

ROLE MODEL

By Audrey Taylor



ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN DUKEHART

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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ROLE MODEL

By Audrey Taylor

I felt good preparing the recommended shoe buy for Mrs. Grippe, carefully evaluating sales and existing inventory for each style. After sweating through senior year and graduating from Walden High last June, I was enjoying my first full time job at 'Fashion Heels & Soles', diligently working on this important purchasing project.

It had to be completed by Monday morning as Mrs. Grippe had several appointments with salesmen later in the week. I'd already stayed late on Thursday and Friday and it still looked like Sunday would be needed to get it done.

There goes my apartment hunting, delayed again.

Not that living with Mom wasn't okay, she was super. It's just that I was a normal eighteen year old guy, crazy about my girlfriend Ellen and wanted my own pad really badly, you know what I mean.

I walked to the rear of the store listening to the click of my heels (Mrs. Grippe insisted I wear them at work. 'You must get the feel of the products we sell.'). The nylons felt slinky on my legs as I carefully checked our stock in one of the more popular styles. I was thankful for my own pants and shirt, which hid the garter belt I wore to keep my stockings taut ('heels need stockings,' she'd dismissed my inquiry). I was past my initial difficulties with the 3" heels, not realizing how much my posture and stride had changed to accommodate the unusual balance they required.

Mom came in looking for me for lunch and talked idly with Mrs. Grippe while I got ready.

"I'm starved," I said, switching to flats (no way I wore heels to lunch) and told Mrs. Grippe I'd be back in an hour.

Mom held my arm possessively, as we walked the three blocks to the Crescent Diner discussing our plans for the balance of the weekend. As we strolled together, we looked so much like sisters, my resemblance to her came through for all to see. People were always saying, "You're certainly your mother's child," ever since I could remember.

Growing up under Mom's influence, with no males around, my masculinity had suffered considerably. At school most of the kids just avoided me, thinking me eccentric. Except for my friend Ellen, thank God for her, because without Ellen I probably wouldn't have survived. Now she was going off to college, leaving early next week. I was going to miss her big time.

At school she was always sticking up for me, explaining how my father had died in a car accident when I was only three and how there hadn't been another man to identify with.

Strange, how my mother had never remarried, in fact I couldn't remember her ever being out with a man. She'd always shrug off my question with a smile, "What do I need a man for? I've got you."

She certainly enjoyed and seemed to prefer the company of her lady friends, especially Alice. It wasn't until later that I learned of the woman who'd almost died alongside my father and how they'd been out drinking and carousing around together earlier that evening. And that hadn't been the first time either.

Mom ordered salads for us cautioning me, "You know Evelyn (my middle name from my grandmother, which Mom used exclusively), you've been putting on some weight lately (constantly on my back). Your waistline will disappear if you're not careful."

So what, I thought, I'm a guy and guys don't worry about their waistlines. I'm concerned about developing my pectorals.

"It's only a couple of pounds and I'm still growing you know." Unfortunately my height hadn't changed in two years (only 5'4"). I was long overdue for a growth spurt, only I didn't realize at the time the direction my next growth spurt would be taking.

Mom looked at me smiling, "Darling, it's a few pounds here and a few pounds there and suddenly your clothes don't fit. Trust me, watch what you eat next week and the excess weight will disappear."

"But Mom, I only weigh 135. How can you call that excessive and besides I'm joining a gym next week so I can get into shape like you." I admired her trim figure. She did regular exercising every morning to keep in top shape.

"Why don't you try aerobics with me in the morning," she suggested for the umpteenth time. "It works. You can join me tomorrow and we'll see whether you can keep up with me," she challenged.

"Tomorrow's Sunday Mom, my only day off, and you want me to get up at seven and jump around to your weird aerobic music." I looked at her incredulously, "Do I look nuts?"

Her immediate embarrassment brought a deep flush to her cheeks. "Hey, you can't hide your inadequacies behind silly words. I can see you'd prefer to remain a blob, so I won't mention it ever again."

"I'm sorry Mom." That's great, now I'm insulting her. I could do her stupid exercises no sweat, I thought to myself, it's the getting up so early that's the problem. My mind rambled on as we strolled back to 'Fashion Heels & Soles'.

"Don't forget I'm going to the ballet tonight, so plan an early dinner, okay? See you later darling," she said, continuing on to her doctor's appointment for a checkup.

I returned to my shoe project with intensity, hoping to disturb my Sunday as little as possible.

Chapter 2

“How'd it go?” I asked as Mom came in the front door. She was disheveled and sat down heavily into a kitchen chair watching me prepare dinner. I was frying flounder.

“Evelyn, stop for a minute and sit down. I have something important to tell you.” She was deadpan serious.

“Just a minute Mom,” the fish was ready so I removed it from the pan and sat down opposite her at the table.

