



Copyright © 2010, Mags Inc - All Rights Reserved

Gossip Woman

by Sarah Thorpe

Chapter 1

Simon Wry leaned back in his chair, satisfied with what he had written. It had taken him quite some time, but at the end he was very pleased with the result. Just in front of him was two thick volumes of paper, one was a full fledged novel, the other was a movie script based on that same novel. He had made paper copies just in case someone wanted to read it that way.

Now comes the next question. Who will read it? He had at least one candidate, Larry Hammerstein. He was once a big star, but after a certain woman started talking and writing about him, he was dead in Hollywood. Everything she had written was false, and he could prove it all. But that didn't stop her and finally Larry was in all practical terms banned from making movies or television shows. Fortunately he had laid up enough money so he could live happily ever after. But Larry liked to work, he couldn't stop going on stage. So the only act he could do was to do drag shows in Las Vegas. "He should be the first to read my book," Simon said to himself.

Simon called up Larry right away. As soon as he answered he said: "Hi Larry, it's Simon. I'd like to see you. Can you come to my place in the not so distant future?. I have something I would like to show you."

"Isn't it a little risky for you to see me," Larry answered, "that could put you in the same situation as I am right now."

"I know, and I'm willing to take the risk. Just in case you can use my secret entrance. You know that, don't you? And if you want to be even more cautious, come in something that resembles your stage clothes."

"That might work. I'll be there tomorrow at noon. It's a too long drive, but I need to do some preparations before I can visit you. I'll park in the Guest Parking Area and use the front door. No one will recognize me anyway."

"On the other hand, someone might be suspicious if they see an unknown woman coming to my house in the middle of the day. Do as I said and enter the garage. I have a vacant slot in there. Just give me a call when you're at the gate."

"OK. See you tomorrow."

"One thing more. I'd like you to stay for a few days if that's possible, you're more than welcome, you know. The thing is that that it might take some time to go through all I want you to look at."

"I'll consider it."

When the conversation was over, Larry took a good look at himself. He lived in a secluded area with very few neighbors; and none of them knew what he once was. He remembered it so well. He was a small star in Hollywood, playing many roles in movies and on television. He was never the big star, but was big enough to get good roles and he made quite some money. Then one day rumors started going round. Nobody knew where they came from, but they were stated in the newspaper column of Carla Swenson, and they said that he had been a child molester. This was utterly nonsense of course, but the police had to intervene and he was arrested. He went through rigorous interrogations by police detectives, but he never broke. He stood his ground. The alleged victim and her parents even came forward and said that she that their daughter never had been molested at all. He was cleared of all charges, of course, but the damage was done, he was banned from Hollywood and could get no more acting roles. His wife, however, stood by his side, but she moved to Eastern Arizona where she had her roots. Where there's smoke, there's fire," people said.

But the whole thing was older than that. A few years earlier he had a role in a series based on a true story. The story involved a man who went through a transformation from man to woman, and he had the role both as the man and as the woman. Carla Swenson didn't like that, such a role should have been played by a woman in her eyes. That's when the hatred between the two started.

The result of the rumor was that Larry couldn't get a job anymore. He loved to perform and he couldn't live without the stage or screen. He got some small parts in a few underground movies, and in one of them he had to dress as a woman most of the time, just like the series he'd done a few years earlier. He did this so well that someone offered him a contract to do Drag Shows. He was reluctant at first, but gave in. He just had to be on stage. He then took the opportunity to buy a house in Vegas while his wife was still in Arizona. She and their kids came to visit him very often, though. His wife's daughter from an earlier affair had even moved into his house in order to go to High School in Vegas. Now he was between shows and was laying low. The phone from Simon was very welcome and he had no problems to visit him. But as this were, he couldn't come as himself. Simon lived in Hollywood and if they were seen together, Simon would be ruined as well. So he had to dress up in what Simon called stage clothes.

