

GOODBOYS

By Sofronia Anne Strong



ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN DUKEHART

A 'HER TV' NOVEL

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GOODBOYS

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Chapter 1

“Uppy, Up-Up, precious. It is a glorious Saturday morning and we have much to do, sweetheart”. Brad pulled the covers over his head. His mother's cheerfulness, first thing in the morning was a little more than he could take. It had been a bad week. He had been suspended from school, hauled before the principal and sent home with a note to face his irate parents. He was glad the week was over and he looked forward to the regional soccer match this morning. Why, he wondered, was Mother acting like such a cheery idiot when only last night she had threatened him with her silver hairbrush if he didn't wash the dishes while wearing that inane ruffled pinafore apron. It was just a damn notion she had gotten into her head. He never had to wear an apron while washing dishes before! So a little dishwater got on his T-shirt! Big deal!

“Places to go, things to do, people to see today, precious,” she nattered.

“Don't call me precious, Mom. That's dad's pet name for my sister. Let Minnie be precious. I'm ferocious.”

“We'll see about that too, precious,” his mother rejoined. “Now up and out of there, Missy. You have a very big day ahead of you and it doesn't include soccer, unless you can play in high heels.”

“Awww, Mom!” Brad wailed. “First I have to do dishes and now I can't play soccer? What next? I know I got in trouble but let's not overdo it. I just gotta play in the soccer match. We've been at this all year. If we beat Marshall today we go to state. They really need me Mom. I'll be good. I promise, but don't keep me home today. I'll make it up some other way, can't I?”

“Oh, you're not staying home today, Missy. You have a full schedule. First the doctor, then the hairdresser, an appointment with the corsetierre and lunch at the Sky Room with your little friend, Jenny. Then it's off to the Helton School for the first of your charm lessons.”

What's this “missy” shit?” he shouted. Hairdressers and corsets? Have you lost your mind? I'm not doing any of that. I'm playing soccer. They'll kick me off the team if I don't show for this match. Gimme a break!” Brad dived back down under the covers and piled the pillow on top of his head. “Please, Mom, don't get crazy about this.” These last words were muffled and barely audible.

“Bradford Cowles, come out of that bed this instant and take your bath. We mustn't be late to the doctor,” his mother commanded.

Minnie, on command from her mother, snatched the bedcovers away exposing Brad's naked body. “Oh, ish, the wretch sleeps in the buff! He thinks he's so damn

manly doing that,” she complained. As Minnie pinned Brad's arms, his mother applied her silver backed hairbrush to the miscreant's pink bottom. Six times the brush splatted against the reddening flesh as the unfortunate boy sobbed and squirmed.

When she was done and his big sister had released him, he sat up on the edge of the bed rubbing the tears away.

“Now then, Miss Brandee Cowles, get yourself into the scented bubble bath we have prepared for you. You have ten minutes and then I want to see you right back in here, all pink and sweet. The only way you are playing soccer is in high heels, sweetie. Now, scoot!” Brad scooted. The scented bath soothed his burning fanny as he mentally tried to process all the terrible things his mother had threatened. Did she really think he would allow her to turn him into some facsimile of a girl? Was this some kind of punishment for the trouble at school? It had to be, but she must be out of her mind to think she could make him cooperate in such a transformation. It was outlandish, it was insane. It was too bizarre. God, he thought, it's just too embarrassing. What will the guys think? For that matter, what about the girls?

“Oh shit, oh, dear, oh craps oh, crud,” he mumbled. Whatever have I done to myself?” he wondered. “Mom has been pretty mad all week. I don't think I'm going to get out of this one.” He was right!

Mrs. Jon Cowles had encountered her friend Andrea Goodwin at the hairdressers the previous Monday. They shared a common problem. Brad Cowles and Jeff Goodwin had become the scourges of Windhill Middle School. For several months there had been a steady decline in deportment by the two boys as they had plowed their way through the ninth grade. Both mothers were mystified as to why their two very competent little sons had, between eighth and ninth grades, degenerated into two rowdy, unmanageable little monsters. They had gone from polite to rude, from respectful to scurrilous, from well-mannered to uncouth and from scholarship to stupidity. When asked, one of their teachers flippantly replied, “Oh, don't you know? Between eighth and ninth grades some of these kids become too cool.” That was the mystery. Between thirteen and fourteen some demon seemed to have taken them over.