“I got bad news today from Doctor Farrell. She's not certain but she thinks I may have leukemia. She took a series of tests and should have the results back by Tuesday. I knew the pains I've been having could be trouble.”

I stood up and looked in her eyes trying to fully comprehend. “How serious is leukemia?” I managed from my dry mouth.

“It could be real trouble. I'm still in shock. Here I am, supposedly in excellent shape, and suddenly this doctor's telling me I have a serious blood disorder. The pains I've been having in my back and thighs are certainly real enough. When the test results are in on Tuesday we can decide what has to be done.” Color was returning to her face. Talking with me had been a calming influence.

It was sinking in, “How do they treat this disorder?”

“I'm not sure darling,” she came over to me putting her arm around my shoulder. “We hardly discussed it, preferring to wait until it's confirmed or not. Come on, let's have dinner. If you don't mind I'd rather skip the ballet tonight and tag along with you and Ellen to the movies.”

“Of course Mom,” I smiled wondering at her change in plans. “We always love your company.”

“I'll call Alice to let her know. Evelyn, let's keep this between us girls (she was always referring to me as one of the girls), until I'm certain. No need upsetting the others unnecessarily.”

“No problem Mom,” I assured her watching her call Alice. Dinner was on the table when she hung up and we both ate in peace and quiet, lost in our own thoughts. I couldn't help but wonder how debilitating it would be, concerned about her business. She was the owner and only worker of a small, yet highly successful women's active wear store ‘The Active Woman’, located directly under our apartment.

She also owned our building, actually a portion of the building which was part of a small shopping center. The center called ‘Women's Corner’, was appropriately named, exclusively catering to the needs of the female sex. The other three store owners were in partnership with Mom.

They were all professional business women, Mrs. Sandra Grippe being one of them, whose shoe store I was currently employed at. There was also Ms. Alice Stevens, a wispy blonde in her mid thirties whom I've had a secret crush on since I was eight. Her dress shop, ‘Dress Your Best’, offered quite a variety of ladies casual wear and even had a small formal gowns area. And then there was Ms. Marilyn Black the oldest

in the group, whose hair was always pulled severely back into a bun. She was a stickler for appearances, constantly reminding me to comb my hair or straighten out my shirt or something, whenever she saw me. She ran 'Corsets For All', specializing in foundation garments, ladies underwear and sleepwear.

Is it any wonder, growing up in this environment had played a significant role in my appreciation of things feminine? My mother's close relationship with these woman had helped her overcome the tragic loss of my father. They'd also assisted with my upbringing providing the close family unit, including Alice who I daydreamed about all the time. She usually wore corsets outlining her magnificent figure (a real knockout) and I stopped quite often by her shop on any pretense I could dream up just to catch a glimpse of her. My girlfriend Ellen knew nothing of my obsession. No one did.

During my teenage years I often helped out at the stores, earning extra pocket money either taking inventories, doing window trimming or running errands. Over the years I'd gotten pretty friendly with many of the customers.

My mother loved to explore any interest I had in ladies wear and at times I'd probably tried on just about every type of garment known to womankind. Maybe now you can understand why I wasn't objecting to the garter belt, stockings and heels required for the new job. It was just no big deal.

In fact I left the stockings on, only changing to a fresh pair of panties (worn them ever since Ms. Black gave me a dozen in multicolors for my eleventh birthday) and shirt and pants for the movies. My new slacks, a gift from Mom had the zipper on the side and the soft gray cashmere sweater was a hand-me-down Mom didn't want anymore. "There's still plenty of wear left in it," she said putting it in my drawer. This happened pretty regularly. My drawers were filled with her castoffs, her insisting they were unisex enough for me to wear. I felt Mom's presence when I wore them and Ellen never seemed to mind. She'd also gotten some of the hand-me-downs over the years and frequently borrowed things of mine she liked, balking only when I occasionally tried borrowing her things.

Ellen thought I looked great when she saw me, greeting me with a solid kiss before we left for the movies.

Ellen asked why I was feeling down. I just squeezed her hand telling her it was nothing. She was so tuned in to me.

The three of us were frightened silly by the horror movie we saw and their screams almost deafened me. They squeezed my arms black and blue and sometimes hid in my shoulder. Afterwards we stopped for ice cream and then slowly walked home. When we parted I told Ellen I'd call her tomorrow. Hopefully I'd have the project completed early so we could spend some time together. It was okay with her, she was fully absorbed with getting last minute things needed for school.

Mom came to my room to say good night and gave me a crushing hug, expressing her deep love for me. We were so close. I felt her soft breasts squash against me filling me chest with adoration for her. I lay awake quite a while remembering all our good times together and how wonderful she was. This threat had better be nothing I almost yelled out. She was too important to me.

