had been an incredible girl. The most beautiful woman Lopez had ever had.

But now, Lopez knew, the only thing he could do was get Pete back to being Pete and try his best to forget Pete as a woman because Pete had sacrificed his own happiness and future to return that body to its rightful owner.

Smoke break over, Lopez went back to the bullpen—crappy florescent lighting and crumbling cubicles, got on his computer and kept trying to track the organization that had been behind the switch. The best lead he had was the talent agency where they had been recruiting young women, allegedly for careers as models and actresses, though they had really been luring them into “careers” as exotic dancers and in some cases prostitution. You couldn’t rent office space in New York City without leaving a trail, and though the Sister-Brothers, as they called themselves, had created as dense of complicated a web of fronts and shell companies as any Lopez had ever seen, he kept digging, knowing that given enough time and patience he would—

His email chimed and he mechanically clicked on it, saw the message: Two Days. He opened the email, and a picture of him appeared, his official ID picture for the NYPD. As he watched, his hair grew out, tumbling down over his shoulders in golden curls as his face softened into a big eyed, girlish shape, and his shirt burst open as big, white, creamy breasts blossomed on his chest. The words “Two Days” flashed on the screen.

Lopez watched himself being turned into a woman, and it gave him chills. He did not like the idea. Not at all. But there was no way they could let the creature walk, not knowing who he was and what he was capable of doing. So, Lopez watched it again, putting his hand on his balls for courage, and then forwarded the email to the cybercrime guys. Let them see if maybe they could track this one down.

Before heading home for dinner and Maria, Lopez went to the precinct gym, changed into a black tank top and a pair of baggy gym shorts. He loaded 315 pounds onto the Hexbar and started doing reps, watching his bulging shoulders and muscle-laced arms in the mirror as he dead lifted the weight again, and again, and again—10 total reps.

“Fucking stud!” Kanisha Brown, one of the few female officers in the precinct called when he finally dropped the weight to the floor with a metallic crash.

Lopez smiled and gave her a thumbs up. She wore a sports bra that hugged her full, round breasts and showed off her slender arms and flat tummy, yoga pants that hugged her round legs. She was resting between sets of hip thrusts. “You’re looking ripped,” he said, wanting to return the compliment, but as he looked at her tight, gorgeous little body he suddenly imagined himself in a sports bra with breasts of his own, imagined looking in the mirror and seeing small, delicate arms, a mass of tumbling blonde curls framing a girl’s face—he could feel the bra around his chest, feel the weight of breasts— shaking his head, he pushed the thought from his mind, put his hands on his hard, muscular chest.

“I’ll do that for you if you want,” Kanisha said with a playful smile.

“I bet you would,” Lopez said feeling the attraction, but turning away, reminding himself he was still in hot water with Maria. He loved women. Their shapes. Soft skin. The sound of their voices, and, no, he could not imagine being one. Would not be one.

Lopez grabbed a 30 pound slam ball and started to throw it angrily against the wall. It thumped into the gray cinder block, each time releasing a little white cloud of chalk dust. It’s just a bluff, Lopez thought. Just scare tactic bullshit. And if it isn’t? Well, they had to touch

you to turn you, and Lopez would make damn sure no hot little girl put her hands on him. He'd Taser her first. No touch, no switch. It was that simple.

When Lopez got back to the apartment he shared with Maria, he shook the snow from his coat, stepped in and, meeting Maria's eyes, forced a smile. "It smells great in here," he said, inhaling the tangy smell of paella, and enjoying the warmth of the apartment.

"Thanks," Maria said, her eyes hard. She still wore her blue nurses' uniform, which to Lopez looked like a pair of pajamas.

"What's wrong?" Lopez said, glancing at the wall clock. It was 6:42.

"Another letter came," she answered, nodding toward an open letter sitting on the coffee table.

Lopez went over and looked at the letter—a naked woman on her back, legs spread, showing her hairless, pink slit, hands on her tits, a woman with his face. They'd photo-shopped his face onto the body, even painted it to look like he was wearing ruby lipstick, smokey eye shadow, blush. The words *2 Days in Pink*, girly script. Lopez crumpled up the letter and threw it into the trash, took Maria in his arms. "It's just threats," he said, kissing her on the cheek. "Ignore it."

Maria twisted to get away from Lopez, but he held her tight, and she finally settled into his arms and sighed. "What if they really do it? What if they steal your body just like they did to—the other ones?"

"They won't. They can't."

"Those pictures make me sick."

“Stop looking at them.”

Lopez tilted her face back, gave her a long, comforting kiss. She needed him to show her he was a man. He needed to show her he was a man. That the pictures and threats meant nothing. He grabbed her butt with both hands, lifted her as they kissed. She wrapped her legs around his waist, and he carried her into the bedroom, tossed her onto the bed, climbed on and ripped her top off. Maria’s eyes went wide and got glassy, and she grabbed his belt and eagerly struggled to undue it while Lopez reached around, effortlessly slipped her bra off and then took one of her breasts in hands and squeezed while teasing her nipple with his tongue.

Maria made a squealing noise and managed to get Lopez’ belt undone, yanking his pants down and then grabbing his manhood and giving it a squeeze. Lopez grunted, grabbed her arms and pinned her down, showing her his strength. She struggled, smiling playfully, and held her down, grinning like a tiger toying with its catch. “Take me,” Maria whispered, and Lopez let go over her arms and kissed her on the cheek, the neck, working his way down to those soft breasts, and as he did Maria squeezed his bulging shoulders and ran her hands over the ridges of his biceps and triceps. Lopez kissed his way down to her smooth, taught belly, then grabbed the waist line of her panties and tore them off her, throwing them aside and teasing her with his fingers. Maria hissed and dug her fingernails into his back, the pleasure and pain making Lopez roll the eyes back in his head, and then he was doing her with one hand while grabbing her nipple, pinching and twisting it viciously.

Maria screamed and laughed and slapped him across the face, twice, and then he caught her slender wrist and held her little arm fast, smiling cruelly as if he were about to make her pay, but instead he kissed her on the inside of her wrist, pinned her arms with one hand and then reaching down, guided himself inside her, gently, at first, and then rhythmically working her as

she started to lift her hips in unison. Lopez loved to look at women's faces as he made love to them, and he smiled as Maria closed her eyes and bit her lip, her cheeks and the tip of her nose flushed pink the two of them found their rhythm and rocked and then stars exploded in both of their eyes as they came together, and Lopez finished with a grunt and rolled off, Maria immediately wrapping her arms around him, pressing her breasts against his back, one soft thigh draped over his thick, muscular leg.

Lopez kissed her forearm, tolerating the female and her needs. He hated cuddling and would actually kind of like to go and sleep on the couch after they had sex, but he knew Maria always loved to hold him and be close to him after they made love, and so he just closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep, his woman wrapped around him like a second skin.

He woke, feeling cloudy headed, his mouth dry, and he felt Maria reaching around from behind him, her hand slipping between his thighs and then between the lips of his vagina, and he panicked, tried to get up, but Maria had her legs locked around him, one powerful arm around his chest, crushing his breasts, and she whispered, "Just relax and let it happen, baby."

"No," Lopez gasped in a soft, little voice, squirming helplessly in Maria's arms. "I'm a man."

"Hush, baby girl," Maria whispered in his ear. "You're going to love being a woman."

His golden curls in his eyes, he strained with all his might, terrified at how helpless and small he felt, at the feeling of Maria's hand inside his vagina, probing, finding his.... "Omigod!" he whispered as she found his clit and gave him a terrifying taste of female pleasure that shattered his masculinity and replaced it with an aching emptiness. "Please," he said. "Please. Please."

“I love hearing you beg for it, baby” Maria said, nibbling on his earlobe as he struggled helplessly in her arms. “You’re a sexy little girl now, and I’m going to love making love to you.”

“No. Please... stop. Maria. Stop!”

“You’re my girl now, Adrian.”

“I have two more days!!!!”

Lopez sat up, shocked and terrified, drenched in sweat. He could still feel Maria’s fingers inside him, still feel his hot, wet slit even as he looked down at his hard, flat chest, and his still very male body and realized it was all just a nightmare.

“What’s wrong, baby?” Maria said, sleepily pushing the hair out of her eyes.

“Nothing,” Lopez said, giving her a pat on the hip. “I’m thirsty. Go back to sleep.”

“Okay, baby. Don’t be up long.”

Baby. The word irked him now. It was what she had called him in the nightmare. Two more days, Lopez thought, but looking at the clock, he saw it read 1:24, and he realized this was it, the last day before the Brother-Sisters had threatened to steal his body. He had to find some leverage, some way to stop them from even trying. He went to the refrigerator and grabbed a can of Rock Star. Time for an all-nighter, he decided. Failure was not an option.

He looked at Maria curled up on the bed, her hip high in the air, her long hair tangled, head resting on her small arms. She was tough for a woman, strong, but still so emotional and soft. A strong female, but still just a female. Women’s lives were hard. They had to put up with

a lot of shit, and he felt sorry for them. One thing he knew for sure looking at that little woman sleeping on his bed: Adrian Lopez was not going to let anyone turn him into a woman.

Lopez quietly dressed, checked his gun, and, scrawling a quick note for Maria on the back of a paper plate, headed out into the night to see if he could get them before they got him.

XVI

Lopez flashed his badge at the sleepy security guy in the dingy lobby of 477 10th Avenue and took the elevator up to the recently vacated offices of Star Makers Talent Agency, the place where the body switcher Johnny Temp had been captured. The NYPD had been preempted by the feds in this case, who'd swooped in and sealed off the location within hours of the Pete O'Malley incident. The doors were sealed with crime scene tape, and there were dire looking signs plastered on the glass doors warning of federal felony charges against any unauthorized individuals entering the crime scene.

Lopez stood staring at the doors for a few moments and realized with surprise that his hands shook. He was a clean cop—a pretty clean cop—had certainly never broke his way into a federal crime scene before, something that could cost him his job and a lot more, but he thought the pictures they'd sent him, thought about his friend Pete, who they'd trapped in a stunning young stripper's body, and how he'd eventually started to act and think and want what a young woman wanted, had eventually begged for it. Meanwhile, Joe, the other cop they had switched, had become an actual stripper, with billboards all over town, dancing around on stage showing his tits to the world.

The feds could take a lot, but the Sister-Brothers could take everything. So he needed to do whatever necessary to take them down before they did him.

Looking closer, Lopez confirmed what he expected-- the box mounted on the wall behind the receptionist's desk, it was dark. No lights at all. The feds had shut down the Star Makers security system and replaced it with- nothing. It made sense. As far as they were concerned they'd found anything and everything there was to find.

Lopez got out his lock pick kit. There was nothing stopping him from opening the door, taking a look around, seeing if maybe the feds had missed something that would lead him right to the Sister-Brothers. He easily popped the lock, opened the door and walked into the empty offices. Making his way past reception, he glanced into the small offices that lined the hall— cheap linoleum desks, overturned chairs, no papers, no computers. He gave each room a cursory look-over, but kept heading back, back where he knew the administration offices had been, but when he got there he found the same thing— desks and chairs, but not a scrap of paper or tech.

Shit.

He checked the drawers. The bottoms of the desk. Yanked up carpet and checked the walls for any kind of hidden panels. Worth a shot. He climbed on a chair and lifted ceiling panels.

Nothing.

Double-shit. Nothing. Now what?

He climbed down from the chair he'd been standing on, started back out, then he heard a noise as a machine rattled to life, and walking back toward the noise he pushed open a door to

see a refrigerator, microwave, toaster oven: break room. At a loss as to what else to do, Lopez walked into the break room, opened the microwave and saw crusty melted cheese in the corners. He randomly pulled open a drawer by the sink and found half-empty boxes of plastic forks and spoons.

Such a letdown, Lopez felt. He'd expected the Brother-Sisters to have some kind of space-age cutlery. A clean microwave. But they seemed just like everyone else. Why were they doing what they were doing? What was the motive? Why switch with a bunch of grunt cops when they could be stealing the bodies of millionaires?

Lopez pulled open the refrigerator door. Empty. The Feds had taken whatever had been in there, maybe to swab for possible DNA or some such shit. He closed the door of the refrigerator door and pulled open the freezer, but again nothing. Needs to be defrosted, he thought looking at the inches thick layer of frost that had accumulated around the perimeter. Dirty microwave. Iced up freezer. Cheap plastic spoons. Lazy slobs, Lopez, thought, irritated by their lack of discipline and...

But what if it wasn't?

Lopez opened the door. Looked at the ice. Could they be that clever? He broke the front panel off the drawer by the sink, began to hack the ice away, smashing the particle board drawer against the ice, sending shards of ice or chunks of wood flying, hacking and hacking, and then there it was—something shiny and plastic. Lopez chopped some more of the ice away to reveal a Gladlock freezer bag. He yanked it free and tossed it on the counter.

Protocol said he should call the feds and turn this over, at least have I processed as evidence, but he glanced at his watch and saw that it was now 5:23 AM, and he had now only one more day.

So Lopez tore the bag open and saw business cards and flyers from businesses all over the city-- strip clubs, modeling agencies, restaurants, escort services, caterers. Were these all fronts for the Brother-Sisters?

He arranged the cards on the counter, then the flyers, started to look them over carefully, one by one. Finally, he found what he was looking for on a flyer for a massage parlor in Chinatown named Empress Massage: a tiny arrow under the title. Scanning over the rest of the document, he noticed that one word had been underlined: Transcendent.

Lopez chuckled. Whether the other businesses were connected or not, he felt sure the message here was clear: If a member came and found this front had been compromised, they would find the arrow and then the password, and this was how they could find each other if a Brother-Sister somehow got separated from the pack.

Lopez scooped all the documents back into the plastic bag and shoved it into his pocket. Heading back toward the door, he yawned, and part of him really wanted to take a quick nap, rest his eyes, make sure he was thinking clearly before he headed down to Chinatown and raised some hell, but just then his phone buzzed, and he looked to see a picture of his face plastered on a hot, blonde woman's body, and she on her knees, looking back over her shoulder as a guy was about to do her.

“I’ll figure it out when I get there,” Lopez decided, checking the magazine in his pistol. He sent a text to Maria, letting her know he was out working the case. Told her to have a good day at work.

Then, Lopez took a deep breath, rubbed his eyes and headed out into the cold, dark morning.

XVII

Officer Peter O’Malley brushed his long, black hair back, gathered it up with one small hand and then tied it into a ponytail with a sparkly pink hair tie. He smoothed down his purple Frozen t-shirt with the smiling face of Elsa and GYHGHF on the front, saw down and tied the bright pink laces on the white, platform Nike’s Sofia had bought for him.

His roommate, Kerry Anne, stuck her head sat on her bunk watching impatiently. “Ready?” She sighed, dramatically.

“Yes!” Peter said, smiling his prettiest smile to let his friend know he appreciated her patience.

“Thank, GOD!” Kerry Anne said, rolling off the bunk and rushing to get in front of Pete as the two headed for the door.

“Hey,” Pete said, trying to get through the door first, and he and Kerry Anne ended up tumbling into the hall. Giggling, they jumped to their feet and looking at each other with mischievous eyes, they shouted, “Race Ya!” at the same time, and they both raced down the hall.

“Girls! Girls!” Mrs. Abernathy said as the two little hellions raced past, but neither responded as they raced down the hall in a cloud of giggles and squeaky sneakers. Kerry Anne

beat Pete to the cafeteria and got in line in front of him, smirking. Pete had found his new body was not particularly athletic. Most of the other girls were faster and better at sports than he was, but he made sure that no one ever tried harder than he did. He got himself a bowl of oatmeal, it was one of the least disgusting things the orphanage had for breakfast, then he sat down next to Kerry Anne at a table full of other girls his age.

He joined in the chatter, smiling and laughing. More and more he seemed to be forgetting that he'd been a man, a police officer. This was his life now, and it became more and more normal with each passing day, his old life as a man seemed like a strange dream. He might even have been able to forget it, but for the fact that people from his old life came by to visit. He smiled thinking about the visit he expected later that day after school from Sofia and her parents. It would be good to see them, of course. He'd spent time in Sofia's body and became close with her family, but what made him giddy with excitement was something else: they had promised to bring a pretty dress for him to wear!

XVIII

Captain Patrick McNulty did not like feds. Whenever they came around they not only brought a superior attitude, but a complete and total ignorance of the reality of law enforcement work in a filthy hellhole like South Harlem. The only thing worse than a fed was a woman fed. The only thing worse than a woman fed was a black woman fed. And the only thing worse than a black, woman fed was a black woman fed, as far as McNulty was concerned, was a black woman fed serving under a black president. In this particular case, the woman in question was Special Agent Nicki Carver, and McNulty hated her even more than he expected.

The only special thing about her, McNulty thought, letting his eyes drop to Nicki Carver's firm round ass as he let her into his office, was her body. She was hot as hell. Nicki, sensing the roving eyes on her backside, glanced back and caught him, her eyes getting a little hard, but McNulty just acted like nothing happened, went and sat behind his desk, sighed and said, "Didn't we just talk yesterday?"

"Am I bothering you, Captain?" Nicki answered.

"Yes, you are."

"I'm not the enemy."

"Says you and every federal agent who comes in here and tells me how to do my job, right after they assure me they are not trying to tell me how to do my job."

"Well, let me just set your mind at ease," Nicki said, "because I will gladly tell you how to do your job."

"I don't have time for this shit," McNulty answered, putting his hands on the armrests of his chair and starting to stand.

"Two of your men are now women," Nicki said. "A third has been threatened repeatedly. Why haven't you put him under protection?"

"I think it's all bullshit," McNulty answered. "Body switching? It's like some kind of crappy movie on late night cable."

"Then what about the fact that two of your officers are missing?"

"One is missing. I have the other one in a cell. And yes, I am concerned about both of those things, but I don't see how that concerns you."

“There are other factors I can’t discuss with you because they are classified, but I will say that if I had the authority, I would put that officer under protection immediately. The Brother-Sisters are a very real, very serious threat, and you need to know that.”

“Well, thanks. Hey, while I’m at it, want me to put out an APB on Sasquatch?”

Nicki shook her head. She could feel it coming off him like steam—the contempt, and it didn’t take a lifetime of experience and great instincts to know that the real reason the man sitting in front of her wasn’t taking her seriously was because she was a black woman, and he probably figured she was just affirmative action on the job, underqualified to be working in a white man’s world.

But she also knew better than to say all that out loud. Instead, he locked eyes with him and let him know she knew, and then she plastered a fake smile on her face and said, “Thank you for your time.”

“Don’t be a stranger,” McNulty said, standing and doing his best to crush her hand in his big, meaty fist.

Nicki left, annoyed, but not surprised, and she immediately got on her phone. “Location on Target?”

“Heading downtown on the N train. I have him in sight.”

“Keep me posted.”

“Roger that.”

Nicki had a job to do, and she would find a way to do it with or without the help of McNulty. She was sure that the Brother-Sisters would make an attempt on Adrian Lopez. Her

orders, however, were not to stop the switch, but to let it happen and then capture the switcher alive. It meant Lopez would be spending the rest of his life as a woman, but sacrifices had to be made, and they wouldn't make the grab until they were sure they had one of the Brother-Sisters.

Nicki planted herself at the old steel desk they'd lent her in the back corner of a dusty, disused office space. The heat wasn't working, and the wooden chair was cold and she squirmed uncomfortably. What had McNulty said about the body-swapping stories? It was like a crappy movie on Sci-Fi Channel? And it was, she had to admit. It was. She wouldn't believe it herself but for the intensity with which her office had responded to the reports.

She hadn't even heard about it, didn't know about the news reports from Montreal, but then she and her team had been issued an Open Ops Protocol, meaning they were charged to do anything they could to bring the case to resolution and were guaranteed immunity from criminal prosecution if they broke the law.

That kind of authorization was rare and limited to only the most serious threats to national security. Large scale terrorist attacks. That kind of thing. And so Nicki knew the whole thing was being taken very seriously.

As much as it sounded like bullshit, Nicki was sure it was real.

XIX

By the time Lopez climbed up the stairs from the Subway tunnel, snow had started to fall. Light flurries, but it turned the crooked, winding streets of Chinatown into a snow globe. The

narrow streets were crowded with people, but despite the neighborhood holding onto the name Chinatown it was now home to Asian immigrants from countries throughout the region-- Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Korea and all points in-between. Lopez didn't know the neighborhood well; he came down here maybe once a year or so for food or maybe to see a parade. It was far outside his precinct and social world. He had to pull out his phone and Google Map the address on the card to figure out where he was going.

He felt a sense of relief being surrounded by all these black and brown heads; no blonde women. And, for the first time, he realized that he had become tense or edgy whenever he did pass a blonde girl in the streets now, wondering if she were the one, if that was the body they intended to trap him in.

Blondes. He'd always had a thing for them, partly because there were no natural blondes around when he was a kid. The Latinas had dark hair, brown skin, and so the only time he'd seen those girls with the golden hair and the pale, pink skin had been on television and in magazines, eventually in Playboy. They were exotic, other worldly, and though he had since dated a couple, he still saw those golden haired, pale skinned girls as something mysterious and exciting, the same way some Anglos saw Latina or Asian women. They must have guessed that, he thought, known that he had a special thing for golden-haired girls, known that the thought of becoming one of them, becoming his own kind of fantasy girl, would make him queasy, would actually terrify him more than just the sex-change itself.

Probably better than Asian, though, he decided looking at all the women milling around him. Lopez thought of Asian girls as meek, submissive, excessively feminine and cute. And even though the Asian-American girls he worked with did not match that stereotype, it stayed

with him, and he thought that being turned into an Asian girl would mean he would be turned into a geisha.

Lopez turned a corner and made his way down the narrow street that would lead him to Empress Massage. It was really just a glorified alleyway. On either side the old metal fire-escapes clawed their way up the sides of the buildings, despite the cold and gentle snow he saw clothes tossed over some of them, as if left out there to dry. As he pushed deeper, the alley became darker and more congested, bikes chained to metal rings anchored in the walls, steel drums. He could hear some noise coming from the windows rising above him; Asian hip-hop, some sort of chattering radio voice speaking a language he didn't recognize. The air smelled like charcoal and mangos.

And then Lopez found himself standing in front of a red, wooden door with the silhouette of a woman's face, Chinese lettering announcing the name, and, as per NYC regulations, the street address in roman numerals that matched the address on the business card for Empress Massage.

Lopez took a deep breath, reached out, grabbed the handle and pulled open the door revealing a dimly lit lobby of teak and jade, and a young woman behind an elegant desk who looked up, smiled and, sizing him up, said, "English?"

"Yeah," Lopez said, entering the building and pulling the door shut behind him. Wiping the snow off his shoes.

"Welcome to Empress Massage," the girl said in English with a hint of British Colonial. "How may I help you?"

XX

McNulty ran the morning muster meeting, went back to his office and stewed. Things were going on in his precinct, things he didn't know about, didn't like. All of this bullshit about body swapping, and now some broad was going around claiming to be one of his former officers, doing strip shows and he had another in a cell being held on all kinds of charges as much as anything else to keep him out of the hands of the feds for as long as possible.

And of course, the feds. What the hell did they really want?

McNulty had a Nerf basketball and a little orange hoop, so he got up and shot a couple of baskets, finding himself wheezing with just that little bit of effort, so he went out into the bullpen looking for Detective Francis Corbonne. Francis, seeing the Captain coming, quickly shut the window on his computer where he'd been reading Next Magazine and opened the New York Daily News on his laptop—a picture of the “stripper cop,” a stripper who claimed she was his former colleague Joe DiPetro, wearing nothing but a bikini and a pair of pumps.

“You buying into this load of crap, too?” McNulty asked coming around the desk and checking out the hot body on the screen.

“Nope,” Corbonne said. “Just like looking at strippers.”

“Well take a break before you get yourself in a sticky situation,” McNulty said. “Let's talk in my office.”

As they headed off, McNulty saw a pair of patrolmen bringing in two women—hookers by the way they were dressed, but high-class girls, a couple of lookers; one was black and the other looked Latin. “Whores never looked that good in my day,” McNulty said.

“Mine, either,” Carbonne answered.

After the two entered, McNulty closed the door to his office, gestured for Carbonne to take a seat.

“What’s up?” Carbonne said.

“You know we got feds hanging around, right?”

“Yeah. Checking on the whole body-switching thing, right?”

“So they say.” McNulty raised an eyebrow.

“You think maybe they’re looking at something else?”

“Maybe they are, maybe they aren’t. I’d like you to find out what you can.”

“How?”

“You’re a young, good looking guy. I’m sure you can think of something.”

Carbonne nodded. “The fed you’re talking about is the looker?”

“Yeah, but watch out. She’s a hard ass.”

“I can manage it.”

“Okay. I’m going to tell her I decided to detail you to assist her in the investigation. That’ll get you started. Then, keep me posted.”

“On it, boss.”

McNulty made his way back to the dusty, dark corner where he'd stuck Nicki Carver, and as he approached he heard her talking to someone. "No. Just stay on the door for now. If Lopez doesn't come out in an hour, we'll consider moving in."

McNulty frowned. Lopez. Was she tailing his officer? He paused, waiting to see if he had a chance to hear anything more, but Carver stopped talking, so he turned the corner and tried to act like he'd just strolled up and hadn't heard a thing. "Agent Carver," he said.

"Captain."

"Have a minute?"

"Take a seat," Carver said, keeping her face as blank as possible. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, look, I know I have not been the friendliest face around here since you arrived."

"That's an understatement."

McNulty chuckled. "Yeah, well, let's just say I have had some difficult times with interagency bullshit in the past."

Carver nodded, waited.

"So, can we start over?"

"I'd welcome that, Captain."

"I want to assign one of my best detectives to work with you-- serve as your liaison, resource. Francis Carbonne. New York born and raised, 10 years on the force, he knows this

city from the gutters to the top floor of city hall. He can help you with anything you need to know. Sound good?"

"Can he tell me where to get a great slice of New York pizza?"

"I can tell you that. Pete Pistorelli's in Bayridge. No place better. But, yeah. Whatever you need, Frank can help you out."

"Thank you, Captain."

"I'll send him back to introduce himself—that is, unless you're busy with your investigation."

"Send him back. I'm going to put him to work."

McNulty stood. He and Carver shook hands, and McNulty walked away, pausing as he was about to leave and turning back, Colombo-style. "One more thing."

"Yes?"

"I have to ask. Do you really believe this shit about body-switching? I mean, is such a thing possible?"

Nicki nodded. "The Federal Government certainly thinks so," she said. "I wouldn't be here if they didn't."

"Jesus," McNulty said.

"Mary and Joseph," Nicki finished.

Nicki watched McNulty shuffle off and shook her head. It was a good move by McNulty to put someone with her, someone who could keep him informed as to the mission, and he

earned a little respect from her now. As far as Carbonne was concerned, she didn't have anything to hide anyway, and if she could get useful information from him, then it was wins all around.

XXII

"How can you help me?" Lopez said. "How about a massage?"

"Of course," the girl answered, placing a leather bound portfolio in front of Lopez and then opening it to reveal a sheet of vellum on which different services had been listed in both Chinese and English. There were no prices.

Lopez scanned the sheet, smiled. I was hoping for something special.

"Such as?" The girl said, never breaking her smile.

"Transcendent," he said.

"Excellent choice," the woman said, putting the menu away. She then looked up expectantly and held out her small hand. "Credit card?"

"Of course," Lopez said, fishing for his wallet and pulling out his American Express. He watched the girl's face as she examined the card and then scanned it into the system, but saw no sign that his name had registered.