Alice and Andrea sought family counseling. Their husbands demurred on grounds of work commitments but agreed to accept whatever pronouncement Dr. Vickers might make. Dr. Vickers made no pronouncements, of course. She merely nodded knowingly and identified the demon which had infested their sons.

“Testosterone,” she declared. “It's a raging monster that seeps into their cells at puberty. Some boys show very high levels in their bloodstream, others less, but in every one of them, manic male mania overtakes them to some degree at this age.”

“So this behavior is normal, then? Pubescent boys always turn into monsters. Is that right?” Andrea sipped at her coffee as Alice lit a cigarette. Dr. Vickers sat back in her swivel chair.

“More or less, yes. Remember norms are just averages, but from the behavior you describe in Brad and Jeff, I would put them at least one standard deviation above the norms.”

“That's jargon.” protested Alice. “Are you saying that boys will be boys, but OUR boys are kind of far out? In plain language does it mean that the boys are abnormal?”

“Statistically, yes,” replied Dr. Vickers. “One standard deviation means that less than a third of boys will behave as outlandishly as yours. That is hardly anything to be disturbed about. It just means that they are a couple of difficult ones. Again, statistically speaking, they will return to normal after a while.”

“Even if we do nothing about it?” Alice asked incredulously.

“In all probability.” Dr. Vickers sounded reassuring. Alice and Anita were not reassured.

“How come?” Alice wanted to know. “Do you mean that the testosterone thing calms down? Do they have less of it after a while?”

“Oh, my, no!” Dr. Vickers protested. “They will even have more of it as they mature. It won't reduce its level until they are well past middle age.”

“If the stuff is driving this outlandish acting up, how can you say that they will get normal as it's level increases? I can't take much more of this. Brad is driving us nuts.”

“It all has to do with learning how to be a man, ladies. Or what passes for being manly. They think they have to try out all this macho, aggressive stuff, test it out and find out what works.”

“How does that work? I mean, no one is going to come right out and tell them, are they? Anita crushed out her cigarette.

“Ordinarily, no. They will try out various kinds of behavior and look to see what is approved by their peers and their parents and teachers and what gets them in trouble. If they think trouble is manly, they'll get into more trouble. If, however, someone sits them down and makes an effort to approve gentlemanly behavior and somehow show disapproval of churlish behavior, they will begin to figure it out. What brings about the return to normal behavior is the discovery of what will make them feel like men.” Anita looked at Alice and addressed the doctor.

“So, someone has to mentor them if we want them to get civilized again.”

“I think so,” nodded Dr. Vickers. “Find some way to let them know that sassing teachers, starting food fights, underage drinking and verbally assaulting girls may make them feel manly, but it isn't acceptable male behavior. Show them that they will have to find alternative modes of manliness, modes nearer the norms.”

“Well, Dr. Vickers, we've tried. We've spanked and we've punished them. We've pulled them off sports teams and put them to washing dishes, but nothing seems to get through to them,”

“Really! I'm not surprised. Sometimes you have to hit these kids over the head with a two-by-four, metaphorically speaking of course. What is the response to these restrictions?”

“Oh, they get sullen, and angry and uncooperative and just dig their heels in. It's as though they think they can stonewall us and get what they want through stubbornness.”

“Well, you'll just have to find some way to break through that wall of emotion and get to their core being, something they can't escape from or avoid, if they are really to learn something from it.”

“Like what?” The annoyance in Alice's voice was apparent.

“Nothing gets through to these two brats anymore. I'm at my wit's end,” grumbled Anita. The doctor continued, unfazed. “The best I can give you is that everything exists as pairs of polar opposites—light and dark, heat and cold, and we learn proper male behavior from comparing it with female behavior and vice versa. If you can somehow get that through to them you will have taught them something.”

