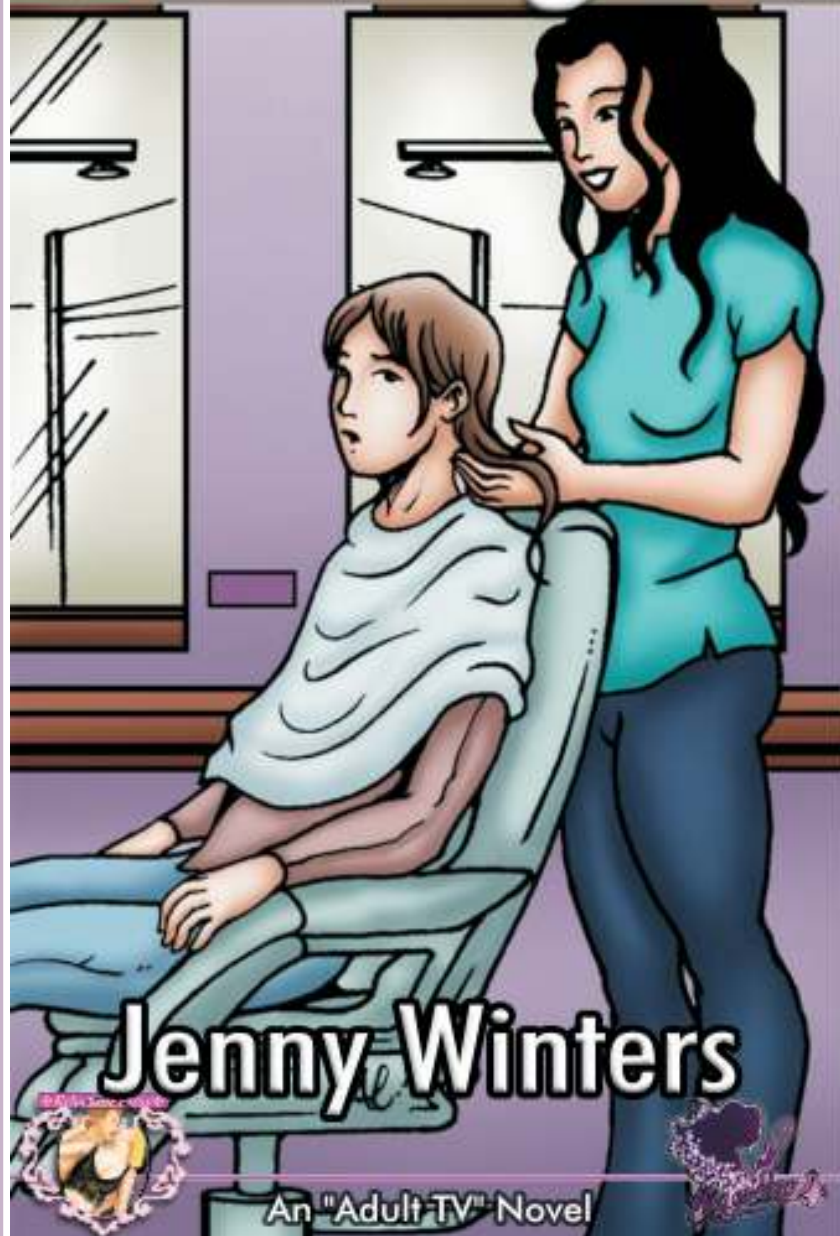


Amy



Jenny Winters

An "Adult-TV" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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Amy

By Jenny Winters

“Do you really know about these huge things?” I remember Dad taking me to his yard where all the equipment was stored.

“I have to,” he replied. “I know how to drive them, repair them, maintain them and sell them.”

“Gee, that’s a lot to do all at the same time,” I replied, wide-eyed as the child I was back then.

I remember that day and how childish I was. It was my first visit after mom had passed away. I think I knew that Dad was involved in the business of agricultural and other machines; I got toy tractors to play with. I didn’t know that he owned a substantial business.

I was eight years old when mom was taken from us. It was sudden; a motorcycle went out of control, hit her crossing the road and disappeared never to be traced. Dad kept it all together and did all he could to look after me.

