

# "TO BE OR NOT TO BE"

*By Darlette Davis*



*ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN DUKEHART*

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A 'HER TV' NOVEL

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## “TO BE OR NOT TO BE”

by Darlette Davis

### DENISE

My little call box came alive and it was Marilyn's (my boss's) voice, she is the Chief Associate legal partner of Harding Associates.

“Denise darling, will you be a dear and run and get us some coffee.”

“When you said 'us,' did you mean for both you and me, Miss Roberts?” I replied.

“Yes, and no need to bring your pad when you get back.”

“Wow, 'Miss Bosslady' sounds in a chipper mood this morning,” observed Madge, Mr. Harding's secretary, from her desk facing mine. “You must be in for some kind words or even a raise, though I've never heard of raises following only three months on the job.”

“At least I've never heard of being fired after a request to join your boss for coffee,” I rejoined with a smile.

Minutes later, after being asked to close her door, I was seated opposite my exotic-looking superior, clad in an electric blue dress, her dark hair, as ever, immaculately drawn into a tight flat bun, her lovely face beautifully made-up.

“Tell me honestly, Denise,” she said after taking her first sip, “you've remarked about your enjoyment at being with us, but honestly, is it really working out for you? I mean not just the kind of things you're doing as a secretary, but your whole lifestyle change. You're no longer privately ensconced as a practicing attorney. Instead you're slipping into a skirt and blouse every morning to come here to sit in a crowded office and be at my beck and call. From professional to glorified 'gal Friday,' not to mention the big drop in your income.”

I reflected a moment, knowing there was no simple answer to Marilyn's question, then said, “I have no regrets in doing what I'm doing, Miss Roberts. First, I have a paying job. That's not something I could be sure of a few months ago. Secondly, although I'm still confused about it, I like working as a secretary which I consider professional, depending on my competence. I'm a little bored at times with my life in general, but not when I'm here at the office doing the best I can to help you.”

“Well thank you, my dear, that's sweet of you, and I in turn appreciate having you work for me. Your typing is flawless, your shorthand is becoming very rapid and you seem to quickly fulfill any offhand request I make for anything in the general files as well as our own. So I can confirm that you're already professional in the conduct of your duties.

“Beyond that, it gives me satisfaction that you've fit in so well here, and so unobtrusively. The girls in the outer office who work with you think of you as a little introverted but appreciate the help you give them whenever you have a spare moment. Best of all they seem to have a protective feeling about you meeting the challenges you face every day trying to become one of us.”

“Oh, thank you, Miss Roberts, I've nothing but good vibes working with any of them, and Madge I think has adopted me as her special charge, and I hope as a permanent friend.”

Marilyn frowned through her nod of approval.

“You mentioned being confused about yourself. Care to go into that, dear?”

What was my boss probing for, I wondered. This meeting, I began to feel wasn't called just as a session in mutual admiration.

“Oh nothing serious, Miss Roberts. It's just something I can't put my finger on. I'm doing what I want to do and just love working for you. It's maybe that I'm quite lonely away from work. 'Adrift' might be a better word. Right now, I frankly don't know who I am, almost like I'm a non-person feeling my identity only in the recognition of others.”

As Marilyn made no attempt at agreement or rebuttal I went on.

“I don't feel sick anymore from my medication, but I guess I still haven't gotten over my divorce. I haven't even had a date since then. To be truthful, I wouldn't know what to date, let alone who to date,” I blurted out, facing a truth about my current self for the first time.

If Marilyn caught this final observation she decided to let it pass, instead observing, “You know, Denise, for some time you've been quite passable, but I've wondered, as others who have spoken to me have, why you've never experimented with clothes and make-up. And you know, that lack of interest seems to be reflected in your very careful, subdued manner about the office. You give the impression you're not at all enjoying your new life, and your clothing and get-up seem to emphasize that.”

Warming to her theme, she continued.

“You're too young, barely thirty, to be seen every day, without a touch of color on your face and wearing one of those two or three things you have, almost carbon copies, the long, dark skirt, the plain blouse, the severe jacket. And that straight, squared-off 'Dutch boy' haircut, my dear. It almost seems like you should be wearing high-button shoes, but those patent leather flats are a reasonable facsimile.

“Now, don't get me wrong, darling,” she added, possibly noting a stricken expression on my face, “none of this detracts one whit from your exceptional performance and value here. Maybe I should be quiet and thankful you're not suffering the distractions which a more attention getting appearance might induce. I can hear Desmond asking me why I'm voicing thoughts that might divert you from your unstinting attention to your job.”