“Oh, great, Alice, now she goes theoretical on us. Will you please translate that into something practical, doctor?”

“I do sympathize, Mrs. Cowles, but I know of no programs designed to teach boys how to be gentlemen while pushed around by their male hormones. I wish I did, it would be very useful. Millions of parents need help with this problem. You'll just have to use your ingenuity. If you stumble on something that works, do let me know. It will help so many.”

“For this we are paying ninety dollars an hour?” Anita slapped her forehead in frustration.

“Former societies had rights of passage for boys, in which they were initiated into manhood, such as breaching, the cult of chivalry and rules of protocol, but that has all been superseded by the cult of sensibility. Nowadays kids have no forms to follow. We've trashed them all. You are on your own. You'll have to devise some formal ritual for bringing your boys to an understanding of the difference between gentlemen and louts.”

“Why haven't we had these problems with our daughters, Dr. Vickers? They got secretive and withdrawn and terribly tight with their girl friends, but they never became so antisocial.”

“Less testosterone, ladies. Girls solve problems with intimacy, with rapport with friends, with their cliques. They seek peer support. Boys compete, fight, dominate and solve problems by aggressions, girls by communion. Girls do behave in aggressive ways, but there is a great difference in degree and style from boys. Further, there is a great diversity in adolescent behavior. It is a time of testing gender roles, of trying to learn how to be a man or a woman. Take heart, ladies, they usually get it worked out.

Alice sat back in her chair. “Yeah, I remember when Minnie went through her tom-boy stage. Her testosterone levels must have been pretty high. She wanted her name changed from Minerva to Mike, cut her hair short and wouldn't wear a dress for two years.”

Alice acknowledged these facts and reminisced about her older son Paul. She explained that he had become feminized for a while in high school, wearing a pony tail, piercing his ear lobes and shaving his legs. He had gotten over it, though.

"There you are," rejoined Dr. Vickers, "just as I said. Don't worry too much about it. There is a great range of diversity in gender identities out there. Just take it as you find it and learn to live with it."

"Well," Alice said abruptly, "that's all well and good, but if we can't find some way to settle Brad and Jeff down, in two years we will both be basket cases. They can be as gender-diversified as they like, but they are going to learn to be gentlemen, one way or another. Come on, Andrea, we've got our work cut out for us. Thank you Dr. Vickers. You have given us a lot of food for thought." They both stood and shook the doctor's hand.

Alice and Andrea sat in Dee's Beauty Nook as Jo Anne deftly turned their nails into crimson talons. They explained their dilemma to Dee and she had grinned knowingly

"Some boys make very pretty girls you know," Jo Anne handed Alice and Andrea each a back issue of the FEMME MIRROR to read while they were under the dryers. Their eyes widened as the magazine discussed the problems of transvestitism, of being men in frocks in a world where such behavior is taboo. A parade of men in stylish skirted suits, cocktail dresses and evening gowns were on display. There was even a spread covering a wedding with two participants in elegant white bridal gowns. Both of the mothers were wide-eyed and shocked by the time Dee combed them out.

"You're right! I had never imagined there were such men. Must be something wrong with their testosterone," commented Alice.

"Au contraries, ma Cherie," announced Dee. The guys you saw in there are the most manly guys you could ever hope to meet. They just adore women so much they want to emulate them and be just like them."

"Isn't imitation supposed to be the sincerest form of flattery?" asked Andrea.

"Yeah, but come on," protested Alice. Those guys are just drag queens, gay guys looking for a connection."

"Or female impersonators, those guys who drag for a living," Andrea added.

"Sorry ladies, wrong on both counts. Those guys are all heterosexual, and most of them have wives and families and work in professional or technical fields."

"How do you know?" Andrea wanted to know. "Did you ever meet one of these guys?"

"Of course, your own son Paul, Alice. You mean you didn't know? Now that he's away at college he feels free to be himself. He comes in here as his alter ego, Paulette. God, I'm sorry! I thought you knew."