“It’s a pity you don’t have a brother or sister to look out for you,”

Aunt Martha said as she collected me from school. She wasn’t any kind of relation really, but a kindly widow neighbour lady who lived alone after her children had grown and left. She was the first of a succession of “aunts” who were willing to help out my widower of a father with his only child.

I think that was the first time that I realised how alone I was in the world apart from Dad and the people he hired to look after me while I was in junior school. He worked long hours, and through the weekends too.

“People want to buy and try when they’re ready to,” he told me. “If I’m not there, I don’t get a second chance to persuade them to buy from us.”

I had to grow up quickly then. I had to learn how to be responsible and self-sufficient. Dad usually dropped me at school or daycare in the holidays.

I didn’t much like the holidays. I had to mix with kids who were much rougher and who wanted to play ball games all day long. That wasn’t for me. I wanted to draw and write. I wanted to read and to learn. I wanted to grow up quickly to help Dad at work.

By the time I was twelve I was allowed to go home from school alone. I begged and begged until I was allowed to stay home on the weekends and holidays. It was much more comfortable to be on my own than it was to be in that group.

Looking back, I think I’m saying that I was contented as a kid. I was quiet and responsible beyond my years, with no wish to join the crowd. By the time I was fourteen, I was helping at Dad’s showroom ev-

ery weekend and during my vacations. I knew the catalogues as well as he did and sometimes better, especially when it came to understanding new technology.

Gradually, I learned to operate the tractors, how to connect machinery and, as my knowledge progressed, I started to learn about the prices, and trade-ins, the finance options, and the relation between price and economy of operation.

I was really excited when Dad took on a franchise to sell trucks as well. They were much more exciting than the tractors. They could go on the road. I had dreams of being allowed to use one as soon as I got my driver's permit.

I wasn't allowed to do the deals though. I was too young to sign the legal documents but gradually Dad began to take my advice and let me draw up draft agreements. He even put me on the payroll, even if it was far below minimum wage.

Life seemed to stretch seamlessly in front of me. Finish school, go to college for a qualification, then join the family business.

Little did I think when I was sixteen how everything could change.

The first change was girls. I began to notice them. I watched how they walked and listened to how they talked. They didn't shout and swear. They wore heels and trainers, jeans and skirts, dresses and scarves. They smelled nice and some of them were so pretty they took my breath away.

I dreamed of dating. Katie Hassall was the one I really wanted, but she accepted me as a friend; one to help her with her homework. That was it.

"You're not really boyfriend material." It hurt so much when she said that to me. "I mean, you're nice and kind, but you don't make my heart boom."

"I could try," I said. "Just give me a chance."

"Let's face it; we're never going to be more than friends," she replied. "I don't think of you that way."

"Are you sure?"

"I really like you and I like hanging around with you. I go for a guy with muscles, taller than me and without the hair; yours is longer than mine. If you were a girl, you'd be my best girlfriend."

Those words hit me hard; was I more like a girl than a boy?

I tried not to be downhearted. I still like the idea of getting a girlfriend. They didn't spit and hide round corners smoking and drinking. Well, some of them did, but they weren't the ones I was dreaming about.

My best friend at school was Derek Gentry. His father was about the biggest landowner around town and I knew his father was a good customer of my Dad's. I didn't see him much outside school; he was as busy working for his father as I was for mine.

When he told me that he was dating Katie Hassall, I think my fantasy world collapsed.

I didn't let anyone know and I didn't know that another change was coming fast.

“Chip, can you come down a minute?” Dad called from the door when he arrived home one Friday evening.

When I came down, there was a girl; well not a girl, a woman with him.

“This is Evie,” he said. “We’ve been on a couple of dates, and I thought it was time for you to meet her.”

“Hi Evie, I’m Chip,” I said, not knowing what to say next; I don’t think I’d been this close to a young woman before, at least not an attractive one.

Evie was slim and blonde, a little taller than I was, and dressed casually; a white silk blouse, black slacks, heels and a black leather jacket. I thought she looked cool and she was a lot younger than dad.

“Were you really christened Chip?” She smiled and pulled me in for a quick hug; her perfume was really sweet.

“I’m really Henry but I’ve been Chip for years,” I replied.

“I’m sure we’ll be friends,” she said, holding onto my hand. “If you don’t mind I’ll call you Chip as well?”

“Evie’s going to be around the house soon,” Dad said. “I’ve asked her to move in with us.”