He had over the few years since he was banned from Hollywood managed to build up quite a feminine wardrobe. He looked good when dressed up, and had no problems walking the streets of Hollywood as a woman. He had done that several times already, poking at people who snickered at Larry. He loved to walk amongst them, and many times he had heard them talk about him in a quite negative manner. If they only had known that the person they were talking about was sitting next to them, hearing everything they said.

He took the invitation from Simon very seriously. Simon was actually the only friend he had left in Hollywood, and he trusted him 100%. And when he in addition asked him to stay for a couple of days, something special must have come up. Simon was a writer and must have something up his sleeve.

Then suddenly he thought of something. He called back to Simon; he had to ask him a few extra questions. He made the call to Simon's private cell phone to make sure that he was the one that took the call. "Simon, Wry," came the answer in the other end.

"It's me, Larry again. I just want to ask you a few questions."

"Go ahead."

"Do Nicole and the kids know about my visit?"

"They do, and they do look forward to see you again."

"Even if I come in my stage clothes, as you called them?"

"That doesn't matter. I've told them everything and you will be welcome either way. They know what kind of trouble you're in and like me; they support you all the way. We have a spare bedroom you can use while you're here. And please don't get out of character while you're here. We might get some visitors that know Larry and don't like him. By the way, what name do you use while in your stage clothes?"

"I call myself Laura Westinghouse, and I even have an ID card, a Driver's License and a passport in that name. That was something the police gave me to help me stay in character. I even have a bank account in that name. These are the papers I normally use now."

"That's fine. See you tomorrow. Bye." They hung up.

Next morning Larry, or rather Laura, started preparing herself as soon as she was out of bed and had taken a shower. She took out something that was called a torso. It came in two parts, one for the lower part of the body, and one for the upper. It widened her hips a little, gave her a flat groin with the penis hidden inside a sheath, a narrow waist and a nice pair of breasts. The area where torso met skin soon blended in and was almost impossible to see. With the torso in place she put on a bra and a panty and sat down in front of the vanity and started putting on some make-up. She was very skilled in applying make-up and by the time she was finished her face looked just like a female face around 30 years of age. She did not overdo it; it was just the right amount. Next step was the auburn shoulder length wig that was partly fastened to Larry's own hair. She combed it out and took a good look at herself. She looked ravishing. Next step was to apply nail polish to her finger- and toenails. They came in the same color as her lips. As soon as the polish was dry, she put on a pair of very sheer stay-ups, just to smooth out her legs a little. Next a white blouse unbuttoned at the top and a narrow white skirt that reached almost to her knees. A match-

ing jacket was made ready to be carried along. On her feet she put pumps with 3" comfortable heels. Some jewelry finished off her transformation from man to woman. Laura was ready for the world.

She walked around the apartment for a while to find out what kind of clothes she should bring along. She took out some dresses, shoes, skirts and blouses and added some beach clothes. She might not go to the beach, but spending time by Simon's pool was very likely. She had no idea how long she would be gone, she just had to make a guess how much clothes she needed. If she came short, she might always get the chance to buy something. Laura loved shopping. It gave her great satisfaction to walk around in women's stores and try on things other men could only dream about. She loved the duality she had discovered in herself.

When she had found what she thought she needed, she packed a large suitcase and took it to her car. Before she left she ate a bowl of salad just to keep the worst hunger away. She washed the bowl before she walked to her car and drove off.

It took Laura quite a few hours to reach Simon's house. It was located in an area with relatively low apartment buildings, and Simon owned the three top floors in one of them. To make matters easy, several of these buildings shared an underground garage with very limited access. Simon had four slots, two for the two family cars, and two for guests.

As she approached the garage, Laura called Simon on her cell phone, telling him that she was about to turn to face the garage door. Simon looked at the monitor and saw the car, it was identical to the one Larry/Laura owned so he opened the garage doors. Laura drove through the doors and as soon as she was inside, the doors closed behind her. She knew where Simon parked his cars and found a vacant slot amongst the four slots available. Only one was taken at the moment, Laura took the second one. Not long after Laura was out of the car, Simon came through the elevator door to greet her. He took a good look at her and said: "Larry, or shall I say Laura, is that really you?"