Andrea stared at Alice and a grin spread across her face. "So much for Dr. Vickers and her probabilities for a return to normalcy. Paulette? Oh, that's good Alice. I love it"

“Oh shut up, darling” Alice spat back. “You heard Dee. He's just as manly as any other guy. He just likes to wear dresses, I'll bet.”

“And get a perm and a manicure and a facial. I do him every time he's in town. Haven't you noticed? I do his hair so that he can switch back and forth from boy to girl. Paul...Paulette...your son is a regular chameleon.”

“Well, he's on his own now that he's away at school. I just hope he's happy. I wonder why he didn't tell me, though?”

“Oh, Alice, don't be so dense. He was afraid you wouldn't approve.”

“Not Paul. I know my Paul. He doesn't care what anyone thinks. If he wants to wear frocks, he'll just wear them. God, I hope he's attractive.”

“He's a doll,” Dee reassured her. “Now, let's dish. What did Dr. Vickers recommend for those two rascals of yours, or isn't it any of my business?”

“Well, it's not Dee, but as long as you ask, she recommended that we find some way to get to them where they live, some way to reach them emotionally. Something that will bring them up short and make them think about what they are doing. Any suggestions? We're stumped.”

“Sure, bring the little monsters to Auntie Dee. I'll make them take a different view of themselves. A little manicure, a new hairdo and some bright face paint and they'll see themselves differently, I guarantee it!”

Alice and Andrea gasped and then, looking at Dee, huge knowing grins spread across their level,

“Do we dare, Andrea? Wouldn't that just be too apropos? Transform the little bastards into little ladies. I love it!”

“OK, but let's go up to State and talk with Paul or, more likely, Paulette. Let's get his read on it. Maybe it's illegal or something.”

“No, it's not,” rejoined Dee. “There's no law that says a boy can't wear a skirt. Used to be, but they repealed it ages ago. Let me know when you're ready. I'll make you two of the sweetest little sissies you ever saw.” Alice blanched at the word. Andrea rose to go.

The two of them had lunch at the Orangerie and nattered into the afternoon surveying the boutiques for stylish little frocks for their renegade sons. The more they talked about it, the more appealing the idea became.

Chapter 2

“Paul? Is that you? Oh, good. Paul dear, Andrea and I would like to run up to State and see you tomorrow. Are you free, dear? We don't want to impose....”

“Sure, what's up, mom? I haven't much going tomorrow. I'll be out of class by eleven. We can have lunch. Can you get up here that soon?”

“Oh, yes, dear. We'll leave first thing in the morning. Ah.... um, Dee told me, Paul....I mean, I know about Paulette. Are you doing Paul or Paulette these days? It's all right honey, I just don't want you to be embarrassed, so I thought I ought to ask.” There was a long pause on the phone.

“Yeah....well.... I mean, like I've really been doing Paulette a lot lately, Mom. Now that you know and all, I'd just as soon have you meet Paulette, if it's OK with you.”

“Of course dear, just as you please. You know I love you. Be just as pretty as you please, we have to talk to you about Brad and Jeff.”

“The Jerk Brothers? I understand they got canned from school last week. How can I help?”

“We'll fill you in when we get there, dear. Is there anything we can bring you, besides money?”

“Yeah, please...stop by Dee's and bring me a jar of that foundation she picked for me. I'm running low...and a tube of that Floral Plum lipstick. I like that shade.”

“Of course dear,” she replied and rang off. She didn't have to use her imagination much to envision Paulette. Paul always had been a pretty child. He must make a very attractive girl, she thought. Still, she was nervous anticipating it. She hoped her son didn't look ridiculous in dresses. If he really was passably attractive she would be content, but if he was some kind of caricature of a woman she wasn't sure she could accept that.

Brad couldn't stop the tears. While he was luxuriating in his bubble bath his mother had laid out a new ensemble for him. The sight of it laid out on the bed unnerved him and the tears kept dripping from his eyes. His sister Minnie leaned against the bedroom doorjamb with the silver hairbrush in one hand. She slapped it menacingly against the palm of her other hand. Brad's mother pointed to the delicate attire laid out on the bed. She dangled a pair of sheer beige pantyhose in front of his face.