Chapter 3

Sunday went by all too quickly and the project wasn't completed until five o'clock. Mom had actually gotten me up before 7:00 A.M. determined to get me involved in her workout routine. Boy was I sweating and sore in the shower afterwards.

Mom had gone away all day on a trip with the girls to an art museum. I called Ellen and we arranged to meet at Frank's Pub for dinner, one of our favorite hangouts.

Putting a tight pair of jeans over my garter belt and stockings left my feet vulnerable to Ellen, who loved playing with my nylon clad toes. My beige blouse was a cast-off of Mom's which Ellen and I both liked, and matched the beige flats I had picked up just last week at the Fashion Heels sale. They were kind of unisex I told myself, liking how they came off easily under the table or in the movies and then slid back on with no trouble.

I'd put in my fanciest earring, a dangling silver crescent Ellen had gotten me for my last birthday. She teased me about wearing the matching one in my other ear, thinking it such a waste. I told her she was crazy and I'd rotate them so they'd both get some wear.

She had on her yummy yellow dress which barely reached mid thigh and showed off her figure to perfection. We greeted each other with a warm hug, then found our usual table in the back where we enjoyed the music, and each other in relative privacy.

Over soup we played footsie and she told me about the new clothes she'd gotten that afternoon. While we got messy with the spare rib dinners, I almost told her about my mother, but hesitated remembering Mom's wish, 'keep it between us girls'. All too soon we were slowly walking toward Ellen's house enjoying the evening air.

"Ted, I'm going to miss you so much," Ellen groaned. By the way that's my first name, which I've had trouble responding to ever since school ended. I was Evelyn all day long to everyone in the store and around the house. No one else used Ted. "These past four years have been so wonderful and I hope you won't forget me when I'm gone."

"How could you think that?" I exclaimed.

"Well you happen to be my best friend and lover and I'm afraid other people will discover how really wonderful you are and steal you away from me, while I'm gone. I keep having these nightmares that you're wearing an enticing evening gown and are pulled away from me by a handsome man when I turn away for a moment. The nightmares are really strange. They leaves me sitting up in a cold sweat, wondering how I'm going to handle not being able to see you." She stopped and kissed me holding my head so I couldn't pull away, like I wanted to. She was so aggressive sometimes.

I looked in her eyes, "Stop worrying El, I'll write you all the time. I've been dreading this too, all summer. I know it's going to be tough, but we'll make it. I love you too much."

We kissed again deeply, separating only after noticing several people walk by with broad smiles on their faces. We reached her house and reluctantly parted, both dreading next Wednesday when she was leaving for school. My legs were aching as I walked home thinking that Mom expected me to join her at aerobics again tomorrow morning.

I was already missing Ellen. Maybe Alice could somehow jump out of my fantasies into real life to take her place.

Chapter 4

Mrs. Grippe was impressed with my proposal. I had recommended purchasing quantities by color and size for all the styles she currently carried. "I can see I'll have to bring you to the buying show in November, to help me select the styles for next season. I'd also like you to sit in on the salesmen's presentations this week and offer your opinions when I ask for them. Okay?"

I felt good, "Sure Mrs. Grippe."

"That's another thing Evelyn," she placed her hand on my arm. "I'd appreciate it if you'd call me Sandy from now on. You're no longer a child. You've matured so nicely and have certainly proven yourself capable of handling our relationship on more familiar grounds." She was squeezing my arm affectionately.

"Thanks Mrs. Grippe, eh, I mean Sandy. It's going to take some getting used to." I smiled trying to excuse myself, "I wanted to put the Posner shoes into stock before lunch."

She nodded and released my arm. She moved toward a customer in need of assistance while I went to unpack the recently arrived shipment.

Sandy, that's a new step. She'd been Mrs. Grippe my entire life. I wonder what ever happened to Mr. Grippe.

I filled in the back room stock carefully sitting down several times to rest my weary feet from the new 3 1/2" heels Sandy had me wearing. She constantly got me into new styles, wanting to give me the experience so I could make recommendations to the customers. My legs felt weary having gone through morning exercises with my slave driver Mom. Between the heels and the aerobics I wasn't sure I'd survive.

The customers were accustomed to me in heels, no one ever seemed to mention it. It made me taller, nothing wrong with that. I often wore them home since it was only a few doors down.

Mom commented on my height, meeting me at the front door.

"My legs are killing me," I complained.

"My day was pretty bad too, my backache and cramps didn't let up," she countered. "Can you fill in for me tomorrow afternoon when I go to the doctor at 2:00 o'clock. Check with Sandy in the morning, okay sweetheart?"

"Sure Mom. Why don't you go lie down awhile and I'll make dinner," I offered.

"Thanks hon, that's a great idea. Maybe I'll take a short nap. How about 7:00 P.M. for dinner," she watched me nod my approval and wearily trudged off to her bedroom.