"Yes, it is," she replied in Larry's normal voice, "Do you like what you see?"

"I like it very much. You're dropdown gorgeous. How do you do it?"

"I'll tell you later. It's a drag artist's secret. But you should have seen it in Hollywood as well. They use it there all the time."

"I might have seen it, but I might not have known what to look for. Let me help you with your luggage. Besides, I haven't seen you as a woman before. At least not in private."

Simon took one of the suitcases to the elevator. They both entered and soon they were in Simon's apartment. He was alone at the moment; his wife was out picking up the kids from school.

Inside the apartment Simon took Laura to a guest room and told her to settle in. "You can stay as long as it takes," he said.

"What do you mean by that?"

"You will understand in a while. I have something I want you to read, and I want you to read it thoroughly. Just hang up your clothes and I'll see you outside on the top floor in a few minutes."

It didn't take long for Laura to put away her clothes. She grabbed her purse and soon joined Simon on the roof terrace. Simon gave her a soft drink and said: "You see, I've written a new novel, and I want you to be the first to read it. Even Nicole hasn't read it yet. It's very controversial; you'll understand why when you read it. And I don't want you to leave before you've read it all and given me your opinion. I trust your judgment on this."

They sat and small talked until Nicole showed up with the kids. Laura stood up to greet her, after all they were old friends. Nicole just went over and gave Laura a big hug. "I feel I must do this," she said, "I know you have a hard time and I appreciate very much that you would come and stay with us for a while. By the way, you look very beautiful. You must tell me the secret on how you do it."

"I will. And it's so good to see you. I'll be happy stay with you. What do your children know about me?"

"You have met them as Larry, but I haven't told them about Laura. The only thing I've told them is that you are a friend from High School in Omaha. I think they're a little too young to really understand at this moment. And to other people we meet, you will be that old school friend. In a sense it's true, you know; Larry and I went to the same High School, but graduated one year apart. We knew each other then so it's no lie."

"I know. We were in fact good friends. We lived rather close to each other and often walked to school together."

"We did, and that's what makes the story great." At this moments two kids came out on the terrace. It was Ronald, nine years old, and his sister Mona, seven years old. They stepped up to Laura and welcomed her to their house. They were a little shy; they didn't seem to know how to handle the situation.

They sat down on the open patio together and Simon asked: "How's life in Vegas? And what about your family?"

"Life in Vegas is OK. I have a house in an area where many artists live. They know about me and feel sorry for they way I've been treated. They don't bother whether I come as Larry or Laura. During the season I stay as Laura almost all the time. Off season I'm mostly Larry.

"My wife and my kids are on the Reservation right now. My wife's daughter Tanita will soon be 17, and is in her second year in High School. She goes to a High School in Vegas and lives with me during the school year. My own kids and wife normally lives on the Reservation. I want then to learn about their Native American heritage and culture and be proud of it.

"When it comes to Tanita, she's 100% Native American and the most beautiful girl I've ever seen. She does extremely well in school and plan to go to college and study either law or economics. She plans to have a career in politics and consider these choices to be her best options for such a career. She is very ambitious. She just told me that since a black man can be elected President of the US, a Native American woman should be as well, and

in fact, she plans to be that person. She aims for the election in 2036 or 2040. She has no hopes to be the first woman president. A woman in the White House will come long before that, she said."

"She sounds to be quite a girl. I'd like to meet her some time."

"That can be arranged earlier than you think, my friend. My wife and all her three kids plan to visit Los Angeles in about one week. If I can stay that long I'll be happy to introduce them to you all. My kids are about the same age as your kids, you know."

"That would be fine. I think we even can find some space for them here."