“Do you know how to put on pantyhose, precious?” she queried. Brad flinched and backed away.

“Jeez, Mom, really! How would I know that?”

“Then sit down on the bed and I'll show you how to roll them on without snagging them.” It was clear that playing dumb wasn't going to help. Alice ran her fists into the legs, rolled them down and deftly began rolling them up Brad's legs. The cool silkiness of the nylon felt good and that frightened him. He didn't want any part of what was causing him to feel good.

"I am sorry we have to do this, darling but we have to do something to help you know the difference between being a gentleman and being a clod. I really do think a few weeks living as a young lady will help you with that. Now, hold still, just tuck your funny little privates between your legs. This is called a gaffe. She slipped the straps of the jockstrap- like device over his legs and pulled it up into place. It differed from his jock in that the waistband was edged in lace and the front of the device was yellow satin, onto which had been embroidered his new name, Brandee, in blue thread. Brad noticed how his groin was now smooth and featureless, just a slight mound of gleaming satin.

"There went his manhood, mom," taunted Minerva, "just as if the surgeon's knife had been taken to him."

"Shut up!" he screamed at his gloating sister. "This is bad enough without you. Just stick a sock in it." Minnie dived at him with the hairbrush raised. Alice slapped the boy sharply across the cheek.

"Enough!" she commanded. "If you can't be helpful, Minerva, just go away. Now just stop bawling, Brandee, dear, and put on your panty girdle." Brad lowered his head, picked up the yellow satin garment from the bed and thrust his legs into it. Minnie pulled it up around his waist as the elastic cross panels crushed his tummy and the waistband clamped down on his middle. Mother held out a yellow satin brassiere with lace over its cups. Brad woefully thrust his hands and arms into the straps. After Minnie had clasped it shut in back, Mother filled the tiny cups with tissues. She stepped back and looked her son over.

"Very nice," she opined, "very trim and girlish. Keep your shoulders back, precious. No slouching allowed!" Minnie banged a cocked knuckle between his shoulder blades to make the point.

Brad gasped and snapped into an erect posture.

"Knees together, shoulders back, tuck your fanny in. Now there's a good girl. Have we a slip for our little miss to wear, Minnie?"

His sister picked it up off the bed and held it out to him. Brad feared he might faint. The delicate garment was of yellow nylon tricot, the bodice of delicate yellow lace which was repeated at the wide hem. Pulled down, it came to mid-thigh. Once again Brad was disturbed by its cool smoothness and the way it slid against his bra and thighs.

A slip gives a smooth surface for your dress to ride on, dear," instructed his mother. It gives shape and form to your outer garments. It really IS pretty, isn't it Minnie?"

"Just a doll, Mom! He's just a doll. His Wonderbra really gives him an uplift, even with A Cups."

"Come on you guys," Brad whined. "This is bad enough without your commenting on it. I feel like a complete dork."

"You look like a complete dork, sweetie" his amused sister rejoined. "Our commenting on it is part of the fun."

“True, Minnie. We have to see to it that our little Brandee doesn't run away from her new reality. Our running commentary keeps him focused on his new finery. Now then, precious, are you ready for your pretty dress?” Brad wasn't ready at all. He recoiled back into Minnie's arms.

“Aw, c'mon, Momma” he pleaded. “I've already got the point. You don't need to go all the way with this. I'm a bright boy. I've already caught on.”

“I doubt it, and your not a boy anymore at all, dear. If you had caught on you wouldn't have called yourself one. No, sweetheart, I'm afraid you've just begun.” She lifted a white petticoat made of net, with three tiers of ruffles stitched to it. Minnie shoved him back toward their mother.

“Oh God,” he exclaimed. “Not a petticoat! The slip is bad enough. I'm not going to wear that thing, mom. Just put it away.”