Feelings of apprehension overwhelmed me watching her in pain, knowing she'd never needed naps before. Hopefully rest would help and I kicked off my heels stretching out my weary feet in front of the evening news.

Later we both enjoyed the chicken fricassee and Caesar's salad and she informed me she was thinking of hiring an assistant. Business had improved and she was having difficulty keeping up with it.

“Maybe I can help when it's not busy at the shoe store,” I suggested.

“That's an interesting idea. I'll talk to Sandy about it and see if we can work something out. It would certainly save me a lot of training time.” She beamed at me, “You're such a marvelous son. I'm so proud of you.”

Later in bed I prayed that tomorrow would bring good news, finally falling into another restless sleep.

Chapter 5

Mom walked into 'The Active Woman' about 4:00 o'clock looking like disaster. I locked up early and followed her upstairs.

I sat down at the kitchen table while she made tea for us.

Her hands were shaking. She came over and hugged me and started crying on my shoulder. "It's worse than I expected," she said as I felt her tears wetting my neck. I cried too. "Come let's sit in the couch and I'll try to explain it."

When we settled down with her arm around my shoulder she blurted out, "I'm dying Evelyn. I've got this damn disease and I've only got maybe three months to live."

I felt a shudder run through my whole body.

"It can't be Mama," I cried.

"It's true. The tests confirmed this stupid disease is eating away at my bone marrow and can't be stopped. It's definitely the cause of my pain and the doctor's given me strong medication to relieve it. She wants you to come with me tomorrow morning, so she can talk to us together and answer all our questions. I'm going to ask Alice to come too so she can fully understand the situation."

I sat there numb. She was talking but I couldn't understand anything she was saying. There had to be a mistake. We'd all go to sleep tonight, and everything would be fine in the morning. I felt her helping me undress (how did we get in my bedroom), helping me into one of her nightgowns (I loved their feeling of security) and tucking me in with a kiss as a gentle smile crossed her pale face. I lay there in shock until sleep gratefully claimed me.

Chapter 6

Mom's gentle touch on my shoulder told me aerobics was beginning in ten minutes. She loaned me a warm-up outfit I'd always liked and we jumped together to the routine for over forty minutes, leaving me sweating profusely at the end. We showered together, something we hadn't done in a long time, but it seemed so natural when she came in the shower with me to wash my back.

She still had a beautiful shape in spite of this disease eating away at her. Her full breasts hardly sagged and her narrow waist curved out to her firm hips and her bottom cheeks, still attractively round and full. Her breast brushed my arm while she gently lifted my hair from my eyes and asked me to soap her back thoroughly. I did a good job.

I enjoyed emulating how she dressed, putting on my panties and garter belt and smoothing my nylons over my legs so the seams were straight and wrinkle free. Aside from her bra, we were dressed alike in black slacks and cashmere sweaters and when we looked at ourselves in the mirror we smiled. She put my gold earring in for me, which matched hers. She added a slight hint of eye liner and mascara to my eyes. We wore matching three inch heels heading out to the kitchen for breakfast.

I loved looking like Mom, losing myself in admiration for her. We'd dressed alike several times in the past, but not recently, my involvement with Ellen had taken higher priority. This morning I needed to feel close to Mom.

Alice knocked on the door and walked in. "Evelyn, you look scrumptious. Where's Mom?" she asked.

"In the kitchen," and you look pretty scrumptious yourself I thought as I poured her a cup of coffee. "We have to be at the doctor's by 9:00. Have you eaten?"

"I grabbed something earlier. This coffee is just what I need," she walked into the kitchen giving Mom a big hug. We sat around sipping coffee, Alice mentioning that the other girls (Sandy and Marilyn) were not opening either this morning, wanting to be with us at the doctor's office instead. Mom got choked up immediately, nodding her consent, so Alice called them, letting them know the appointment was for 9:00. Numbness returned as I realized my nightmare was still on.

Entering the doctor's office we met Sandy and Marilyn, each of them embracing Mom and me. When they hugged me, each of them whispered compliments about my appearance even as they offered to help with whatever I needed.

We all trailed into the doctor's inner office a few moments later, circling around her desk as we were introduced.

The doctor smiled, how much I looked like my Mom's. Then she got down to business, "I hope you all understand that Loretta has an illness that is spreading swiftly and unfortunately there's no effective treatment to stop it. It's attacking her bone marrow and causing a shortage of red blood cells. This is starving her body of oxygen and significantly reducing her energy levels. Soon she'll be unable to handle her regular daily routine."

She looked at me, “Evelyn, your mother's form of leukemia is particularly virulent, depleting her energy very quickly. She probably won't be able to manage her shop for too much longer, and she'll need assistance as soon as possible. I'm counting on you and her close friends,” she glanced at the others, “to help make this as comfortable as possible for her. She'll have pain killers to help her sleep comfortably which must be taken regularly to be effective.”