"I would appreciate that. Now I want you to tell me why you wanted me to come and see you. I suspect this is more than just a social visit.."

"You're right. I have written something I want you to read." Simon took out his manuscripts and handed them to Laura. "There's one novel, and a script for a movie based on that book. I want you to read it and tell me what you think. Don't say anything until you're finished. And remember, besides Nicole, you're the only person who has seen these books. They have not been handed to any publisher yet. I don't even know if anybody wants to take them."

"Sounds interesting. I'll start reading right away."

Laura took the books and found a place in the shade on the top terrace. She opened the novel and started reading. She was a quick reader and it didn't take her long before she understood what it was about. Herself, or rather Larry, was partly involved, and so was the person that had put out the rumors about Larry. In the novel she was called Kitty Foster, but everybody in Hollywood knew her as Carla Swenson, the gossip woman. Every piece of dirt she could dig up she published in her daily column in major Los Angeles newspaper. She never checked her sources, in her eyes if the rumor was out, it's something in it. And if you can't find any dirt on someone, invent something. No one is beyond her evil pen. That's how Larry became one of her targets. She had tried to get something on him, but he was too clean. Nothing dirty showed up. Because Larry was so clean, she hated him. Nobody in Hollywood could be that clean, there had to be something to him.

Then one day it happened. She saw him in the park with a five-year-old girl. He took the girl by the hand and they walked to the other end of the park and disappeared. Carla followed and managed to take a picture of the two. By looking at her camera monitor she saw just what she wanted to see, a grown up man taking a little girl away and into the bushes. She rushed back to her house and started to write an article about what she had seen. She didn't care to check out the full story, that was not important. What was important was that she had something on Larry Hammerstein. Next day it was in the newspaper, blown up out all its proportions. She also filed a claim to police so they had to investigate. They believed the woman and arrested Larry right away. Once more Larry was on the front page of the newspapers. Even the local TV station brought a story on the subject.

But was this the real story? Of course not, Larry had seen the neighbors little girl in the park, obviously lost. He took her hand and comforted her while calling her mother from his cell phone. They had agreed to meet at a place somewhere between the park and the girl's home, and happened to be right behind the bushes where Carla had seen them dis-

appear. She had sneaked up there herself, but saw nothing. She only found a red ribbon that later was identified to belong to the girl.

The police thought they had a solid case and treated Larry very badly. He was thrown into jail with no chance of getting any help. Other prisoners heard what he apparently had done and gave him a solid beating. When the police talked to the girl and her mother the next day, they heard quite a different story. They didn't know what to believe, but for a few days kept to Carla's version. But one detective got suspicious. He realized that something fishy was going on and visited the girl and her mother once again. He heard the full story from the mother once more, even the fact that the girl had injured herself between her legs a few days earlier. This injury had been taken as proof that Larry had molested her.

Three days later Larry was cleared of all charges and could go back home. But the damage was done, his reputation was ruined and nobody wanted to touch him. He only had a few friends left that really believed him, two of them being Nicole and Simon. It got so bad that Larry was openly harassed on the street by complete strangers. It was so bad that he couldn't leave his own house to get food. He complained to the police. They understood his predicament and offered him relocation and a new identity. That's how he ended up as Laura.

Laura continued reading the books. The more she read, the more she remembered from those fatal days three years ago when her life was turned upside down. It was tough for her to read on, but she knew she had to do it. If making a movie and publishing a book would bring that Swenson woman to silence, she was all for it. But who would dare to publish? And who would dare to make the movie? She was sure Simon had someone up his sleeve; otherwise he wouldn't have written it.

It took Laura almost four days to finish reading. She had stayed at the house all the time, not taking a single step out in the open. When she told Nicole and Simon she was finished reading, Nicole stood right up and said: "Forget about the books for a while. Now you and me are going to do some serious girl shopping. We will finish off with a nice meal in a fancy restaurant. Get yourself ready and we will let Simon take care of the children. There's no better cure for a woman than to go shopping. Today's Saturday so the shops are busy. Get yourself ready, you have maximum 20 minutes."