“That's why this is called petticoat punishment, Brandee darling. There are two things that girls wear that boys never do, brassieres and petticoats. They are completely gender-specific garments. You will wear both, little lady, no matter how ”dorky” they make you feel. In fact, the dorkier—as you put it—you feel, the more likely you are to get the point. Bad boys get better when they have learned to be nice girls. Now put it on or Minnie applies my hairbrush.” Brad took the horrid garment and stepped into it. Secured about his waist, the petticoat descended over his hips and to his knees at a thirty degree flare. It, too was yellow. Brad wanted out. He didn't even want to think about his new condition. He wished he could cloud their minds, and make himself invisible. He felt something inside himself receding, withdrawing, trying to get away from his new reality. Mother turned him to face the mirror. He felt faint at the sight of the frilled, lace-encrusted little lady in the mirror.

He doubled over, feeling the rustle of the petticoat against his nylon clad legs, buried his face in his hands and sobbed loudly. Minerva lifted the petticoat in the rear and brought the solid silver back of the hairbrush down on his satin covered rear end. He let out a long wail.

“Stand up, little lady-shoulders back, chest out. Tuck your little tush in. This is just the beginning, sissy. Before I am through with you, you will be a beautiful girl and a perfect little lady. You have a long way to go, so stop your blubbering and let's get on with it.”

“Let him cry, mom,” Minerva advised. “It's okay for girls to cry, remember? It's boys who aren't supposed to show their emotions.”

“You're right, Minnie, but I can't have him blubbering every time he puts on another garment.”

“Why not? He'll get cried out eventually. Let him slobber like a girl. I think it's sweet.” Brad struggled to get hold of his runaway emotions. This new idea that crying might be acceptable girlish behavior intensified his desire to not do it. His emotions seemed so out of control. Ordinarily, it was control of his emotions, his capacity to dissociate himself from his feelings, to show no feeling that had characterized his manhood. Now he was sobbing like a girl at the sight of himself in a petticoat that would

enthrall any real girl. He felt that letting his shame and embarrassment show doomed him to femininity and shoving them down would choke him.

“Minerva, I think you are right. Dr. Vickers recommended we find some way to get to his inner feelings, to put him face to face with his core emotions. From the look and sound of him we seem to have succeeded. Come, now precious, into your pretty frocks! Your days as a renegade little son-of-a-bitch are over. And I don't mean you will be a genuine bitch either. You're going to be a perfect little lady. If you can do that for me you can go back to being a boy or, hopefully, a gentleman. Until you can show me that, it's dresses and tresses for my little Brandee.”

Brad gave it up. Mother seemed so determined, his sister so smug. He hadn't realized that any such horrid consequences might arise from some simple pranks and a little smartness. He hadn't reckoned with Mother's distress and Dad's passivity, the principal's ire, the teacher's distress or Sandra Willingham's rage at having her ponytail removed with a scissors. In short, he hadn't reckoned with karma, which comes to all of us in myriad forms and combinations that leave us as bewildered and confused as Bradford Cowles was this bright Saturday morning. His mother pulled the yellow satin jumper down over his yellow lace blouse with its puffed sleeves. Teetering on three inch sling pumps, the newly contrived Brandee Cowles staggered out to the car for his appointment with Dr. Vickers' syringe.

Chapter 3

Alice Cowles and Andrea Goodwin left early in the morning, following a breakfast of croissant and blueberries with yogurt. The sparkling spring skies were mottled with cumulus clouds as they pulled onto the freeway, headed for the state university and their assignation with Paulette.

“What do you think, Andrea?” Alice mused. “Are we out of bounds on this. Putting those two little termagants in girl's clothing seems a bit severe. A semi thundered past them.

“I don't think it's going to hurt them one little bit, unless it hurts their pride. That's the idea, isn't it—to bring them down a peg or two?”

“Yes, hubris will bring an arrow pride, all right, if I remember my Greek mythology. When mortals become too prideful, the gods will bring them back to reality by bringing them down. Hence, pride, it is said, goeth before a fall.”

“Yeah, but a fall into second-class status, a drop into womanhood, falling into the inferior class? Maybe that's a bit much.”

“Whoa, there, Alice girl. That, in itself, is a bit much. Whoever said that women were second class citizens?”