She looked at the whole group again, “It's important you all stick together through this. Loretta's fortunate to have such devoted friends to help her through this difficult time. She and her son will need your support. Enough said, does anyone have any questions?”

The group was tongue-tied with shock.

Marilyn finally broke the ice, “Isn't there anything that can be done to stop the progression. Chemotherapy, radiation, anything?” she almost pleaded.

“No, Ms. Black, I've gone over it thoroughly with Loretta. This type of leukemia resists all current treatments. It's unfortunate but they would only cause her further discomfort and have no effect on this disease. It's progressed too far for any surgical options. The best we can do now is make her as comfortable as possible.

“I've already suggested she make her important decisions as soon as possible, definitely in the next several weeks. Loretta will be seeing me every week to be sure she's getting everything she needs. If there's any further way I can help please let me know immediately.”

The doctor left a short time later.

The stunned group filed out deciding to visit at our house for a while. Alice made coffee and we sat around discussing the decisions Mom had to make. Marilyn said she'd arrange a meeting with her lawyer posthaste.

Soon Marilyn and Sandy decided to open their stores. Sandy told me to spend time with Mom and not worry about my job, she'd handle things herself for a while. Alice left soon after that leaving Mom and I alone. Mom suggested we open the shop so she could begin showing me her regular routine. That way I could fill in when she started to slow down.

As we walked into the store and turned on the lights it dawned on me that Ellen was leaving for school that morning and I hadn't spoken to her. Quickly calling I learned that she'd left an hour earlier. I'd have to write and tell her the awful news.

Mom asked me to put on some lipstick and even suggested I wear a bra so my image would be complete. Looking half and half wouldn't do, if this was going to work. She put some realistic breast forms in the bra cups and I admired the curves in my sweater. With my fluffed out hair (it was always long) I passed easily, as the mirror confirmed.

A customer came in and I watched how Mom handled her, listening carefully to her suggestions and comments. I had much to learn. I'd never really paid close attention to the details of the clothes, like the type of material, the sizing and all the little things

that went into a woman's clothing purchase. All this I had to learn, while simultaneously dealing with the loss of the most important person in my life.

Chapter 7

I couldn't believe it was already Friday and I was getting ready to close up. What a hectic week. Mom had been carefully teaching me everything about women's athletic clothes and about running the business. She was upstairs resting at the moment, feeling comfortable enough to leave me alone for the last few hours. My appearance had improved a lot during the week (the mirror kept reminding me). Last night she'd worked on my hair, creating a style similar to hers, before we went to bed.

We were spending so much time together. Ellen was gone and I was deeply involved with 'The Active Woman'. We talked a lot about what I would do with my future. Mom encouraged me to dress in her clothes, helping me improve my feminine image, feeling it was necessary if I was going to be at all effective in the store.

She actually seemed to be enjoying herself and I didn't have the heart to utter one complaint. Did it really make any difference? Even when I had to shave my legs because of the dress I wore on Thursday. Then last night she helped me depilate my whole body before showering. I watched all my hair disappear down the drain. It was not an unpleasant feeling, just made me feel more naked than before. The clothes felt different. I was more aware of the textures against my smooth skin, especially my underarms and rear end. I was sensitive to cold.

The girls suggested I might want to continue running the business for awhile, offering to help with anything I needed. They were getting together later for their regular bridge night and had invited me to participate for the first time. I'd gone with Mom frequently when I was younger.

The corset I wore (Ms. Black brought it over last night) still made it difficult for me to breathe and I'd had all day to get used to it. It certainly gave me feminine curves. Mom laughed when Marilyn told me that my figure needed reshaping and I should be wearing one every day until I had accomplished it.

Big laugh. They were starting to go overboard.

Mom's smile, when she saw my improved appearance, melted my resistance like butter. She'd oohed and aahed this morning delighting in my new curves, deaf to my complaints of breathing difficulties and restricted movements. "You'll get used to it darling," she had reassured me, "just give it a chance." How long did she think this would go on?

Walking upstairs after locking up, I took off my shoes so as not to wake her, anticipating her being asleep on the living room couch. I went to change into something more comfortable but couldn't loosen the corset by myself so I threw a housecoat over it and went to prepare dinner.

Mom walked in on me a little while later as I was sitting at the kitchen table, "The delightful smells woke me. You sure know how to disturb a nap," she said playfully, feeling good from her rest. "How was business this afternoon? Any better? It's really fallen off lately. I think word of my illness has gotten out and people are avoiding me.

It makes them uncomfortable. I'll discuss it with the girls later and see if they have any suggestions.”