I looked from one to the other, wondering what I was expected to say.

“Don’t worry; I won’t be in the way,” she said, breaking the silence which was getting awkward.

"I'm going to collect dinner," Dad said. "Is Mexican okay for you both? I'm going to leave you and I hope you'll be able to talk for a while; get to know each other."

"I think he doesn't know what to say." Evie smiled after Dad closed the door behind himself. "Come and sit with me and we can talk. He's really proud of you. He's told me how you're such a help in the show-room."

"I like working there," I replied. "Understanding the machines is something which comes to me easily."

"What about people, girls in particular? Have you got a girlfriend? A guy your age should be dating."

"I don't seem to appeal to girls." I could feel myself blushing. "I'm too short, too thin and I don't play sports."

"I'd guess they'd be jealous of your hair too." Evie reached out and touched my hair which was long straight and a deep chestnut brown. "I wish I had hair your colour and such great texture too."

"Yours looks good," I stammered.

"Mine is the product of my stylist's art." She laughed. "There's nothing natural about this blonde."

"I wouldn't be so rude..." I started.

"It's alright; you've not had a woman around for quite a while."

“It’s been me and Dad for years now,” I replied. “I see some of the ladies in the office, but I don’t really talk to them. I don’t know much about them at all.”

“You can think of me as a big sister then,” She said. “I’m about ten years older than you, and we both know that makes me younger than your Dad by a long way.”

“Don’t you have children?” I asked.

“No I don’t and I don’t think I can have any, so don’t worry on that score.” Evie looked at me. “I was married once, but it wasn’t good. We divorced, I moved away and then I didn’t date for years until your Dad persuaded me to go out with him.”

“I don’t know about the big sister,” I said. “I never even had a little one, or a cousin.”

“I don’t know about having a little brother either, so that makes us even. I don’t even know about being a mother.”

“I don’t think I want a mother,” I blurted out.

“Perhaps we can agree to muddle along together?” she asked. “I think your Dad would like that; I certainly would.”

Evie’s move into our home was smooth and didn’t cause me any problems. The meals got better and Dad was home more too. He seemed to be happier than I remembered and in tandem with that, business was doing well.

“You are in danger of becoming my top salesman,” he told me one day.

“It’s only because I’m here every day,” I said. “I like being involved and learning all the new technology is fun.”

“I’m glad you think so,” Dad replied. “I’m far happier when I’m re-selling some of the older items. I understand them.”

“I can give lessons,” I said.

“I’m happy to leave it to you and the company reps,” he said. “But you need to take some time off. Evie says I should worry that you’re not doing the things that other boys of your age should be doing.”

“Did she say that?” I wondered what they’d been saying about me.

“She thinks you should be off with friends your own age, maybe a girlfriend.”

“Did she say I should be drinking and smoking as well?” I smiled as I said it.

“I think you know what I mean.”

“Don’t worry about me,” I replied. “Girls aren’t interested in me, and I’m happy to help out here.”

“Well, as long as you don’t blame me if she comes up with some plan to brighten your life. Remember, she means well.”

“I know, and I’m glad she makes you happy.”

Dad sent me home early one Saturday afternoon. I had to collect some packages for Evie on the way. I

got there and she was sitting in the kitchen wrapped in a robe with a towel around her hair.

"It's alright, I won't bite," she called as she saw me hesitate at the door. "I'm thinking of what to wear to-night. Your Dad's taking me to some big social in town, where the traders meet for some charity fund raiser."

"I heard about that," I said. "I think my friend Derek's taking Katie as well."

"Didn't you want to come?" Evie took the parcels from me. "I'm sure I could ask your Dad."

"No it's not for me," I replied. "It's not as if I'd be taking anyone and I'd only be a spare part with you."

"I'm sad you think like that." Evie held my hand. "I don't think of you that way."

"I never thought you did. I'm shy really; I guess I'm not the sociable kind."

"You're always the soul of charm in the show-room," Evie said.

"That's because I don't have to think what to say. I know about the machines. They ask a question and I can explain everything. Heck; I can explain everything to everyone, even the hillbillies from way out of town."

"And I guess there aren't many girls amongst them." Evie smiled. "You never get a chance to practise how to charm a girl."

"Let's accept that I'm too shy." I said wanting to end the conversation.