“Oh, about four thousand years of Western culture, Andrea, darling. Men have put us down at least that long, Can you deny it?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact, I can. Just because the guys have taken all the glory for themselves at our expense doesn't mean that we have to buy into that crap. We have our ways of equalizing things if we have the nerve to just do it. After all, they die young and leave all the goodies to us. We wind up living longer and getting all the money they went out and competed for. They may think they are in charge but they aren't; not if we don't allow it.” Another semi roared by. “See what I mean? Mr. Lagerlout up in that cab may think he's King of the road but I bet I know who he hands his pay envelope to when he gets home!” Alice laughed. It was true, she knew it was.

“What if the little rascals ever figure it out, find out that we girls have all the advantages and get all the goodies in the end? Maybe they'll decide they are better off as girls. That bothers me.”

“Won't happen. Alice, honey. They are too far gone, too much into their macho things. Boys will be boys and calling a time out to make them be little ladies for a while isn't going to change their inborn nature. Testosterone- remember?” Alice swung the Toyota convertible into the fast lane and left the lumbering behemoth of a truck in her wake.

“OK, Andrea, I just wondered if we are doing the right thing. It really is rather extreme, you know. There's no clinical studies to back us up . We're pioneering here and that's kind of scary.” The clouds were organizing and the car tore into the front wall of a summer thundershower. Lightning crackled and thunder rolled as the frontal winds lashed a sprinkling of hail against the car. Alice slowed down slightly as sheets of driving rain slashed at them.

“Are the gods trying to tell us something, dear friend?” Andrea asked.

“Yeah, they are telling us that we can expect real trouble if we lose our nerve. Zeus has spoken. We are to transform the little darlings as surely as Achilles was driven into hiding as a maiden in a harem”

“Is that true?” Andrea giggled.

“According to Homer, and he never lied. He was a poet and they always speak to our emotions. Don't you remember? Remember how we called them the Idiot and the Oddity in high school? Cyclops, Hiram, Troy, “wine-dark seas” and all that neat stuff? Gods acting like people, people acting like gods, hubris, the fates, Cyclops and Penelope, Troy, the thousand ships- the whole works!” Andrea was laughing out loud by now. A lightning bolt parted the trunk of a tree next to the highway. There was a click and a white flash of light and shards of oak rained about them.

“Oh, God,” Andrea shouted, suddenly no longer amused. Alice pulled the car into a rest stop. The two of them stared at one another as the rain pelted the rag-top.

“I think Zeus has spoken,” she murmured.

“Good enough for me,” rejoined Alice. “What God hath decreed let no man put asunder.”

“Which God?”

“Does it matter?”

“No! I guess Brad and Jeff are in for a bit of feminization training. aren't they?”

“Looks that way. Achilles, huh? Are you sure?”

“Yeah, even Ajax couldn't tell him from the other maidens.”

Alice pulled the car out onto the highway as the storm subsided. They were on campus before noon. Paulette was waiting for them in the trattoria of the student union. Alice and Andrea breathed a sigh of relief. The elder Cowles son was lovely in a white satin blouse with a large pointed collar, full sleeves and French cuffs. He wore a black wool skirt that flared to mid-calf and black oxfords with blocky high heels. His hair was pulled back in a French braid. His make up was shiny and fresh and he wore a complex intertwined set of hoops and chains linking the holes in his earlobes. Bright crimson lipstick matched his long squared nails. Andrea thought he looked the perfect college girl, bright, smiling, radiantly happy with herself and just as attractive as she could imagine any real girl to be.

“Wow! Gee, Paul,...I mean, Paulette, I am just stunned. Where did you learn.....”

“Gender 101, Mom. You should read the college bulletin. I got three credits for this get-up, and the others that go with it. Wanna come to lab this afternoon? They're doing cocktail and party dresses. I have a new number in lavender peau du soie I'm going to model.”

“Whoa!” Alice spluttered. “Too fast for me. Are you telling me that they give classes in which boys learn to be girls?”

“Or the girls can learn to be boys, but that isn't so popular. Most girls seem to know they've got it made. It's the guys that want a look-see at the other side of the gender continuum.”