“Mrs. Henderson bought that cute lavender outfit for a tennis party she's going to tomorrow night,” I gave her the good news. “And Joanne Cooper picked out a pair of running shoes which she asked me to hold for her until tomorrow. I sold some swim accessories and Margaret, you know the top heavy waitress from Pharaoh's, was looking for a sports bra to help contain her charms for a new aerobics class she joined at the 'Y'. Said she'd be back tomorrow. I think she needed your opinion before she made her decision. That's about it.”

“Good. That rest sure did me good. I'm getting tired so quickly. I don't know how long I'll be able to continue our aerobics in the morning sweetheart.”

“Just when I'm starting to get the hang of it. You know, I've already lost those extra pounds you mentioned to me last weekend. It's sure helping my leg muscles contend with the strain of high heels every day. For the life of me, I don't understand why women put up with them. There should be a revolution against high heeled shoes. I'd better not let Sandy hear me.”

I served us tea, while dinner was cooking.

“Bridge is at Marilyn's later,” Mom reminded me. “I'll help you get ready as you've never really worn this type of clothing before. It's usually a lot of fun. By the way, I'll rotate with you so you get a chance to play and I can get some rest periods. It's a good thing you've always been interested in the game. That's the reason the girls thought you'd be a natural fill-in.”

During dinner she discussed each of the women and their individual styles of playing bridge. After we cleaned up, she helped me into one of her long dresses that almost touched the floor even with my heels on and fit snugly over the corset that was locked in place. You can bet, I certainly hadn't eaten much for dinner. She fixed my hair and make-up commenting again about having my other ear pierced to complete the picture. This step I gently but persistently resisted, feeling the permanence of it.

We stood admiring ourselves in the mirror. It felt wonderful seeing my image match so closely with Mom's, and we hugged before putting on light sweaters for the walk over to Marilyn's. Having the corset and the boobs in place certainly changed the feeling of a hug, and I wondered, not for the first time, what it would feel like to have real breasts to squash into others during hugs. I didn't know at the time that my questions would soon be answered.

The girls were all there when we arrived and each said something nice about my appearance as I too complimented them on their similarly elegant appearance. Their custom of dressing completely in old fashioned styles from the eighteenth century was known to me, but this was the first time I was a participant. This included stiff-boned corsets, high collared necklines, skirts to the floor, elegant jewelry and sophisticated hairdos. Make-up was unusually heavy, almost to a fault. Each of them sometime during the evening commented on my missing earring while I simply smiled, politely disregarding them.

While the game went on, the women discussed Mom's situation, offering their assistance with my female image, so I could handle the customers more comfortably. They didn't even ask, just assumed I'd go along with it. Mom gave me a look that told me we'd talk later and not to make a fuss about it now.

Alice even suggested we talk to Dr. Farrell, that she might be inclined to give me female hormones to help me adjust temporarily to the new role. "It must be difficult acting like a woman and dealing with them all day long, without having a true understanding of the feminine perspective," she was dripping with sympathy. To tell you the truth it was hard understanding their problems, like today with Margaret seeking a sport bra for added support during aerobics.

But hormones, wasn't that a bit drastic.

I listened intently struggling to hold my tongue, while fantasizing of making love to Alice who was enchanting in her beautifully flowery dress. Her breasts looked magnificent. I had difficulty keeping my attention on my cards and the bidding. She was easily the most beautiful woman I'd ever encountered, including Ellen who was really quite attractive but hardly approached Alice's level.

The game broke up about 10:30, as we all had to work in the morning. We parted with kisses and hugs, with me feeling a new level of acceptance into their intriguing world. I was now on a first name basis with each of them, and was enjoying the camaraderie of the group. They were very supportive.

When Mom helped remove my corset I almost collapsed with relief, filling my lungs with air as never before. As we went to bed she came over and kissed me, whispering in my ear that I was the most wonderful son in the whole wide world. She sat beside me, "Evelyn, I need to ask you a big favor. The girl's need to feel they are helping in some way. If they can help with your adjustment, make you more convincing as a woman, they'll be helping to relieve my anxiety of leaving you alone in the store. Can you understand that?"

I nodded, "I think so Mom."

"Good. It won't be for long and then you can decide for yourself what's best for your future. These friends have been so close to me, I regret leaving them almost as much as leaving you. I hope you can appreciate their feelings and find the patience to deal with their interest without struggling. They're very much involved with your well being."

She hugged me and suddenly she was overcome with pain, rushing to find her medicine. Later I lay awake trying to digest all the dynamics of the situation, wondering where I was heading and wishing only for my mother's suffering to go away.

Chapter 8

On Tuesday I got dressed carefully as we were going to the doctor's that morning and I wanted to look my best. Alice was also coming, while the other two were meeting with the lawyers to handle some legal matters that had to be taken care of. The doctor had us wait, so I mailed a letter to Ellen in a mailbox down the block I'd spotted when we came in.