Despite Marilyn's disclaimer, I felt defensive.

"I'm just following Ruth's advice, Miss Roberts. She has told me again and again that for the first year at least, until I confirm a final decision about myself, I should maintain as low a profile as possible."

"In fact, her drama friend, Mildred, who I started taking behavior modification lessons from while I was still with my former employer, agrees with her one hundred percent.

"Their consensus seems to be that there's time enough to decide the woman I want to be and look like when I'm sure I'm on the right track basically. In the meantime I should maintain a subdued voice, avoid any unnecessary motion, movement or expression, dress conservatively and keep myself away from any situations where I can get hurt. Not physically, but emotionally where I've been pretty scratched up by insensitive people, not so much lately, thank goodness, as the medication and experience become more of a protective factor."

Marilyn's lips were pursed, as if she was not overly impressed.

"That was fine for your first week or two here," she observed, "but you knew we had already accepted you by then, and you like what you're doing, so what's the problem of meeting your emerging self halfway? You've made your commitment, at least for the next year, so why do you still appear to be fighting it? I think that may be at the bottom of your confusion, your loneliness and apparent arm's length relationship with your new self.

"You have a trim figure, not exactly womanly but one certain models would not object to having. Plus you have the kind of regular features that would benefit from the use of make-up," pursued Marilyn. "With your possibilities you just can't be determined to be the plain-looking Jane you are right now, like some of the sad-eyed frumps I've known."

I struggled to hide my hurt over Marilyn's merciless caricature.

"I'd love to listen to any ideas you might have for helping me with these problems, Miss Roberts," I primly responded as she paused, looking at me expectantly. "I agree with your feeling that my waiting passively for some heavenly inspiration at the end of a year or two probably isn't going to help me be a little more content with who I am now."

Marilyn smiled, probably pleased with my acquiescence to involving herself so bluntly in my personal affairs. "Tell you what, Denise," she said, turning to address her desk work in her typical "end of conversation" mode, "Why don't you make it over to my place, say about 6:00 this evening. There we can relax a little, have a drink and something light for supper while we try to figure how you can find some more positive enjoyment out of the success you're having with us. We don't want to lose you to the outside world either as your new or former self."

**MARILYN**  
**(Chief Associate Partner of Harding and Associates)**

Driving home, I suddenly realized I was enthusiastically looking forward to my evening with Denise. Not only did I feel I could work wonders with his confusion concerning my new identity, I realized I could at the same time both enjoy myself and solve a nagging problem of my own.

I fell to reflecting on the strange series of events that had led to my fortuitous employment of Denise.

Madge had been the key to the process, starting when we had taken our usual vacation trip together a few months ago.

I had been talking to her of my concern having to look for a new secretary to replace my invaluable Colleen, recently resigned to leave town with her transferred husband. Jokingly I had asked Marge if she knew of a clone of herself over whom I might hire. I added that I'd steal the original without a second thought if she wasn't an executive secretary reporting directly to our head honcho and firm president, Desmond Harding.

"I think I've got someone better for you," Madge had answered, "someone with top skills and who will also bring a law degree with her. Also I think you'll be intrigued with the interesting transition going on with my candidate."

"What transition and what lawyer wants to work as a legal secretary these days?" I had responded.

"Well hold onto your hat, my darling," Madge had replied with a playful nudge, "my candidate is a guy who's been learning to live as a female outside of work hours while polishing her secretarial skills, taking behavior lessons and champing at the bit for any work opportunity except with her present employer, which she feels would be a little much too handle.

"She'd start as a file clerk but I think you could make a lot out of her beyond what she'd bring to the table as a secretary, utilizing her experience in patent law."

"How did you hear about this poor creature, and is there any possibility he looks like anything but a freak?" I had inquired, somewhat mystified, repelled; yet, intrigued by the possibility of employing a male who aspired to be a woman.

Madge had then related to me at length the story of David as told to her by her friend Ruth.

It seems David had been hired a few years ago by her firm primarily to do a load of patent work in connection with a new breakthrough in the art of flock-coating. Since its discovery fifty years ago, this process had been limited to the manufacture of artificial suede, but was now thought by Ruth's Director of Research to be subject to amazing, patentable changes enabling a variety of softer finishes which could revolutionize the clothing and carpet industries. Unfortunately, the changes while occasionally demonstrable in the lab, continued to frustrate all attempts to reduce them to a mass production capability.