"You may sit," the girl said. "Your masseuse will be here for you shortly. Would you like a drink while you wait?"

"No, thanks," Lopez said, taking a seat.

After only a few moments, a narrow door at the end of the hall opened, and a petite Asian girl dressed in an orange silk robe and sandals came out, wooden pins in her hair, just like a character in a karate movie. She bowed and said, “Mr. Lopez?”

“Yes,” he answered.

The girl met his eyes and smiled, her cheeks dimpling. “I am Miko. I am here to serve you. Follow me, please.”

Lopez smiled back and stood up. “Glad to meet you, Miko.”

The girl looked away, turned and led Lopez back the way she’s come. The air flowing through the little door smelled of jasmine and lotus blossom, and it had a warm, damp feel to it, tropical. The lights were dim, and Lopez found himself walking down a shadowy hall crowded with plants that brushed against his arms, while various ferns and vines dangled down from scaffolding in the ceiling. The liquid hum of crystal bowls seemed to come from all around, and he could feel the vibrations pass through his body, his eyes dropping to the high, round shape of Miko’s swaying behind as he followed her down the twisted hallway. They came to several cross paths, and glancing down each Lopez saw more thick, green growths, but the ambient light in each hallway was different—something the misty air had a purple haze to it, other times red, something emerald and sometime a deep, royal blue. They kept moving back, back, deeper and deeper into the labyrinth, and try as he might Lopez wasn’t sure if he was remembering all the twists and turns as they made their way backwards. He felt certain that Miko was getting him lost on purpose, and the logic side of his brain was telling him to stop, call for back up, get out before it was too late, but his eyes stayed glued to Miko’s ass, her perfect little behind, and he found himself following, following, following, unable to stop, to find the energy to think through

where he was, where he was going, what was happening; he only knew that he wanted to follow Miko, to get wherever it was she was leading him.

Transcendent.

Yes. That was what he'd been promised. What he'd paid for. And now he realized that whatever it was, it was the thing he'd been missing his whole life, searching for, wanting, needing, craving but which he'd never been able to really ever grasp and hold, but only to just barely touch with the tips of his fingers, just the faintest of connections, and then it had always been broken and he'd been left alone in the dark feeling hollow and broken and hungry for that impossible something that he felt he'd always been promised but had never been able to hold—the big tease, the ultimate disappointment.

Transcendence, and Miko could lead him to it, take him to a place where he could let it take him and keep him forever.

XXIII

“You're sure he never came out?” Nicki asked.

“Not unless he left through some other exit,” her man on the street who'd been watching Lopez said.

“Did *anyone* come out?”

“No traffic at all in or out since Lopez entered the building.”

“Okay. I'm gathering a team and heading down there,” Nicki said. “Stay put.”

She closed out the call. Carbonne looked at her. “Something up?”

Nicki decided to tell him. She’d never intended to keep anything from the locals anyway. “I have Lopez under surveillance. He went into a suspicious location in China town an hour ago and never came out.

“You think it’s this... thing?”

“Yes. You coming?”

“Yeah. Just give me a minute to get... something from my desk.”

“Meet me front in 5 minutes. A van is on the way. I’m leaving with or without you.”

“Got it.”

Yeah, Nicki thought as she checked her side arm, then slipped into her flak vest. You go run and tell your boss. I doubt he’ll come running to cover your ass. She headed out into the bullpen and noticed several officers processing groups of pretty, young hookers, at least based on their clothes. Nicki looked over their long legs and slender arms, their perfect skin, and she spotted one black girl in particular that took her breath away, but before her mind could go down any dirty paths she forced herself to focus on her mission.

XXIV

Lopez found himself looking at the floor—teak wood. He blinked and shook his head, started to move, but he felt firm, tiny hands on his back and Miko said, “relax. Relax.”

Lopez realized that he was on a massage table, face down, and that Miko was working his shoulder muscles. The last he remembered he'd been lost in the hallways of the massage parlor, wandering around behind Miko. He had no recollection of entering this room, taking off his clothes, getting on the table. Confused, he said, "how did I get here?"

"Don't talk," Miko said. "Close your eyes. Take deep breaths. Relax."

Don't talk, Lopez thought to himself. Close my eyes. Relax. And then he did exactly those things, closing his eyes, he started to breath, and Miko began working more intensely. The smell of jasmine and lotus blossom filled Lopez' head, permeated his body, and he felt himself sinking into a trance-like state as Miko worked, all the muscles in his body letting go of their tension, uncoiling, growing calm and free.

"Yes," Miko whispered. "That's it. Let go. Let go. Let go."

Let go, Lopez repeated to himself. Let go. Let go.

"You want to meet the Empress King."

The Empress King? Lopez thought, still finding that he did not want to speak.

"Yes," Miko said, as he had spoken. "That's why you're here. To meet The Empress King."

Yes, Lopez realized for the first time. That was the true reason he had come here. Of course. He needed to meet the Empress King.

"I will prepare you."

"Thank you," Lopez answered in a soft, high-pitched voice, a voice like a school girl's.

"Thank you so much."

He found moving down a hallway, but effortlessly, as if he were floating. It felt like his body had become molten—hot and fluid, with breasts swelling on his chest only to disappear. He would look at his hand to see a small, delicate wrist and tiny, white palm, but then when he looked back it would be mannish and calloused. He felt it should bother him, but it didn't. He just felt as if it were all some odd dream, and he felt elated, happy, totally free in a way he'd never felt before. More and more bodies seemed to be joining him as he moved along, bodies that shifted and morphed as they moved, just like his, and soon he found himself being led to the base of a great, golden throne.

A blinding white light shone from the top of the throne, and he instinctively dropped to his knees and kissed the cold, hard stone floor.

“You are not Vhywhyn, are you?” The voice said in amused tone.

“I don't know what that means.” Lopez said, now in his old voice.

“You are not ... a Brother-Sister.”

“No,” Lopez said, nervous now, caught, unsure what would happen to him now that he'd been found out.

“You are one of The Blind. Yes. Lopez.”

Lopez wanted to get up, to make a run for it, but instead he found himself remaining in his prostrate position, paralyzed. Unable to move.

“Once more, let me offer you a chance to free out Brother-Sister from captivity. In return, you may remain in that shape.”

“No,” Lopez said. I won't.”

“Show him what he will become.”

Lopez felt hands at his elbows and he was raised up to his feet. He pulled the silk robe he was wearing closed and tied the sash, idly noting that his body seemed to have stopped changing. The crowd parted and he saw a woman being led toward him. She was Asian, with light, golden skin, big, green eyes and long, straight black hair that poured down past her shoulders. She had a long, graceful neck, slender shoulders and full, firm breasts that swayed above a tiny little waist and wide, soft hips above long, tone legs. Lopez felt himself getting a little bit of a boner just looking at her, at that glowing goddess, and as she slipped the robe off her shoulders and let it fall to the ground, revealing the full length of her perfect, curvaceous body his eyes dropped to the dark thatch of hair between her legs.

“That will be your new body unless you agree.”

“No,” Lopez said, shaking his head, terrified of the thought that he would become that stunning woman, that those perfect breasts and that perfect face would be his. “No,” he repeated, only once again he now spoke in the tea-kettle voice of a school girl. The thought of being turned into an Asian girl scared Lopez even more than the thought of being turned into a blonde.

The woman licked her lips and walked toward Lopez, her breasts swaying with each graceful step. Now, panicking, Lopez did try and run, but he was being held firmly in place, struggling helplessly. “Let me go,” he shouted in his little voice. “Let me go!!!”

The woman was now standing right in front of Lopez, and she reached up and put a hand on his cheek. “Last chance,” she said in a voice as smooth and soft as silk. “Agree to free our Brother-Sister, and you can keep your manhood.”

Lopez shook his head. No. He would never do that. Could never do that.

The woman took Lopez hand and pushed it down between her legs, so he felt his hand against her vagina. She smiled and said, "that's going to be yours soon, pretty girl. And I am going to enjoy fucking you while your girlfriend watches."

XXV

Peter O'Malley burst through the door to the waiting room and shrieked "Sofia!" Running to her, he leapt into her arms, and she held his small body to her and twirled him around.

"So good to see you, Peter," she said. Each time she came to visit, Peter O'Malley seemed to behave more and more as a little girl, less and less like a man pretending to be a little girl.

"Good to see you, too, Sofia!" Pete climbed onto her lap and smiled up at her. "You smell pretty."

"Thanks, sweetie. I have some exciting news."

"What?" Pete said.

"You are looking at the newest member of the Rockettes!"

"Ohmygod!" Pete shrieked, hugging her again and this time giving her a kiss on the cheek. "Omigod... omigod... omigod!!!!"

"It's all thanks to you, Peter, and I won't ever forget the sacrifice you made for me."

Pete took her hand and gave it a squeeze. "I did what I had to do. It's your body, not mine."

"I brought you a present." Sofia lifted a box wrapped in pink and white paper, with all kinds of pretty bows.

"It's so pretty I don't want to open it," Pete said, looking at the box.

"Yes, you do."

Pete proceed to carefully take the ribbon off, then gently undue the tape and removed the box from the wrapping, but when he saw the word Frozen and caught a glimpse of the shimmering blue dress inside and screamed. "Omigod! Omigod!" But still maintained his control and daintily removed the box without ever tearing any paper. "This is worth more than gold in here," he said, composing himself, remembering for a moment he was supposed to be a man.

"Oh, is that why you want it, Peter? To trade it to some girl?"

"Yes," he said, and then biting his lip he looked at her mischievously and said, "And also to wear it a little."

"I thought so."

Peter hugged the box, then hugged Sofia some more. "How are your parents?" He asked.

"Good. They told me to say hi and thank you. Again."

"Oh. And do you have a boyfriend, yet?"

Sofia smiled and rolled her eyes.

"What! Tell me! Tell me!" Pete insisted, his eyes flashing with girlish excitement.

Nicki and the Tactical Team had gathered in the alleyway outside Empress Massage. It had taken nearly an hour, but now a couple burly officers with the door buster stood ready, and the rest had their weapons out and were ready for the signal. Nicki approached the door, intending to walk in and first offer whoever was inside to peaceably produce Officer Lopez. It was risky. There was a chance he was just inside there now getting a massage and a happy ending, and if so it would all look pretty ridiculous, but Nicki's instincts were good, and the fact he had come here right after searching the offices of the Brother-Sisters only known operation had her certain that she was about to hit pay dirt.

She moved closer. Closer. Was at the door, ready to grab the handle, when the door was flung open from the other side and two hissing metallic grenades tossed out. "Fire in the hole," someone yelled, and Nicki felt someone push her aside and shield her as the grenades each exploded with a concussive blast and the alley filled with green and red smoke. Nicki's eyes burned, and she struggled to get out from behind whichever officer had protected her, and as she did so she saw that half naked women were rushing out of the door, screaming, rushing out in the smoke and the chaos.

"Stay clear," Nicki tried to say, but she started coughing. "Don't... touch... you..."

One of the girls had leapt onto the trooper in front of Nicki, wrapped her legs around his waist and already had him locked into a kiss. As Nicki slipped past him and into the smoke-filled

alley, she saw him suddenly turn, lower the girl to the ground and then stand up. The switch. It just happened, Nicki realized. “Hold it right there,” Nicki shouted, holstered her hand gun. “Don’t move.”

The Brother-Sister smiled and raised his hands in the smoke. “Behind you,” he said.

“Oldest trick in the book,” Nicki said, retrieving the handcuffs from her belt, and then she heard the electrical spitting sound of a Taser being fired, and collapsed to the ground, twitching and spasming helplessly while the trooper in front of her turned and ran down the alley.

Carbonne had been toward the back of the alley, planning on following the Tact Team in after their initial entry and then just being eyes and ears for his boss. As he watched the team get in place and Nicki move toward the door, he texted McNally. About to GO! McNally texted back, “You get switched I wanna blow job.” Carbonne shook his head and thought, *I don't have to get switched for that*, and then he heard someone yell “Grenade” and looked up to see someone throw himself in front of Nicki as two silver canisters bounced down the alley, making hissing noises before each exploded with a concussive THUD that popped his ears.

Smoke filled the alley, and Carbonne watched warily as he saw shapes moving in the smoke, heard shouts, and then he saw a woman in a negligee run out of the mist and lock eyes with him: she looked Indian or Pakistani, with dark skin and big, dark eyes, huge tits, and ran right at Carbonne, screaming “help me!”

Carbonne had read the reports, the stories in the paper, and he knew this was exactly what had been reported—girls came running up to officers asking for help and then stole their bodies. Carbonne could see it in her eyes, a kind of gleeful hunger, and he turned and

hurried down the street, trying to get away, his loafers slipping on the icy sidewalk and almost skidding out from under him before he grabbed a fire escape and steadied himself.

“Help,” the girl yelled again in a high-pitched, nasal voice. “Officer, help!”

“Stay the fuck away from me,” Carbonne said, hurrying down the alley toward the street. “I’ll fucking shoot you.”

Just as he was about to reach the end of the alleyway, two women stepped out and blocked his path. They tossed their hair and put their small hands on their hips, smiling. “Going somewhere, officer?” One looked Greek, with a mass of curly red hair, while the other was a silver-haired Russian.

Carbonne waved his gun. “I will fucking shoot you,” he said. “Get out of my way, you fucking bitches.”

And then he couldn’t see, as two little hands came from behind and covered his eyes. Carbonne jerked, fired a shot, tried to free himself, but then all three women were on him, and they wrestled him to the ground, and he was on his back, his arms pinned at his sides while the dark-skinned beauty climbed on top of him, straddling him with her legs. He could feel her sex resting against his belly, and as she leaned down his head swam with her perfume, and he turned his head to the side so she couldn’t kiss him on the lips, but she just kissed him on the cheek instead, and then he was looking down at himself even as his new body went limp, and the man beneath Carbonne caught him and rolled over on top of him, and Carbonne felt the cold, icy ground against his naked thighs and back, felt the weight of his new breasts, and the man on top of him, the man with his face and his body, put a hand on Carbonne’s breast and squeezed it, and

Carbonne felt a surge of pleasure as he heard two women laughing, and the man leaned down and said, "welcome to your new life, honey."

Minutes ticked by. McNally kept checking his phone. Nothing. Of course, it would take a little time for the Tact Team to do their thing. He knew that. But he was going nuts wanting to know what was going on down there, and he was getting calls from the Captain down there as well, calls from people at city hall as well as every other damn person he could think of. Damn it. Might as well get some air, he decided, wanting to get away from the phone, the questions. He dug through his desk, grabbed a half-full flask of Irish Whisky, stuck it in his jacket pocket and headed for the door. The floor was unusually busy for this time of day. He saw half a dozen officers taking statements from more hookers, and there was another group of three getting booked. All young. All incredibly hot. Who knew there were even this many high-class whores in South Harlem. Talk about gentrification.

"Captain? Captain McNally?"

McNally turned to see a stunning woman walking toward him, a little purse dangling daintily from her slender arm. She was black, with big, brown eyes and full, soft lips; her hair was in an afro, and she had a pair of majestic tits struggling against a thin, transparent white blouse that let him see the outline of her metallic green bra. A golden necklace nestled in her cleavage. McNally let himself drink her in, her wide hips and gorgeous legs, the hoop earrings flashing from her seashell ears. "Yeah?"

"I have some information I thought you might want to know about," she said in a tiny, little girl voice that alone would have given McNally blue balls even if it hadn't come out of her

perfect, pillowy lips which she now opened into a wide smile that showed off her bright, white teeth.

“Like what?” He said.

The girl glanced away, shyly, and said, “Can we talk somewhere... private?”

Something’s not right here, McNally thought. His cop instincts started to kick in, but then the girl locked her arms behind her back, lifting her breasts out and up toward him, and she said, “Pretty please?” Making her voice even higher and softer. She was wearing a tight little metallic green miniskirt, and her long, slender legs were as perfect as the rest of her.

McNally’s eyes dropped to those breasts—so large and firm, and then up to her big, bright eyes, and he huskily said, “Why not?”

He led the girl back to his office, not even noticing that she gave a wink to the clustered groups of young women around the office, and as soon as McNulty closed the door behind her and turned, she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him, and McNulty found himself looking up into his own face, and he felt his big, soft breasts being held against his old body, and as the man he’d been lowered him gently to the floor McNulty was screaming inside, screaming because he was now not only a woman, but a black woman. McNulty stared up helplessly as his old body lowered him to the ground, then reached up under his skirt and stroked his vagina while squeezing his breast with the other hand. “You hot ass little bitch,” her old voice spat. “I wish I could hang around here and break you in, but I am sure you’ll find yourself a big, strong man soon enough.”

Out in the bullpen, as cop after cop was grabbed, kissed and switched into the bombshell body of a stunning young woman, the same shock and terror played out again and again, while

out in the streets of South Harlem cops and detectives working the streets were grabbed and switched. Even officers on their days off out in Queens or Connecticut, Brooklyn or New Jersey one by one by one found themselves switched into the bodies of females, facing new lives as beautiful young women. Within a single hour, every police officer assigned to the South Harlem precinct was female.

XXVII

Maria checked her phone, again, as she rode the elevator up to her floor, thankful the elevator worked. When it broke, she would have to take the stairs, and tonight her arms were loaded not only with her bag from work, but with plastic shopping bags loaded down with groceries for the big vat of chili con carne she planned to make as a way to warm their bones and, hopefully, help Adrian get his mind off the ridiculous and disgusting pictures they kept sending to him. The day would be over soon, she thought, unlocking the door to their apartment and pushing it open with her foot, the groceries in her arms, and then they would...

Someone grabbed Maria behind as she entered, and the groceries crashed to the ground as one of her arms was twisted behind her back and a large hand covered her mouth. She found herself being almost carried back to the bedroom, her arm screaming in pain, and she struggled and twisted in terror as she was shoved forward and into the dark, candlelit bedroom. She saw Lopez, then, on his knees on the floor, his hands cuffed behind his back, a gag in his mouth. Two tall, stocky boulder types stood on either side of him, and a stunningly beautiful Asian girl was curled up on the bed, brushing her long, glossy black hair, smiling wistfully. She wore only

a bra and panties, showing off her perfect figure and large, firm young breasts. Maria met Adrian Lopez' eyes, and she could see the concern and rage.

“Maria. Welcome,” the Asian girl said in a silky, but girlish voice. “My name is Jade, and I am going to switch bodies with your boyfriend and make love to him right in front of you. How do you like that?”

The hand came off Maria's mouth and she said, “What the hell are you talking about?”

“I'm going to put your boyfriend in this body,” the woman said, cupping one of her full breasts and lifting it. “And then I am going to fuck him like the bitch he is.”

“Fuck you,” Maria said, the words not making sense, but the threat resonating.

“Last chance, silly girl,” the Asian woman, climbing languorously off the bed and walking over to Lopez. “Agree to free my Brother-Sister, and you get to stay a man.”

Lopez shook his head. No.

“She's such a loyal little bitch,” Jade said, taking Lopez chin in her hand. “So, you're sure? You're going to be a hot piece of ass for the rest of your life, girly girl.”

Lopez jerked his chin free of the girl's small hand.

“Just do it,” Maria said, looking at Lopez. “Do what they want, Adrian.”

He shook his head, the veins in his forehead bulging in his forehead as he strained against the handcuffs binding his wrists. He tried to lunge at Jade, but the bouncer looking dudes grabbed him and held him in place.

“Have it your way, honey pie,” Jade said, nodding to the bouncers. One of them grabbed Lopez head with both of his huge hands and held him steady, while Jade got on her knees and kissed him on the cheek.

Maria watched as Jade’s body immediately slumped to the floor and then lie there, her big, brown eyes open and staring at the ceiling. The guards then removed the gag from Lopez’ mouth and took the cuffs off him. Jade, now in Lopez’ body, rubbed her wrists and leaned over the young woman on the floor, brushing her hair back from her face and then letting her hands gently run down over her breasts and between her legs.

“Get used to that feeling,” she said as she caressed the lips of Lopez’ vagina through his panties.

“Did you switch? For real?” Maria asked, struggling to believe what she had been told.

Jade slipped her arms under Lopez and picked him up, placing him on the bed face down. She glanced back at Maria and smiled. “Your boyfriend is now a woman,” Jade said. “Now, I am going to fuck him.”

“No,” Maria said, still not certain if she believed what she was being told, but sure she didn’t want to see it. “Don’t.”

Jade lifted Lopez hips so he was on his knees, his breasts pressed into the mattress, his ass in the air. Lopez couldn’t move, but he could feel everything, and his mind screamed against the impossibility of it all—the fingers on his vagina, the heavy, soft presence of his breasts, and the feeling of the cool air against his bare bottom as he felt Jade pull his panties down past his thighs.

“Please,” Maria begged. “Stop. For the love of God, don’t do this.”

Jade dropped her pants and climbed onto the bed, positioning herself behind Lopez, grabbing his hips. “Your boyfriend chose this,” she said, huskily. “She probably wants it like the dirty little slut she is now.”

Lopez felt her thrust into the soft, wet lips of his vagina, and his body made a reflexive little sound like a bird chirping. He felt sick, violated, powerless, humiliated, and tears came to his eyes and he felt them dampening the sheets beneath his face as Jade began to slide in and out, thrusting, pushing his whole little body forward, pressing his breasts deeper into the mattress, and then pulling back, and thrusting in, pulling back, and thrusting in, and Lopez found his body was making little squealing noises as he cried, terrified and disgusted by naked reality of his newfound female form and the way he was being ravished.

“Oh my God,” he heard Maria mumble in a broken voice. “God, no,” because she knew that man was not Adrian Lopez, that he would never do to a woman what that bastard was doing, and she knew, without a doubt, that it was all true: Adrian Lopez, the man she loved, was now in the body of a young woman, and he was being raped right in front of her. Her abdomen seized, she doubled over, but the man holding her grabbed a hunk of her hair and pulled her head back, forcing her to continue watching, and the vomit sputtered from her mouth and dribbled down her chin.

Jade kept her firm grip on Lopez’ hips, slamming into him, faster and harder, faster and harder, and then she exploded inside him and she felt Lopez spasm beneath her. When she finished, she pulled out of the man’s hot, wet hole, slapped him on the ass, and said, “You’re a good fuck, honey.”

Lopez, still unable to control his body, fell onto his side and lay there facing Maria, his tear-stained eyes wide with horror. Maria looked away, ashamed for him, and then she was shoved forward, landing at the side of the bed, as the three men laughed, turned and marched out of the apartment as if they'd just gotten done playing a game of Scrabble.

Maria looked at the pretty woman on her bed, those wide, innocent eyes flooded with tears of horror. She took one of Lopez delicate, soft little hands, and with her other she caressed his smooth, round shoulder. "I'm so sorry," she said, not even knowing what she was sorry for. "I'm so sorry for everything."

Lopez closed his eyes, trying to block out the impossible feelings of his new body, the soft mass of his breasts, the sleek feeling of his hairless thighs pressing against each other, the feeling of his long hair flowing down his back, and most of all the hot, sticky feeling inside his vagina, and clinging to the side of his thigh.

They had done it. Just as they said they would. Adrian Lopez was now a woman.

XXVIII

In Chinatown, Nicki Carver had grabbed the three other women who'd been a part of the Tact Team. They had all been left alone, and were mobile, so they began to pick up the immobilized females from the frozen street and carry them into the Empress Massage Parlor. She hoped that somehow it they wouldn't all turn out to be her men—former men. But one by one the girls began to move, to sit up, and as they did, Nicki had them identify themselves. One by one the pretty young woman shook their heads and announced their names through their painted lips: Leroy, Kevin, Ike, Carmine... all men she knew, had known, who now spoke in the

tiny little voices of girls as they looked at her from stunned, Barbie Doll faces. She helped them to their feet and watched as they took their first uncertain steps on their long legs, their hips and breasts swaying as they moved, tentatively, uncertainly, confused in their Barbie Doll bodies, putting small, manicured hands to their smooth cheeks, barely able to believe what they were experiencing was real.

Support started to arrive-- local and Federal law enforcement. Nicki draped blankets over the smooth shoulders of the nearly naked girls—men—she didn't even know what to call them, and as the teams moved carefully into the interior of the Empress Massage Parlor, Nicki found a corner and leaned against the wall, sighed, and realized that this was her fault, it had happened on her command, and a bunch of good men were now women because of her.

What was proper procedure in a situation like this? What was she supposed to do? Say? There was no protocol. But she decided she should call McNulty, let him know what had happened, and that there was so far no sign of Lopez. She pulled up his name from her list of contacts. After two rings, the phones connected and she heard a young girl say, “Carver?”

“Yes. I need to talk to McNulty.”

There was a long pause. And then the girl whispered, “This is McNulty.”

Nicki stared at her phone. “What?”

“They hit the precinct. They got all of us.”

“Shit.”

“The same thing happened on this end.”

“They switched your whole team?”

“All the men. They’re now, well, you know.”

The line was silent. “I’m going to admit something to you,” McNulty finally said. “I’m embarrassed to say it.”

“Okay,” Nicki said, feeling herself sinking into a stupefied state of shock. “Go.”

“I don’t know what to do.”

“Me, neither, McNulty. There is no damn procedure for this shit.” And for some reason, at that, they both started laughing until they cried.

“Carver?” Janice Wall, one of her female agents said, approaching her. “Everything okay?”

“No,” Nicki said. “Not at all.”

“Why are you laughing?”

“Because I don’t know what else to do.”

“Well, you ready for a little more bad news?”

“Sure. The more the better.”

“Well, two network news trucks are already here, and they are asking for a statement.”

“You hear that McNulty?”

“Yeah,” he said. “Jesus. That didn’t take long. Look, I’m going to see what I can do to rally my ...men.”

“I’ll keep you posted if we find anything here.”

“Wait. Carmine?”

“He got switched, too.”

XXIX

Dr. Mildred Brinkman had sat down in her living room with a steaming cup of chamomile tea, pulled a quilt up over her legs and settled down the watch Wheel of Fortune when the broadcast was interrupted. “This is a News 2 special report with Carlita Pena direct from Chinatown. Carlita?” The reporter stood on the street in the gently falling snow, and behind her Brinkman saw flashing lights from a mass of police cars and ambulances. She could see people milling about in the background—NYPD, men and women in Navy jackets with FBI stenciled on the back, and homeland security.

Terrorists? Brinkman sighed.

“Eyewitness reports from local residents indicate a group of law enforcement massed in the street behind me sometime around 4PM. Shortly thereafter, residents heard two explosions, the alley filled with smoke, and moments later people witnessed members of the team flee from the alley and run off into the city.”

“Wait, Carlita, did you say that law enforcement fled the scene?”

“Yes. One resident did shoot a video with his Iphone.”

The broadcast cut to the video. Brinkman watched as smoke billowed from the alleyway, and then she saw one plainclothes cop, gun in hand, hurrying out of the alley, but that cop was grabbed by a young woman wearing nothing but a bra and panties, who seemed to lock him in an embrace, kiss him, and then slump to the ground as if she’d fallen into a trance. The office

seemed to lean down, fondle the woman's breasts, kiss her and then run off into the darkening city streets.

Shit, Brinkman thought, watching. She knew she's just seen the officer get switched, and as she watched more and more male officers running out of the smoke filled alley, she felt certain that every single one of the men who had once lived in those bodies was now a female.

"This seems connected to the incident some weeks ago where claims were made that two male police officers had been switched into the bodies of strippers."