Twenty minutes later the two women left the apartment and drove downtown in Nicole's car. They found a vacant parking place downtown Hollywood and stepped out. Nicole took the lead. First stop was a shop for women's clothing. Laura's spirits were getting higher by the minute and soon she was in the mood, just like Nicole. Four hours later they had been through several stores, ranging from dresses to lingerie, shoes to make-up. They had to try them all. At the end of the raid they left their packages in the car and went to the restaurant Nicole had suggested. They were obviously expected. The maitre d' took them straight to a table in the back where they could have peace and quiet while eating. They really enjoyed the service they were having. It was expensive, but it was all worth it. For Laura this didn't matter at all; after all Nicole paid for the food and drinks.

It was dark when they finally came home. The kids were in bed already and the three of them sat down in the living room for some drinks. Laura wanted to talk about what she had read, but Simon silenced her. "Wait until tomorrow," he said, "then we will discuss it

all. I know you have a lot of questions and I have the answers. Don't worry, everything will be all right."

Laura settled with that. Instead they talked about everything else. Laura had a nice evening with good friends and enjoyed it. She went to bed around midnight, totally exhausted both physically and mentally. She didn't sleep very well that night.

Chapter 2

Nest day being Sunday, Laura, Nicole and Simon was gathered on the patio. It was Simon that opened the conversation. "Now Laura," he said, "What do you think about my books? Did you like them?"

"I liked them all right, but they brought back some sad memories. Memories I would have liked to be without. That woman took my life away from me."

"I know, and I hope we can redeem that with my book and the movie. Both Nicole and I would like to have that woman out of circulation as soon as possible. Since nothing seems to work when it comes to her, I thought a novel and a movie script would do the trick."

"You may be right. But who's gonna publish the book, and who's gonna produce the film? And who do you think would star in such a movie?"

"I've thought a lot about that. I have some friends in the business, you know, and I know my way around. I have actually talked with a publisher in New York that would love to publish the book. He hates Carla just as much as you and I do. She did him wrong once and he had to move to the East Coast to get away from her. But he would like to see the movie finished before he publish. When it comes to production I have plans to leave for England. I've talked with people there and they have the means and capacity to do such a production. They also have the actors, no one there is afraid of Carla Swenson. When it comes to the main character herself, I would like to ask you if you would like to play the part of Kitty Foster. You seem like the ideal candidate to me. And I think it will humiliate Carla even further when she learns that a man portrayed her; and to make matters even worse, that man is you. What do you think?"

"If this really can bring Carla down, I'm all for it. I know exactly how to play that part. I'll make her as evil and mean as you can get them so that people can see right through her. I've learned that she was furious when the police released me. They have a very good detective at the LAPD that really can get to the bottom of a case. She's a woman named Annie Wolfe and is as shrewd as you can get them. She even wanted to press charges against Carla, accusing her of false accusations. But politics prevailed and she was stopped short before she came that far. It made her and the Chief of Police David Miller really mad. If push comes to show, you can really rely on these two."

"That's good to hear," Nicole said, "I plan to have a part in that movie as well. Maybe portraying Annie Wolfe would be my thing. Or maybe I should play the mother of that little girl you were accused of molesting and use my own daughter as the girl you found. I'll make up my mind later. But now, Laura, We want to know what really happened."

"I'll tell you, just listen." And Laura began her story.

It was a sunny day in early August three years earlier. Larry had just sent his wife and kids back to the reservation. They had been with him for several weeks this summer, learning how a movie was made. Larry had a role in an upcoming movie and he had taken his family to the set. There they had seen how the takes were done, and what happened to them afterwards. Larry's character would play a greater role later during the filming. In the beginning he was just there to be more or less in the background.