I apologized for not seeing her off and fully explained about my mother's illness and how it was absorbing so much of my time and energy. I told her of my involvement in running 'The Active Women', skipping over the necessity for my feminine appearance. I ignored it figuring it was only temporary until I resolved what to do with the store. I hoped she was enjoying school and asked her to write soon as I missed her very much.

The doctor examined Mom while Alice and I waited. Then we joined them in her inside office. Unfortunately there was nothing good to report about Mom's condition.

Then she turned and looked at me, "Evelyn, the girls came to talk to me this past week. They suggested I might be of assistance to you with your handling of your mother's business by giving you some female hormone therapy."

They'd really done it, gone and talked to the doctor. I could hardly believe my ears.

She was continuing, "It would only produce secondary female characteristics that would disappear fairly quickly once you discontinued the therapy. You'd be under my strict supervision. Judging by your appearance, you are showing definite signs of wanting to identify with your mother which is really quite normal under the circumstances. It must be some job for you to masquerade as a woman in order to run her woman's active wear store, without really understanding their perspective about things. I don't envy you.

"If you'd like to try it, you can come inside and I'll give you your first injection. You can see how you react to it and can stop it whenever you want to," she concluded looking for my response.

I looked at Mom who said it was entirely up to me, and then at Alice who thought it might help with my appearance. How do you say no to your fantasy girl. I watched her face break into a smile as I said I'd give it a try. I followed the doctor back into an examining room.

She had me lift my skirt and lower my panties while she prepared the injection. "It's a mixture of estrogen and progesterone which will begin to change the hormonal balance in your body. You'll take a weekly shot and some tablets on a daily basis which will eventually shift the hormonal balance in your body and adjust your perspective on life to that of a female. I'll be carefully watching the effect it has and expect you to tell me immediately if you encounter any problems. Expect to have an upset stomach and cramping for the next few days which is a normal initial reaction to this therapy. Any questions?"

"I guess not. If I want to, I can stop at any time, right?" I said feeling her swab my smooth cheek and insert the needle.

“Absolutely,” she assured me, feeling the hormones enter my system as she pushed the plunger in all the way. What was I getting myself into now? I knew someone had to take care of the business. It made sense, didn't it?

I pulled up my panties, soothing the sore spot with my thumb and followed her back to the office. Mom and Alice smiled at my frowning face when I returned. Several minutes later the doctor gave Mom her pain medication and handed me a small container labeled 'Evelyn Astor - one tablet at each meal - three times daily'. It was signed Dr. Susan Farrell and dated today. I guess I'd soon be looking more like Mom. Not such a bad thing.

We stopped for a sandwich on the way home, and on the spur of the moment decided to catch a movie, some romantic thriller playing at the multiplex. It was a pleasant surprise. It looked like our shops might not open today.

I sat between the two of them and was delighted by Alice grasping my arm and leaning into it with her breast, making it impossible to pay attention to the movie. Mom wasn't much better, leaning close to my other side and I almost jumped when I felt a hand caress my nyloned thigh. Alice was causing a monstrous bump to grow in my skirt. I took a quick peek her way, seeing her looking straight ahead obviously engrossed in the movie. I knew better, as my excitement mounted from her probing fingers.

Soon she was stroking and holding my erection through my panties, having pushed my skirt aside, and suddenly I lost all control exploding wildly into my panties while she held on firmly. Unbelievable. Mom must have felt it. She was firmly latched on to my other arm, yet hadn't spoken a word. My groans had been so loud that Alice had leaned over quickly kissing me to absorb the sound. Her lipstick and tongue tasted delicious while her hand kept squeezing me, causing me to lose all sense of where I was. Fantasy meets reality.

When our lips finally separated, I missed her slyly winking at Mom as I slowly returned to earth. Her breast still rested firmly against me and I leaned into it allowing her to pull my hand to her lap. I explored her marvelous thigh slowly running my fingers along the inside where her nylon ended and her soft flesh began. This was pure ecstasy and I wondered if Mom knew what was happening and whether I'd have a big stain on my skirt from my soaked panties. I looked down for a moment noticing my skirt was back to it's proper position. I hadn't even felt it's return.

A steamy make out scene on the screen had Alice moving closer to me. I could also feel Mom squirming in her seat as she held my other arm possessively. Was this really happening?

Suddenly Alice slouched down in her seat bringing my fingers into direct contact with her moist pantied crotch. I pressed the nylon into her quivering vagina feeling my fingers get sticky. Her excitement invaded my nostrils causing a new reaction to start in my own panties. Moving her panties aside I entered her wet and inviting cavern, while her nibbling at my neck and ear were driving me crazy. I felt Mom tugging on my other arm almost like an anchor. Thank God the movie was almost empty and we were way on the side in the back.