"Ergo," Madge had said, "Ruth tells me the company either has to let David go, or get him to temporarily fill in his time doing other things."

Madge had gone on to relate how two important events had transpired to focus David's attention on a drastic redirection of his life.

His intensive efforts to find other employment had hit a blind wall, recently revealed in the Wall Street Journal and other periodicals, that mid-career lawyers were a drug on the market as law firms were retrenching and hiring only newly-minted graduates.

Secondly, even though he'd had to take a drastic cut in pay, he'd surprisingly taken a genuine liking to performing secretarial type duties, which had turned out to be his "march-in-place" assignments at the company.

Ruth had been personally put in charge of training him so that his typing, filing and shorthand skills were honed to perfection. As a result, he was turning out to be the perfect fill-in for every girl on secretarial row.

The upshot was Ruth's selling David on the idea of becoming a legal secretary to continue to use his experience and maximize his earnings. When he'd finally swallowed that, she fed him some drinks one night and after getting him to climb into a blouse and skirt "for the fun of it," induced him to agree to experiment, in privacy with her, living as a woman so his opportunities for career employment might be expanded by a factor of a hundred or so.

She used the "Tootsie" scenario about adapting a sex to fit the career need and persuaded him with the help of her friend Mildred that with his face, all he'd need was some estrogen treatment and mannerism training to pass as a female.

The rest had been downhill, both for David and ourselves. Madge had interviewed him at length over dinner at Ruth's twice and while out together at a restaurant to see how Denise acted in public and was reacted to by others.

With a promise that I would meet with David, now to be called "Denise," for luncheon upon our arrival home, I told my dear friend I couldn't wait to see and at least chat with a real live transsexual, if not hire my new legal "gofer".

## **DENISE**

I was admitted to my boss's apartment promptly at 6:00.

She looked stunning as usual, dressed in a yellow, silken floor-length hostess gown, her lustrous hair combed out to fall upon her shoulders.

"Come in, Denise, and keep on going down the hall and to your left. I thought we'd waste no time doing a little revision in your appearance as a basis for continuing our afternoon discussion. You might take off your blouse and skirt, and shoes and stockings for that matter. Wait for me while I get us something to drink to help you through what's coming next."

I entered what appeared to be Marilyn's bedroom where over a chair I saw the blue dress she'd worn during the day and what looked like a blonde wig.

Upon her return I had divested myself of my outer clothing and was greeted by her astonished remark, "For goodness sake, Denise, what are you doing wearing jockey shorts to go with that little bra? Now there's a combination that Vogue has never featured, I'm sure.

“Here,” she walked over to open a bureau drawer to pull out a pair of pantyhose. “Go into the bathroom and put on these in place of those shorts. They’ll give you all the support you need and you can then be a thorough little lady from the skin out.”

“I assume you’re going to dress me in a manner you feel will be more becoming than the garments I had on today,” I said softly, not knowing whether to be resentful, oblivious or happy with Marilyn’s well-meaning rudeness effecting my change of attire.

“Exactly dear, so what we’ll be doing right now I hope you’ll comply with, saving your reaction till later. Then it’s your decision whether to adopt my ideas, or that’s the end of it, and you can crawl back into your protective wallflower cocoon. Agreed, dear girl?”

“Of course, Miss Roberts, I had an idea something like this would be occurring tonight and I’m willing to give you my full cooperation.”

Within a few moments I found myself slipping reasonably well into Marilyn’s blue dress, being fitted with the blonde wig, and finally forcing myself inside a pair of open-toed pumps which were at least three sizes too small for me.

“There now, that’s step number one,” pronounced Marilyn as she brushed away at the wig, finally observing that she had the curls arranged as she wanted them. “Already I see the real Denise emerging, honey. Now I want you to sit down over there while we do a little work on your face.”

With that, she had me in a chair to one side of the stool at her dressing table while she alternately worked with powder, lipstick, blusher and assorted pencils and sponges, talking to herself how this color was right and that one wasn’t, while telling me that “we’d” have to do something “drastic” about my eyebrows, among other “improvements”.

Concluding her soliloquy, she decided, “All that can await another time while we limit ourselves to the general picture tonight.

“Now just a minute while I get the blue earrings and some things to brighten your wrists and neck. There now.”

Marilyn stood up, “swing your chair around so you can take a good look at what a cute secretary ought to look like.”