"Could this be some sort of prank, Carlita?"

"Based on the amount of local and federal law enforcement behind me, I would something happened here, something very serious."

"Thank you, Carlita. When we return, we'll speak with Dr. Wesley Lawn on the whether or not these claims of body-swapping are possible."

Brinkman turned off the television, sipped her tea and rubbed her eyes. Better get my rest, she decided, because a whole bunch of pretty men are going to need my help.

XXX

McNulty reached into his blouse and adjusted his bra strap. He'd gone into his office and found a copy of his credentials—a laminated ID on a lanyard, and he'd draped it around his neck. Grabbing a couple of iPads, he headed out into the bullpen and saw Kanessa, one of the

natural born female officers comforting a gorgeous girl who looked red and freckly and Irish.

“Kanesha.”

Kanesha turned and looked at the pretty young black woman approaching her. McNulty held out his credentials, and Kanesha’s eyes went wide. “No.”

“Yes,” McNulty answered. “I’m afraid so.”

“I’m sorry,” Tanesha said. “Or should it be congratulations?” She found herself checking out McNulty’s new body, the large breasts, wide hips. “Are you still my boss?”

“I think so,” McNulty said, feeling self-conscious as he felt Kanesha examining him, woman to woman. He had once been a lot bigger than her—taller and wider, but though he was still a little taller, he now felt much smaller and weaker. “Is that a problem?”

“A little.”

“Well, for now, help me out. I want to start identifying all of our officers. Can you start on the north side of the room? Take a picture of each of the... men... get their names and badge numbers? I’ll start on the south.”

“Yo,” the red haired Irish girl said in the voice of a high-school cheerleader. She was looking up at McNulty with wide, frightened green eyes. She was on the verge of crying. “We stuck like this, boss?” Large, golden hoop earrings flashed in her ears, and her green bra pushed up her impressive, freckled breasts.

“I don’t know,” McNulty said. “Your name?”

The girl looked away, embarrassed, pulling her knees together and crossing her slender arms over her breasts.

“That’s Farakh,” Kanesha said.

Hearing his name said out loud, Farakh put his hands over his face and started crying.

“I’ll handle this,” McNulty said, softly. “Get started.”

Kanesha headed to the North end of the building, a little annoyed she was taking orders from what looked like a 19-year-old little black girl, but the girl seemed like McNulty, had the same accent, and even with his now pretty, high-pitched voice she felt she recognized the essence of the man inside the young, female shape. She felt a lump in her stomach, broken-hearted for Farakh, if that was Farakh. Turned into a woman, and a white girl at that? Farakh didn't like anything white-- not white bread, white rice. He hated the snow cause it was white, and the one thing he talked down on even more than white was women. Well, Kanesha thought, maybe all of them were about to have to reassess their attitudes toward women, and that wouldn't be such a bad thing.

McNulty sat down and put an arm over Farakh’s shoulder.

“I’m dead,” Farakh said, confused and scared by his new body. “I... I...”

“Nah. It’s okay,” McNulty said, surprised to find tears springing to his own eyes.

Barely aware of what he was doing, Farakh turned and put his arms around McNulty, and the two men held each other, their soft breasts pressing together.

Eventually, the tears stopped, and realizing what they’d had been doing the men separated, each flushing with embarrassment. Farakh brushed his long, curly red hair back from his face and looked away. “Okay. Let’s never tell anyone about that.”

“Agreed,” McNulty said, wiping his own tears away. “Let me get your picture.”

Farakh turned so McNulty could snap a photo with the Ipad, and then McNulty entered Farakh's information into his spreadsheet. McNulty turned and started to go and see the next officer, but then stopped and said, "I have a feeling I'm going to need you, officer. Sooner rather than later."

Farakh sighed, his impressive breasts rising and falling. "I'll be ready, Captain. Somehow."

McNulty headed off, feeling that something wasn't right, something even more than just the fact that he was now a woman. It felt like he had something inside him—inside the area above his crotch. Was that normal? He wasn't sure, but he really didn't have time to worry about it as he approached yet another young woman with a stunningly beautiful face and large breasts, this one with a Latina look about her. She looked up at McNulty as he approached, and McNulty could see that she, too, had been crying.

McNulty took a breath and said, "I'm Captain McNulty. You are?"

"Greg Foster," the girl answered. "You're McNulty?" Foster let his eyes play up and down McNulty's curvaceous young body appreciatively, just as if he were still a man checking out a woman.

McNulty felt that same sense of insecurity sweep over him, but just nodded. "Yup. It's me."

"Shit," Foster said, nervously twisting one of the bracelets on his slender wrist. "You're black."

"Really?" McNulty said. "I hadn't noticed."

McNulty and Tanesha had gotten about halfway through all the girls, getting their pictures and names, when his phone rang, and he saw it was from the Chief of Police in New York City, Anthony Bucceli. McNulty started heading toward his office and took the call. “Hey, Tony,” he said.

“Hey, Tony? Who is this?”

“I know you may have a hard time believing this, but it’s your old buddy McNulty.”

“They got you, too?”

“Yeah. Big Time. You actually believe this is me?”

“Hell. I’ll believe anything now. Listen, I have sent Deputy Chief Janice Ferrell down there to run things until we can get this crisis sorted out.”

McNulty swallowed. He knew this was probably coming. Had seen it happen to Pete and Joe when they got switched; the NYPD couldn’t just take the word of any girl who came along claiming she used to be a man and a cop. But it still shocked him and just added to his pain and humiliation. He was a woman, and he had lost his command. But one thing McNulty had always prided himself on was on being a proper officer, and as much as anything else that meant respecting the chain of command.

“Yes, sir,” McNulty said. “Anything else?”

“No. Janice will be there any minute now.”

“Ow,” McNulty said, putting his hand to his side as he was hit with a sudden cramp.

“You have a problem with that?”

“No,” he said, clutching his side. “I, um, stubbed my toe is all.”

“I’m counting on you.”

“I won’t let you down, sir.”

“Good... man,” Tony said, ending the call.

McNulty sat down, feeling a little light-headed. Sitting felt just as strange and uncomfortable as standing. Walking. He looked down at his round, firm breasts, decided he’d better button up his blouse before his new boss showed up, but then he realized that the blouse he wore didn’t have any top buttons. In the meantime, he really looked at his nails for the first time- long, they were painted glossy crimson, with golden applique symbols in what looked like some kind of Asian lettering. He felt ashamed to meet a superior not just in this body, but dressed up and primped out so much a damn... girl, for God’s sake. He decided to see if he could find something else to wear, maybe trim off his ridiculous nails, but just as he stood up he saw Janice Ferrell burst through the door to the precinct, an entourage of three other women in suits behind her, and he sighed realizing he was going to be stuck meeting his new boss wearing a mini-skirt and with his boobs bulging out of his see-through blouse.

“Never thought I’d have to worry about showing too much tit,” McNulty thought, nervously tugging at the hem of his short skirt as Janice approached. “Or having too short a skirt on.”

Janice Ferrell marched back to McNulty’s office. She saw a pretty, actually stunning would be a better word, young African American woman tugging nervously at her blouse and the hem of her skirt, and she thought, *that cannot be McNulty*. But, as she entered the girl stopped

fidgiting with her tight, slutty outfit and said, “Deputy Ferrell. Believe it or not, I’m Captain Jim McNulty.” She held out the credentials around her neck.

Ferrell couldn’t believe her eyes or ears. The girl spoke like McNulty, had the same accent, but her voice was so high and girly. Ferrell looked the girl in the eyes and reached out to shake her hand. McNulty reached out, and Ferrell took his small, baby soft hand in her own, giving it a firm grip. “I’ve been briefed on the situation, but it is still almost impossible to believe, Captain.”

“Tell me about it.”

“How are you holding up?”

“I don’t know.”

“Fair enough.”

Ferrell closed the door to the office, introduced the rest of her team. The four of them sat down, McNulty noticeably awkward in his skirt. He tried to cross his legs, felt strange, and then just settled on sitting with his knees together, his hands in his lap.

“Captain,” Janice said. “First, let me say that I have the utmost respect for you and the job that has been done over the years by all your officers.”

“I have a feeling I am not going to like this.”

“We are going to have to bring in temporary personnel to staff this precinct while we sort out your legal status.”

“Just like with Peter and Joe?”

“Yes.”

“I understand, but isn’t there something...?”

“Legally,” Kelly Meyer interrupted, “none of you is empowered to serve as NYPD officers. Until we can work out a way to establish your identities, any arrests made by you or your officers would be impossible to prosecute, and at the same time we feel it likely the NYPD would be open to additional liability risks.”

“But, Commissioner ...” McNulty grabbed his side as another cramp hit. “Ouch!”

“Are you okay?” Janice said.

“Yes,” McNulty said, squirming uncomfortably and feeling like he had to pee. “I’ve been having these cramps since I got switched into this body.”

“Cramps?” Janice asked, looking curiously at the pretty girl holding her side in an all-too familiar way. The women all looked at each other.

“Yeah,” McNulty said, and catching their glances, like they were in on some secret, he realized something was going on and said, “what?”

“Um, Jim, I think you might be having your period.”

“My, what? No, that... can’t... be...” but as he ran through his memories of his ex-wife’s monthly visitor, the shock of realization came over him. “No.” His eyes widened and his mouth fell open.

“God, this is not great in terms of timing. Do you need to use the restroom?”

“No,” McNulty said, self-consciously squeezing his legs together, determined to fight for what was left of his identity. “I spoke to the commissioner and he...”

“Made this decision himself. He wanted me to tell you in person.”

McNulty felt small, helpless, totally emasculated. He could feel the tears brimming in his eyes, his strange new body once again wracked with emotions he didn't seem able to control.

Janice felt terrible. She had her doubts about this whole body-switching thing, but through the course of the short meeting she'd come to believe that this girl was McNulty. She just seemed like him. It felt cruel to take away his job, and yet Janice also felt it best to rip the bandage off rather than let the pain drag out, and so she said, “I have to ask for your credentials.”

“What? Oh,” McNulty said. He took the lanyard off, handed it to Janice Ferrell, the tears now pouring uncontrollably from his eyes, pouring down his cheeks. “What am I supposed to do now?”

“Go home,” Janice said, standing up and patting McNulty on his small shoulder.

“Okay,” McNulty said. “Fuck. Okay.” He stood up, and Janice reached as if to hug him, but he pushed her away and said, “No. Just, no.”

Head hanging, blinded by tears, he walked out of his office and went to the bathroom, pushing through the door to the men's room defiantly, he found a stall and wiggling out of his skirt, he pulled down his panties. Sitting down on the cold toilet seat, he looked up to see a crudely drawn figure of a woman with huge tits and a penis being shoved into her crotch. He'd seen it a hundred times and never cared, but now it sent a shock of rage through him. Assholes!

He tried to pee.

Nothing happened. He felt plugged. Still. Like there was something inside him. Disgusted, he reached down between his soft, hairless thighs and closing his eyes he felt his vagina, frustrated and disgusted by the alien feeling of having that between his legs, and then he felt strings, and grabbing them he pulled out his bloody tampon and threw it on the floor, crying in shame at what had become of him.

XXXI

Maria recognized the symptoms of shock, and she knew that Adrian Lopez was suffering from shock. The far-away look in the eyes, the inertia. His mind had shut down, too overcome by his sex-change and rape. Maria had let him be for a time, but she'd eventually taken him by the hand and helped him undress, ushered him into a hot shower so he could scrub off the stink of the man that had violated him. Lopez had cleaned his new body in a daze, aware of hot water on his breasts, his soft belly, but not really registering. When he stepped out of the shower, Maria helped him towel off, and then she had him slip into a pair of his old pajamas and then his big, fluffy cotton robe she'd bought him for Christmas, but which he never wore. His clothes. His old clothes. But they didn't fit. Too long in the sleeves and pant legs, but tight against his large breasts and full, round ass.

He didn't feel hungry, didn't feel anything, but Maria sat him down on a stool at the kitchen counter and got him to eat some chicken soup. While he ate, she pulled his long hair back and tied it into a ponytail to keep it out of his face.

"Do you want to talk?" Maria said, sitting down and looking at the beautiful face of the woman sitting across from her, the woman she knew was her boyfriend.

"I think I just want to sleep," Lopez said in his little girl's voice.

"Okay," Maria said.

She followed Lopez into the bedroom, and watched as he slipped out of his robe and climbed under the covers, his breasts straining against his pajama top. Maria couldn't help but appreciate how beautiful he was now. So sexy. She felt threatened and impressed and sorry all at the same time.

"Good night," she said as Lopez turned onto his side, curling up into a ball. And then she turned off the light and went out to the living room, to sleep on the couch, double checking the locks and the windows and realizing for the first time that she, too, was in shock over what had happened.

XXXII

Francis Carbonne wore a women's track suit in powder blue with white piping that hugged his curvy body. He'd managed to get his long hair back in a ponytail and had taken off his earrings, but now as he stood at the end of the alleyway in Chinatown where he'd lost his body and his manhood, he was afraid to do what he wanted and needed to desperately to do: go to his boyfriend, Jacob. He felt alone and scared, more alone and scared than he'd felt since he'd been a child, and he needed his man more than ever, but he was ashamed at what he'd become, and terrified at how Jacob would react when he walked in all tits and ass and said, "It's me, Francis."

I have to do it sooner or later, he decided. No time like the present. The women who'd stolen his body had run off with his phone, and she hadn't had the courtesy to leave him with

hers, or with a wallet, or even a Metrocard, and it was a long, long walk to Queens from Chinatown. So, he wandered back into the alley and found Nicki. "Agent Carver?"

"Remind me?" Nicki said, looking at yet another Barbie Doll face.

"Francis Carbonne."

"Yes," she said. "What do you need?"

Francis could see the strain on her face, the stress the situation had put on her. "A ride?"

"I don't even have a car...."

"Maybe you could call a taxi for me or call McNulty for a patrol car? I have no wallet, money, anything."

"Oh. I am so sorry. The other switchees are all part of the tactical team, so we are taking them back to the hotel, and I just forgot...."

"It's okay. It really is."

Nicki dispatched one of her people to get a cab for Francis, then feeling guilty for having forgotten him she smiled and said, "You okay?"

"No," Francis said. "Not at all."

"Worried about your job?"

"My relationship."

Nicki searched for words. Came up with nothing. "I'm sorry," she said. "Hopefully, she'll understand?"

"Hopefully," Francis said, and then thought, but *he* doesn't like women.

Francis gave Nicki a hug goodbye and they exchanged a kiss on the cheek. He thought maybe Nicki gave him a little look of recognition, like maybe she had realized he was a gay man trapped in a woman's body, but then he also thought he'd caught her checking out his tits, so he decided he was probably just confused and misreading everything.

The cab ride seemed to take forever. Thankfully, the driver was listening to some kind of Serbian disco-rap and didn't want to talk. Francis found himself examining his body, or what he could see of it without putting on a strip show for the driver. His wrists were delicate, his hands slender and refined. He realized with some surprise that he was wearing a bunch of bracelets on one wrist and three rings, and it surprised him he'd been so unaware, but of course he had been dealing with other larger and rounder issues, like his huge boobs. He had soft, fleshy thighs. Baby-sized feet. Just like Joe and Peter, and the other men down in Chinatown; they'd switched them all into full-bodied women with really pretty faces, and so far everyone he'd heard speak had a variation on a Betty Boop voice. The bitches had even managed to keep up the ethnicity switching, so that not one of them was the same ethnic group he'd been born into.

The cab pulled up outside Jacob's building and Francis got out. He stood in the snow for a minute, then walked up and pressed the buzzer for Jacob's apartment. The sound of Jacob's voice brought tears to his eyes. "Yes?" Peter said.

"Jacob. I need to see you," Francis said, not even bothering to try and sound like his old self.

"Who is this?"

"I'm a... friend of Francis. He... he..." Francis voice broke, "asked me to come and see you, and..."

The buzzer sounded, and Francis heard the door unlatch. "Come up," Jacob said.

When the elevator reached the 7th floor, Francis stayed in it. His heart was racing, and he was terrified to face his boyfriend, terrified of rejection, so he just stood in the corner of the elevator and watched as the doors slowly closed.

But just before they slammed shut, a hand slipped between the doors, they re-opened and Francis looked up to see Jacob standing there-- tall, broad shouldered with his square jaw and full head of sandy blonde hair, and Jacob looked right into Francis' eyes, held out his hand and said, "Come with me."

Francis reached back with his small hand, the bracelets flashing in his slender wrist, and he took Jacob's hand, and Jacob drew Francis to him, threw his arms around him and kissed him on top of the head. "It's you, Francis. Isn't it?"

Francis looked up into his boyfriends eyes and smiled even as tears rolled down his smooth cheeks. "You knew me," he whispered.

"Yes," Jacob said, leading the woman his boyfriend had become from the elevator and down to his apartment. "I watch the news."

Francis playfully slapped him on the arm. "Don't ruin it."

Jacob hugged his boyfriend tighter, hiding his own deep regret and deep sense of loss. Peter would be there for his friend, would help him and care for him as much as always, but Peter was not attracted to women, and he knew their days as lovers were over the minute he

looked into that elevator and saw that pretty little woman, with her big tits and wide, round hips standing there.

As the day ended, the switched men one by one fell to sleep. Some lone in the dark, feeling frightened and confused. Some cried themselves to sleep on couches while their wives cried themselves to sleep in cold beds that seemed suddenly too big and lonely for one. Some got drunk and passed out at the apartments of friends or parents, and some slept in the rooms and apartments that belonged to the women whose bodies they now occupied. One even slept on a small bed in an orphanage. Some slept deep, dreamless sleeps, while others tossed and turned, woke up repeatedly, each time shocked to find they had breasts, women's bodies, and then were forced to remember, again, and face the fact that they'd been changed.

Not one of them was aware of how badly the city was about to need them.

XXXIII

McNulty woke, head pounding from the booze he guzzled down the night before, reached up and put his hands on his tits. Shit. It hadn't been some kind of weird, pervy dream. He groaned, pulled the sheets back over his head, felt the pressure in his bladder and realized he had to pee.

Double shit. He reluctantly tossed the covers off and rolled out of bed, feeling the jiggle and sway of his new body as he did so. He immediately saw the dark, rust-colored stain on his sheets, and he remembered that he was having his period.

He was wearing a pair of his old boxers, now also stained, and a NY Mets tank top that hugged his huge tits, and he still felt slightly shocked as he saw his black skin. Walking into

bathroom, his breasts bouncing with each step, he pulled down his shorts and squatted down on the cold toilet seat, cursing at how frigid it felt against his bottom. He heard his phone ringing out in the apartment somewhere, the theme song from Hill Street Blues, the ringtone he had programmed in for all work calls. Assholes, he thought, wiping himself the way he supposed a girl did it, grossed out by feeling the toilet paper against the lips of his vagina. Send me home, high and dry, after all my years of service?

He started to pull up his shorts, saw the menstrual stain, and crinkling his nose, kicked them away in disgust. Shit and more shit. He didn't have any... girl things... to stop himself from leaking. Maybe he could buy some? Have them, delivered? Half asleep and on autopilot, he went to the sink and grabbed a can of shaving cream, but then looked in the mirror and set it back down. He forced himself to look at his new face, and then he whispered, "I can't believe how pretty I am." It made him feel a little scared, a little sick, because he had a stunningly beautiful face that celebrated every feminine ideal—big eyes with long, curling lashes, high cheeks, a small chin, a tiny nose and perfect, smooth black skin, dark black skin, darker than most of the black girls he'd ever seen, as flawless as onyx. Worst of all were his plush, thick, soft lips, the kind of lips asshole like him liked to call "cock sucking lips." And now they were all his. His hair, which had been a huge afro when he first got switched into this body, was now just a tangled mess.

He let his eyes drop down to his long, slender neck and smooth, narrow shoulders, his prominent clavicle and then those huge, firm young tits pushing out the front of his old Met's talk top, stretching the N and the K out, the thick, full nipples prominent through the fabric. The good news was that if wanted to get himself a man, he wouldn't have any problem. The bad news was that he still thought of himself as a man and still thought of blacks as....but was he

really black? Was he really a woman? He had been born and raised a white man, and had been a white man until just a few hours ago. Wasn't it what was inside that mattered?

But then again, the world would look at him and see a sexy little black girl now, and wouldn't they treat him that way?

His phone rang again, and he thought, fuck it. Grabbing another pair of boxers, he stepped into them and wandered out into his living room, finding his phone and seeing the call was from Nicki. "Yeah?"

"Captain McNulty," Janice said. "I was hoping to..."

"Sorry," McNulty said. "I gotta go." And he hung up, chuckling.

He went to his kitchen and poured a bowl of Captain Crunch, splashed some milk on the little cubes of... whatever the hell they were." Just as he started eating, he heard frantic knocking at the door that turned to pounding.

"What is it?"

"It's Kanessa."

He looked down at himself, thought—fuck it—and opened the door.

"McNulty! Where have you been all morning?"

"I was relieved of my duties last night. Didn't they tell you?"

"Of course, but... wait. You haven't heard, have you?"

"The city is in chaos. All the male cops are calling in sick, staying off duty."

McNulty chuckled. "I can't say I blame them."

“Janice has been trying to call you. She needs you back. The city needs you.”

“So that’s why she called.”

“The Brother-Sisters are on a crime spree and every other low-life in the Five boroughs is joining in on the fun and games. There aren’t enough cops around, and everyone knows it, so now the whole city is going into a panic. Get dressed, and let’s get going.”

Part of McNulty wanted to say no. To tell the city to go to hell after the way they turned on him. But he was a cop, had always been a cop, and, besides, what else was he going to do? Sit around and play with his tits all day? “Give me a couple minutes to get ready. Beer’s in the fridge if you want one.”

“Beer for breakfast?” Kanisha called.

“Breakfast of champions,” McNulty called back over his shoulder.

McNulty showered and dressed as quickly as he could. He put on a t-shirt and a fresh pair of boxers, then a dress shirt that he barely got buttoned over his boobs, and then one of his suits, with the tiny little belt from his mini-skirt that he still couldn’t believe fit him now. He also had to slip into the metallic green ankle boots. He didn’t blame Kanisha for laughing when she saw him come out. “I know,” he said. “I know. It’s the best I got right now.”

“Better than that slutty little skirt from last night,” Kanisha said as they headed out the door. “Can I tell you something, Captain?”

“Sure.”

“You are one fine ass sister.”

“I guess. Am I supposed to say thanks?”

The South Harlem Precinct was like a ghost town. The four women from the night before along with Nicki Carter were gathered in the conference room, all of them on Ipads or cell phones, communicating frantically with anyone and everyone might be able to send help. McNulty strode in, smiling like the cat who ate the canary, and said, "Problems, Janice?"

"McNulty?" Nicki said. "You're black?"

"Hey, Carver," McNulty said, trying to hide his embarrassment. "I'm also a girl if you haven't noticed."

Nicki was smitten. McNulty was the most beautiful girl she had ever seen, and she forced herself to take her eyes away from his perfect face.

"Kanesha filled you in, right?"

"She sure did," McNulty answered. "But I don't see how I can help you. I mean, I'm just a young black girl with no authority to perform any law enforcement activities."

"Knock it off. You gonna help or what?"

"I'm here. What do you think I can do?"

"Get your men in here. As many as you can. Round em up and get them motivated to do their jobs. We need them. Boots on the ground. Calm the city."

"But what about all the legal issues?" McNulty said, in all seriousness this time. "The NYPD does need to protect itself. That wasn't just bullshit."

"We have a crisis," Janice said. "And..."

“We found a solution,” Patty, from Homeland Security cut in. “We swear all of you in under your new identities as emergency deputies. That would give you all legal authority to act as police officers no matter who the courts ultimately decide you are. How does that sound?”

“Brilliant,” McNulty said, nodding. “Wish I’d thought of it.”

“Get as many of your men back as you can,” Janice said. “We’ll swear them in tonight and calm the city.”

“I’m on it,” McNulty said, feeling a rush of excitement to be back in action, doing the job he loved.

McNulty spent the rest of the day running around the city and on the phone, tracking down as many of his “men” as he could. He yelled, pleaded, challenged, threatened. He’d known most of them for years, knew how to motivate them, and one pretty head after another eventually nodded and agreed to come back to work, suit up and get back to doing what they did better than any other group on Earth—police work. All but three agreed to come back to work. McNulty couldn’t believe it, and neither could anyone else, least of all the men themselves, who’d thought they would never show their faces in public again, let alone be back on patrol a day after being turned into young women.

But McNulty knew how to motivate, and he felt himself swelling with confidence as he proved that at least one skill hadn’t been lost along with his balls.

The easiest call of all turned out to be Lopez.

Maria had been with Lopez on his first morning as a woman, but she’d had to go to work, and so she had left him alone in their old apartment to sit alone and think. He’d tried to kiss her

goodbye on the mouth out of force of habit as anything else, and she had turned her head away, and they'd exchanged a pained look, and Maria had said, "I'm sorry, but I've never been into other girls."

Lopez had turned away so she wouldn't see the girlish tears springing to his eyes.

Once he'd stopped crying, he decided to check himself out, stripping down and looking at himself in the mirror, horrified and disgusted and fascinated and aroused and he didn't even think there were a words for some of the things he felt as he looked at his full, meaty breasts and tiny waist, wide hips and of course his vagina. He put his hands over his nipples, felt them, cupped and lifted his breasts, then slid his hands down over his smooth, soft belly and between his legs, letting his fingers slide over the his thatch and then just gently touch the surface of his vagina. His arms squeezed his breasts together, and with his fingers on his new sex he felt a tremor of pleasure pass through him, a new pleasure he'd never experienced of even imagined as a man, but even as he did so that feeling coupled itself with fear and degradation as he remembered being raped in his first moments as a woman.

The memory of being taken, raped, tried to intrude, popping into his mind, the feeling of that man behind him, thrusting into him and then the hot cum shooting inside his body, sticking to the side of his leg. As much as he wanted to push that memory away, to pretend it never happened, he forced himself to remember it, to remember the feeling of being violated, powerless, or knowing his girlfriend was watching the whole thing as she was terrorized and humiliated in her own right, and he let those memories kindle the fire of rage within him and stoke it into a furious inferno of hate.

The Brother-Sisters would pay for what they did to him. To Joe. To Pete. They would pay for it all, and they would pay with their lives.

Lopez slipped back into his pajamas and robe, and then brushing some stray hairs that had escaped from his pony tail out of his face, he sat down at the dining room table with a pad of paper and a pen, and he started to write down all of the things he knew about the Brother-Sisters. It was the first phase of his investigation, and one that he knew would go on as long as it took for him to find them all.

He just needed to get his hands on a gun and...

His phone rang. Again. Work ring tone. He decided to answer, said, "Hello?" In his soft little voice.

"This Lopez?" A young woman asked.

"Who wants to know?"

"This is Chief McNulty. I got switched."

"Oh. Wow. You sound, well, anyway, I'm sorry."

"Me, too. Listen, I know this is hard, and we could all use more time to adjust to this shit, but the city needs you to come back to active duty."

"Okay." Lopez said. "I'm on my way."

"Wait. Seriously?" McNulty said. "It's been taking a little more convincing with most of the men."

"Not me. I won't let those fuckers beat me."

"Good man. We'll talk some more. I've got a lot more calls to make."

A badge and a gun, Lopez thought, clapping his little hands. Payback time.