With his family on their way, Larry walked to the nearest park to kook at people. He loved watching people, especially kids playing around in the sun. He sat down on a bench to watch the children play. After about 10 minutes he saw a little girl crying. He looked at her and recognized her right away. It was the neighbor's 5-year-old daughter Maria. He stood up from the bench and walked over to her. "Hi Maria, It's me Larry. What has happened?"

Maria looked at him and saw who he was. "I want to go home," she said, "I want to be with mommy."

"I'll take you there, but how come you're here all alone?"

"I was with the other kids and they just walked away from me."

Larry understood that she had been with the kindergarten and that they for one reason or another had abandoned her. He knew that the girl's mother worked in a store not very far from where they were, and he decided to take her there. He had the mother's number on his cell phone and called her up. He told her the story and they agreed to meet just on the other side of some trees at the end of the park. It meant that they had to pass through those trees, but that should be no problem. He took Maria by the hand and they started to walk. While between the trees Maria had to take a leak, and Larry just let her do it. She was big enough to do the job herself. Out on the sidewalk on the other side they started walking in the direction Maria's mother would come from. She arrived in less than five minutes, thanked Larry for a job well done and drove home with her child. Larry had decided to stay out a little longer, so he walked back to the park.

It took him another hour before he arrived home. He sat down in his living room to watch some TV. He hadn't been watching for very long before he heard someone burst through his door. It was the police, and two of them grabbed his arms and bended them behind his back. A police officer said that he was under arrest for child molesting and dragged him to the car. Under way they read him his rights and took him to the station. There he was placed in the interrogation room where a police officer started questioning him. He gave the police his side of the story, but they weren't satisfied. They wanted a confession and didn't get it. When he saw where this was heading, he refused to speak and asked to have that phone call. They gave him access to the phone and he dialed his lawyer. He was a little busy at the moment, but promised to be there in less than three

hours. Larry just had to wait. In the meantime he was thrown into a cell and told to keep quiet. There were other prisoners in the cell as well, and they had obviously heard what he was accused of. It was one thing these hard core criminals didn't like, and that was child molesters. They gave him quite a heavy oral beating while he was there.

Larry's lawyer, Patrick Simpson arrived after a little over two-and-a-half hours later. Pat had been given the papers they had on him so far. Larry gave the lawyer his version about what had happened. Pat listened to what he said and stopped him before he was through. "Please don't speculate," he said, "your story is far better than theirs anyway. They're still investigating and three detectives are already at the house where Maria lives. What will come out of that, I don't know. I feel there is something fishy going on in this case, and I'll talk to a friend of mine in the police and ask if he can put someone else on the case. I would like to have someone neutral investigate this. Just stay calm and don't admit anything. I know they will try to get you to confess; and if you do, even under stress, we have an almost lost case. I need you to hold out for another hour or two. Can you do that?"

"I think so. These guys have been really tough on me. Can you also call my wife and tell her what has happened. I would have liked it you could talk to Maria's mother as well, but that might be a little dangerous. I think they will charge you with interfering with an ongoing investigation, and that won't be right."

"You're right, I won't contact her. But I will call your wife. I have her numbers."

"Thank you."

Pat Simpson left the station and made his calls. Larry's wife became so upset that she decided to turn around right away. The other person Pat called was LA Chief of Police, David Miller and introduced him to what was happening. He saw no conflict in this; he was normally not a defender in criminal cases, but he knew the law and what rights the various individuals had. If this comes to trial, he would most probably not defend Larry anyway. Especially not after he had talked with The Chief of Police.

Pat called David from his car. "Hello Dave, It's Pat. I have something I gotta tell you. Something has happened to a friend of mine and I need your help."

"Hi Pat. I'm all ears."

Pat told Dave what he had just learned about what had happened to Larry. Dave and Larry had met, and Dave knew the man as a decent and well behaved citizen. When Pat had finished he said: "That's quite a story. I smell something fishy here. What do you want me to do?"