After thirty seconds during which I was engaged in an awed scrutiny, Marilyn leaned down to place her face next to mine, her hands busily fastening the clip-ons, bracelets and necklace. Finished with this handiwork, she turned to buss my cheek, saying, “that little idiot smile on your face tells me all I need to know, ‘babykins’. You like it, don’t you? Here, stand up and take a good look at your full length image in the mirror over there.”

Indeed I liked what I saw a lot while becoming embarrassingly aware that I was hardening beneath my pantyhose as I stood to haltingly walk toward the longer mirror.

The skirt hem and heels were keeping me from making my normal stride, my physical reaction was forcing a projection in my dress and my heart was beating uncomfortably, but I couldn’t stop my smile.



All I could do was reach out for Marilyn's hand, taking her with me to gawk at the distracting stranger returning my wondering glance from behind the looking glass.

“Well, what do you say, 'Miss Tongue-tied'?” queried Marilyn. “I didn't get you all gussied up to make you lose your voice, sweetie. You can admit to Mommy you love the way you look. I won't tell a soul. Now tell me, what's your reaction?”

“I feel awful, no, I mean excited, oh, I don't know, something I've never felt before. Talk about mixed emotions!”

Why was my thinking so tangled up, so irrational, I wondered.

Continuing, I said, “I guess I should just thank you, Miss Roberts, and sort my tangled feelings out when I get back to earth. I should say this though, if you want me this way at the office, I'm just going to die. I'll feel everyone's staring at me and I don't know how I'm going to concentrate on my work.”

“That's easy,” said Marilyn breezily, squeezing my hand, “we don't have mirrors sitting on our word processors or file cabinets, so how you look is everyone else's problem, not yours. You're just going to need to be distracted only when you do yourself in the morning and refresh your make-up in the ladies' lounge during the day. After a while, like with everything else, you're going to get used to it. Now let's get away from admiring yourself while we finish our drinks and see what I've got going for supper.”

While I helped Marilyn get things ready and on the table, it was as if we'd done nothing but pass the time of day over our drinks, and even eating supper, she'd divided discussion among subjects one might talk about with a fellow passenger on a plane. No mention of business or the unexpected trauma I had been put through following my arrival.

Afterwards, I cleared while Marilyn loaded the dishwasher, and after pouring us what she announced was a tummy-settling creme de menthe, she invited me to be seated with her in the living room.

“Now back to our assignment for tonight, 'babykins'. Incidentally, not to worry, I'll never use that expression in the office, but it does fit your big blue eyes with that make-up I loaded you up with. And by the way, I think we'll have you go bright blonde, that wig becomes you so.

“Now let's start on the other phase of our operation for tonight. First, though, please comment on this assumption: You love the way you look when dressed as you are right now and you would like to appear that way every day. Am I hot, warm or cold?” she asked with a knowing smile and a toss of her dark tresses.

Again I felt the inane, causeless grin spreading my features.

“I never knew I could look this way and worse, I never knew I could get so pumped up looking at myself this way. I just hope I can get used to it, but, no offense, I'm afraid I have to say you're very hot, Miss Roberts. I just wish I could afford going around looking this ridiculous.”

“All right, Denise, and since I noticed you earlier quietly indicating to me with your remaining symbol of manhood that you enjoy what I've done to you, I have the solution to your becoming the new you full-time. It will also help me out with a problem.”

Marilyn then went on to describe how she currently was without housekeeping assistance, her weekly maid service having gone out of business.

“If you like, Denise, you can be my new part-time maid, say spending your Saturdays working here.

“There's a lady I used to have that did a terrific job; but, who had to quit when her husband didn't want her doing such demeaning work. I can have her in here this coming Saturday to give you a complete training course after which you can decide whether cleaning, dusting, laundering as well as occasional serving maid duties are for you.

“In return, I'll be your beauty advisor and shopping aide, helping you learn to dress exquisitely, show you all the make-up tricks plus pay you the same generous fee my maid service was charging me.

“That way, you can build your new wardrobe a little bit each week, so in six months you can quit if you like and have a wardrobe any fashionable young lady would envy.

“Oh, oh,” she added as she waited my reaction, “that appreciative look on that brand-new baby-doll face of yours tells me I just hired myself a brand-new maid.”

**RUTH**  
**(A Secretary at L.P. Franklin, Inc.)**

It started out as a very bad day indeed. Parker Craig, Director of Research (and my boss) for L.P. Franklin, Inc. had called me into his office first thing and without so much as a good morning, he had launched into a summary of the previous evening's emergency executive meeting.

“Two major events were announced, significantly affecting the Company, Ruth, and particularly certain individuals including you and me.