XXXIV

Everyone was issued a uniform, whether they had been plainclothes or not. The NYPD wanted visibility. The citizens of the city—criminals and honest citizens alike—needed to see cops on the sidewalks and in patrol cars, to know they were around and ready to go into action. And none of the men had any clothes that would fit them now anyway.

The only problem was that the average woman did not have tits and ass like these men now boasted, so all of the switched men found themselves with too tight tops hugging their huge breasts and super tight pants hugging their asses beneath gun belts that hung on the edges of their wide, round hips. They were all gathered that night in the South Harlem Muster room, dressed in their new uniforms, and they stood together and were sworn in as officers of the law, handed badges and guns and credentials identifying them by their new names, all the men now being identified as Charlottes and Monica's, Tinas, Kimicos and Chandras and Dineps and Consuelas. McNulty had been chagrined to find out that his new name, or his body's name at least, was Ebony St. Croix.

The room full of young women was unusually quiet for a group of cops-- boys or girls-- and McNulty figured they were all still embarrassed by the sounds of their voices. "They are way to quiet for cops," McNulty said, nervously tugging at his uniform.

"Probably still uncomfortable with their new voices," Nicki said. "Hard to get used to sounding like women."

"If only I sounded like a woman now," McNulty said, putting his hand to his long, slender neck. "I sound like a little girl."

"I was going to say like a sexy baby," Nicki said, and McNulty scalded her with his eyes, but she also saw a little smile on his pretty face.

McNulty was actually glad Nicki had busted his balls a little. It was a sign of respect in his world, but he decided to shift the conversation away from how much feminine he was than Nicki now before she started making jokes about his tits. "I'll see if the shrink can address the voice thing in one of her sessions she's setting up."

"You can call it 'Squeaking With Authority,'" Nicki said.

McNulty playfully punched her on the arm. "Too far," he said, annoyed at the squeak in his voice. Janice performed the swearing in on behalf of the Police Chief, who was keeping himself under guard out of terror he would be switched next, and when she finished reading the oath and said, "Do you so swear?" The room filled with the soft pretty voices of the men chanting "We do so swear" like a group of sorority sisters taking a pledge.

The TV news was there, as were all the papers. The city wanted them there to get the word out the NYPD was taking measures, would be on the street in force. Pictures were taken of the pretty men at attention, hands behind their backs, breasts thrust out out, standing in rows in their new uniforms, looking cute in their police caps. Word had circulated among the officers that even before the ceremony that they were now being dubbed The Barbie Patrol by the media, and sure enough, the news that night showed a room full of young women with Barbie bodies

dressed as cops. The headlines and news segments all questioned the ability of these sexy girls to do the job:

Can Beat Cop Barbies Save City?

Barbie Doll Cops; Pretty. Ineffective.

Barbie Patrol: To Serve and Be Protected?

Sexy in the City: Barbie Patrol Ready for Busts

The questions and reports made all the cops bristle with resentment and McNulty had used it to motivate them all the more, to provoke them to go out there and prove that they were still up to the job. Meanwhile, they were all experiencing a lot of confusion and arousal as they gathered to dress in the locker rooms. Their male thinking patterns and habits remained, and they found themselves glancing at each other's full breasts and long, tone legs, at their soft, round shoulders and slender, vulnerable arms, feeling stirrings in their own bodies that shamed and unnerved them.

When it came to assigning partners, McNulty had worked with Janice to pair up switched men with female born officers, hoping that the cops who were used to being women would be able to help the new girls along, but it was also a safety thing as all of the men had been put into girly-girl bodies with tiny arms and almost no upper-body strength at all, so the reality was plain to everyone that the men were now not only women, but the weakest and most vulnerable women in the NYPD. However, the number of former men outnumbered the natural born women, so some of the cops would be paired up with fellow switchees.

The Barbie patrol night shift would head into action as soon as the ceremony was over, while the rest went off to sleep before reporting for their own shifts in the morning or afternoon.

When the it was finally all over, McNulty sank into a chair at the conference table and sighed with relief. Nicki sank down next to him and said, "I'll second that."

McNulty rubbed his eyes. He'd found a moment to clip off the maddening finger nails.

"I have to hand it to you," Nicki said. "I really am impressed."

"Just doing my job."

"Under a lot of duress. You seem to be handling it better than most."

"I've been using work to avoid facing myself for years," McNulty said. "So, it just comes naturally."

McNulty had suited up just like the rest of his officers, and Nicki thought he looked extra cute now in his blue patrolwoman's uniform. She wondered what he looked like under all that, mentally undressing him, picturing those huge breasts of his. "I don't know about you, but I am starving. Want to grab a bite while we have a minute?"

"I don't know," McNulty said. "I'm so exhausted I can barely move."

"Come on," Nicki said. "We've all been so busy in crisis mode we haven't been able to focus on the real issue at all."

"The Brother-Sisters," McNulty said, opening his eyes and looking at Nicki.

"Yeah."

Nicki grabbed McNulty's soft little hand and pulled him to his feet. McNulty smiled and put his other hand Nicki's shoulder. Nicki felt her stomach flip. "You're buying, right?"

McNulty said.

"Of course I am, girlfriend." As soon as she said it, Nicki wanted to kick herself, but McNulty just laughed.

"Call me Ebony," he said. "I guess that's my name now. Ebony St. Claire."

"Ebony?" Nicki laughed, too. "You poor thing. It's like the universe really does have a sense of humor, right?"

"Oh, you think this is funny?"

"Actually, yes. I kind of do."

McNulty and Nicki headed out into the night, and each one was wondering what it would be like to kiss the other, hold her in their arms, see them naked, and each one was terribly afraid to let those desires show.

XXXV

Nicki dragged McNulty to a Soul Food Restaurant, and the two of them ate, had some beers, which went right to McNulty's head, and he found himself giggling and laughing, staring into Nicki's eyes and stealing glances when he could. His cheeks felt warm, and he was wishing he were still a man as Nicki paid for their meal and then held the door for him. As he walked past, Nicki put a hand on the small of McNulty's back and he looked up, surprised and pleased as the gesture sent butterflies fluttering through his stomach.

Nicki, emboldened, said, "It's cold. I need to snuggle," and slipped her arm around McNulty's narrow waist, pulling him to her. McNulty felt nervous, skittish, but he also felt warm and safe, so he put his arm on Nicki's back and let her pull his head against her shoulder.

They walked together in silence for awhile, just enjoying being together, and then Nicki said, "What do you know. This is my hotel."

McNulty smiled and said, "What a coincidence."

"Want to come up for a drink?"

"Yes," McNulty, head swimming with alcohol and estrogen, whispered. "I would. I ... don't want to be alone tonight."

Nicki kissed him on the head and brought him up to her room, slipped his coat off. "Sit down," Nicki said.

McNulty sat on the couch, crossed his legs nervously, tapping the air with one foot while his head buzzed with nervous excitement. Nicki poured a couple of fingers of Maker's Mark into rocks glasses. She looked up and saw McNulty there on the couch, fidgeting nervously, so pretty and insecure, acting just like a young girl about to "go for a drink" for the first time, which was exactly what he was. Nicki walked over and handed McNulty the glass, sat down on the couch next to him so their legs were touching and then raised her glass. "To doing the job," Nicki said.

"To doing the job," McNulty said softly, staring into Nicki's eyes. They each took a sip of their drink, and McNulty almost gagged. "Oh. I guess Ebony wasn't much of a whiskey drinker."

Nicki took the drink away from McNulty and put it on the table next to hers, then lifted his chin and leaned in until their lips were almost touching. "I'm scared," McNulty admitted, his voice trembling. "I ..."

But before he could continue Nicki kissed him silent, and then she kissed him again and found his tongue as she pushed McNulty onto his back. McNulty's whole body was on fire now, and as Nicki started to sit up, he grabbed her and kissed her again, wanting and needing her like he'd never wanted and needed a kiss before, and so Nicki kept kissing him even as she reached down and unbuttoned his shirt, pushing his top open so she could slid her hand into his bra and cup his soft breasts.

McNulty squealed and arched his back, stars flashing in his eyes as this new pleasure sent a bolt of lightning through his body, and then he reached up and put his hands on Nicki's breasts and gave her a squeeze. Nicki got McNulty out of his uniform shirt, and then she slid her arms behind him and unclasped his bra, slipping it off him and letting his big, black breasts bounce free. She sat up and looked down at him, taking in the sight of McNulty's full, firm young breasts, his hard little nipples pointing proudly in the air. McNulty smiled up at her, cupped his breasts licked his lips, but he was also feeling a little insecure, a little nervous, like maybe Nicki didn't think he was pretty, but then Nicki smiled said, "You are the sexiest girl I have ever seen."

McNulty giggled with pride and pleasure, and then gasped as Nicki took one of her breasts in her hands, leaned down and began to tease his nipple with her tongue. Soon both women were naked, kissing and caressing each other's bodies, McNulty being driven to new and mysterious heights of female pleasure by the expert hands of his lover, and then a fiery impulse took over his body, his mind seemed to act of its own accord, and he found his face between Nicki's legs as he pleased and teased her with his mouth and tongue.

After, Nicki and McNulty climbed into bed and held their slick, soft, sweaty bodies against each other. Nicki spooned McNulty from behind, her strong arms possessively across his ribs. McNulty wondered if he should feel confused or ashamed over what had happened, what he'd done, but the reality was he was glowing with pleasure, feeling beautiful and sexy and safe and wanted and loved, and as he drifted off the sleep he felt happier than he had felt in many, many years.

He was Nicki Carver's girlfriend, and he liked it.

When Nicki's alarm woke the lovers at 5am, they sat up, groggy and hung-over both from the booze and the sex. McNulty tilted his head back and accepted a good morning kiss, his breasts swaying proudly on his chest, a fact which Nicki couldn't ignore and which led her to reach out and give one a squeeze. McNulty playfully slapped her hand away and said, "We have to get to work," in a soft voice that sounded even higher-pitched to Nicki than it had before.

"I don't care," Nicki said, and as McNulty turned and started to get out of bed, she grabbed him around the ribs and pulled him back.

"Nicki!" McNulty squeaked.

Nicki kissed him on the shoulder, keeping her strong arms wrapped around his mid-section, just under his breasts. She whispered in his ear, "You were incredible last night, baby."

"You, too," McNulty said, putting his arms over hers.

Nicki started to nibble at his ear, and McNulty closed his eyes and sighed, feeling his resolve weakening as his nipples started getting hard, and he felt himself getting a little wet between his legs, but he really did need to get to work, to see how things were going with the

Barbie Patrol. "I need to pee," he finally said, which was true, and Nicki let him slip out of her arms. She watched him walk to the bathroom, that firm, round ass of his shaking from side to side, the curve of his back, those long, long legs, and she said, "Damn you are fine, girl."

"Stop it," McNulty giggled, realizing how girly he sounded and not caring. "You're impossible."

He closed the door, and Nicki found herself imagining him sitting down to pee, just like every other girl. The thought brought a smile to her face. McNulty was the most beautiful woman Nicki had ever been with, one of the most beautiful girls she had ever seen, and it gave her a thrill to know that she'd scored such a hot girl. That her gorgeous little piece off ass had been a man turned her on even more. It gave her an extra thrill to kiss his nipples, to play with his huge breasts, to slip her fingers into his vagina and make him squeal and sigh and curl his toes? And she loved hearing him talk in that sweet, sexy little voice of his.

Of course, she decided, laying on her back, feeling the cool air against her naked body. Maybe she would have to talk to a shrink about it someday, but she could not deny that she loved having a man as her hot little girlfriend.

And the fact that he seemed to love it? Well, that just made it all the sweeter. Nicki pictured him in something skimpy and frilly, some sexy little lace panties from Victoria's Secret, and a smile came over her face. Yes. Most definitely. McNulty would look so sexy for her, and she was sure that in his new body, facing his new life, she could get him to do it willingly, and it probably wouldn't even take all that much alcohol.

McNulty floated to the office, all smiles and butterflies inside. Is this what it feels like to be a girl in love, he wondered? As he got near the precinct, he felt his phone buzz and fishing it out of his pocket he saw a message from his ex-wife: Nice tits, Sister Souljah. It took a little of the glow off, and he suddenly felt very self-conscious again about his breasts, his body. Of course his ex was laughing at him now, and so were ex-girlfriends and a lot of other cops around the city, guys he'd known over the years. Shit. It had almost seemed like it was going to be almost easy with he and Nicki and insulated from it all here in his all-female precinct, but now he realized that wouldn't last, and eventually he would have to face a world that would think less of him, a lot less, now that he wasn't a man anymore.

As he walked into the precinct he saw handcuffed preps, tired cops rubbing their eyes after a long night on the job, and others just showing up, ready for the first day of the rest of their lives, he smiled and said good morning to Haley at the booking desk and checked the numbers to see... normal stats for a, what was it? Monday night.

Walking back to the Conference Room, he found Janice, and as soon as she saw him she slapped the conference table, smiled and said, "hell yes, Captain."

"What?" McNulty said.

"It's working," Janice said. "Criminal activity already rescinded to normal levels last night, and we continued the media blitz this morning with footage of perps being brought in by the Barbie Patrol, showing everyone that they could and were doing the job."

"It's working," McNulty said. "That is fucking great."

Janice went for a hug, he raised his hand for a high-five, and then Janice won as she pulled him in and held his soft body against hers. "You did an amazing job, Captain. I'm so proud of you. You really rose to the occasion."

"Oh, I don't know," McNulty said, still hanging awkwardly in Janice's arms.

"Get a room, you two," Nicki said, walking in with a cardboard tray of Starbucks coffee.

"We have great news, Agent Carver," Janice said. "The city is under control."

"Yes!" Nicki said. "That's the first good news we've had in a couple of days. Good morning, Captain," Nicki said. "Coffee?"

"Good morning," McNulty answered, trying to remain and nonchalant as possible.

"I was just telling McNulty how impressed I am with the job he's done, getting all these officers onto the streets, rallying the troops in such a time of crisis."

"He really does make an amazing woman, doesn't he?"

"Yes," Janice said. "In fact, I was thinking the same thing."

McNulty shook his head. "I guess that's a compliment?"

"Definitely," the women said in unison.

"Well, now that you've inflated my ego, I better go and rally the morning shift."

"Go get 'em."

McNulty made a point of thanking the returning night shift officers for doing a great job, then headed in for the morning briefing. He gave them the good news, challenged them to keep

up the good work, to keep proving the world wrong about the Barbie Patrol. The men all nodded, grim looks on their pretty young faces.

Francis and Lopez ended up assigned to a squad car together, doing neighborhood patrols. Before they left, McNulty grabbed Lopez and after introducing himself, he said, "I just thought you should know that during the big switch Pete's body walked out the door."

"What?" Lopez said, confused.

"One of them got the keys and unlocked his cell, and with most of the precinct paralyzed they just walked right out the door."

"But then why? They kept threatening me with... this... telling me unless I let that thing out ... but if they were going to just let him out anyway? Why?"

"I don't know," McNulty said. "I don't understand any of this, but they did what they did."

"We need to figure out their motive, Captain."

"I know, and we're working on it. Right now, I need you on patrol."

"I know," Lopez said. "God damn I hate these fuckers."

Lopez and Francis drove around, their job mainly just to be a presence. Calls came in-- the usual early morning stuff: domestic disputes, some overdose victims found, but nothing came to the two of them, so they rode in awkward silence, getting used to the way their breasts jiggled inside their bras each time the car hit a bump or a pothole. The silence was driving them both crazy, but neither had any idea what to say or talk about to a fellow sex-changed man. Every possible topic seemed fraught with danger.

But then the car hit a really bad patch of road, and Lopez reached up to hold his breasts.

Francis looked over and smiled.

"My boobs are driving me crazy," Lopez said

"Mine, too," Francis said. "I just can't hold mine while I'm driving."

They laughed then, and the sounds of their high-pretty laughs broke the ice.

"What's your girl name?" Lopez asked, unable to see Francis' name badge.

"Niji," Francis replied. "It's an Indian name for 'rainbow'."

"Niji," Lopez said. "Could be worse."

"What's yours?"

"Jade Blossom."

"You're kidding?"

"I think she may have changed it in order to advance her career as a dancer."

"Yours was a stripper, too?"

"Yeah. Yours wasn't?"

"Of course she was. The Brother-Sisters just love doing that to us. Putting cops into the bodies of strippers, making sure there are plenty of pictures of us all over the internet."

"Some of mine are kind of disgusting."

"I fucking hate this," Francis said. "I feel like I'm Buffalo Bob wearing a woman suit. Everything feels too bouncy and soft and curvy and weird."

"I know," Lopez said. "I can't sit, walk, stand, ride in a car without feeling all weird."

The car was quiet for a moment, and then Francis said, "My boyfriend wouldn't even kiss me this morning."

"Wait," Lopez said. "Boyfriend?"

"Yeah. I don't see much point in staying in the closet now. I'm gay."

"Oh," Lopez said. "Well, at least that will make this all a little easier for you."

"Why would you say that?" Francis said, angrily.

"Nothing. I mean. Never mind." Lopez looked out the window at the old brownstones along Malcolm X Boulevard.

"No. Tell me."

"Well, I just figured since you already like men, anyway..."

"I know. I knew that's what you meant, but it's not as easy a transition as you think. First of all, I liked being a gay man, and I liked making love to other men as a man."

"You were a top?" Lopez said.

"Yeah. That, too. Maybe it's hard for you to understand, but when I was with my boyfriend last night, and he was so caring, and he held me, but then I started to feel attracted to him, and it was all wrong. My nipples got hard, and I felt... wet... between my legs, and it was all no. Just no. This is not the way it's supposed to feel. It was..." He saw that Lopez had his hand on his cheek and was staring, glassy eyed out the window, and Francis sighed. "You know, maybe you aren't used to talking about this kind of thing so openly."

"I was raped," Lopez said softly. "I know about how it feels when it's wrong."

Francis stopped the car. "What?"

"I was raped," Lopez said, tears streaming down his face. "When they switched me. And they made my girlfriend watch."

"Oh, you poor boy," Francis said, taking Lopez' hand. "I am so sorry."

They cried together for a time, and then a call came in about a disturbance at a bodega a block away. "We have a job to do," Lopez said, grabbing the radio and taking the call, his big eyes burning with anger and determination.

Francis slammed the car into gear and burned rubber, just for the fun of it. "Barbie Patrol Saves the Day!" He shouted, and the two young, newly female cops checked their guns, adjusted their bra straps, and raced into action.

It was the same all over the city as the all-female patrol force went about the business of doing police work, glad to be busy, to have something to do besides focus on their new bodies, and what it meant in terms of their relationships to wives and girlfriends, parents and children, friends and mistresses. Meanwhile, Dr. Brinkman had arrived and arranged for the formation of counseling groups. She had worked one on one with the two men who had been transformed before and was now the world's foremost and only expert on helping men transition reluctantly into womanhood, so the NYPD had just decided to bring her and let her work with groups.

The first group gathered in the cloud of muted griping and resentment typical of cops feeling they were being forced to do extra duty, and Dr. Brinkman decided to see if she could shock them into giving her their attention. "Good morning, ladies," she said. "I want to get right

down to business and answer one of the questions I know is on all of your minds. The answer is yes, you will soon start loving dick."

The gambit worked. The pretty faces all rose, livid with indignation. "What the fuck?" "Bullshit. Shut up!"

"I thought that would get your attention. This is a support group. It's a safe place where we can talk about anything you want."

"The Yankees?" Someone asked.

"Anything. Who wants to start?"

The room was silent, as was usually the case when a new group formed. Brinkman just waited. Patiently.

"Is what you said just now true?" A sweet faced freckly Irish looking girl whispered. "My name is Chin."

Brinkman nodded.

"But I still find myself checking out girls," Chin said, and heads nodded in agreement as more than a few nervously crossed his arms over his breasts.

"All of your memories and habits and experiences have been transferred from your old bodies. But, those patterns are now housed in female brains and female bodies. Have you ever heard the people are born gay?"

"Yes," Chin said.

"Well, you are now born not gay. The bodies you possess are the bodies of women, and those bodies want men, and they want babies, and they usually get what they want."

"So we're going to start wanting guys to fuck us?" A man now in the body of a light-skinned black girl said.

"Yes. I've seen it happen with two of your former colleagues: Pete and Joe. Both initially swore they would never think or act like women, never even consider having a romantic relationship with a man, and both of them ended up sleeping with men and loving it. Both gave me permission to share that with this group."

"But what if this body was born gay?" One asked, not certain that any answer would really make him feel better about his new sex.

"Then you will be attracted to women, but so far it seems the Brother-Sisters have taken perverse delight in putting men into extremely beautiful young female bodies that want men. Still, I want to invite you to have your own experience and to accept and try to enjoy that experience. The bigger message here is that whoever you find yourself attracted to now, it isn't wrong. Maybe you will start fantasizing about sucking on Channing Tatum's toes, and if so that will now be normal for you."

"Isn't therapy supposed to make me feel better?" Chin said.

"Sometimes it makes us feel worse before it makes us feel better."

The room was silent again as the men turned this new information over in their minds, each one thinking, maybe the rest of these sluts are going to start sleeping with guys, but I never will. Never!

One of the cops raised a slender hand. "Can I ask about something, um, regarding... well..."

Brinkman just smiled and nodded. The cop was blushing like a teen-ager, clearly shy and flustered, but he finally said, "... can you tell me what to do.... when... well... I get my *period*?"

"Of course," Brinkman said, and she noticed all the men lean forward and start listening intently as she explained some things to them about feminine hygiene.

XXXVII

When the first full day of The Barbie Patrol ended, everyone in the city breathed a sigh of relief. Things had returned to normal. The crimes believed to have been orchestrated by the Brother-Sisters to take advantage of the chaos-- diamond and jewelry store heists-- had completely ended, and the regular street scum criminals had gone back to their usual levels of criminal activity. And, the success of the plan had an unexpected side benefit as male cops began reporting to duty, both because they were no longer as worried about getting switched and because they were all more than a little embarrassed for the whole city to see that what looked like a bunch of 20-year-old strippers had more balls than they did.

Soon, a week had passed, and the city had calmed, things turning almost to normal. Almost. The South Harlem Precinct had become like a teen girl's summer camp, with a lot of curious females experimenting. He found them kissing in closets, their tops open, caught them making out in squad cars in their bras, and there had even been some open hand holding in defiance of fraternization rules as young romance blossomed. He noticed that they had all

started calling each other by their girl names, probably because it was easier at this point to kiss a Chrissy than to consider the fact they were really kissing a Chris.

But his pretty young girl cops were all finding that Brinkman had been correct, and as much fun as they had kissing and getting frisky with other girls, they found themselves one and all wanting more, wanting to play with someone who came with a penis attached. Strange dreams and blushing cheeks followed.

McNulty, too, had found himself checking out and thinking about guys, but he was so in love with Nicki and so grateful for her for having been there for him in his first confused and frightened days of womanhood that he ignored those feelings and determined that he would stay with her as long as she would have him. He felt safe with her, and he needed her like he'd never needed anyone.

As for work, McNulty had not felt this excited and alive in the last twenty years of police work. He got congratulatory calls from the Police Chief, The Mayor and Governor, and he quickly got used to the idea he would now be praised for being "an incredible woman" rather than an incredible cop, but he just couldn't stay angry because of how happy he felt each time he saw Nicki. None of that stuff seemed to matter so much anymore. He was a young girl in love, and his mind was full of hugs and kisses. Sometimes he even imagined himself leaving it all behind, retiring and sitting in a bikini by the pool while Nicki grilled up some steak and shrimp on the grill.

He was sitting at his desk, daydreaming about just such a future when Nicki came in and said, "Ebony, check out the news."

McNulty turned on the flat screen in his office, and saw the scrolling announcement beneath the newscaster: Brother-Sisters Make Statement. "What is this?" McNulty said.

"The Brother-Sisters released video and emailed statement to the press saying they did all of this because they wanted human to truly embrace equality. They wanted the world to see that men and women were equal, and they felt the best way to do that was to turn men into women."

McNulty shook his head. "But who are they? Why?"

"The statement says they are an extraterrestrial species that has transcended sex and gender roles, and that this is an attempt to push human evolution forward."

McNulty ran all of those ideas through his mind and shook his head. "Bullshit."

"I agree."

"Is anyone buying this crap?"

"Patty has been called back to Washington," Nicki said. "Homeland Security is calling the situation resolved."

"What about you?" McNulty said, suddenly anxious.

"I talked my boss into letting me stay another few weeks. Work of clearing up some things, but eventually I'm going to have to go back to Washington."

"And what about... us, Nick? After? If it was just a think for you, I understand, I mean..."

Nicki put her arms around McNulty. "I want you to come with me to Washington."

McNulty looked into her eyes, started to speak, stopped.

Nicki was surprised and hurt. "I thought that's what you wanted, too."

"I think it is, maybe, but I have my job here, and my life..."

"You're a whole new person now, Ebony. You can start over with me. You'll love my family."

"They'll know who I used to be."

"They won't care."

"I don't know what to say."

"Say yes."

"I have to think about it for now."

"Damn it," Nicki said, angrily, she started to pull away, but McNulty held on, refused to let her out of his arms.

"We have these two weeks, at least, Nick. Let's make them special, let's not worry about the future, but just enjoy this time together, be here, together, and cross that bridge when we come to it." He pressed his breasts against hers, tilted his head back and let his wet, crimson painted lips part.

Nicki put a hand on his cheek and kissed him, a long, lingering kiss, and then she let her hand slip down to McNulty's soft, round behind, and she gave it a squeeze. "I love you," she said, looking in McNulty's pretty eyes, caressing his soft lips with her thumb.

McNulty kissed her again, put his head on her shoulder and cried.

"I think I know something that might help you make up your mind," Nicki said. "Do you trust me?"

"Of course."

That night Nicki handed Joe a pink box with a pretty white bow from Victoria's Secret and said, "put this on."

McNulty bit his lip and sauntered off to the bedroom. Opening the box, he giggled as he looked down at the pretty little things Nick had bought for him. Eagerly, he slipped into a tiny little pair of lace panties and a push up bra-- purple and gold, and over that he slipped a transparent nightie. Then, he slipped the necklace over his head and let the little heart nestle in his cleavage, before slipping bracelets on one wrists, then going to the dressing table and quickly doing his face-- just some lipstick and mascara, a little eyebrow pencil. He was so sexy he really didn't need it, but he knew that Nicki got turned one when he primped for her. He sprayed some perfume on his wrists, rubbed them together then spread it to his neck before putting the big hoop earrings in his ears that Nick loved and then stepping into a pair of stilettos.

Standing in front of the full-length mirror, he took in the stunning young woman he'd become and smiled. Is this me? Was I ever really an over-the-hill, alcoholic white man? He knew he had been, maybe still was in some ways, but that person seemed so distant now, and this new life so impossible. I can't believe I am about to do this, he thought, turning to get a look at his perfect, heart shaped ass.

McNulty was good on his heels and practically glided across the room, smiling prettily as Nick let her eyes play over his body. He could see the hunger in her eyes, the hot need for have his body, and he turned and put a hand on his hip so she could get a good look at what he had.

"Ebony," Nick said, her voice hoarse. "My God. You are so beautiful."

McNulty smiled. He loved compliments, loved it when she called him Ebony. He accepted the glass of champagne Nick offered him and sipped it daintily, while Nick slammed hers back and then wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. The plan had been to take it slow, but she couldn't restrain herself and grabbed McNulty, kissing him so passionately the drink dropped from his hand, and when their lips finally parted, McNulty almost fainted, clinging weakly to Nick, and he whispered "take me."