Evie looked at me and I could tell she was thinking of something.

"I think you need to let me demystify women for you." She picked up the packages and held out a hand to me. "Come on, we can talk while I let you paint my toenails."

"Did you really say what I think I heard you say?" I could feel myself blushing.

"Come on; I'm nearly your stepmother. I'm meant to be wicked."

"Wasn't that Snow White's downfall?"

"It came out well for her in the end. She was kissed by a handsome prince."

"That's not on my list of things to do."

"Come on and stop stalling. I've a lot to do to get ready. I'm sure your Dad wants me to be his glamorous arm candy tonight."

"His what?" I asked.

She laughed as she pulled me along.

"Now all you have to do is paint the nail. Be careful; don't smear the colour onto the skin around it." Evie waved her foot in the air. "It would be easier if you sat on that stool and I put my foot where you could work easily."

She indicated that I should sit on the low foot stool beside the chair in front of the vanity in the bedroom

she shared with my dad. I sat down and before I knew it, her foot was resting in front of me.

"They look nice," I said, feeling nervous. "Why do you need to paint them?"

"I'll be wearing open toe shoes," she replied.

"But you'll have stockings."

"I will, but they'll have open toes. You don't understand; it's a girl thing. It makes you feel different, like everything's in place."

"I'm remembering something," I said. "It was in one of those culture classes at school, where they teach about actors and plays. There was some quote about starting with the shoes."

"I think it was Marylyn Monroe." Evie smiled. "Well remembered; they said she started to get into character by imagining the shoes, or something like that."

"So the toenails start your character." I looked up at her. "What's this character about?"

"She's the one who needs to hide her nerves and make your Dad happy," Evie replied. "I always get nervous at times like these, and I don't want to get anything wrong."

"I'm sure you won't," I replied. "And I'll make sure you have great toes to start off."

"They look really pretty." Evie admired them when I'd finished. "If you were my girlfriend, I'd have to do yours in return."

"Maybe you can return the favour some other time," I replied. "But no one would see mine anyway."

"But you'd know they were there and that would be your character," Evie said. "Tell you what; let me paint yours now. Then you can tell me if it makes you feel any different later."

Five minutes later, I had red toenails. I put my socks back on when they were dry.

"You should show them off. You'd get lots of attention." Evie laughed and made me blush.

It was a prophetic concept, but neither of us realised it then.

It was a few months later when the colour had grown out of my toenails.

"How would you like to take my cousin Savannah to the summer fair?" Evie asked me, holding out her mobile for me to look at a photo. "She's really pretty and really nice. Her boyfriend dumped her at Easter and she's not been out with anyone since."

"Are you sure?" I asked. "If that's her picture and it's for real, then she's out of my league."

"You should never say that," Evie scolded me. "Think yourself worth it."

"I think you'd better leave me out of it." I really liked the picture. "I'm sure she could have her pick of guys."

"But she really needs someone good and steady like you."

Against my better judgement, I capitulated and agreed to meet her and take her to the fair. She was

as pretty as her picture, but her face when she saw me wasn't encouraging.

I tried my hardest to impress; I really did. I could tell she didn't want to be there and she didn't want to be seen with me. A group of her friends turned up and she soon detached herself from me and disappeared with them.

I did the only thing I could do to save face. I went home alone. I told Evie that I'd had a great time. It was obvious that she wanted me to say that. I got away with the pretence for a few days.

"You didn't tell me that Savannah re-connected with her old flame at the fair," she said.

"I had no idea," I replied. "One minute she was there, the next she saw some friends and walked away. That was the last I saw of her."

"She can be a bit of a bitch," Evie replied.

Maybe girls weren't made for a boy like me.

I kept out of Evie's way as much as I could after that. It was difficult because she and Dad were becoming joined at the hip. I could tell that they were really happy. I didn't want Evie to think that she had to make me happy too.

A strange thing was happening to me. I don't know if it was my hormones bouncing or my proximity to Evie. It could have been because I liked watching how she went from being a tomboy to being really glamorous. It could have been the scent of her perfume or the way she dressed.

Maybe it was the way she seemed to glide across the floor in impossibly high heels.