“First, the bad news, we're doing even worse financially than anyone thought, meaning further personnel cutbacks. Secondly, one ray of light comes as good news, but I could kick myself for not keeping David around, at least to have told him how I planned to make his future secure so he'd stay with us.

“In short, Abe seems to think he's about ready to have us file some intricate flock-coating patents. He's now getting ten out of ten perfect lab results and sees the light beyond the tunnel on adapting his process to mass production. He wants David back on the double. So, where is he?”

I had seen it coming eventually, so my answer was matter of fact.

“Your guess is as good as mine, Parker. He was looking, as you might have surmised, and he just dropped out of sight one day. I've heard nothing from him since.”

“But he was living with you right after his divorce, wasn't he, and he told me more than once that you were totally responsible for his fine secretarial performance in doing his temporary fill-in duties. I had no idea he was about to quit. Where's his wife, anyway? She might know.”

I had that one down too.

“According to David, she gave up the apartment soon after their breakup and as far as he knew, she went back to her hometown, wherever that is.”

“I could never understand that sudden divorce, Ruth. We’d had them over to our place for dinner a month before they split and two closer lovebirds I’ve never seen before.”

“Well, go figure, but here's what we're looking at now. I'm going to have to give you up, probably permanently. It'll not be just for a few months, as was the case when I asked you to train David to temporarily take your place while you bided your time at your old job in Stitching.

“So now that's all I've got for you unless you come up with some way of finding David. In that case I think I could arrange it so I can share you with your typing up of his output.

“Otherwise under the secretarial cutback, we so-called big wheels have to share one secretary between each two of us. There's no other slot open for Betty so I'm slated to share her with Oscar Cohan. One possibility I'm looking at would be to help me, although not you, is to hire a secretary with strong patent and preferably paralegal experience. Then she could dig into David's old notes, thank God they're voluminous, then try to perform his work plus report exclusively to me so I wouldn't have to share girls with Oscar.

“God, how I wish I’d told David what I had in mind for him, but you kept telling me you had to train him a bit more before turning him over to me and returning to your old job for a while.”

“Yes,” I sighed, I hoped convincingly, “and I feel partly responsible, never telling him your plan as you had requested me to, until I felt he was ready to be released to you.”

“Ruth, that's water over the dam, and no fault of yours. You just did as you were told. Now, to face grim reality, they need you over at Number Three in two weeks, or they'll have to hire someone else, so as of that date, you'll be leaving me and I'll have to be using Betty, pending my luck in finding a girl with heavy patent background.”

Following that parting shot, I wasn't able to keep my mind on my work the rest of the day wondering how I could solve this sudden worst case scenario. If only I had played it straight, I would be coming back from Stitching now to resume my secretarial career instead of leaving it for good. Something extraordinary just had to occur for me to salvage my situation.

As soon as I got home I was on the phone with Mildred.

“What do you mean, 'How's David?’” Mildred asked crossly. “You're the one responsible for the creation of 'Denise.' If you'd kept in touch you'd be amazed. I've been meaning to call you. Our original colorless character is now the 'new' Denise. She's divinely happy, loves her job, and if you passed her on the street, you wouldn't know her.

“Get this, her hair has grown, she wears it in curls and almost shoulder length. What's more, she's practically a peroxide blonde. And the make-up! She looks like a model for Revlon and in fact, she would qualify, I'm sure.

“Anyway, the rest of her get-up just complements the bright new features and hair. The last training visit she wore a tight satin blouse miniskirt and was managing on three inch heels as if she'd worn them all her life.”

“Oh, that's even worse than I thought, Mildred,” I mourned aloud. “It sounds like he's made a full commitment. That so-called friend of mine, Madge, or possibly his immediate boss, Marilyn, must have reverted to a doll dressing girlhood, or decided to become Pygmalion. Whatever, I'm still in deep trouble and I don't see that development as making it anything else but more difficult.”

“There, there, Ruth, things can't be that bad. Unload on me. I'm sure we can come up with something.”

“OK, to be blunt, dear, I'm out of my job in two weeks, back to that horrible stitching plant. I never told you, but that's where I was supposed to go temporarily to make way for David being Parker's male secretary till the Patent job was needed again.

“As you know, I was responsible for his steno training. So when I had to go and be a dog in the manger and keep telling Parker David wasn't ready, at the same time, with your expert assistance, making it so he'd never be ready. Now I'm paid back by having to be stuck in the Stitching hen house for good. Do you think I'm horrible, as well as unlucky?”