They kissed, groped, fondled, and soon found themselves back in the bedroom, where Nick paused and put on a strap on while McNulty watched, his eyes wide with excitement and fear. His panties were already soaked, and his nipples aching with need. "You're going to love this," Nick said, squirting some lube on the end of the strap on and then working it up and down the shaft, the sight of which brought a gasp of excitement from McNulty's soft lips.

McNulty lay on his back as Nicki crawled on top of him, and when McNulty felt the tip of the dildo against his soft thigh he again gasped with excitement. Nick put her hands on McNulty's tits and squeezed, and he wrapped his legs around her while reaching up and grabbing her boobs as well, and then Nick thrust into him and McNulty moaned softly, and then again and again, and McNulty cried out, "harder! Harder!" Until he felt an explosion of pleasure and his eyes rolled back in his head while he screamed, "Yes!!!!!"

After, McNulty lay on his back, his arms over his head, and Nicki was idly rubbing his tummy.

"That," McNulty whispered. "Was amazing."

"I thought you would like that, sweetie. I thought you would."

XXXVIII

Pete O'Malley stood proudly in his crushed velvet dress, his white stockings and patent leather shoes. He had a big white bow with black polka dots in his long, pretty hair. The young couple walked down the line of girls, saying a few words to each one, and when they came to Pete the woman, a tall, blonde woman, smiled and said, "You are so pretty!"

"Thank you," Pete said, smiling.

"What's your name?" The man asked.

"Anji."

"And what are you?" The woman said.

"A girl," Pete said.

The adults laughed, and Pete was confused but then the Orphanage Lady said, "We think she might be Sri Lankan, but we don't know."

The men crinkled his nose. ""But she's so pretty," the woman said. "Should we at least consider her?"

"Don't the people down the street have a Sri Lankan?" The man said.

"Oh, that's right."

They started to move away, and the woman stopped and again said, "You really are very pretty."

Pete fought back the tears. He didn't care. Or didn't used to care. He had gotten used to the orphanage, and it was probably better than having to pretend he was someone's stupid daughter. After, when he and the other girls were led back to their rooms, he climbed onto his bed and looked at his Elsa doll with her blonde hair and blue tiara. Maybe I'll get adopted by a king, he thought, brushing his doll's hair. And then I'll be a princess!

He didn't really understand what was happening to him. Why he felt so sick inside each time he wasn't chosen. Some of the girls he'd known had been picked, including his roommate and best friend, Kerry Anne, and now he was feeling lonely, unwanted. I am a man, he thought, trying to remember, to believe he had been a man, was still a man in this small body. A cop. I don't need a mommy and a daddy.

I don't need a mommy and a daddy. And then he started to whisper the words to his favorite song:

Let it go. Let it go.

I am one with the wind and sky

Let it go. Let it go.

You'll never see me cry

And then the girl formerly known as Pete O'Malley, but who more and more as just little Anji the Orphan, buried his face in his pillow and cried himself to sleep.

Francis and Lopez started to work the case on their own time. Legally, they were Jade and Niji, young women who'd been emergency deputized, and so both were not rookie patrolwomen as far as the NYPD was concerned. The ranks of detectives had been bolstered with the transfer of some women from other precincts to the still all-female South Harlem location. The men of the NYPD were terrified of ending up in a skirt.

Or leggings like the Lulumon leggings Lopez and Francis wore along with the powder blue and white Barbie Patrol t-shirts and pink cardigans. They'd gone shopping together and giggled over the idea of dressing like sisters, a girly joke which had blossomed as they had begun to kiss one night in their patrol car. They even had matching charm bracelets sparkling on their slender wrists.

For Francis making love to a girl-man was a safer transition into his new sexuality, and Lopez was still so traumatized by his experience that he was terrified at the thought of ever allowing himself to be vulnerable with a man, so now they each as they gradually accepted their ever more feminine personalities and adjusted to their busty, womanly shapes, kept each other company.

But even as many of their co-workers already seemed resigned to their new lives, just going to work, complaining about backaches and menstrual cramps, and then heading home, Lopez and Francis were determined to get the Brother-Sisters, whom they were sure were still very much around and planning something new.

They had note cards and pictures, time lines and maps, and none of it added up to anything. Lopez stared at the wall with his hands on his hips, and blew up at his bangs with annoyance. "We're missing something," he said. "Something right under our noses."

Francis came up and started to massage Lopez' slender shoulders. "It's been days now, and nothing since the big press release."

"Which was total bullshit. How could people fall for that crap?"

"They wanted to believe it was over, and they didn't care if none of it made sense as long as things seemed to go back to normal."

"Back to normal for them. Not us," Lopez said, stomping his little foot angrily.

"Maybe we're just going to have to make the most of this."

"I will. We will," Lopez said, "but we will also bring their freaky asses to justice."

"Well, I'm going to get ready for the party. Give me a kiss."

Lopez turned and kissed his pretty friend. "You're so great," he said, softly.

"You, too."

That night, the Barbie Patrol gathered at the Hammerstein Ballroom in NYC, the same place one of their own, Joey, had made his debut as a stripper. This night, the city was gathering them to honor them for their heroism during the crisis and continuing through the current day. As the men arrived, they all represented different stages of acceptance. Some wore men's clothes, while others were in a more gender-neutral state, or even confused state, matching business formal wear with sparkly bracelets and earrings, or a coat and tie with a knee length black skirt. Some came with families they were hoping to somehow keep intact, a few came with boyfriends, and more than a few came with girlfriends as they tried to cling to their old identities despite their biological urges.

McNulty wore a tiny little black dress with a plunging neck line that celebrated his full breasts and wide hips. He strutted proudly on a pair of three inch pumps and had had his face done by a professional. Jewelry flashed at his wrists and neck and ears and ankles, and he clung to Nicki's arm, the proud to be displayed as the trophy girlfriend he was. Everyone oohed and aaahed, both amazed at how stunning the captain looked and because THAT was the captain, all dolled up and obviously loving the attention.

The only one there who could hold a candle to him was the glossy blonde Joe had become, but whereas McNulty looked like an elegant and refined Nubian princess, Joe was slutted-up like a crazy college girl looking for an orgy. Or maybe just the professional stripper he became as a woman.

The night was a blur, with music and drinks and lots of hugs and stories as the men shared their stories, trials and fears, and there were boring speeches and politicians looking for face time on the news, but then the time seemed to stop, and the whole room turned light as Nicki walked to the front of the room, took the microphone and said, "Can you turn up the house light for a minute? I have an important announcement."

The lights came up, pretty voices whispering in hushed tones: had there been another attack? Had they caught one of the Brother-Sisters?

The lights came up, and Nicki cleared her throat. "A few weeks ago, I came to New York City and met a man. He was rude, sexist and probably racist, and I did not like him at all. In fact, I hated him. His name was Jim McNulty."

Laughter.

"They say people plan and God laughs, and I never could have imagined that not only would Jim McNulty turn out to be one of the most beautiful and amazing women I have ever known, but that I would fall in love with her."

McNulty felt tears coming into his eyes. Is she about to? Could she be? He felt terrified and excited, and he put his hands to his cheeks.

"And even less would I have ever guessed that one day I would want to ask that disgusting man, who is now known to me as my beloved Ebony St. Claire, to marry me."

A spotlight found Ebony, and she stood there, crying, while the crowd separated and cleared a path between her and the stage. "Ebony, I love you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Will you marry me?"

"Yes," McNulty shouted, kicking off his heels and hurrying to the stage as fast as he could in his tight little dress. "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

The crowd cheered and laughed as Ebony threw herself into Nick's arms, and the two kissed in front of the whole precinct, and tears came to the eyes of every girl in the room, as most were so overcome with emotion they didn't even think to take out their phones and snap a picture.

Looking on as the Ebony cried in Nicki's arms, Lopez turned to Francis and said, "Oh, dear," wiping a tear from the other man's smooth, soft cheek, but then he lost it and started crying as well.

They held each other and watched as the house lights went down, and the DJ started to play, "My Girl" while the newly engaged couple kissed and then began to dance together, staring into each other's eyes, happy and in love and fearless facing their futures.

Hero Book III

Patty Green, Homeland Security, stood at her hotel window and looked at the side of an old, brick building where she could still see the faded remains of a sign painted there: Schnitzer's Seltzer. The Original New York Seltzer. *I wonder if they still make it?* She thought, looking at the grinning face of a man holding a bottle. *And if they do, is it still made in New York?*

Probably not, she figured. If it did still exist, it had probably been bought up by some conglomerate, which now manufactured it and bottled it in a sweat shop in Mexico and had it shipped back to the states. *Nothing is what it claims to be anymore.*

Patty pulled the curtains closed and sat down on the edge of her bed. Tomorrow she'd be on a train and heading back to Washington D.C. The Brother-Sisters, the Barbie Patrol, all of it would be behind her, and she'd be off to the next assignment, once again perpetrating the illusion that all was well, that the government had everything under control.

All was not well. The government did not have everything under control. In fact, the one Brother-Sister they'd had in custody had escaped, and the organization had vanished, though not without a trace. She had leads. So many leads. But it was decided that it was in the best interest of the public to make believe the case was resolved, to prevent a panic, and so she was going back to Washington to tell everyone just that, because they wanted to hear what they wanted to

hear and as she and every bureaucrat in Washington knew, the truth would get you fired. And besides...

There was a knock on the door. "Room Service," a voice called.

Patty got up and headed to the door, opened it to see a young, good looking boy there, his hair hanging in his face like a rock star. "You ordered room service?" He said, squinting at the receipt in his hand.

"Yeah. Come on in," she said, turning and leading him into her room. She felt a sudden movement, dove onto her bed, and the boy leapt on top of her. Before Patty could twist, could put him in a hold- she knew how to fight – she felt the boy kiss her on the neck, and then she was looking at her own face as it broke into a smile, rolled her over and left her on her back, looking up at herself, and she knew she'd been jumped. The boy patted her on the cheek, climbed off her, disappearing from sight, and then she heard herself say, "I have her."

Is that really what I sound like? Patty thought, in shock. *"Weird."*

Lopez sipped his coffee, staring at the map of the New York, New Jersey, Connecticut tri-state area on the wall of the apartment he shared with Francis. The areas where the Brother-Sisters had been spotted or had jumped people were all marked, along with dates and various notes he and Francis had made. Along the bottom in big black letters were the words, "What Are We Missing?"

"Something," Lopez said in his pretty little voice. "Some god damned thing."

Francis sat on the floor at the coffee table, his face lit up by the glow of the laptop. "Take a break," Francis said, his own voice just as high and soft. "Step away from it."

"Is that what you're doing?"

"No," Francis admitted. "But I'm not going crazy over it, either."

Lopez lay down on the couch, putting his hand on Francis' smooth, soft shoulder and looking over his shoulder. Francis was looking through newspapers from all over the region, hoping to see any odd story that might give them a clue that could lead them to the Brother-Sisters. "Anything?" Lopez asked.

"Nada," Francis said.

"No one can disappear like this. No one," Lopez said, frustrated. "Certainly not a group of people. It isn't possible. Not in this day and age."

"It is for people who can be anyone."

"But what is happening to all the people being displaced? There have to be more bodies somewhere – dead or alive."

"I know," Francis said. "We've gone over this, like, so many times."

"I know. I know," Lopez said. "I'm just talking out loud." He closed his eyes. There had been some reported sightings of their old bodies after the great switch – especially the mass of them who'd fled their base in Chinatown. Security cameras. Video surveillance. Since 9/11 there were cameras everywhere, and a few of them had been caught on film fleeing the area. And then: nothing. They had all vanished without a single sighting in weeks.

Lopez got up, feeling his heavy breasts sway and then settle into the cups of his bra. He didn't know if he'd ever get used to having such large breasts – having breasts at all. He wondered if big-breasted women were hyper-conscious of the constant weight, the bobbling. He, at least, hoped he might one day get used to it.

He walked back to the map. All around New York he saw water –r – and then off to the East the vast Atlantic Ocean. What if they just killed the bodies they didn't need? Dumped them in the ocean? What if his body was gone, and he would be this girl for the rest of his life?

He was getting more comfortable with it every day. Had even found himself liking it in some ways, as his personality seemed to be changing to match his shape. Both he and Francis had found themselves acting more feminine, and they had both started to kind of like certain things about being girls. Lopez had even found himself ... appreciating ... certain men in a way he never had before, but then he was scared, really, of the idea of ever being with a man. Scared for a lot of reasons, not the least of which was... well, what would his father think? He hadn't had the courage to see him yet. To face him as his daughter. *Is that what I am now?* Lopez thought. *Has he lost his only son, or can I still be that for him, just in a different form?*

Lopez put his hands on the small of his back, arching his spine against the weight of his breasts, and said, "I don't know if I'll ever be able to face my father."

Francis stopped working, looked back over his shoulder. Lopez was staring at the map, his back to Francis, his hands right above his round, heart shaped ass, his long, sexy legs wrapped up tight in a pair of black yoga pants, showing off his thigh gap. How would his father respond to meeting this gorgeous Asian girl who was or had been his son? "You can never tell how people will react," Francis said.

"How do you think *your* father will react?" Lopez said, glancing back over his slender shoulder.

"I don't know," Francis said. "He didn't like that I was a gay man. Maybe he'd like it better that I turned into a lesbian?"

"Ugh. I hate that *word*," Lopez said.

"Anyway, I don't talk to my family all that much."

"I was really close with mine. Really close. I would usually be heading out there all the time, especially with Easter coming up."

"So call them. Tell them you want to come."

Lopez shook his head. "Unh. I don't know. Usually the girls all wear dresses on Easter."

"So? You're not a girl."

"It would be weird."

Francis got up and walked over to Lopez, wrapping his arms around Lopez' waist, standing behind him and giving him a kiss on the cheek. "Family is always weird. Just be glad you have a family at all."

Lopez' eyes drifted over to the orphanage where his buddy Pete now lived, trapped in the body of a girl named Anji. "Poor Pete," he said. "We should go visit him soon. He doesn't have anybody."

"Poor guy," Francis said. "Not even a grown-up anymore. It's like he's been completely erased."

"Gone from the...."

Lopez slipped Francis' arms, stepped to the map and tapped the orphanage, then turned to face Francis. "Oh my god," Lopez said. "Could it be that obvious?"

Francis nodded. "It's a big facility. They could be hiding people there."

"They have to be! We just assumed it was coincidence or convenience that they had Anji – or Sofia – there, but this could be it!" Lopez rushed to Francis and the two men kissed, their soft breasts pressing together.

"Let's go down there," Francis said. "Check it out."

"No," Lopez said. "We need to be careful. We don't want them to have a chance to run."

"So what? Get the Feds to do a raid?"

"No. No. They'll blow it or kill everyone." Lopez bit his lip. "I think it's time we get Pete O'Malley to do some detective work."

"But he's just a little girl now."

"He's the only one who can do it."

"I don't want him to get hurt is all."

"He's a girl now. Not a china doll."

Peter O'Malley, formerly a tough guy police officer in the NYPD, loved jumping rope with the other little girls. Two girls were swinging a long rope, while he and four others stood bouncing with excitement as they all sang:

All in together girls

it's fine weather girls

when is your birthday

please jump in!

Then, they began to shout out the names of the months, really fast, and as their birthday month was shouted the girls hopped in and began to jump:

January, February, March, April, May, June

But just as Pete was about to jump in, he felt a hand on his shoulder. Looking up, he saw the frowning face of Miss Tremont, and his heart leapt. "What did I do?" He asked, wanting to pull away from her claw-like grip, but knowing he would only get in more trouble.

"Nothing," Tremont said, her wrinkly face impassive. "You have visitors."

"Oh. Gotta go! Sorry!" Pete called out, making a small wave to the other girls, who waved back and kept playing as Tremont led him away.

All out together girls

it's fine weather girls

when is your birthday

please jump out

1, 2, 3, 4...

Tremont led Pete to the visitor's room, said, "After the visit, go back to your room."

Pete grabbed the handle to the big, wooden door with both hands and pulled, using his whole little seven-year-old body for leverage. The door swung open, and he stepped in, shouted "Jade! Niji! And ran over to them, leaping into Lopez' arms for a full body hug, before being passed over to Francis for another. Pete loved being held, and clung to Francis, enjoying the soft warmth of the other man's curvy body, and then impulsively kissed Francis on his soft cheek.

Francis gently set Pete down on the bench at the green, folding table – the kind you see in school cafeterias. "You're letting your hair grow," Lopez said, running his hand over Pete's ponytail, which was held back with a pink hair tie.

"Yeah," Pete said, brushing his bangs from his eyes. "I thought it would be fun. You're both ssssssoooooo pretty."

"Oh," Lopez said, exchanging a glance with Francis. "Don't."

"You do look ssssssoooooo pretty," Francis said, and the two exchanged a quick kiss.

Pete sighed.

"You look all sweaty!" Lopez said, touching Pete's flushed cheek.

"I was jumping rope with my friends," Pete said, and then suddenly felt very self-conscious about it; about who he was now and how he found himself acting; and he could hear a tense, angry voice in his head say, *stop being such a little ditz...* and said, "I know. It's pathetic and weird. I'm actually a boy or whatever, so sometimes I feel like a creepy old man."

Lopez looked at Pete. He was wearing a pink t-shirt with cap sleeves and a Hello Kitty logo on the chest. He was talking and acting more like a girl every time they visited, giving in not just to his new biology but socialization – he spent all his time with girls, and he was fitting in, talking like them, playing their games, wearing their clothes. And yet, there was still a certain Pete-ness about him even within that skinny little body. "I feel creepy just taking a shower," Lopez said. "It is like, well, like there are at least two of me now. All the time."

"So, how are things down at the precinct?" Pete said, wanting to change the subject, preferring to ignore the dangerous feelings he felt welling up in his little body.

The three talked for a while about the South Harlem Precinct, about arrest rates and some of the same old criminal dumb-dumbs who managed to get arrested every week. Somehow they failed to discuss the really big thing – how the guys were getting used to being gorgeous young women.

"I really miss it," Pete said. "Police work. It's actually pretty boring being a kid again. I'd like to get out there again. Even just direct some traffic or something, you know?"

Lopez bit his lip. They'd decided to keep everything on the down low, just in case Pete was being watched, but he did take it as a chance to lift the white gift bag, pink tissue frothing at the top, from beneath the table and smile. "We brought some stuff for you!"

Pete smiled. "Omigod!"

"Go ahead," Francis said.

Pete carefully removed the tissue and set it aside. Reaching into the bag he found a denim skirt, a blouse, a pair of shorts and three Nancy Drew books, and he gushed over each gift before giving his two friends more hugs.

"This one is really good," Lopez said, tapping on the cover of *The Clue in the Diary*.

"I used to make fun of my sister for reading these," Pete said, brushing his bangs back again.

"It's really good," Francis said. "Give it a look."

"I will," Pete said. "I'm not really in position to make fun of girl stuff anymore."

"Me, neither," Francis said.

"Well, we have to get going," Lopez said, pulling his compact from his purse and checking his face.

"We'll be back soon, and don't hesitate to call if you need anything," Francis said, slipping his own purse over his shoulder.

More hugs followed, and afterward, Pete found himself getting a little teary as he headed back to his room. He sort of hoped that maybe Lopez and Francis might adopt him – legally, it was the only way he figured he could ever get out of the orphanage, and it wouldn't be like he would really be their daughter, even though it kind of would be like that. *Do I really want that?* He wondered. *To be someone's daughter? Their child? To grow up again?* He didn't, not really, and yet what choice did he have? He was lonely in the orphanage, and he didn't have any friends since his roommate got picked and left. Seeing his old partner and friend was good, but when he left it just made Pete feel even more lonely, and – angry. Angry at the Brother-Sisters for taking so much from all of them, for turning their lives upside down and inside out and leaving him trapped in this stupid little body and...

Pete threw himself on his bed and took deep breaths. *Calm down. Calm down.* He had to remind himself that he'd chosen this life, this body. He had done it because he wanted Sofia to have her life and body back, to return her to her parents, and it had been the right thing, but hell! It was hard being a little girl.

Boredom made him sad and angry, so Pete decided to do some reading, and he grabbed *The Secret in the Diary*, climbed back onto his bunk and opened it, to see that something had been written on the inside cover:

Pete, buddy. We need you. Investigate.

Poke around. We think the Brother-Sisters
are operating out of the orphanage.

Find out what you can.

They may be watching.

Pete touched the inky lines with his fingers, smiling. Lopez' handwriting still sucked, he thought, idly. The Brother-Sisters. The Orphanage. The thought had occurred to him, of course, and when he'd first arrived he'd kept his eyes open, watched the other girls to see if they gave off any indications they might be men, like him, who'd been switched. He hadn't seen much, and then... well, he'd kind of just forgotten about it. He'd just started to live his life as Anji the orphan, resigned that this was it because, why fight it? It seemed like she was who he would always be now.

But maybe not. Maybe Lopez and Francis had found something. Some clue. It was something to do, to grasp on, a chance to be a cop again or maybe to play Nancy Drew. The one thing that had bothered him when he'd first arrived had been what the other girls called The Scary Wing – the Southern Wing of the orphanage, which was closed – or so they'd been told. But some of the girls swore they'd heard things, noises, and there was a lot of chatter about ghosts.

Still, the first thing Pete had to do was find out if he was being watched. He put on his iPod – the girls weren't allowed to have their own phones – and started to dance and sing along out loud to the music, all the while carefully examining his room in sections, starting at the floor:

I know what I came to do, and that ain't gonna change

So go ahead and talk your talk, cause I won't take the bait

Nothing in the first area, so he kept looking, dancing, waving his arms, flipping his ponytail...

I'm over here doing what I like

I'm over here working day and night

Still nothing, so he moved up to the area around the top of the room...

And if my real ain't real enough

I'm sorry for you babe

Pete was doing a slow turn now, shaking his hips from side to side

Let's find a light inside our universe now

Where ain't nobody keep on holding us down

There! A glint from inside the an old, rusty vent in the ceiling. Pete did another turn, wanting to make sure, now smiling, tossing his hair even more, and when he came back around he saw it again – the tiniest glint, like from a small camera lens catching the light at just the right angle, something no one would notice unless they were looking... One more turn to be sure...

Just come and get it let them say what they say

Cause I'm about to put them all away

Yes, there was the glint, and in a moment of bratty audacity Pete turned his back to the camera, put his hands on his knees and started twerking as he belted the chorus:

Focus on me!

Focus on me!

And then he kept dancing, letting his little body move as he sang, excited to have a lead, a purpose, a chance to pay back those space turds for everything they'd done. *Pete O'Malley is back*, he thought, tossing his ponytail, *and these things are going to pay for what they did to her friends!*

Jefferson Davis Jackson, President of the United States, smiled. "I need some private time to discuss some sensitive issues, gentleman. You will excuse us."

"Of course," Agent Taylor said, nodding to the second Secret Service agent in the room. Both men exited the hotel room, leaving only the President and his guest.

"Let's get right down to business, Patty," President Jackson said. "I'm guessing you wore purple."

Patty Green smiled. "You can plainly see I'm wearing black."

"I mean your panties."

"No, they're..."

"Show me," Jackson said, shaking his head. "Good lord, what happened to you up in New York? Did you forget how to flirt?"

Patty giggled, though it was a strange, strained giggle. Then she stood up and undid the button on her skirt, slipping it over her hips and letting it fall to the floor. She put one hand on a hip and stood there in her white granny panties.

"Oh, Patty," Jefferson said, sipping his bourbon, his face sour. "You didn't really think I wanted to be briefed on all that bullshit up in the city now did you?"

"No," Patty said, shaking her head. She started to unbutton her blouse.

"Stop!" Jackson said, "You don't do anything unless I tell you, too. Dammit!"

Patty sighed. "This is getting annoying," she said.

"What?"

"Why should I take orders from a little slut like you?" she said, stepping out of the skirt pooling at her feet.

Jackson stood, unsteady, slightly drunk. "This some kind of game?"

"No," Patty said, and then she threw her arms around Jackson's neck and kissed him.

President Jefferson Jackson felt the room spin, and his body went limp as he found himself looking at his own face, feeling his breasts pressed against his own body, the cool air around his bare legs. He couldn't speak, his body was limp, and his mind was reeling, desperately searching for some way to make sense of the inputs it was receiving from its senses, inputs that couldn't be true.

He felt himself being lifted off his feet and tossed onto the bed, staring up at the ceiling, and then he felt someone climbing onto the bed, on top of him, and his own face leered down at him. "Hi, slut!" said the man above him, the man who looked just like him, and then caressed Jackson's smooth cheek.

Jackson felt the man shove his hand down under his panties, and then his mind screamed again, recoiled, and if he could have shaken his head he would have, because what his body was telling his brain right now was that the man had his fingers on Jackson's vagina, running them along the soft lips, the bristling hairs of Jackson's bush. It wasn't possible. No, Jackson thought, disgusted and violated. He *couldn't* be feeling what he was feeling...

And then the man kissed Jackson on the neck, and again, and started to nibble on Jackson's earlobe while slipping a finger inside the wet lips of Jackson's slit, and Jackson felt the fingers moving *inside* him, probing a cavity he didn't believe he had. Terrible new fears and

unwanted pleasures flooded Jackson's baffled brain as his nipples – which felt like they were floating above his body – hardened and struggled against the firm cotton of his bra, and he thought I can't have breasts, I'm not wearing a bra, I'm not a woman..... and the man on top of him put his hand on Jackson's right breast, over his shirt and bra, and when the man pressed and squeezed the soft flesh Jackson heard himself softly moan, and he was shocked and disgusted, and desperately wanted to push the man off, or run, or scream for help, but he couldn't move; and when he tried to *voluntarily* make a sound... nothing. And now the man was pulling Jackson's panties down, yanking them down over his thighs to his knees, and Jackson felt tears in his eyes, and he tried to say, *no.. please don't...* but the only thing that came out was a soft sound, like a lost kitten, and the man chuckled and climbed back on top of Jackson, who now felt the hard throbbing of the man's erect penis against his thigh, and a surge of terror surged through his body because he suspected.... but no... no that couldn't happen to him... none of this could happen because...

The man ripped open Jackson's blouse, and he felt cool air against his breasts, and then the man had his hot mouth on Jackson's breasts, sucking, while his hand once again slipped inside Jackson's slit, his vagina... and then the man sat up, slapped Jackson across the face, laughed and then leaned down, grabbing Jackson's jaw and saying, "I'm going to fuck you now you stupid little bitch."

Jackson moaned, tried to struggle, to call for help, but then he felt it, felt the man *enter* him, and his brain screamed at the impossible injustice of it all, and he mentally screamed *No! Please!* And as the man thrust in and pulled out, thrust in and pulled out, Jackson saw a face – Jenny Franks, all freckles and with a ribbon in her hair – they'd gone back to his dorm, and he'd taken her... and she'd said no. And then as he'd taken her she'd cried and said those same words *no.... please...* and he'd just laughed... and now he was Jenny Franks.... and *he* was getting raped... and if he could have cried, he would have... but all he could do was lay there and take it.

And occasionally moan, involuntarily.

Once the Brother-Sister was done with President Jackson, she patted him on the cheek and chuckled. Then moved away, while his mind circled in helpless futility, trying to grasp what she'd done, what had just happened, what he now was... and then he felt a pinch on his hip, and his mind slipped further away into a drug-addled trance, and he felt himself drifting off... off to sleep....and the last thing he remembered was hearing his voice say, "... really drunk...make sure she gets home safe, and be discreet." Then he saw the faces of the secret service agents looking down at him, disgusted and amused, and he closed his eyes and sank into blackness.