Then again maybe it was none of these things, but I started to watch how she moved and how she dressed. I watched her makeup and everything that made her such a woman. I saw how her hair changed from strawberry to ash blonde. I saw how she fascinated my Dad, and how she was beginning to fascinate me.

She occupied my thoughts, but for different reasons. I was at the top of a slippery slope, but I didn't know it then.

I shouldn't have let it happen.

She was absolutely super glamorous at the local Chamber of Commerce ball. She wore a tight black dress, off the shoulders, with strappy heels. Her hair shimmered and swung with every movement, showing her earrings glittering as they caught the light.

I think that was the first time I imagined what it might be like to be her. That was a thought too far, but I didn't realise it then. I fantasised about her dress and heels, the makeup and the jewellery. It was all in another world; a far more glamorous one than mine.

"How was your night?" I asked as Dad and Evie appeared in the kitchen next morning.

"It was wonderful." Evie held out her left hand for me to look at a ring on her third finger.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Evie gushed. "This is going to be second time lucky."

"She means you're getting a stepmother for real," Dad smiled. "I hope you approve."

"Of course I approve." I stood to hug Evie and then to shake Dad's hand.

It all felt good.

"My friend Anna has a daughter who's been stood up by her date at a party," Evie announced one morning as we were sitting after breakfast. "It's really important to her and she doesn't want to go alone."

"Why are you telling me this?" I asked. "Things didn't go well last time."

"Anna's so worried for her. I wondered if you could stand in," she replied. "I've met her and she's really pretty and a nice person too. She's about your age and I'd pay for everything. Please say you'll do it as a great favour to me."

"Okay, I'll do it," I replied with a sinking feeling in my stomach.

"I'll ask her to come over this evening and you can meet her. Then when you go out, you'll have something to talk about."

"Does she know about tractors?" I asked.

"You're joking." Evie looked shocked until she realised that I really was joking.

I think I secretly hoped it wouldn't happen; that the girl would make other plans. It wasn't that way.

"This is Louisa."

Evie ushered her into the garden the following afternoon as we were sitting after work. She was small, slim and dark, with long tendrils of black hair tumbling over her shoulders in what looked like an untameable cascade. She wore jeans and white trainers, a white top and a bandana loosely around her neck.

"I'll leave you to talk." Evie ushered Dad into the house and left us alone.

"Thanks for taking me," Louisa said. "Please say you'll pretend to like me."

"Of course I will," I replied, already liking to be near her.

"It means a lot to me, the other girls in college can be cruel at times."

We got on well that evening, talking about this and that, everything and nothing, until Evie called to say that her mother was collecting her. We arranged that Evie would drop me off at her home and then a cab would drive us to the party.

The cab was waiting when I arrived. Louisa rushed out, looking striking in a tight dark red top with a scooped neck which showed the tops of her breasts and tight black trousers with heeled boots.

She wore no jewellery other than some sparkling white studs in her ears. Her hair was tied back loosely in ringlets. Her makeup was minimal, apart from some black eyeliner and mascara. I knew about makeup from watching Evie. I thought Louisa looked amazing and I wanted people to see me with her. Maybe then they wouldn't think I was such a loser.

The party was being held in a local restaurant. I knew it by reputation as a classy place, but I'd never been inside. As I looked round the room, I recognised a few of the boys there from school, but as I hadn't gone on to college, I didn't recognise many of the older ones.

It wasn't bad. I'm not going into the details of the evening, but we ended up spending time with a girl called Olivia and her boyfriend Tad. Apparently they'd been best friends since junior school. It was all very good and I took Louisa home at the end of the evening.

"I hope you didn't mind me talking so much to Olivia," she said as we walked to her door. "She's always been there for me."

"That's okay; I thought Tad was a nice guy too."

"Let's go out together again soon," she said and let me kiss her quickly on the lips; just a touch before the cab took me home.

"I liked her," I replied when Evie quizzed me about the evening.

We went out as a foursome a few times. We saw some movies and ate pizzas; we hired a boat and swam in the lake when it got warm enough.

I got to know Tad. He was a studious sort of person, determined that he'd get the grades to go to medical school. As the girls walked and talked together, it seemed we did the same. It was when we went to a drive-in movie that things started to change.

Louisa got out of the car which I had borrowed and clambered into the back seat of Tad's car with Olivia. I assumed they had much to talk about, although they never seemed to stop talking. They were always talking, giggling, looking at each other and even hugging whenever we were together.