“Well, Ruth, your behavior is shocking, but not unlike you. You were always good at looking out for number one.

“But, as for Denise, I wouldn't waste any time worrying how you ruined his career. I'll bet if he knew about the current situation, he'd be thinking a lot about whether he really wanted to return to where he was. He'd know it would probably mean giving up his emerging boobs and make-up kit, and I think that would give him more than a pause or two.”

“I've got to somehow involve him, Mildred, 'cause now he's my lifeline,” I responded. “There must be a way but I can't see what it is. I've been constantly on the verge of calling him, but I think in doing so I'd just dig my grave a little deeper.”

“I really don't see that it would hurt, Ruth. Why isn't it worth a chance where in getting him back, you might be able to continue with Parker?”

“That's the way I tried to think about it,” I agreed, wearily. “But there's a few major problems I've already recognized that keeps me from lifting the phone. One, David's alienation when he realizes the big trick I've played on him, and spills how I led him down the garden path.

“Secondly, and even worse, Parker might not only not want me working for him, he might have me canned from the company itself either for my obvious duplicity, or for his having to share someone else's girl.

“Thirdly, and most likely I fear, when he got over his shock, he would probably find Denise the ideal answer to his situation, a two-for-one package deal no less. He gets

both Denise as his exclusive secretary and the former David as a sharp, experienced patent attorney.

“There's probably other reasons, but any one of those are sufficient to eliminate me for good. Shoot, I thought I'd feel better talking to you, but I'm starting to feel really miserable,” I admitted, feeling the tears which had come and gone during the day spewing forth in earnest.

“Oh, please try to be less woebegone, Ruth,” Mildred broke in. “While you were talking, the germ of an interesting idea popped into my head that would benefit both Denise and your boss, and if handled right, just might salvage your secretarial career.”

“But right now I have a couple of students waiting, and I want to mull over my thoughts so you won't think it's half-baked. Are you free for dinner tonight, and if so, how about Barcotti's about seven? I can run my little script past you over cocktails.”

## **DENISE**

Ruth, my dear friend from L.P. Franklin Inc., had called me the previous day to make an appointment with Marilyn, and I had been summoned to the reception area to escort her to my boss's office. I wondered how warmly she would greet me as I had not heard from her in several months and I in turn had hesitated trying to see her with my appearance so radically different from what she had planned for me.

It turned out I had wasted my concern.

“Oh, Denise, it is Denise, isn't it? You look just darling, exactly as Mildred described you. I love you blonde, and you look just lovely all dolled-up.”

“Thank you, Ruth, and you look fabulous yourself, so radiant,” and I meant it.

Ruth was not given to smiling and lavishing compliments as she now seemed to be doing quite honestly.

“I'm sure we'll have a chance to visit before I leave, dear,” she said as I showed her into Marilyn's office after which I was asked to close the door on their privacy.

An hour later, my call box informed me I was to come into the office.

“Oh, I just can't believe how yummy you look, Denise,” observed Ruth as I came through the door. “Marilyn takes some credit for the transformation, but I guess neither of us foresaw how make-up and smart dressing would produce not only a little cute, but have such a dramatic effect on your demeanor. Marilyn's been telling me you've become positively vivacious. I've always admired your personal qualities as David, darling, but 'vivacious' was the last one I would have attributed to you.”

“Now don't lay it on too thickly,” Marilyn admonished her, “or 'Miss Dollface' will become just impossible to live with.”

Then turning to me she added, “Ruth comes to us with a great proposition, Denise, that would involve you directly.” With a nod and a wave to Ruth she said, “You have the floor, Madame.”

“Well dear, I'll let your boss run over the details with you later but here are the essentials.

“The Company, or rather Dr. Mendes, or I guess you knew him as Abe, has announced he wants us to apply for several patents on his new flock-coating process which he claims is just about perfected. A week ago he came to Mr. Craig with the suggestion he get in touch with you immediately.”

“Oh, they want me back?” I asked eagerly. As both women seemed to be waiting for the other to speak, I continued, “I think I understand your hesitation. It means dispensing with Denise, doesn't it? A company as old-fashioned as L. P. Franklin, Inc. would take bankruptcy before hiring a guy all made-up and swishing around in a dress and heels.”

As both women started to object, I rushed ahead, anxious to allay Ruth's fears. “No, I don't want to put them through that. Therefore, I'm prepared to fall on my sword if necessary to help Franklin out, that is, if I'm not leaving Marilyn in the lurch.”