Adrian Lopez squirmed, and adjusted his bra strap. On the screen in his apartment Wolverine slashed at some cybernetic soldiers, sending sparks flying as he decapitated them, but Lopez wasn't really paying that much attention to the action. He was watching the way the muscles in Hugh Jackman's arms coiled as he moved, the tight cords of muscle, his square chin, his rock hard ass. Lopez's nipples were hard, and he could feel himself getting a little wet – Jackman's eyes were full of animal fury, and it made Lopez' skin tingle with pleasure as he imagined what it would be like to slip into Jackman's arms, tilt his head back and smile up into those eyes as Jackman leaned down for a kiss...

Lopez put his hands on his breasts, imagining them pressed against Jackman's hard, muscular body... and then it happened... suddenly he saw the faces of his parents... his mother, eyes full of tears, as she crossed herself and said, "I will pray for you..." and then his father, his face stern and angry, cruelly mouthing the word, mericon. It stung, and shame flooded over Lopez, but kept his eyes on the flat screen, where Jackman was now trapped in an elevator with a robot with a shield, who was deflecting his claw strikes while the severed hands of other robots clawed at his legs....

Lopez fought against the guilt, struggled against his needs, but those needs were stronger, and instead he slipped his hand under the waistband of his sweat pants and slipped it down between his legs while squeezing his breast with his free hand... he pictured himself on his hands and knees, Jackman behind him... and some part of him raged... *stop it! You're a man!* But another part of him, a powerfully hungry part that refused to be denied, sang with excitement and joy and pure lust. In his imagination he started to get up, but Jackman grabbed his hair, his wrist, twisted it painfully, forcing him back to his knees and he closed his eyes, bit his lip and pressed down on his clit, swooning at the thought of Jackman manhandling him, taking him...

"Um! Oh!" He slumped back into the couch, tossing his hair to the side, watching the movie, wiping his slick fingers on his sweat pants... his skin tingling...he could still feel the angry presence of his parents... their shame and disgust.... Self control... *where is my self-control....?* The cyber soldier managed to shred Jackman's shirt, and Lopez smiled. It was hopeless. *Jackman was so hot.* Too hot. And he, Lopez, was a woman now. A straight woman. Things with Francis were... okay. Fine. They did love each other, and they took care of each other, but Lopez didn't think he could deny this body much longer; it wanted a man. *He wanted a man.*

He would have to talk to Francis about it. Maybe they could take some time apart.

Agree to a break. He didn't want to have the conversation, to deal with all the feelings... but he felt like if he didn't, he just might lose his mind. *Merde!* He thought. *I never thought I would be this hard up for dick.*

Pete clapped and chanted while jumping, his ponytail bouncing as he hopped, the ragged braids of the old jump rope swooping around him and then scra-a-aping across the pavement.

ABC and vegetable goop

What will I find in my vegetable soup?

A.... B... C... he jumped, keeping the rhythm as all the girls chanted along, and Pete felt himself getting excited as he kept going and going and finally it came to W.. X... Y... Z! He hopped out of the rope and pumped his fist, the other girls cheering and clapping...

"I'm going to go sit down for a minute!" Pete said. He swaggered away, thinking *I'm pretty much the best at jump rope...*

Sitting in the shade under the big old elm tree at the edge of the playground, he waited until he was sure that no one was paying attention to him and then snuck off, making his way around the playground corner to the loading zone behind the building. Kids were not allowed to go back there, and he felt excited and scared; alive! There was a rusty old metal door, and a truck bay with a roll up metal door where trucks would back in with supplies. Pete climbed up, reached up for the handle with his little hands, and.... darn! The door was locked. He checked the door to the bay and found it locked as well. So, he thought, putting his hands on his hips, it won't be easy. Or....

Along the bottom of the building where the red brick wall met the cracked asphalt, there were little windows.... and he saw now that one of them was open. Sneaking up to the window he kept his head low, looked in and saw a small room crowded with shelving and boxes of what looked like old files. The window was narrow, far too small for any full-sized person, but not, Pete thought with a smirk, a scrawny malnourished little orphan girl like him. Getting down on the pavement, he slithered under the open window, found the top shelf with his feet, and lowered himself into the room, crouching on top of the wobbling shelves and squinting as his eyes adjusted to the darker space. Once he could at least see, he started to climb down, while it swayed and wobbled ominously with each move he made. Holding his breath and moving his

tiny arms and legs slowly, carefully, as he moved down, down, down, he finally felt the solid floor under his feet.

There was a door, and Pete put his ear against it, listening, hearing nothing, so he carefully turned the handle and pulled the door open, just enough for him to slip out and then crouch. A narrow hallway stretched before him, painted in two tones of puke green, the paint peeling, the length of it dimly lit by a row of bulbs that ran along the ceiling, dangling from a tangle of wiring. The bulbs were low-wattage, flickering. Some looked to have been long burned out. Pausing to get a sense of his location, Pete headed in the direction he felt would lead him to the Southern wing, moving noiselessly down the hallway in his pink and white Converse sneakers.

Along the hallway there were doors, and Pete peeked in to see rooms full of wooden desks pushed into corners. They looked dirty and unused, so he kept going, eventually coming to the end of the hall, where there was a locked door and a stairway leading up. He could hear noises from the stairway – the clanging of metal, voices speaking in Spanish. A wedge of light shone down the stairs. He climbed, letting his fingers drag over the cinder-block stubble of the wall, until he came to the top, where he found a small landing and a door propped partly open; warm, damp air and the smell of tomato sauce pouring through the opening along with the dull, incandescent light. Pete got on his knees, crawled to the open door, and poked his head around, seeing the legs of stainless steel tables, as well as jeans and black shoes moving back and forth. The shoes were pointed away from Pete, so he crawled into the room, staying low and making his way along the back wall, moving without a sound as the people in the room chattered in Spanish.

Once he came to the end of the long, metal table, Pete looked around, spotting an exit, but stood across the length of the kitchen, and there were four people milling around, working, talking, but whose line of sight he would have to cross if he tried to get out that way. Pete

tugged on his ponytail. Maybe he should just go back? Or make a run for it? Or wait? Or, he wished Lopez or Sofia were there to tell him what to do...

He heard a squeaking noise, a rattling, and pulled back a little, crouching lower, watching as a cart with a white cloth hanging over it was pushed into the room and placed right at the end of the table he was hiding behind. His heart fluttered with excitement. *I could sneak onto the cart!* They would take him out of here, and right through that door to the rest of the building! But should he? Fear rose – what if they saw him? What if he got caught? Got in trouble? All the other girls would make fun of him... And where was that cart being taken anyway? What if...?

Shut up! He just crawled forward, slipped under the table cloth and climbed onto the bottom rack of the cart. He felt it shift a little as he climbed in, and froze, listening, but the workers just kept talking and clanking, not reacting at all... so he slowly, carefully let out a breath, and then brought one in, and then sat, crossed legged, fitting neatly in the cart. And then realized he needed to pee.

It wasn't a desperate need. Not yet. But he was suddenly aware of the pressure, his body's call for release. He couldn't hold it as long as when he was a boy. *Shit. Not now.* He focused on his breathing. Calming himself. *It's just a reaction to all the excitement,* he thought. *You're fine. Fine...*

The pressure, the urgency, grew less; he felt a little better, but it was still there, and he rolled his eyes impatiently as he waited for the cart to move on to its destination. He started to think about jumping rope, running the cheers through his head:

Made a mistake and kissed a snake

How many doctors did it take?

1 doctor 2 doctors 3 doctors four

4 four doctors 5 doctors 6 doctors more!

Pete kept running the chants in his mind, imagining himself on the playground, hopping, hopping... time seemed to pass so slowly... sooooo slowly.... the cart just sat, the sounds of the kitchen kept churning along. Someone turned on a radio, and Latin music underscored the conversation, the rhythm and singing breaking Pete's concentration and bringing him back to his body, and his need...

Come on! he thought, wondering if he should just crawl off the cart, back down the stairs? He felt like he might have to, like maybe the cart wasn't going anywhere anyway, but then he heard something clunk down on top of the cart, some rapid-fire conversation, and the cart lurched backward, turned and then jerked forward, the wheel starting its squeaking once more, and Pete had to keep from crying out with joy because they were moving, and that meant he was at least getting somewhere.

The cart rolled along; took turns. Pete tried to pay attention, to keep some sense of where he was, but it was hard to tell without being able to see anything. When the cart finally stopped moving, he had no idea where he was, but then he heard a knock, and then the man pushing the cart said, "Dinner."

A muffled response Pete couldn't hear, and then he heard a door being opened, felt the cart being pushed forward, heard a voice say, "Thank you." Then the door closed, and Pete heard someone move to the cart, then away. There was some kind of classical music playing, a perfume scent in the air.

The pressure in his abdomen was getting intense, and he was struggling to keep from peeing himself. Carefully, he lifted the cloth hanging from the cart on the side opposite where

he thought the person was. Looking out from underneath the cloth he saw a deep, ruby carpet; and then raising his eyes further he saw the legs of a chair, and a lamp.

Crawling out from under the cloth, Pete moved to where he could peek around the edge of the cart, and looking up he saw Miss Tremont. She hadn't seen him, though. Yet. Pete felt his heart flutter with fear at the sight of the strict and cold disciplinarian. It had been drilled into his little body. He couldn't help it, and the fear and desire to get away from her only mingled with his pressing need to pee, making it intensify to the point of pain. Tremont was sitting, her profile to Pete, but with a clear view of the door. Glancing around what seemed to be her private quarters, he saw another door – probably leading to a bedroom, and Pete suspected, a bathroom, but could he sneak there without her seeing or hearing him?

If he got caught, it was all over. Not only would he get in a lot of trouble, but the Brother-Sisters would know he was spying on them, and they would put a stop to it, or move, or do something other than get taken down....

No. He had to find out for sure. To see what was hidden in the Southern wing. So he closed his eyes, willed himself to hold it, just a little bit longer... just a little... and he sat, knees together, as Tremont ate. And when he finally heard her stand up, he almost peed himself with excitement, but instead he risked a look, and saw her go into the interior room, and then he heard a door close. Scurrying, keeping his knees pressed together, hurrying to the front door, he grabbed the handle. Pausing only the briefest second to make sure the hall was clear, he slipped into the hallway and closed the door behind him.

He felt his bladder finally give way. No choice. No time to look for a toilet, so he pulled down his shorts, squatted and peed onto the cold tile outside Tremont's door.

Pulling up his shorts, Pete made a choice and hurried down the hall in what he hoped was not the way back to the kitchen. Blushing, excited, scared... he wasn't even sure, his whole little

body was shaking with emotion, and he was just moving now, trying to find something that would give him a sense of where he was, or someplace to hide, or both.

XLII

"I'm just going to do some cardio," Lopez said with an apologetic shrug.

"I thought you wanted to put some muscle on those little arms of yours?" Kanisha said, squeezing Lopez' slender bicep.

"Arms are a little sore," Lopez lied, glancing at the two of them in the mirror. Though they were both women, Kanisha had a more solid, muscular build, with shoulders and arms that showed she loved to lift heavy shit. Lopez, in contrast, was... dainty? He had slender arms, a tiny waist, little wrists, a swan neck. When he'd first been trapped in this girl's body those things had all been embarrassing, had left him feeling as vulnerable and ashamed as the bouncy soft parts had. He'd been determined to improve his upper body strength, put some muscles on this skinny bitch he'd become, but now....?

Now he found himself... kind of liking it? He kinda liked being... tiny? In certain places?

Women are crazy, he thought, getting on the treadmill and starting to run, his breasts bouncing, even nestled firmly in his sports bra. *I'm crazy*. Why would anyone want to be small? Weak? It made no sense, especially for him, but really for anyone, and yet... he *wanted* pretty, feminine arms now. He liked the way they looked in a sleeveless shirt, or a tank top; he liked his round little shoulders.

Where had it come from?

The same place as his thoughts about Hugh Jackman's biceps, of course. The same place as those fantasies about Jackman pulling his hair, pushing him down to his knees... He felt his body tingle at the memory. *I should fight this*, he thought. *I have to fight this. I'm losing myself.*

But looking in the mirror, he saw his even, cinnamon colored skin, the thick lashes surrounding his big, green eyes, their exotic slant; his full breasts and those sexy little arms, and he felt he was lost, had been the moment he'd been swapped into this beautiful young woman's body.

He wanted to be pretty. He had already learned to love the attention of attractive men, to blush with pleasure at their looks, their compliments – not the gross leers, the catcalls. He hated that as much as any girl; but *oh!* it gave such a thrill when some cute guy took a sly look at his ass, or looked him over, then made eye contact and smiled. Lopez would feel himself get all... girly and giggly when that happened, even at the same time his cheeks burned with shame for what he was feeling. He needed to fight it, had to fight it, to cling to who he was, the man he'd been, but then....

Why fight it? he thought. What was the prize for fighting this body, the new feelings? No one else cared. There was no Academy Award for pretending to be a man. So what did fighting get him? A life of repression? Of denial? A life of making out with Francis, pretending Francis was a man?

But what if he gave in, continued to give in, what if he let some guy fuck him, and then got his own body back? What then? Could he ever be a man again? Could he respect himself as a man? And what would the other cops think – not the Barbie Patrol. They would probably understand. Some of them already were with men. But the rest of the NYPD? Could he ever get promoted if they knew he'd let some guy fuck him? Had wanted it?

Lopez increased the speed, the incline. He ran harder, harder, wanting to feel the burn, to get lost in a runner's high, to STOP THINKING! Every decision seemed wrong. There was no way of telling where any of the paths would lead. All he knew for sure was that right now, here, he was Jade, and he was 20 years old, a female, Asian, and he wanted out of this body, this life, this insane situation. It just wasn't...

He increased the speed. The incline.

No. I am Adrian Lopez. I am a man, he thought to himself. *I am a man.*

But he felt the weight of his breasts bouncing, his hips swiveling, his bouncy butt; felt his long hair, tied back in a ponytail bobbing around as he ran; looked in the mirror at his big, pretty eyes, his full lips... his pretty face...

Jade. I'm Jade. He thought about Hugh Jackman, imagined kissing him, holding him, feeling those rock hard muscles; saw himself running in the surfed, naked, his slender body dappled with sea-foam, Jackman running behind him....

Faster... faster.... his eyes started filling with tears, and he wiped them, and kept running, thinking, *I'm a man.... I am not this body...*

He stumbled as the treadmill suddenly decelerated, making a groaning noise, the incline dropping. Grabbing the handles, he looked and saw Kaneshia holding the Emergency Stop Key, and looked away, ashamed of his tears.

"Let's talk," Kaneshia said.

"No, thanks." Lopez hopped off the treadmill and started to walk away, but Kaneshia grabbed his arm. Lopez yanked angrily, but her grip held firm. "Let go," Lopez said.

"No," Kaneshia said. "Talk to me."

"You wouldn't understand," Lopez said, the tears still stinging his eyes. He tried to twist his arm free, but Kaneshia held firm, looking him in the eyes, shaking her head.

"We came up together. Came through the academy. I know you, Lopez."

"You don't," he said, feeling frustrated and helpless, struggling against a woman he could easily have overpowered back when he was a man. "Not anymore."

"I just..."

"Let go of me!" Lopez shrieked, his voice rising to an angry little girl.

"Why? Why won't you...."

"I don't want you to see me cry!" Lopez said. "I don't...." the tears overwhelmed him, he couldn't even see anymore as they poured down his cheeks, and he let Kaneshia pull him in for a hug, wrapping his arms around her, pulling her close. "I don't..."

Kaneshia patted his back, held him. "It's okay. It's okay."

"I don't... want to cry...."

"It's okay," Kaneshia repeated, leading him over to the couch in the corner.

Lopez cried for awhile, just letting Kaneshia hold him, and when the tears finally stopped he sat back, raised his eyebrows and smiled sheepishly. "You must think I'm ridiculous. I'm sorry..."

"No. No. I don't think you're ridiculous at all. I can't even imagine how hard this has been for you."

"Well, I feel ridiculous."

"So, what's going on with you? I thought you were going to have a heart attack on that treadmill."

Lopez rolled his eyes. "Oh my god. I don't even.... I'm not sure. I thought I was, not getting used to this, but at least dealing with it?"

"It's only been a few weeks."

"I know. Yeah. But, well, it's also....? No."

"Come on," Kanasha said, giving him a little punch on the arm. "Stop being such a pussy, and be a man. Talk to me."

"Be a man?" Lopez said, looking down at his breasts.

"Dude. Talk to me. Is it your body?"

"No. Yes. Sort of?" Lopez bit his lip. Looked away. Shrugged. "Don't tell anyone."

"My lips are sealed."

"It's, well, it's like my body is changing me. My mind. I'm feeling... I don't know the right word, but – remember when you asked about me working on my arms?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I didn't want to because – and I don't understand this at all because it makes no sense – but I really want to have... little arms?"

"Oh. I see."

"You do?"

"Of course."

"But, wait. You, I mean, you're, like, really strong, for a"

"Woman. Yes. But, Lopez, what you're going through? A lot of girls go through it. Not that you're a girl, but I just mean – welcome to the club."

"I don't understand."

"We want to be feminine. We want to be strong. Back in high-school I used to hide who I was. I didn't lift weights. I did yoga. I was worried guys wouldn't like me if I was too butch or whatever the fuck. I liked being a jock, a dudette, but sometimes I also wanted to put on something pretty, dress up, be a girly girl. I wanted to be able to be both and neither. But the feminine stuff? It was always tricky because I always felt it made me less than a guy."

"That's it," Lopez said. "I keep feeling, wanting – like I saw these earrings the other day, I thought they were sooooo pretty, and I really wanted them, but they were those ridiculous hoops, which seem so impractical to my *dude* brain, and I used think women who wore them were sexy as hell, but I also kind of always thought they were a sign that chicks were kind of airheads, and so I wanted them, and I was ashamed because I wanted them at the same time?"

"I've been there."

"I guess that makes me feel better. Sort of."

"Wow. Well, I'm glad I could sort of help."

"Oh!" Lopez said, covering his mouth. "I'm so sorry!"

"Don't worry. My advice? Get those earrings. Give it a whirl. See how you like it."

"Maybe I will, Lopez said, standing, stretching. "It's good talking to you now. Different, but good."

"You, too, Lopez." Kanesha grabbed a dumbbell, started to curl it. "You lift lighter weights, you can just tone those pretty little arms of yours, you know."

"I know," Lopez said, scrunching his nose. "But, also? Weights are boring?"

"You *are* turning into a girly-girl."

Lopez grabbed his ankle and pulled his leg back, stretching his quads. Then, in an offhand way, he said, "Yeah, well, I think I also might be into guys now."

"What?" Kanesha said, almost dropping her dumbbell.

"Nothing," Lopez said, walking out of the gym, putting a little extra wiggle in his walk. At the last second, he glanced over his shoulder and gave Kanesha a wink. She flipped him the bird. Lopez smiled. He knew how lucky he was to have a friend like Kanesha, a friend like Francis. It was part of what had kept him sane – or sane enough.

XLIII

Patrick McNulty was sitting at his vanity in a bra and panties, putting on his mascara. His girlfriend and fiancé, Nicki Carver was standing by the bed, fixing her cuff-links. "I'm thinking of getting my hair cut?" McNulty said, glancing at her in the mirror.

"Let it grow out longer," Nicki said.

"It's just, well, it takes so much work?" He set down his mascara brush and fluffed his kinky black afro with his fingers.

"Your curls are so damn sexy, though, babe," Nick said. "You look so damn hot."

McNulty smiled prettily at the compliment. "Maybe just a little trim or something?"

Nick sighed inwardly. McNulty had become such a needy little female, but that was part of why he loved him. It got her off to see that formerly swaggering asshole all emotional and insecure, but it also tugged at her heartstrings. Inwardly sighing, she forced a smile on her face, went over to McNulty and kissed him on his bare shoulder, then put her hands on those slender little shoulders of his and kneaded the tense muscles. "Let it grow some more, and then I'll set you up with my stylist. You'll get used to it."

"Okay," McNulty said, smiling, turning his head side to side, double-checking his make-up.

"That's my girl. Damn you are hot."

McNulty giggled. Stood. Nick started to kiss him, but he tsked and pointed to his cheek, and Nick gave him a loving peck, then as McNulty walked past her she slapped him on the ass. "Hurry up, now! We'll be late."

"I'll just be a minute," McNulty said. He'd laid his dress out on the bed, and picking it up he carefully stepped into it, slipping the spaghetti straps over his shoulders. It was a thin, nearly transparent black that came down to mid-thigh, showing off a lot of his dark, perfect skin, and hugging all his soft curves. Nick came over and zipped him up without being asked, and McNulty whispered thanks. He slipped into his pumps, grabbed his purse and turned to face Nick.

Nick looked him up and down, then smiled and said, "Yes. You will be the most beautiful woman at the reception tonight."

"You're just as hot," McNulty said, offering Nick his arm.

"I think the word you're looking for is handsome," Nick said, kissing McNulty on the back of his neck. "No one is going to be looking at me with you on my arm."

"Am I too pretty?" McNulty asked. "I mean, if you..."

"I love you being the pretty one, babe," Nick said. "Please."

Even in heels, McNulty was shorter than Nicki, and as they walked out into the breezy spring Washington night, he marveled at just how right it felt to be clicking along in his heels, clinging to the arm of his tall, strong girlfriend, a tight little dress flaunting his full breasts and wide hips. It seemed like his life as a man, a police captain, was a hundred years ago, a lifetime ago, a dream. *Shouldn't this be harder?* he wondered.

The air smelled of cherry blossoms, and they walked together in silence until they got to the DAR Center for the performing arts. The Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre was performing as a part of a fund raiser for the NAACP, and as they entered the hall, McNulty saw that the vast majority of the people there – almost all of them – were African American. He felt... exposed. Like everyone would be looking at him. And, in fact, as they entered, a lot of eyes did fall on him.

"Do they know who I am?" McNulty whispered, clinging even more tightly to Nick.

"No," Nick said, patting his hand.

"Why are they all staring at me?"

"Because you're super-hot. Now just smile and follow my lead."

Nick began to make the rounds, introducing McNulty by the name of the body he now wore. "This is Ebony St. Croix."

"Are you from the Caribbean?"

"My family is," McNulty answered, smiling prettily as the man leaned down and kissed him on the cheek. "But I grew up in Brooklyn."

"Well, you are a lovely young woman," the man said, keeping McNulty's soft little hand in his own as he turned to Nick. "She's gorgeous."

"Thank you, Doctor Franks," Nick said. "I'm very much in love with her."

Occasionally, Nick would step aside to talk with one of the men, and McNulty was left alone with a wife. The first time he was terrified, but the conversation seemed to stay polite. Who designed your dress? How did you like growing up in Brooklyn? McNulty would ask them questions, try to keep them talking about themselves, smiling and laughing. There were a lot of hugs and kisses. A few people seemed a little uncomfortable with the fact that he was a lesbian, but even that was mostly just a feeling he had. No one was rude. The show was incredible. The dancers so powerful and graceful. McNulty cried, and Nick put her arm around his shoulder.

Soon enough, they were back at home, in bed, exhausted, but both buzzing with the afterglow of a successful debut as a Washington couple. "I am so proud of you," McNulty said, stroking Nick's arm, gazing at her with soft, loving eyes.

"Me, too," Nick said, gently rubbing her foot against McNulty's smooth leg. "Proud of you. Everyone loved you."

"Watching you work the room, so confident. So in control."

"You were radiant, Ebony. Charming."

"Are we, like, the hottest couple in Washington?"

"The hottest couple anywhere," Nick said, giving McNulty a kiss.

"You wanna?" McNulty asked, raising one of his slender, perfectly plucked eyebrows.

"I'm really tired," Nick said. "Have to get up early tomorrow. You understand?"

"Of course," McNulty said, hiding his irritation behind a pretty smile.

"Love you," Nick said, giving him another kiss.

"You, too," McNulty chirped.

A minute later, Nick was snoring, but McNulty curled up on his side and hugged his legs to his chest. He was replaying the whole night in his mind, all the people he'd met, the show, the walk... his cheeks ached from smiling so much, and the whole thing had been like one long, warm glow. Again, everything had felt so right, so perfect. Except for the end, but that was just...

Annoying, he admitted. He'd spent so much time getting ready. Finding the perfect dress, getting waxed, doing his make-up, his hair, which he'd wanted short! And then she couldn't even find the energy to make love to him?

I'm acting like a silly girl, he thought. *I am a silly girl*. He smiled at the thought. He liked it. Being a girl. Being silly. Emotional. And Nick? From the time he'd suddenly found himself swapped into the body of a 19 year old African American stripper, she'd been his rock, steady and strong, helping him become what he was now.

Why was it so easy? Why did it seem so right?

Patrick McNulty had been a bitter, lonely old man who hated himself and hated his family, and hated the world. He'd been a racist and a sexist, an ugly man who took pleasure only in other people's pain.

And now he was pretty, and loved, and in love.

Who wouldn't make that trade?

President Jackson became aware of sounds, the feeling of a bed beneath his body. Where am I? he wondered. What? Memories came back to him... or was that just some kind of nightmare? He'd turned into Patty Green, somehow, and then he – his old body – had – no. It had to be a dream. Fighting his way back to consciousness, he sat up, only to feel the weight of his breasts swaying in his bra. Pushing his hair out of his face, he looked down and saw bare legs, and panties. He was a woman. Somehow. Of course, he'd heard the reports out of New York, but it didn't seem real, and how could they have gotten to him?

"Oh!" He started, only then noticing a man sitting in a chair near the bed. "Agent Taylor?" he said, his woman's voice strange in his ears. "What's going on here? Do you know who I am?"

"Mr. President," Agent Taylor said, nodding.

Jackson's heart leapt with joy. "You know who I am? Thank god. Those Brother-Sisters got to me somehow. You have to alert the Vice President."

Agent Taylor stared at Jackson. Shook his head. "Nah."

"You aren't Taylor?" Jackson said, crossing his arms over his chest, the joy sapped from him, replaced by terror.

"No," the Agent said, standing. Smiling arrogantly. "Agent Taylor is now a very cute girl. I think she might Swedish. Big tits. His name is Ellie." The Agent turned and called. "She's awake."

Jackson skittered away to the headboard of the bed, curling up into himself, all the terrible memories of what had happened to him flooding back, the horrible feeling of powerlessness, the violation of his body.

A gorgeous little Latina entered. She had long, straight dark hair that poured down over her shoulders, full breasts and wide hips, a tiny waist. Her face was achingly pretty. She wore a tank top that hugged those perfect breasts and showed off her flat belly. It read Latina Princess across the boobs. Her mini-skirt barely covered her sex and celebrated her long, toned legs. Hoop earrings flashed at her ears, a tiny little stud sparkled in her nose, and her slender wrists were festooned with colorful bracelets.

The girl smiled and looked right at President Jackson. "Hi, Tika," the girl said in a sweet, tea-kettle voice. "I'm your new body. Yeah, we wouldn't want to leave the President of the United States in the body of a known agent of Homeland Security; someone people might *listen* to. In a body which people might *respect*. No, we need someone... a bit more *special* than that for the *US President*. You know what I'm saying, girl? And maybe, maybe you need to learn some new... skills. A new way of thinking? Just to keep your pretty little head out of trouble."