What came next really shocked me.

Tad got into the car with me, leaving them to it. We were silent for a while, waiting for the movie to start.

"Aren't you going back there?" I asked as the intro started and the lights over the field dimmed.

"You don't get it, do you?" Tad said slowly.

"What don't I get?" I asked, turning to look at him.

"Louisa isn't going to come back and Olivia expects me to stay here." I turned to look at him, my face showing that I didn't understand it at all.

"They're dating," he said. "They're using us to hide it from both their parents. We're their disguises."

I thought about it and in that instant some things became clear. Why would Louisa go out with me? I was shorter than her, slimmer and with longer hair. I thought it was because I had good earnings and money to spend. Now maybe I should have been thinking differently.

"And what are we supposed to do?" I asked.

"Nothing, I guess." Tad looked at me. "I don't mind, I'd rather be dating you than Olivia."

"I don't understand." I looked at him as he leaned towards me and quickly kissed me on the lips.



"Now do you understand?" he asked quietly. "You haven't slapped me or screamed, so I don't think you object too much to being kissed."

"I've never been kissed before."

I was shocked by his action and my reaction. I didn't feel threatened and I wasn't scared.

I took Louisa out a few times after that evening. We went to the movies and to the theatre. We hiked and swam together. I was beginning to think that I had a real secure relationship here. I should have known better.

"I've arranged for us to go to Pilgrims Lake," Louisa announced one evening. "It's a birthday treat for Olivia. She's coming with Tad and we have adjoining accommodation."

"That's nice," I said with less than full enthusiasm. "Are you sure that you want them along?"

Of course I knew the answer before I put the question. We'd made out a few times, but when I thought about it, I knew she was always holding back.

"It's going to be lovely," she said. "Show a little enthusiasm. I know that they both think you're good company."

So we went a couple of weeks later. Pilgrims Lake was a sprawling resort, with hiking and cycle tracks, a pool, and an entertainment complex which had just about everything for a break away from the stresses of the work-a-day world, and by we got there, I was feeling pretty worn out with how busy I'd been.

I should have seen it coming but I was stupid and I didn't. We had two units designed to cater for two people. They were in a small clearing, and quite private from other units.

After dinner on our first night, we walked back the short distance from the restaurant. We stopped as if to wish each other a good night.

Olivia kissed me gently as Louisa kissed Tad. Then the girls kissed; not just a peck, but a real full-blooded kiss on the lips, bodies pressed close and lingering. With arms around each other, they walked into Olivia's unit. Tad and I started at each other.

"You knew that was going to happen?" He looked at me as he posed the question.

"I had no idea," I said slowly, thinking that I should have guessed.

"That leaves me with you to share." He gestured towards the second unit. "They won't be coming out before morning."

"I don't think that's a good idea," I said. "I don't want to repeat..."

"Oh, that was pure impulse. I thought you wanted to be kissed," he said. "I'm sorry if I upset you. I won't do it again. Now can we go in; it's getting colder out here."

I hesitated for a moment and then realised that there wasn't much of an alternative, so I unlocked the door and we went inside.

It may sound trite in view of what happened later, but I enjoyed that evening. Tad was good company.

We played some video games which he won, then a silly card game which he also won. We were drinking and I think that made my concentration low.

We chatted all the time; he with a host of anecdotes that made me laugh. From the way he was talking, I knew he expected me to listen and to be impressed. It all felt good, even though I would rather have been with Louisa, I understood that wasn't going to happen.

When I could no longer keep my eyes open, Tad decided that I should go to bed. I went to bed. I had the bedroom and he slept on the couch.

Nothing else happened.

By now, you've guessed; if things had stayed that way, you wouldn't be reading this.

You'd have thought I'd have learned from this experience, but I didn't. I really liked Louisa, and we had been out a few times together. It seemed as if that little flirtation with Olivia was a one-off.

Louisa and I didn't sleep together but I thought we were growing closer. We didn't make a foursome with Olivia and Tad for a while, but I knew the girls were keeping in touch by the things that were said casually. I kept in touch with Tad too.

I don't know if I wanted to understand more, or if I simply wanted to be involved. These were my friends, after all.