I suddenly had thought of how my boss had lately been so complimentary of my work, telling me how she never knew how she had gotten along without me in the past. The perfect combination of secretary and maid, and all her very own creation.

“No, Denise,” protested Marilyn, “I wouldn't stand in your way for one second if you could go back.”

“Now c'mon you two. Marilyn already knows that you don't have to bother your pretty blonde head about giving up your skirts and nylons to return to drab suit and tie, Denise. I had tried, Lord knows how hard I tried, to persuade them to let me find you. I felt so guilty that I had led you into turning to hormones and behavioral training with Mildred so you could be transformed into a female secretary,” Ruth observed. “However, after all that effort, I was finally told not to bother because there's no way the Company will take you back. It's not at all over the fact that you've come to enjoy painting your face and tripping around in a mini-dress. That never came out, because I supposedly still don't know where you had gone. No, it's all to do with my having to leave the company without notice, and what's worse, supposedly without reason, or any way of contacting you.

“Also, Mr. Craig was very hurt at the way you disappeared; but, he wasn't the main problem. Mr. Big, Mr. Crabtree, President of L. P. Franklin, Inc., that is, said that from the day you left, he had decided your male self would never work for anyone let alone us as a patent attorney again if he had anything to do with it. He doesn't know about the new you.”

I sat back, relaxed, surprised at my relief that my days of enjoyment observing the development of my rounded body and firm breasts were not about to suddenly end.

Marilyn broke in. “Yes I was so sorry when Ruth told me of her company's strict refusal to consider your re-employment, Denise. But what Ruth will tell you is that she has sold them on a way of using you without their knowing it.”

“Exactly, Marilyn,” continued Ruth. “With your rehiring out of the question, I redoubled my efforts to see if we could somehow work with you. I so wanted to make amends for having been unwittingly instrumental in bringing about your permanent banishment.

“Then suddenly I came up with the ideal solution and that was to bring about the retaining of Marilyn's firm to tend to the professional aspects of Abe's patent work. And my plan ensures everybody wins. Marilyn's firm will make more on an hourly basis than it ever did, and the beauty part from our standpoint is that the Company will actually save a bundle of money while still having a full-time patent attorney.

“L. P. Franklin, Inc. is actually in a temporary cash-flow bind, so by having me do all the running around and clerical work, I proved it will be cheaper for them to retain a law firm specializing in patent law than to try to do patents in-house.”

“And we, darling, are the law firm specializing in patent law, I just found out,” interjected Marilyn with a merry laugh.

“Yes, get used to it, girls, you're the best law firm in town for our particular needs. Do I lie, Denise, with you selected to perform the assignment? By the way, there's all your notes sitting on Marilyn's desk so you won't be picking up having to rely on some vague recollections.”

“Yes, Denise,” Marilyn explained, “Ruth has asked me to look them over to get familiar with their contents, followed by your intensively briefing me through the end of this week. You'll also develop a preliminary presentation I will make to their board next Monday.”

“Assuming we're allowed to take a crack at submitting a proposal for handling the project, Ruth and I will spend some time with Dr. Mendes, then throw the ball in your lap.”

“Neither Ruth nor I see how we can fail to get the entire contract. They've proved they can recognize good work when they see it, and they're going to be amazed at the uncanny way top quality patent work is going to seamlessly continue for them, just as though you'd never left them.”

**MADGE**  
**(Chief Secretary at the law firm of Harding and Associates)**

For the past several weeks there had been quite a bit of abnormal activity involving Marilyn's office. Denise was frequently absent from her desk working either in our library or away from the premises altogether while two of the other secretaries had been pressed into part-time service to handle Marilyn's routine work. I gathered from them and remarks from Denise herself, that Marilyn was engaged in a substantial project involving patents, a type of legal work I'd never known us to handle. What patent requests came through to us through our regular clientele I was used to seeing farmed out to a small firm across town that specialized in that kind of work.

While I was happy for our people to be so busy in a new kind of legal activity, I was not at all comfortable with what I recognized was a growing coziness in the relationship between Denise and Marilyn.

Without prying, which is so unlike me, it seemed that Denise was not only doing some kind of personal work for Marilyn on weekends, but I sensed from what one or

the other said occasionally, that there were evening meals together, not entirely social of course, when they would be working late together.