"No," Jackson said, looking at the stunningly beautiful girl as she slowly approached, her hips swaying.

"Your name is Tika Araya, and you're 18 years old."

"Please. I'll do whatever you want."

The girl climbed onto the bed, began crawling toward the cowering figure of President Jackson in his bra and panties. The girl kept smiling, her dimples, her face. She was so, so pretty, and Jackson shook his head from side to side. He couldn't be her. No. "Let's work something out. I'm president of the United States..."

"Girl, you aren't even a citizen. You're in America illegally."

"You can't do this to me!" Those lips. So soft and full. Men would want... they would think... Jackson felt himself starting to cry. "I can't be that pretty."

"Sorry, Tika, but this will be you for the rest of your life." The girl took Jackson's face in her hands and looked him in the eyes, still smiling. "You are a sexy little Latina Princess." And then she kissed him, on the lips, and Jackson felt the world swim again, just like before, and then he saw Patty's face, now with that same smile, as he slumped over onto his back and stared helplessly up at the ceiling.

"Don't worry," he heard Agent Taylor say, even as he felt what he thought was the man's hand caressing the inside of his thigh. "We're not going to fuck you."

"You're still a virgin," Patty said, brushing his hair from his face, cupping his cheek. "There are people who'll pay real good money to pop your cherry."

XLIV

Dimly lit hallways, doors; crouching when he heard a noise; Pete just kept moving, lost in a kind of frantic haze, moving, looking back, worried at every noise or hint of a footfall that Miss Tremont was coming, chasing him, that she would catch him, grab his arm and tell him he'd been a very, bad girl...

And then he found himself standing in front of a door. THE door. On the door, written in peeling paint, were the words, South Wing. *This is it*, Pete thought. *This is the end. The place where the answers lie.*

How late was it? How long had it been since he'd snuck off from the playground? His tummy rumbled. He'd missed dinner. And he was thirsty. Tired.

Scared.

But he grabbed the handle, pulled the door open, and slipped into the Southern Wing.

The hallway was dark. He could go straight or off to the right. There was darkness to the right... safety, maybe. Quiet. Straight in front of him – maybe fifty yards away – light from an open door, and he thought he could hear muffled voices. Talking quietly. Gnawing on the inside of his cheek, he stared at the light, even while his chest tightened and his palms grew sweaty.

Instinct said the answers lay ahead. In the light and voices. The danger. He needed to go there. Had to go there. And so he clenched his little fists and started to walk into the blackness, the dark, carefully, quietly; he walked into the fear and made his way down the hall. As he moved down the hall and came to the light, the open door, a small office, and now he could plainly hear voices – two men –

"For me it's been pizza. Ever since I switched into this one. Pizza."

"Pizza is good. I like it in every single body I've been in."

"Yeah. But it isn't good, good."

"No. Not at all."

Silence.

"I wish I had some right now, though."

"Yeah. I could go for a slice."

Beyond the office where the men talked, Pete could see two more open doors, and a big room – a gymnasium, with a parquet floor. Inside there was a flickering bluish luminescence. His heart beat faster. There! That room!

He just had to cross through the light, the pale white light that flooded out of the office and cut across the darkness of the corridor, like the chalk white finish line at the end of a race. He thought about trying to take a look, about creeping up to the door and glancing inside, to see

if the men were looking, would see him, maybe to create some kind of distraction and then sneak past, but something in him was saying – just do it. Just go! Just walk right by them and into the room. You'll be safe.

And so he did. Without any more thought or worry, Pete stepped into the light, walked through it – glancing in the door he saw the men sitting with their backs to him, watching a wall full of monitors flickering with cryptic data in some alien script – and then he was stepping through the open double doors, into the blue light, and a room where rows upon rows of glass tubes held the bodies of men and women, and children- hundreds of them crammed together, their eyes closed as if sleeping peacefully.

He kept walking, moving deeper into the room, looking at the faces, the bodies.... but there was something more here, something that pulled him along, toward the back of the room... and then he saw the first one: an alien. It had an octopoid look to it – the skin was smooth and hairless, glistening, with only slits for a nose and a jumble of tentacles where a human mouth would be. The body was long, lean and muscular, but looked sexless to Pete, and somehow repugnant. The very sight of it filled him with an urge to run, to scream, to kill it. He looked and saw more of them – more of the creatures sleeping in the tubes.

The original victims are in these bodies, he thought. This is where they've been all this time. Sleeping in these alien shapes, waiting until these creatures needed their bodies back... And the others? Bodies they could use. Switch in and out of.

This was it. Pete pumped his fist, started to head back. He needed to find a phone, call Lopez and Francis, get the NYPD...

"You!" He heard a man shout. Turning, he saw what looked like his old boss, McNulty. "Stop!"

Pete turned, running toward the double doors.

"Stop!" McNulty's body shouted. "Hey! Hey!"

As Pete raced out the door he saw one of the guards poke his head out of the office – he recognized this one, too – Puchino – he didn't know him well – Puchino ran into the hall, stood with his hands out – "Stop!"

He was standing with his legs wide apart, like he was bracing himself to catch a larger person, and Pete threw himself onto his chest and slid between the man's legs, immediately bounding to his feet and racing down the hall.

Pete ran blindly, back down the hall and then, once again following a gut instinct, rather than going back the way he'd come, and turned and ran down the other hallway – the one that led to darkness and safety. He came to a door, shoved it open and found himself running out into the cool, darkness of the night, and he saw the woods in front of him, the woods that surrounded the orphanage, and he ran into the trees, the men stumbling into the dark somewhere behind him, and then Pete smiled as he slunk among these trees, because he'd played hide and seek here many times, and he knew many very good places to hide.

"Kid! Come out! You're not in trouble!"

Pete smiled. They didn't know who he was. That was good. They thought he was just some little girl who got lost, so that was an advantage. He darted from one tree to a scrubby bush, then to another.

"You want a candy bar?"

"Some water?"

They'd split up. The voices were coming from different directions. Pete stayed low, sneaking from tree to bush, to... snap!

A branch cracked near him. Very near him. His heart leapt, he held back a shout of fright, and instead climbed under an old, mossy log. There was a hollow underneath it – like it had maybe been dug by some animal- and all the girls knew it was a really good hiding place – if you didn't mind getting gross. Pete felt the slimy, wormy earth on his hands and knees, covering his shirt.

He saw a pair of feet stop, standing next to the log. Saw the beam of a flashlight cutting back and forth, back and forth. Pete held his breath. He could feel a squirming underneath him, like the ground was alive, slimy things wiggling against his legs and arms.

Another set of feet appeared. "Anything?" One asked.

"Nothing."

"Shit. We are going to be royally fucked when the Empress finds out about this."

The squirming things made Pete wiggle, they felt so gross. He wanted to slip away, to move, to push them away, but he stayed frozen, holding his breath.

"Fuck."

"Let's look a little more. Then...?"

"What?"

"Who says the Empress needs to know?"

"Hvfth. You know better."

"It's just some kid got lost. She'll get hungry eventually. Go back."

"Kid? You want a candy bar?"

"You're not in trouble."

The feet moved away, the flashlights, the men calling out. Pete slipped out from under the log. There were fat, red worms sticking to his legs and arms, writhing in his hair. He slapped them away, shook them out of his hair, then hurried to the back of the wood and to the hole in the fence, which he slipped through, and then ran, and a couple minutes later he was on the streets of New York City.

Even in as jaded a city as New York, people will not ignore the sight of a little girl covered in mud wandering the streets alone – at night. And while Pete was busy trying to think of a way to contact Lopez, a woman stepped in front of him and said, "Honey? You okay?"

Pete looked up at her. "Okay?" He asked.

"Where are your parents?"

"I don't... I'm lost..." Pete said, letting tears pool in his eyes, roll down his cheeks. "Can you help me?"

"Sure. Sure. What's your name?"

"Anji."

"Why don't you come to my house?"

"I want to call my mom."

"I know. And you will. But let's get you off the street. You're trembling!"

Off the street. Good idea. The woman seemed harmless enough. Pete nodded. The woman took his hand, and he walked along with her. "Thanks," he said.

"Of course, darling," the woman said. "You poor thing. You must be frightened to death."

"No," Pete said. "Hungry."

XLV

"No," Lopez said. "Hold on." He was on his hands and knees. Francis was behind him, wearing a strap on.

"What is it?" Francis said.

Lopez pulled up his panties. Turned around and sat cross legged on the bed. He was wearing a lime green lace push up bra that matched his panties. "I just – I have something I need to talk about."

"Right now?" Francis said. "Can it wait?"

"No. It's about *this*."

"Ugh. Okay," Francis said, clearly annoyed. "Give me a minute." He undid the harness for the strap on, slipped it off and into a bathrobe. He'd been wearing a t-shirt and baggy boxers, playing the man. He climbed onto the bed and stretched out. "Okay. Go."

Lopez smiled apologetically. "Here goes. Sorry. Well, I was running on the treadmill today, and I started crying, and I talked to Kanisha?"

"Right," Francis said. "Okay."

"So, anyway, I'm really sorry. I mean, I feel like I should have said this sooner, but when I talked to Kanisha, I really felt like I came to some clarity, and I need to express this to you, but I want you to know that I love you, and I always will, and –"

"Are you breaking up with me?"

"I'm sorry," Lopez said as he started crying. "I'm so sorry."

"Will you please stop apologizing?" Francis said, sitting up now, brushing Lopez' hair from his face.

"I just feel so bad."

"But what is it? Why? Is it something I did?"

"No," Lopez said, taking Francis hand, kissing it. "Nothing. Not at all."

"So what, then?"

Lopez took a deep breath, smiling through the tears. "I think I like guys now."

"Oh!" Francis said. "Oh. I see." He squeezed Lopez' hand. Then giggled.

"What?" Lopez said, pulling away. "I can't help it! It just started, and –"

"It's not that?" Francis said, kissing Lopez on the cheek. "It's – I've been struggling with the same thing."

"You have?"

"Yeah. I mean, you know I was never into girls, and we just seemed to fall in love and it worked for a while, but I am so horny for a man I can't even begin to tell you."

"Shit," Lopez said. "Crap." The tears kept coming, though. It still felt so hard, to make this change, this move. They would still be friends. He believed that. Always close. But not as close as –

Both of their phones rang. The NYPD ring tone. Work. An emergency. They looked at each other. Both of them grabbed their phones. Francis swiped on first. "Officer Niji Patel," he said.

"Officer Patel. We have a call from a girl who says she's your daughter? An
GETPETE'SNAME?"

"Put her through." Francis covered the phone and said, "It's Pete."

Lopez moved closer.

"Mom!" Pete chirped through the phone. "Can you come and get me? I'm lost."

"Of course," Francis said, playing along. "Address?"

"Here you go?" Betty Washington said placing a grilled cheese sandwich in front of
Pete.

"Thank you," he said, giving Betty his prettiest smile. "I'm starving!" Pete took a bite of
the sandwich, savoring the melted cheddar and onion slices as he chewed. He was wearing an
old pink dress with a Peter Pan collar and lace trim – Betty had given it to him, saying it had
been her daughter's.

"Don't your people say grace before eating?" Betty said, looking at Pete over her
spectacles.

"My people?" Pete said, then seeing his brown hand, he remembered he was now in the
body of a Sri Lankan. "Oh."

"I'm sorry if I offended you," Betty said. "I didn't mean anything. I'm just curious."

"It's okay," Pete said. "I was actually raised Catholic."

"Me, too," Betty said.

"Really? I didn't know too many...." now it was Pete's turn to feel embarrassed. He had been about to say *black Catholics*. "I mean..."

"It's okay. I know. Looks like we both put our feet in our mouths."

Pete smiled again, his teeth full of cheese, and Betty laughed.

"We should pray," Pete said, putting down his sandwich.

"If you want to, Betty said. She took Pete's hand and said, "would you like to lead the prayer?"

Pete nodded, the words to the traditional Catholic prayer coming back to him though he hadn't been much of a church-goer. "Bless us O Lord and these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ, Our Lord, Amen."

"Amen," Betty said.

"And thank you for sending Betty to help me," Pete added.

Betty smiled. "You're welcome." She watched Pete eating, her eyes filling with a sweet pleasure. "You know God watches over you even when you don't know it," Betty said. "it's a good thing to remember. Nothing happens in this world but what's God's will for us."

Pete nodded. "My mom always says that." But did he really believe it? Was it God's will he'd lost his name, his body, his life?

"Your mother is right. Things happen. Terrible things. But you just have to keep living, keep trusting."

"I will."

There was a knock on the door. "That's probably your mom," Betty said getting up.

Pete stuffed the last bite of his sandwich into his mouth, jumped up from his chair and ran down the hall.

"Cool your jets!" Betty called, following along behind as fast as her old legs would let her.

Pete waited by the door, hopping impatiently. He didn't feel right opening someone else's door and besides she had, like, five locks and he wasn't even sure how to unlock all of them. Betty finally got to the door. Unlocked the locks. Opened it up to reveal Lopez and Francis, smiling. "Mommies!" Pete shouted, jumping into Francis' arms.

"Oh!" Betty said. "Anji has two mothers?"

"Yes," Lopez said, patting Pete on the back. "Thank you so much for watching out for her. We've been worried sick!"

"Lucky girl who has two such beautiful mothers!" Betty said. "God really is watching over this one."

"Thank goodness," Francis said. "She does get herself into trouble."

"Won't you come in?"

Lopez and Francis politely declined, went through all the appropriate motions, smiling and playing the parents while Pete clung to Lopez leg, watching it all with wide eyes, still hopping excitedly. Finally, the door closed, the three of the them made their way to the elevator, and as soon as elevator doors closed Pete flipped his pony tail, pumped his fist and said, "We got those mother fuckers!"

The alarm buzzed. Nick hopped up, walked to the curtains covering the sliding door that led to deck outside their bedroom window and pulled the curtains back, flooding the apartment with light. McNulty groaned, put his pillow over his face.

"Rise and shine!" Nick said.

"No!" McNulty answered. "I want to just sleep all morning."

"Me, too." Nick said, then dug her hands into the bedding, finding McNulty's ribs, tickling him.

"Ahhhh!" McNulty rolled away, giggling, sat up, folding his arms under his breasts. He was wearing a pink nightie. "You are evil!"

"I know," Nick said.

"I don't want to go for this interview today," McNulty said.

"Of course not. Whoever wants to go on a job interview?" Nick disappeared into the bathroom, leaving McNulty sitting on the bed.

Of course, Nick was right. Partially. But also not really. McNulty hadn't gone on a job interview in over 30 years, so that was that, but it was also going on an interview as Ebony, a 20-year-old woman with only a GED. And it was taking another step into living his life – *her* – life. Nick didn't make enough money on her government salary to support the both of them – not in Washington, D.C.-- so unless his identity issues were worked out and he was able to collect his pension, he would need to find work. And so Nick had set him up for an interview for one of the best jobs he could get as a young, mostly uneducated black girl: receptionist.

"You're pretty and you have a sexy phone voice," Nick had said. "That's pretty much the job."

Pretty much the job. But was it also pretty much *him* now? And if it was – should it bother him?

He didn't know, but he knew he needed to go on this interview if for no other reason than to keep Nick off his back, so he climbed out of bed, stretched and went to the kitchen to eat something while Nick used the bathroom.

They did their morning routines. McNulty got on his toes and gave Nick a kiss and a hug as she headed off to work, then he showered, did his makeup and hair, made himself pretty, and grabbing his purse headed nervously out into the city. He always felt a little nervous when he went out alone now – he was so much smaller and more vulnerable than he'd been that he almost felt like a child when he found himself on a crowded sidewalk – everyone seemed so much taller than him now. But he slipped his way through the people, shifting and dodging the bigger, pushier men who would have knocked him over if he didn't, and endured the cold, penetrating gazes of the men who let their eyes sweep up and down his body. Finally, he arrived at the location, an old, Greek revival style marble building. He stood outside nervously, checked his nails – Nick had impressed on him how important it was for him to have perfect nails now – fished his compact out of his purse and checked his hair and make-up. Good. Good. He adjusted the way his breasts were riding in the top of his dress, tugged at the hem, then smiled and walked into the building. The guard at the front desk glanced down at McNulty's breasts, met his eyes and gave him a big smile. "Good morning, young lady."

"Good morning," McNulty said, his nerves making his little voice higher and prettier than usual. "I'm, um, here for an interview?" He put on his pretty smile.

"And who would that be with?" The man said, a slightly condescending tone to his voice that sent a shiver of resentment through McNulty.

"Garvin and Turin," McNulty said, still smiling prettily.

"Take the elevator to the 4th floor."

"Thank you," McNulty said, and as he walked past the desk, his heels clicking on the marble floor, he could feel the man's eyes burning a hole in the back of his dress. *Hmph!* McNulty fumed, but at the same time another thought passed through him, one that was becoming a mantra now that he was a woman: *I guess I'll just have to get used to it.*

As Nick headed to work, she remained largely oblivious to much of what was happening around her. Her mind was mostly on the previous night- how beautiful her girlfriend McNulty had looked, how sweet and charming she'd been, and how confident she, Nicki, had felt as she worked the room. It made so much difference having such a beautiful woman on her arm, and though she'd had attractive girlfriends before, she'd never had one as stunning as McNulty. It had made her feel like such a badass. The movers and shakers had noticed, too. She was sure she'd seen a new respect in their eyes as they reassessed someone they thought they knew. This could advance her career at Homeland Security, or maybe even lead to something more – a run for office? Who could be sure where it would end? Anyway, she needed to get inside and get to work. She was scheduled to meet with her boss, Patty Green, first thing, so they could put together their report on the New York Incidence, as they were calling it now.

A series of unmarked vans rumbled down the street toward the orphanage. Inside, the members of the Barbie Patrol were crammed together, wearing bright yellow hazmat suits, their heads yet uncovered. Pete sat crammed between Francis and Lopez, his arms crossed, his mouth set in an angry frown. "I'm the one who found them!" Pete said.

"Give it a rest," Lopez said.

"I'll stay back," Pete said. "I'll stay out of the way."

"You can't," Francis said. "You know that. You're not a cop."

"Who's going to tell anyone?" Pete said, exasperated. "Are any of you going to say anything?" The pretty men all shook their heads. "See?"

"You can't," Lopez said. "That's it."

"Why not?"

"Are you going to make me say it?" Lopez said. "Is that what you want?"

"Yes. That's what I want."

"Okay. Fine. You can't go because you are just a little girl."

"I'm not!" Pete said. "And you know it!"

"You are," Lopez said. "You're a child. A little girl. It isn't safe."

"He's right, small-fry," Francis said, trying to lighten the mood.

"Don't call me that. There's a grown man in here – with years of training."

"But you are a little girl now – also in the eyes of the law. There are liability...."

"Bullshit!" Pete squealed.

"Liability issues."

The can rattled to a halt. All the Barbie cops pulled on their head gear. The doors to the van opened. "Go! Go! Go!"

"Be good," Lopez said, pulling his hood on.

"Stay put!" Francis added.

And then the van was empty as the cops all rushed out and stormed the orphanage.

Pete ran to the edge of the van, hopped down to the ground and moved to where he could at least watch the Barbie Patrol breaking open the metal gates, rushing into the playground – currently empty, and then fanning out into different groups to rush the building from three sides, with a fourth group staying back to cut off anyone who tried to escape. The hazmat suits were to keep the Brother-Sisters from switching with anyone – and all the cops were armed with tasers and cattle-prods, the belts on their suits festooned with plastic ties so they could hog tie the grown-ups as they subdued them. It was possible, maybe even likely, that not all the adults were Brother-Sisters, but they weren't taking any chances.

Pete would have gone in anyway. He wasn't afraid now – not too much. Not afraid at least of anything other than getting jumped again, put into another strange body, with another new name and life. And so he stayed by the van, hoping nervously as the raid continued. Without him.

President Jackson sat in the back of a limo, staring out the window. His knees were clamped tightly together, his arms crossed defensively over his breasts, which jiggled and bounced every time the limo hit a pothole. His hoops earrings bounced as well, tugging on his ears and brushing against his smooth cheeks. In the limo with him were the two aliens who'd taken on the bodies of his secret service detail. They were taking idly, completely ignoring Jackson. It had been a long time-- a very long time-- since Jackson had been ignored. For so many years-- President of his Frat and eventually the student body president at Princeton, then a job at a law firm where he'd been recruited and treated like a rock star from day one, to his senate run and then the presidency-- he'd been a powerful man, a man people respected and feared.

Now, who was he? What was he? He was still him, and yet to the world he was just some Latina stripper, some whore. Someone expandable, ignorable. How did someone like this girl get what she wanted? Get attention? Other than by showing someone her tits, which he already had vowed he would never do.

He didn't know where they were taking him-- or to who they were taking him. The creatures had been gloating when he first switched, telling him how someone had paid a fortune to take his virginity. But once they'd gotten him in the car, they'd seemed to lose interest in the taunts and mocking, and when he spoke to them they ignored him.

Helpless! I'm helpless! He thought. *And they are taking me to get raped. Again. Raped.*
No. No. But what could he do? He was so small and weak. Helpless. He hated the feeling, hadn't felt anything like this since he'd been a child, and he started to breath quick, short, shallow breaths, his breasts heaving, and tension was building in him, he realized he'd clenched his jaw, was digging his long finger nails into his palms, and then unexpectedly a terrified scream ripped free from his body, louder and more terrifying than he'd even imagined such a little female could ever create-- eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee-- and he covered his ears, freaked out by the sound of his own scream, and started kicking his feet, and he screamed again...
eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee---

"God damnit!" Taylor shouted, covering his own ears.

"Cut that shit out!" Parker yelled..

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE! Jackson was thrashing side to side now, screaming, unable to stop himself or think or really even hear what they were saying to him as some terrible feeling of panic filled his soft little body....

"Shut her up!" The driver shouted back.

"Stupid bitch!" Taylor said. "Shut up!" He tried to grab Jackson, but Jackson raked his nails across the man's forearms, drawing blood, and he pulled back. "Fuck!"

Jackson was freaking now, kicking and waving his hands like claws, screaming, and his foot slammed into Parker's solar plexus, driving the wind out of him and causing him to double over in pain.

Taylor grabbed one of Jackson's legs, an arm.

"No!" Jackson screamed, terrified the man meant to rape him right there in the car. Nooooo!!! He thrashed wildly, and the driver pulled the limo over to the curb and turned, grabbing Jackson's hair and yanking his head back.

Taylor slammed his fist into Jackson's stomach, then again, and Jackson went limp, crying, moaning, holding his belly and curling into a defensive ball.

"Damn it!" Taylor said, rubbing his bleeding arms.

Jackson was still hunched over, gasping.

"Can we tie her up?" The driver said.

"I don't know if we have anything." He turned to Parker. "You okay."

"Will be."

"Well, fucking hold her down or something. I'm going to close the privacy window so she can't fucking attack me."

"Yeah. Yeah."

Taylor's phone rang. He swiped it on. "Yeah?"

Taylor's face went pale. "Oh, shit."

"What is it?" The driver said.

"They're raiding the orphanage."

"Who?"

"I don't know, but the orders are to burrow."

"What the fuck?"

"Yeah."

"What about this bitch?"

"Keep her safe with us."

Jackson, his face hidden by his long hair, heard it all, and sighed with relief. At least for now, he would keep his virginity.

XLVII

Nick was sitting in the lobby outside Patty Green's office, scrolling through her morning emails, when he saw Patty rushing through the office toward the door followed closely by a well-dressed man she didn't recognize. "Patty?" She said. "We meeting?"

"Just wait here," Patty said without slowing down. She slammed through the doors and hurried down the hall without looking back.

"What's going on?" Nick asked her secretary.

She shook her head. "I haven't heard anything."

Just wait here. The order had been clear, but something didn't seem right. Nick went to her phone. Opened up Safari. Nothing on her newsfeed. She looked back at her email. Nothing. On impulse, she decided to check the New York news, and immediately pulled up a news reports from Channel 11. A raid. On an orphanage -- it wouldn't have meant much to the average person, but Nick knew that was the orphanage where former NYPD officer Pete was living. There wasn't much else there, yet, but Nick felt like Patty's hurried exit and the raid had to be connected somehow, so she turned, rushing out the door and down the hall in the direction that Patty had gone, determined to get in on the action.

As she hurried down the hall, he saw Patty and the man crash through the doors to the stairs-- which was weird in and of itself-- and she followed along, getting through the door without making any noise, and then carefully following the two down the stairs, doing her best not to be noticed. Patty hurried down the stairs, slammed her way into the parking garage, and Nick followed, crouching behind cars and watching as Patty and the man jumped into a car, fired it up and then burned their way out of the parking garage, the tires leaving behind the stomach turning stench of melted rubber.

The raid on the orphanage. Patty seeming to be on the run. It all clicked. She'd been jumped. Nick was sure of it. She dialed the deputy director, Jeffrey Sparks. Got his secretary. "Code Omega Seven," Nick said.

A moment later, the deputy director came on the phone, his voice tense. "What's the emergency?"

"What is your Intel ID?" Nick said.

The deputy director recited his number. "What fraternity did you pledge at Harvard, sir?"

"There are no fraternities at Harvard, Carver. What the hell is this with the questions?"

Nick sighed. She didn't have time to do any more tests. "I believe Patty Green has been swapped by the Brother-Sisters and is now on the run, sir."

"Details?"

Nick filled him in on what she'd seen, the news about the raid.

"Something's up. Get a car. Follow her. Do not let her know she's being followed. We should have her on GPS, but just in case. In the meantime, I am going to try and call her. Go!"

"Yes, sir!" Nick hurried over to the fleet of government cars, taking a moment to text McNulty while she hurried along. "Check NY News. Raid!" Then, she used her thumb print to get into the car, start it, and slamming it into gear, hurried from the garage and into the Washington D.C. traffic.

As McNulty's phone started buzzing in his purse, he was just leaving his interview, beaming. They'd loved him and offered him the job on the spot. He felt so proud of himself, and he couldn't wait to tell Nick about, so when his phone buzzed he got all excited thinking maybe Nick had called to ask him how it had gone-- he'd even started to get a little bit of a warm fuzzy feeling in anticipation of realizing Nick was thinking about him, just as he was thinking about Nick, about how close they'd become and... then he saw the message. McNulty instantly felt nervous, anxious. He was a lot more insecure now than he'd been, and he hurried along as fast as he could in his high heels, wanting to get home, off the street, to lock the doors and make sure he

was safe before he checked the news and saw... whatever was happening, but first he tapped out a text to his lover:

"OMG! Be Safe! Come Home!"

And then McNulty hiked his purse up onto his shoulder and skittered toward home.

Ca-THUNK! Pzzzzzt. POW! The concussion grenade detonated and smoke filled the corridor. Lopez and Francis moved forward, and a shadowy shape loomed out of the darkness, tackled Francis, sending him tumbling to the ground with a thud. It was a man, and he was bigger and stronger than Francis, started to claw at his hazmat suit, searching for some way to make a make contact with Francis' flesh, to initiate a change. Lopez stepped up and hit him with the taser, his body twitching spastically, eyes rolling back in his head, and then Francis rolled him over, straddled him and zip-tied his wrists together while Lopez secured his ankles. The two high-fived, and then continued down the hall, where other members of their unit were similarly stunning and capturing anyone they came across.

As they moved down the hall, a large shape came stumbling toward them, arms raised. "Hold On!" he called, coughing. "Hold on!" Slowly he emerged from the smoke, a haggard, familiar face. 'It's me," he said. "McNulty."