"I want the case transferred to your office and I would like if you could put one of your best guys on the case. Larry has never done such a thing; it must be some kind of set-up. Somebody wants to get to him, and that very bad. "

"I'll see what I can do. I think my best investigator is available right now. It won't take her long to clear up this mess. I will also call the station where Larry is and tell the guys there that we take it from here. I'll have Larry transferred as soon as possible. He most probably have to spend the night there though, but we will be ready in the morning. The

guys at that station will get direct orders from me not to interrogate Larry any more and leave him in peace until we pick him up."

"Who will you put on the case?"

"Annie Wolfe, of course. Who else?"

"Thank you. She's the best of the best. She can be trusted 100%."

"I know. I'll keep you posted."

Pat went back to Larry and told him the news. While he was there the officers at the station obviously received the message from David. They looked over to where Larry and Pat sat and moped. They knew it was nothing more they could do, they had to leave Larry in peace. If they didn't and David Miller learned about it, all hell would break loose. Pat left Larry in a cell where he would be free from harassment from other inmates.

Next morning two things happened. Annie showed up with a squad car early that morning and picked up Larry. He had not been harmed in any way since Pat left. She took Larry to her own station, gave him some decent food and started asking what had happened. Annie listened carefully. She was shocked. The first thing she would do now was to go to Maria's mother and ask her what she thought about the matter.

The second thing that happened was that David came to Annie's office and showed her the newspaper of the day. There, right in front of them was Carla Swenson's gossip column and that gave them all the answers. It also told them one thing more; There was a mole in the police, feeding her with information, and that mole must be amongst the officers at the other station. She had after all written things that only an insider would know in such cases. This called for drastic measures.

Annie hurried off to Maria's mother right away. It turned out that she was not at work, she was home caring for her daughter. Annie drove to their house. It was only two houses away from where Larry lived. His wife and children were back and was at that moment given all the information Pat had so far. Annie decided to make a short stop and tell them what was going on.

She was met by Larry's wife and was told to come in. Inside she gave her the rundown of what had happened so far, and said that she would do everything that was in her power to clear Larry's name and reputation. They had all already read Carla's column and knew that the damage had been done already, they just hoped that these rumors could be put to death right away. Annie promised to do whatever it took to make that happen.

She left the house and drove the short distance to where Maria lived. She knocked on the door and waited for it to open.

She was welcomed at the door by Pat. He introduced her to Maria's parents Lucy and Harold. After a few words of comfort she said: "What is your relationship with Larry Hammerstein?"

It was Harold that replied. "Our relationship with him is like that with any other neighbor and friend. He's a good man and wouldn't harm a living thing, especially not a

child. Maria has complete trust in him and he would never betray that trust. Please help him."

"I will do my best. But I fear that the damage is already done. Her column is out and there is no way she, or the newspaper for that matter, will withdraw what has been written. Even if they're willing to do so, the rumors are out and someone will always believe them. It might help you to know that Larry is innocent, but it won't help Larry I'm afraid. I will do my best though. Now please tell me what happened yesterday when the police came to your door."

It was Harold that spoke this time as well. "Three men and a woman came to our door. They wanted to look at and talk to Maria. It was the woman that did the talking and the examination. She concluded that Maria had been tampered with and that she suffered from something called posttraumatic syndrome of some kind. The main issue was that someone, i.e. Larry had been tampering with her. We don't believe that. Maria told us that Larry had been good to her and only held her hand all the way to meet her mother. I think that Swenson woman just wants to ruin Larry's life."

"So do I. But the damage is done. Her column in today's newspaper is focused on this incident. Once there the rumors will never, ever die. I will, however, do my best to lessen the burden on all parties involved, except Carla Swenson."

"I hope you can, but it might be that we have to relocate, and we don't like that. We love this place."

"I understand, and to be honest, people around here know you and Larry and they won't bother. What worries me though, is that Maria can get a hard time at school. The good thing is that neither Maria's nor yours names were mentioned in Carla's column. That's why I think you're home free. Larry, however, is much worse off."