Meanwhile my day job was getting busier. We were selling tractors and cultivators, harvesters and

ploughs; all manner of equipment as fast as we could get it shipped in. I did the technical stuff and showed the controls and the features.

Dad could always charm and flatter the customers so they didn't realise they were buying so freely and perhaps spending more than they intended. The computer and GPS stuff passed him by. That was my job. But they always went away happy. Dad had a way, and the sales rolled in.

My bonus rolled in too. I spent most of it on Louisa.

I should have known better. I thought I was really getting closer to Louisa. I took her everywhere and treated her well. I thought we were having a good time together. She even let me make love to her, although I realised after that she was less than enthusiastic.

I thought it was just me and that I needed to be better.

Things changed when summer vacation came around. We went to a resort in the mountains. It was a pretty place with bike rides and hiking tracks, swimming and boating lakes, cinemas and restaurants. The nearby town had a new mall with almost everything.

We'd been there for a few days when, much to my surprise, Olivia and Tad arrived as we were sitting outside the restaurant after dinner. Louisa and Olivia hugged enthusiastically. I had a sinking feeling as I went to order another drink. Before I had time to say anything, the girls had walked away, arm-in-arm.

"It looks like it's you and me again," Tad said, looking across the table at me with a strange look in his

eye. "We got on well last time, so let's make the best of it."

"I came on holiday to be one of a couple," I said clumsily. "I never thought that I'd have to spend part of it with another guy."

"I know what you mean."

"Do you?" I asked. "Look at them. No one's ever going to question two girls together behaving like that; hugging and holding hands. It's what girls do all the time. But two guys; they're going to look at us like we're gay lovers."

"Is that so wrong?" Tad asked innocently.

"It's not what I expected this holiday to be about."

"I think we should talk to the girls about it before it all gets ruined."

"You're saying that you don't want it to look like you're a gay couple?" Louisa looked at me with something approaching disgust. "I didn't think you were so narrow minded."

"I'm not, but what if it were to become known?" I asked, quite reasonably in my mind. "Our customers aren't known for being liberal and open minded. Dad would hate it if anything I did would make them think about going somewhere else."

"That's not unreasonable." Olivia looked from Louisa to Tad. "Let's sleep on this. There must be a solution."

"You only want to get Louisa to yourself tonight," I said bitterly.

"It's not like that." Louisa took my hand. "We can't always control who we love. I don't want to hurt you."

"What do you think, Tad?"

"I'm easy," he replied. "I always knew Olivia was a friend, not a girlfriend."

"It's getting late," Louisa interrupted. "We should talk this out in the morning."

Olivia stood and held out her hand. Louise took it and Tad and I were left alone in the cabin.

I went to sleep in the bedroom and left Tad stretching uncomfortably on the couch in the living room.

"Do you want to go home now?" Louisa asked when we met for breakfast.

"Not really; I hoped to be away from work. If I go back, I'll be into the office immediately," I said.

"Do you get along with Tad?" Olivia asked.

"Sure, we get along fine," I replied. "I didn't expect to look like his boyfriend on holiday."

"I think we have a solution," Louisa said slowly. "I don't know if you're going to like it, but please think about it before you turn it down."

"That sounds ominous." I looked at the other three in turn.

"What if you pretended to be Tad's girlfriend?" she said quickly. "I don't mean that you have to sleep with him, but you could have fun in the daytime away from work."

"That's not going to work," I sneered. "You must think I'm stupid."

"We don't at all," she replied. "You're not thinking this through."

"What's there to think about other than it could never work?" I snapped back. "I don't look anything like Tad's girlfriend, even if he had one."

"That's a minor detail." She held up her hand for silence. "How would it be if we could make you look like his girlfriend, just for the time we're on holiday. Olivia and I could do our thing and you could enjoy the place with Tad, without being embarrassed and no one would be any the wiser."

"That could be really fun." Tad looked at me with an expression that suggested interest. "Think about it, Chip; you'd be getting a view from the other side."

"I'm not sure that I want to join the other side, as you put it."

"Come on; you can't say you're not interested," he replied. "You'd have the three of us to look out for you. It's not as if we're asking you to swim with the sharks."

"I'm worried that I be exactly what I'd be doing if I went along with this crazy scheme."

"Please think about it carefully." Louisa looked me in the eye. "It would be a great favour and I'd love you forever if you could do it."