"Nice try," Francis said, tasing him. "But McNulty is much prettier than you."

"This *is* McNulty's body," Lopez said as they tied the man.

"I know," Francis said.

They kept moving, making their way forward, and before too long they came to what Pete had called The ROOM. Walking in, they saw them lined up in tubes, just as had been described. Lopez pulled out his phone. "We have located the holding facility. Proceeding to secure the location."

"Copy that," a voice answered.

They moved into the room. "I wonder if we're in here?" Lopez said, looking at the faces.

"Maybe," Francis said. "Stay alert until we're sure the room is clear."

"Okay," Lopez said absently, but he kept looking at all the sleeping faces, recognizing some, just curious about the others. If he was here, his body, this would all be over. He could go back to being himself, and he wouldn't have to think about wanting men anymore, about how to be a woman.

But would he be able to forget it all? Just go back to normal? Was there such a thing as normal? He tried to picture himself, his face, his real face, but instead he saw *her*-- a beautiful young Asian girl looking in the mirror-- but that wasn't his face. His real face. He wasn't her. What did I used to look like? Why can't I remember? Will I even recognize myself if I do see me in one of these tubes?

He didn't see it coming. Something hard and cold crashing against his head. He just felt an explosion of pain, and then he was on the ground looking on as a man tried to charge past Francis, who tased him then jammed his cattle prod into the man's body. He collapsed to the ground, twitching, and Lopez recognized the face. It was Hakeem's face, but something was wrong, he was foaming at the mouth, his eyes were turning dead, glassy. Lopez tried to push himself off the ground, but his head whirled, vertigo hit, and he collapsed back down.

"Take it easy," Francis said, coming to Lopez' side. "Take it easy." He pulled Lopez' Hazmat hood off, looked at the other man's head. "Ouch."

"What is it?" Lopez said, fighting against waves of nausea. "Oh god."

"Big lump," Francis said, getting on the phone. "Officer down," he said. "Officer down."

"My... my face?" Lopez said. "Did?"

"No. No," Francis said, smiling, putting her hand on Lopez' forehead. "Nothing happened to your face. You're just as pretty as always."

Lopez smiled, relieved. "Thank god," he whispered, smiling up at Francis.

"I'll second that," Francis said, smiling back down into the face of the man he loved.

"Ummmmm....?" Lopez said, looking toward the body. "Check him."

"Oh, yeah," Francis said. As soon as he looked at the body, though, he got a very bad feeling. Not willing to risk getting jumped, he kept his gear on, but based on the best examination he could do, he turned back to Lopez, looking sick. "I think he's dead."

"Shit," Lopez said. "Hakeem."

"I know."

Hakeem had been trapped in the body of a blonde girl with milky white skin and freckles. He was a pretty good guy and a great officer, but he had hated white people. Hated them. Lopez worried what might happen when he found out that he might be stuck as a white girl for the rest of his life.

"All clear! All clear!" He heard the men calling out in their soft, pretty voices. It seemed like every quadrant of the holding facility had been secured. The call came in over their phones-- they were going to switch back to regular police bands now-- they had secured the orphanage, and it didn't matter all that much if the Brother-Sisters were listening in on them anymore.

"I think we won this round," Francis said, taking Lopez' hand.

"Go us," Lopez said. "I think I can move...."

"Don't..."

"No, really, I... ow!" Lopez lay back down. "Never mind."

"Just let me take care of you, okay? Stop trying to be such a tough girl."

"Okay," Lopez said softly. "Okay."

Francis stayed with Lopez as the medics loaded him onto a gurney and strapped him down for safety, then led the way as he was wheeled through the orphanage and eventually outside so he could be taken to the hospital for an examination. Pete ducked under the yellow and black police tape that had been strung across the entrance and ran up to the two of them. 'Oh, no!' he shouted. "What happened? Is she okay?"

"He's fine," Francis said. "Just calm down."

Lopez' head had been strapped down, so he could turn to look at Pete, but he called out, "Just a bump on the head."

"You're okay? You're fine?" Pete asked, trying to get close, but one of the medics pushed him back.

"Get this kid back," he barked at Francis.

"Sorry," Francis said, taking Pete by the hand and then, when Pete kept trying to pull away, scooping him up into his arms.

Pete could look down and see Lopez now, and just being able to see his friend's face helped calm his little body. "You look okay," Pete said. "You... what happened?"

"I'll tell you the whole thing in just a sec," Francis said, carrying Pete along as the gurney was loaded into the ambulance. "We'll be along as soon as we can," Francis said.

"Okay," Lopez said. "I'm fine," he repeated, smiling against the pain. "Bring me some ice cream or something."

"We will," Pete said.

The doors to the ambulance slammed shut and Pete hugged Francis. "Is he really okay?"

"Yeah," Francis said, setting Pete down on the ground. "You're getting too big for me to carry!"

"Yeah."

"We saw it all. All the bodies. The aliens. We have it all secured."

Pete nodded. "Good. Finally, we got these fuckers." He frowned, clenched his fists, and Francis had to hide how cute it was to see the little girl he'd become trying to look so tough.

Nick followed Patty's car out of Washington and into, first, the suburbs of Virginia, and then the into the rural mountain region to the north. She felt confident she hadn't been seen, but

as the pursuit moved into the country and traffic thinned, she felt increasingly exposed in her bland government sedan. It was the kind of car that was so nondescript it was suspicious. She'd been in contact with Deputy Director Sparks the whole time, and additional cars were on their way so they could start a rotating tail. They also had GPS as well as satellite. The only fear any of them had was that Patty might swap into someone else and eventually vanish that way....

Shit! Nick thought as she saw Patty's car exit the highway toward a rest stop. If the two of them were Brother-Sisters and were planning to swap, this would be an ideal place to do it. Despite the risk of being spotted, when the exit ramp came she exited, parked in the first spot she could find and then started to move cautiously toward the rest stop itself-- a low brick building that advertised a Burger King, Starbucks, Cinnabon and Visitor's Center as well as restrooms. Trying to keep herself near or among people, she walked along, looking around before finally spotting Patty heading up the stairs to enter the center, but she didn't see the man anywhere.

Nick decided to follow Patty, staying alert, ever watchful. Her phone vibrated in her pocket, and she ignored it, keeping Patty in the periphery of her vision.

McNulty looked at his cell phone. Nothing. Folding his arms under his breasts, he paced back and forth in the kitchen, checked his phone, paced some more, checked his phone again. His mind raced with terrifying scenarios-- Nick's car crashing into a truck, the thud and crunch... Nick on the side of the road, bloody... NO! McNulty shook his head, trying to push the thoughts away, but more came as he saw himself wearing a black dress and veil, sobbing as Nick's coffin

disappeared into the ground... he saw Nick in a wheelchair, eyes dead, drooling... he, the loyal wife, spoon feeding Nick, sacrificing his own happiness for... NO!

He checked his phone. Called Homeland Security. A robot put him on hold. Terrible music, he thought, disconnecting, calling Nick, texting Nick. He paced, the visions of Nick injured or killed once again plaguing him. She's fine, he thought. Fine! She's the strongest woman I've ever know, and--- the images of Nick, dying in a ditch came back to him.... "Damn it! He screamed. "Why do I have to be such a girl about this?" He took a deep breath, put his palms to his cheeks. He knew he needed to do something to take his mind off it all, to distract himself from his worry. He looked at the glittering pots and pans hanging above the stove, saw the line of cookbooks neatly arranged on the shelf above the sink, and pulling one down he opened it to a recipe for banana bread.

Yes, he thought smiling, feeling himself calm. *Yes*. I'll bake something for her. Bake something nice, and surprise her with it when she comes home. He grabbed the apron Nick had bought him from its hook next to the gleaming stainless steel refrigerator and reached back, tying it on. It was pretty-- with pink and yellow roses, and then McNulty fluffed his hair, adjusted his bra strap and started to gather the ingredients to make banana nut bread.

He didn't stop thinking about the brave, handsome woman he loved, the woman who'd asked him to be her wife, he didn't stop worrying, but cooking helped him manage his fear, and it made him happy to feel he was doing something to show Nick how much he loved her.

Patty was heading toward the women's restroom, and Nick followed along, but then out of the corner of her eye, she saw the guy-- the unknown man who'd run out of the building with Patty-- and he was heading toward the Cinnabon where--

--wait--

There. Nick spotted them at a table in the corner past the Cinnabon. Two guys dressed like Secret Service agents. One of them she was pretty sure was a Secret Service agent. Nick veered off and went to the Visitor Center, watching as her mark bought a Cinnabon and then sat down with the two men. She bought herself a cheap pair of sunglasses and a pink Washington Nationals baseball hat, and slipped into her makeshift incognito gear, watching as Patty exited, then one of the Secret Service agents, and then after what looked like a little tiff, the other two, her original mark keeping his still half- eaten cinnabon and picking at it with a plastic fork as the two walked out, and Nick followed, keeping her distance and a crowd of people between she and the marks, who were now all heading out to the parking lot and a government limo.

Nick found a place to watch, wishing she had a cinnabon. They always smelled so good. But--

What's this? She thought as a gorgeous Latina got out of the limo. She looked scared, and one of the men was gripping her arm, tight, as she looked around. The girl precisely fit the profile of the kind of bodies the Brother-Sisters loved to switch men into-- perfect hourglass figure, big breasts, plump ass, pretty face, and Nick fished out her phone, calling her boss, hoping she had come before....

The girl screamed. "Heeelll..."

Immediately, a hand went over her mouth, and the man half pushed, half carried her to Patty's car while the others looked around nervously, forming a screen to keep people from seeing. Nick looked around, too, most of the tourists seemed oblivious, but there was one man, a tall, stocky Latino guy in a Baltimore Ravens sweatshirt, standing next to his car smoking, who looked over, and started to move toward the incident. "Hey!" He shouted. "Hey! What is this?"

Shit! Nick jammed her phone into her pocket, reached for her sidearm.

"Stay out of this!" One of the "agents" yelled, fishing in his coat, awkwardly pulling out his badge wallet, which then fell on the ground.

"Let her go!" The man said, striding purposefully forward. His group had now come out of the rest area, and seeing trouble they moved together, 6 of them, meaty, thick armed guys rushing toward the Patty and her group. The girl had gotten her legs on the sides of the car and was struggling, trying to keep from being pushed inside, so that man was busy, and Patty was helping him, while the other two moved to confront the approaching men.

"We're Federal agents," the one yelled, finally picking up his credentials, flipping them open.

"So that means you're allowed to kidnap someone?" The man yelled.

"Fucking let her go!" One of the other guys yelled.

More people were watching now, looking on, and the agents were getting nervous, looking unsure. Shit, Nick thought, shit. "I am agent Nick Carver of the Department of Homeland Security," Nick shouted, stepping forward, her gun out. "Let go of the girl!"

Everyone froze at the sight of the gun. The rattled Brother-Sisters looked at each other, unsure of what to do, and the president, seeing his chance, kicked hard against the car, causing his head to slam into the Brother Sister's jaw, sending them both crashing to the pavement. Immediately, the president rolled onto his feet and ran toward Nick, his breasts bouncing and swaying.

"Get her!" Patty said, starting toward the president, but Nick fired her gun, hitting Patty in the leg and sending her spinning to the pavement. The other Brother-Sisters went for their guns, and Nick calmly retargeted, but before she fired--

Screeching of tires, sirens! Nick looked up to see two black sedans racing down the ramp toward the parking lot. The Brother Sisters saw it, too.

"Scatter!" Patty yelled. "Scatter!"

The limo lurched forward, still open door swinging wildly, but it was immediately cut off by two cars, and when the driver jumped out he was taken down.

The three men ran toward the Latino guys who'd been yelling at them. One by one, they were grabbed and switched, their bodies dropping to the ground as the men turned and ran back toward the rest area. Agents in hazmat gear swarmed the parking lot now, and even as the Brother Sisters made additional jumps, the agents started to tase people, bringing them down, tying them up, planning to sort out the Brother-Sisters from the regulars later.

President Jackson ran to Nick and then slipped behind her, cowering as all hell broke loose. Patty, the Brother-Sister inside Patty, was dragging herself across the pavement, trying to get back to her car, but an agent came along and tased and then tried her up.

"You okay?" Nick said, turning to the woman.

Jackson looked up at Nick, brushing the hair from his face with a slender hand. "I am, Agent Carver, thanks to you."

Nick nodded, but the pretty little woman reached out her little hand and said, in her tea kettle voice. "I'm Jefferson Davis Jackson, President of the United States."

Nick laughed, then, when the little woman just stared up at her, said, "Seriously?"

"I am very serious." Jackson kept his little hand out.

Nick, looked down into the girl's big, green eyes, ringed with thick, curly lashes, saw the conviction in her eyes, the belief in what she was saying. "Oh, shit. I can't believe, I am so sorry.... sir?"

"It's okay," Jackson said with a bemused smile. "I'm having a hard time believing it myself."

"Okay. So..."

"I am still waiting for you to shake my hand."

"Oh." Nick took the president's soft little hand and gave it a firm shake.

"I don't know who can be trusted right now. Who is who they say they are," the president said, ignoring the sound of his voice, the feeling of his strange body, the weight of his breasts, the strange feeling of the bra straps on his shoulders. "There's an imposter in the White House, Agent Carver. "Do you know anyone you trust absolutely right now?"

"Yes, sir," Nick said. "My boss. I've been in contact with him this whole time. He did-- all this," she said, gesturing to the agents now swarming the parking lot.

"Call him."

XLVIII

Hthrin, the Brother-Sister occupying the body of President Jackson, sat steely eyed as the humans around him delivered a barrage of news that went from bad to worse. It had started in the morning with news of the raid on the orphanage, the capture of the containment facility where his real body and the bodies of all the Brother-Sisters were stored. He'd been ushered into some sort of crisis management center where various vassals had come in and reported and reported and reported. He'd listened, nodded gravely, acted out the mannerisms of the human shape he now wore and whom he had studied for many months. But the news he was really waiting for, the news he hoped for and dreaded depending on the outcome, finally came late in the morning when a fat, slumped shouldered man in an ill-fitting coat had rushed into the room grinning euphorically and shouted "We got the Empress! We got her!"

The room erupted in cheers and shouts.

"Has that been confirmed?" Hthrin said, his human body reacting to the news with a sinking feeling he did not care for.

"We have confirmation," the man said. "She is in custody now and is safely contained."

"That is good news," Hthrin said. "Excellent work everyone. " He needed to get out. To run. Swap bodies and vanish. The plan was ruined, and the priority now became for as many of

them as possible to escape and go underground until they would be able to make another attempt.
But how?

And then an opportunity offered itself. "President Jackson, sir," Nicholas Sparks, Deputy Director of Homeland Security said. "Shouldn't you call world leaders? Inform them of the latest news?"

"Yes," Hthrin said, standing, nodding toward Sparks. "Thank you."

"Your private conference room is ready. Right this way," Sparks said, holding a door open.

Hthrin strode through the door, hiding his smirk, and as he passed through the door he was grabbed by two men in hazmat suits. "Gotchya!" Sparks said.

Hthrin dropped his head. "Damn," he murmured.

"Straight," Sparks answered.

XLIX

Nick came home later that evening, exhausted, and opened the apartment door to be delighted by the warm, comforting smell of fresh baked bread. "Nick!" McNulty said, hurrying from the kitchen and throwing his arms around Nick, kissing her. "I was so worried about you!"

"What's all this, Ebony?" Nick said, looking at the counter where there loaves of bread, cookies, cupcakes, a half frosted cake.

"Oh," McNulty said. "I've got so worried about you I went crazy and started... baking."

"You are adorable," Nick said, kissing her pretty girlfriend.

"I feel kind of ridiculous now," McNulty said. "Who's going to eat all of this?"

"I think I may just smear some of this cake all over your body and eat it off you," Nick said, pinching McNulty's butt.

McNulty giggled and tried to twist free of Nick's arms, but she held him tight and he felt himself getting hot. He loved how strong she was, loved it when she took control. Powerless in her arms, he pressed his breasts against her and kissed her, then said, "You can do whatever you want to me."

Nick led him over to the counter, grabbed the cake, and said, "let's get some sugar on you, sugar."

McNulty laughed again, his laugh high and pretty, and then Nick took him to the bedroom, pushed him onto his back, ripped open his blouse and started to smear frosting on his big, soft breasts. McNulty lay back, smiling up at her, ready to please her in any way she wanted.

Later, they lay in each other's arms. "So is that it?" McNulty asked softly. "Is it over?"

"For now," Nick said, enjoying the feeling of his smooth, soft skin against her body.

"What will happen to the Empress King? To the Brother Sisters?"

"I don't know, babe."

"What if they find my old body? Try to make me go back into it?"

"I won't let them," Nick said.

"I can't go back to being McNulty. I'm not that man anymore. I'd kill myself."

"Hey! Don't ever say that!" Nick said.

"But..."

"No," Nick said. "You are Ebony now. My fiancé. And I am going to protect you. That's it. Okay?"

"Okay," McNulty said. "Okay. I love you."

"I love you, too," Nick said, then let her hand fall to McNulty's breast. She squeezed it, lifted it.

McNulty sighed. He felt so warm and safe. It was good to be her girl.

L

Pete woke up to the smell of pancakes. Sitting up, pushing his hair back from his face, he looked around, confused until he remembered that he'd gone home with Francis and Lopez, slept on their couch. Lopez was in the kitchen wearing a yellow tank top, his hair tied back with a kerchief.

"Pancakes hot off the grill," Lopez chirped, smiling prettily. "You hungry?"

"Starving," Pete said, rubbing the sleep from his eyes and walking over to the table, sitting down.

Lopez placed a plate with two steaming pancakes in front of Pete. There was butter and syrup on the table. "Thanks, mom," Pete said, starting to slather butter onto the stack on

pancakes. Lopez chuckled, and Pete realized what he'd said. "I mean-- omigod that's embarrassing. Lopez."

"No problem, little girl," Lopez said.

"Screw you," Pete said. "How's your head?"

"Fine. Well, it hurts like hell, and they kept me awake all night because they were worried I had a concussion, so I am tired as hell, and I think I'm starting to get my period."

"Gross," Pete said, his mouth now stuffed with sweet, syrup drenched pancake.

"Well, you'll be getting yours on day, missy."

"Maybe. I guess. I mean, what happens now? Do we get our bodies back? I mean, maybe this will all be over?"

"I hope so," Lopez said. "I think."

"You think?" Pete said. "You don't want to be a woman now?"

Lopez shrugged his slender little shoulders. "I don't really know what I want anymore. I almost feel like I'm not sure how to be a man anymore."

"You know what makes me feel better at times like that?" Pete said.

"What?"

"Pancakes."

Lopez giggled, came over to the table with his own set of pancakes and sat down. "To pancakes!"

"To pancakes!" Pete said.

Francis came out, bleary, sat down and said, "Where's mine?"

"In the stove. I put them in there to keep them warm for you," Lopez said.

"Such a thoughtful girlfriend," Francis said, giving Lopez a kiss. "Ummmm. Your lips taste like syrup."

"Yours taste like you need to brush your teeth," Lopez said, scrunching his nose.

Francis found the remote and flipped on the television as he sat down to eat. He was wearing a foam green night gown, and his hair was tied back in a ponytail.

Ll

In huge letters flashing at the bottom of the screen were the words CONSTITUTIONAL CRISES.

Kate O'Hara, the news anchor, was on the screen. "You can't arrest the President of the United States and try and remove him from office because some illegal alien claims he stole her body," O'Hara said. "The woman is clearly disturbed, and the rival party is just using this heading into President Jackson's re-election in an attempt to take back the White House."

"The man in that body is an alien," Senator Caldwell Grant answered.

"Prove it," Kate O'Hara said.

"At this time, well, I can't prove it, but can we..."

"You can't prove it because it isn't true!" O'Hara shouted. "It isn't true, senator."

"I believe that here is sufficient evidence to suggest we at least..."

"I'm you, senator. I am you, and you are really just some little girl from Mexico. Your name is Consuela."

"I'm saying that the president..."

"I just claimed I was you. Step down. Step down, Consuela. Because we can't be sure who you are."

"That's ridiculous."

"Exactly. It is ridiculous, Miss Consuela."

"This interview is over," the senator said, angrily getting up.

"Adios," O'Hara said. "Beuna Serta!"

LII

"Oh my God," Frances Jackson said. "It is you."

"Yes," Jefferson Jackson, rightful President of the United States said. He was wearing one of his wife's track suits-- the legs and sleeves were too long, but it fit tightly over his breasts and ass. His hair was now tied back in a ponytail.

Frances gave the gorgeous woman her husband had been turned into a hug. Brushed his bangs back from his eyes. "I'm so sorry, honey."

"Thanks," Jeff said, looking up at his wife. "I'm sorry I failed you."

"Send Clay in," Jeff said to the secret service agent at the door. The man looked at Frances, and she nodded.

Clay Parsons, the Vice President of the United States, entered the room. It was an office in the Naval Observatory, the official residence of the vice-president.

"Clay," Frances said, looking the man right in the eyes. "I now believe without any doubt whatsoever that this woman is, indeed, my husband."

"You're sure of this?" Clay said.

"Yes."

Clay looked at the beautiful young woman sitting on the couch looking up at him. She had full, soft lips, big, bright eyes and a tiny little upturned nose. Her skin was a perfect, even cinnamon color. She was stunning, and he couldn't help but notice the swell of her generous breasts in her sweat suit. This was President Jackson? It didn't seem possible, and yet even his wife now agreed that he had, in fact, been turned into this girl. "Mr. President," Clay said, holding out his hand.

The girl reached back, her tiny hand so soft and small in his. For a moment he thought-no. This is some weird con, but then the girl smiled and said, "How many times do I have to tell you to call me Jeff?"

Clay chuckled. The line, the cadence was exactly the same, even in that tiny little voice. "Holy shit, sir. That is you."

"Yeah," Jeff said. "It is."

Clay sat down. "We have a serious problem on our hands.... um, should I call you sir?"

"Jeff," the president said, raising a slender eyebrow. The little stud in his nose glittered.

"Oh, yeah. Like you've told me a thousand times before. Well, Jeff, the thing in your body insists he is you, and a lot of people believe him or at least have enough doubt that legally I'm afraid he is going to be able to... live your life."

"We can't have one of those things running this country. He has to be impeached."

"You realize you are talking about *you* being impeached. Or at least it will be you in the eyes of the world."

"Even if you get your body back," Frances said. "You won't be able to go back to serving as president."

"I know," Jackson said. "I know. I've thought about it a lot, and this is what has to be done. We can't have an imposter in the White House."

"But, Jeff," Frances continued. "Your whole life was built around becoming president. it was practically all you talked about since high-school."

"Middle school, actually," Jackson said. "I just didn't meet you until high-school."

"You'd be giving up everything," Frances said.

"It has to be done, and soon," Jeff said. "I don't see any other way."

"Clay?" Frances said.

"This puts me in a strange place because I don't want to seem like I am gunning for the job," Clay said.

"Nobody thinks that," Jeff said.

"But I see more problems. There is no provision in the law for impeachment based on body swap-- if that's the right word for it. It has to be for treason, bribery or..."

"...other high crimes and misdemeanors," Jeff finished. "I know. I went to law school, too."

"So, impeachment isn't an option," Clay said.

Jefferson Jackson reached out and took his wife's hand. "I'll give you the information you need to impeach me," he said. "I have made some poor decisions, and I am sure it will be enough."

"Jefferson, no," Frances said.

"Frances, I don't have any right to ask this of you, but I am not asking for me. I am asking for the country. We have to get that alien out of power."

Frances began crying, and Jefferson started crying as well. Clay shifted around uncomfortably as the two females wept. He'd never known how to handle women's tears. "Okay," Frances said. "Do what you have to do." And then she cupped Jefferson Jackson's chin, tilted his head back and kissed him on the lips. "You're so brave."

Jefferson kissed her back, then lowered his eyes, shyly. "Thank you," he said, again, feeling he could never thank her enough.

"Clay? Let's destroy me."

XLIII: Conclusions

The little girl formerly known as NYPD Officer Pete O'Malley was grinning, jumping rope, his pony tail bobbing around his head.

Charlie Chaplin went to France
To teach the ladies how to dance.

First the heel, then the toe,
Then the splits, and around you go!

Salute to the Captain,
Bow to the Queen,
And turn your back on the submarine!

On the last bit he hopped out as another girl jumped in.

"Anji!" He heard Lopez call from the window of their apartment. "Anji!"

"Coming, Mom!" He yelled. "See ya!" He called to his friends, running home, his cheeks flush.

"Wash your hands and come to dinner," Lopez said as he dished out the food.

"Okay," Pete said.

Lopez watched his little girl bopping along, and smiled. It was hard to believe Anji had ever been a guy, his friend and fellow cop Peter O'Malley. Of course, it was equally hard for him to remember that he'd been a man once as well and not a young, single mother.

He and Pete had been stuck in these bodies for awhile, and they'd decided to make the most of it. Lopez had made official what had been happening anyway, adopting Anji, making her his legal daughter. Now, after all this time, even if the path ever did become clear for them

to get their real bodies back he doubted they would willingly switch back. Francis had found himself a man, moved on, but they were all still friends.

As it was, the government refused to tell them if their bodies had been found or if so whether they would ever even have the option of being switched back. As far as the government was concerned, he was Jade Blossom, and he had no legal claim to the body of Adrian Lopez, just as Pete was now Anji.

McNulty had lived in fear for a time that he might lose his body, especially when Lopez and Francis had told him that they'd found it, but days passed, then weeks, and he married Nick, and now he was pregnant and expecting his first child. He was Ebony now, and he believed he always would be. As far as he was concerned, McNulty was dead.

As for former President Jefferson Davis Jackson?

"Tika? Order up!"

"Kay, Max!" Jeff said, smiling brightly, skating along on his roller skates to grab the plates of food and deliver them to table 5. He was wearing a halter top that hugged his breasts and a pair of super-tight little daisy dukes, and his hair and make-up were perfect.

"Is there anything else I can get for you?" Jefferson asked, smiling brightly at the customers, one hip thrust out to the side. The stud in his nose glittered.

"No, we're good," the guys said.

"Kay! Bye, boys!" Jefferson skated away, feeling their eyes on his ass. Back at the counter, the other waitress was checking her phone. Jefferson fished his out of his hip pocket, the pink jewel case flashing. "Omigod!" He said.

"Like, what?" The other girl, Casey, said.

"Paul sent me a dick pick," he answered, showing the picture to Casey.

"It isn't even that big!" Casey said.

"Guys are such idiots," Jefferson said.

"Send him a picture of your tits," Casey said.

"I can't," Jefferson said. "I'm going to run for office someday."

"You? Why not just marry some rich dude and have his babies?"

"I'm gonna do that, too," Jefferson said with a giggle. "But I'm also going to be president."

"You wanna party tonight, madam president?"

"Can't," Jefferson said. "I have to study!"

"Whatevs!"

Jefferson skated off to check on his customers. It was pretty fun being back in college, and this time as a girl. He was so busy with his classes, his job, cheerleading, student government. Clay had pulled some strings and gotten him a free ride at Princeton, but he worked anyway because it would be a great story to tell when he ran for office. With the way America was changing, being a Latina immigrant who pulled herself up by her own bootstraps was going

to be a great story, and if the law said she couldn't legally be president, really, well, she didn't mind the sound of Tika Araya, first lady.

The End