Although I pride myself on being an objective person, the fact was I had come to feel some personal concern. Except for our still frequent lunches together, Marilyn had three times rebuffed my efforts to make an evening or weekend date with her. We had been more than friends for two or three years prior to Denise's employment and I sensed our special relationship was becoming unraveled.

Unexpectedly, I discovered a course of action promising to dampen the growing intimacy between my two friends without hurting either one, while promising potential new business for the firm. It occurred one morning after I'd been taking dictation from Desmond Harding, Chief partner of Harding Associates, for a full hour, and he sat back to relax and chat.

"Madge, I'm as pleased as punch that Denise has fit in so well here and is doing such a bang-up job. She is certainly becoming a very attractive womanly person too. Confidentially," he went on with a rueful smirk, "I find myself reacting to her as I normally would to an attractive young girl. I almost had to suppress a whistle once or twice as I've watched her sashay around the office. I swear, I'd never know she wasn't the real thing, would you?"

"Well, literally speaking, Desmond, I still see her just as a cute young man who passes as a surprisingly fetching female. But I know, as I look across at her when she wears one of those low-cut blouses of hers, her developing cleavage is probably the envy of some of our less-endowed girls. But yes, the mannerisms, the speech, even her softening flesh, the hips filling out, I can see where a man might find himself taken with her."

"I think part of it is in her manner, too," I continued. "She seems so happy, at times almost giddy, as only some of we females can be, just going about her routine steno tasks. But I don't see her half the time anymore. Is she still performing secretarial work when she's out of the office?"

"That's the research she's doing at the city library. As you know, Denise is a former patent attorney with L. C. Franklin."

"And you also know your friend Ruth. One day when I think you were out, she came to Marilyn asking if she'd like to do some patent work for them, knowing, as their former P.A., Denise would ace it."

"The proviso was that Denise would be kept under wraps because the Company was still terribly upset that, as David, he had left them without notice or forwarding address. As a result, Ruth told Marilyn, Denise wouldn't be subject to rehiring even if they knew where he was, let alone that he's now a 'she.'"

This is when the bulb lit up showing me a lovely way to start cooling the Marilyn-Denise relationship, happily for me, positively for Denise, but best of all to help the firm.

"Really, Desmond, I think that's just marvelous. And, you know, it's always seemed a shame we couldn't capitalize on her talents. Denise used to remark to me that while she just loved looking forward to becoming a completed woman, she missed patent



work dreadfully. Makes me wonder if we're not wasting an invaluable asset in not promoting her to the attorney level."

"That's an interesting thought, Madge, but there's no way we would have enough for her to do. The law we involve ourselves with is a long way from the patent specialty."

"But I was just thinking, Des, there's work we turn away from time to time involving patents and I think if our business clients were to know we had an expert on our staff, we'd learn of a lot of patent needs we don't even hear about because it's known we don't want that type of assignment."

"Good for you, Madge," exclaimed Desmond. "It's ideas like that which set you apart from the other secretaries. Take this on as a project, will you? Contact the others over the next few days and have them get an estimate from their bosses as to whether and why they think we should have a patent attorney in our firm. Marilyn's current project isn't going to last another year, but her work would cover Denise's keep until we can get patent work flowing in from other sources."

"I'll get right on that, Sir. But how will Marilyn get her other work done with Denise no longer available?"

"Oh, come on, my dear, that's the least of our problems. She'll probably welcome a brand new girl who can work full-time on her regular stuff. I can hear her thanking me now," he chortled.

Yes, I thought as I got up, *Marilyn's just going to love giving up her pet doll*. But Desmond would have to face that when it comes. In the meantime, I was looking forward to starting my little survey, especially knowing ahead of time exactly how it was going to turn out.

Then, as I sat down to spend the rest of the day with my boss's dictation, another delicious idea crossed my mind to advance my boss's interests still further. Pretty far out, I had to admit, but if the right moment presented itself, I would be more than ready.

As if on cue, I got a call that evening from Pamela.

## **DENISE**

It had been over a year since I had joined Harding and Associates and my life had settled into a pleasant routine. "Pleasant" may not be the word, as I was happier than I had ever been before, greatly due, of course, to living my life in "buttons and bows and peek-a-boo clothes."

Although I was earning less than one-third my original salary at Franklin, I had almost all I could want, and far more than I might have dreamed of a couple of years ago.

Thanks to my maid's chores, I had acquired a sizable wardrobe of ladies-wear and I never tired of rising each morning to don lingerie, do my face, comb out my curls, slip into my heels and zip myself into a tight, colorful dress, all while looking forward to another day as one of the girls along secretary row.