Alice suddenly bit my neck, groaning deeply as she pushed up hard against my penetrating finger squeezing herself to me.

“Oh Evelyn, you're too much,” she whispered a moment later, before tonguing my ear out thoroughly causing a shiver down my spine. Mom asked if I was cold. I smiled at her “Not really,” but she still held my hand possessively in both of hers slowly caressing it. I couldn't believe my arousal, feeling it pulsating in my panties. Alice grabbed for me again and then the movie ended, catching all three of us totally un-awares and forcing us to quickly straighten ourselves out before the house lights came on.

“How can they make these movies so short,” Mom expressed her annoyance. “It's hardly worth the stupid prices they charge.”

I smiled, feeling a similar frustration as Alice's hand left so abruptly.

We stopped at the ladies room which gave me a chance to clean up a little. I could hear Alice and Mom whispering and giggling while I was in the cubicle. Alice put on fresh lipstick and then touched me up before we continued on our way home. I was completely mesmerized by her attention.

She kissed me good night (a soft sensuous kiss full of promise for the future) before Mom and I went in.

“You seemed to enjoy the show today,” Mom commented all too casually. “Now maybe you can understand why my friendship with Alice has endured all these years.”

What was she saying? She obviously knew what had transpired between Alice and me in the theater. Only a comatose person could have missed it. Had she experienced similar ecstasy?

“Here's your tea darling,” Mom handed me a cup. “I didn't know how to tell you this before, but it's time you fully understood about Alice and I,” she was answering my unspoken question. “We've been fortunate to share just about everything, including our anxieties, our love and all the frustrations of raising you properly.”

“Evelyn, you may not realize this but Alice happens to adore you. And even more so since you've started developing your femininity.”

“You're kidding,” was all I could come up with when she paused. It was sinking in. I'd never thought twice about her 'loneliness' explanation, whenever Alice was in bed with Mom in the morning. I smiled, “Now I understand the absence of men. You've been too busy with Alice.”

Mom continued her explanation, “We met soon after your father died in the auto crash, while we were negotiating to purchase this building. She was quite young and vulnerable having a lot of difficulty dealing with her own tragedy. Both her parents died in a terrorist attack while they were on vacation in Cairo. She developed a keen hatred of men and the violence they continually display. We kind of naturally took to each other, providing each other comfort and emotional support. Eventually we grew closer until our intense physical passions surprised us one evening when she slept

over. We never really dreamed we'd form such a strong and lasting bond. Neither of us had ever shown the slightest interest in women before that.

“Remember darling, in the beginning, all four of us were in strained emotional states having recently experienced the loss of a loved one. We were risking large insurance proceeds to hopefully earn a living. It was a difficult decision, realizing if we joined forces that we were becoming mutually dependent on each other. Our uncertainties were gigantic and we all looked to Marilyn who was the only one in the prospective partnership to have prior business experience. She had researched the location carefully, evaluating the need for our particular specialties in the community. After we bought the place she spent an inordinate amount of time and energy helping each of us learn the fundamentals of running a retail establishment.”

“So that's why Ms. Black (I had difficulty calling her Marilyn) always seemed to be bullying everyone around,” I piped in, clarifying her role for myself. “You know, as a kid I had visions of her being a prison guard. She was always frowning and seemed so impatient with any disagreement.” I thought of her stubbornness. “It must have been exhausting teaching each of you to run a business. The recent project I just completed for Sandy makes me realize how little she knew about controlling her inventory. I've no idea how she purchased the shoes before.”

“Yes honey. Marilyn at one time or another has actually had to loan us money to help us over unforeseen hurdles which probably would have meant disaster. Don't be misled by her grouchiness, she's really someone special and totally dedicated to the group's survival.”

“Getting back to Alice,” Mom continued, “I want you to understand that she's really struggling with my illness, almost as much as you. Except she's sublimating her feelings, involving herself with you and your adjustment to keep her own pain tucked safely away. Remember we've had a loving caring relationship for over ten years and that's a different thing to give up.”

I understood, my compassion rising to the surface.

“Evelyn, you and Alice are the two most important people in my life. I hope you'll be there to comfort each other when I'm gone. I also hope you'll experience some of the joy we've felt over the years,” she put her hand on my cheek, “like you did today in the theater.” Of course she'd known.

“You can't imagine how often Alice has talked about you, jokingly mentioning how she'd love to go dancing with you in Ellen's place, or to dinner with you at your local hangout. I think you represent the only male on this earth she can relate to safely. She's always had a mild crush on you that's just grown more intense lately.” She broke off for a moment going to the bathroom and leaving me to contemplate all she had said.

Could my fantasy woman actually be entering my real life? She was genuinely interested in me? I stood by the mirror studying my feminine reflection, wondering why.