"We feel pity for him and his family. By writing the way she did, Carla ruined his family as well. But back to business, what do you want from us."

"First of all I want a written and signed statement from Lucy on what happened from her side. Keep it objective and don't speculate. I also want you Harold, to counter sign the statement. I understand that the other police officers only took an oral statement from you?"

"They did."

"That's what I thought. Then they can manipulate it as they wish. When I have that document, we all drive to the hospital where I want you to meet a pediatrician that will thoroughly examine Maria, and a child psychiatrist that will have a conversation with her. They are both female and the best in the state. I have worked with them before and never doubted their integrity. They have often been used in cases like this, and the court has always listened to them. Maria will be in good hands there. And you don't have to drive, I'll take you in my squad car. It's better that way, we have after all special parking permits."

Lucy and Harold smiled at that comment. They knew how hard it was to find parking at the hospital.

Lucy left the others and went to her PC to write down her statement. She wanted to be brief and thorough at the same time, and that was a little difficult. So it took her almost an

hour before she had finished. She gave the paper to Annie and she read it through. "It's good," she said, "Thorough, but straight to the point. Make room for an extra line for me. Then we all sign three copies, two for me and one for you. Please take me to your PC."

Lucy took Annie to her PC, Annie added one line and three copies were printed and signed. Annie put her copies in her briefcase and told Lucy to put her copy in the family safe. Then they headed off to the hospital.

The visit to the hospital went very well. First Maria was examined by the pediatrician and she couldn't find any signs that Maria had been tampered with. Everything looked just like it should for a five-year-old girl. The conversation with the child psychiatrist was equally successful. Maria had only fine words to say about Larry and the psychiatrist had no reason to doubt her. Annie got her reports and gave one copy to Lucy and Harold for their safekeeping.

Annie took Lucy, Harold and Maria back to their home before she reported back to the station. She went straight to David Miller's office and told him everything. She had even voice recorded the conversation with Lucy and Harold. They knew about it, of course.

As always, David was very pleased with her work. He told her that Larry had been released a few hours ago and taken home to his wife and kids. He asked Annie if she would visit Larry and get his version of what happened. David would also like to know what plans Larry had for the future. He could easily see that Larry would get problems now that the rumors are out, and no matter how false they were, and could be proven to be so, someone will believe them and make Larry's life miserable.

Annie had a cup of coffee before she headed for Larry's home. She was met at the door by Larry's wife. She presented herself and said that the Chief of Police had sent her to get a statement from Larry. She let him in and guided him to the patio in the back. There Larry was sitting wondering what had happened to him. Once again Annie presented herself. Larry had heard of her, she had even been at the set once, watching a movie in the making; a movie based on some of her experiences. Annie and Larry were left to themselves for some serious talking.

By the end of the conversation Annie had a very good idea of what had been going on. She kept her theories to herself at the moment, wanting to discuss them with David first. She brought back a signed statement from Larry.

Back at the station she gave David an oral report, the written one would be ready later. "There is a few things that puzzles me," she said, "First, how did Carla get hold of the story in the first place. Since we know that Larry really followed the girl to her mother, we know that she didn't invent the story. Someone must have tipped her off, and then she, or the same person that tipped her off, gave the information to the police. On the other hand Carla might have stalked him and used what she saw, adding some information on her own and thereby making a story out of it. Then she tipped off the police. In any case I think we have a bad apple at that station.

"Further Larry told me that Carla had written a very negative article on him a few years ago. It was after a role he had where he portrayed a man who changed his gender and became a woman, just like I did. That time she said straight out that such a role should never have been played by a man, a woman should have done that part. Using a man in

such a role was a mockery to women she had said. And after that role she has been after Larry with all she could muster. Seeing him following a little girl that was not his daughter might be enough for her to put out the rumors. It didn't matter if they were true or not, someone would believe them and Larry was ruined for life. That woman is devious enough to do such a thing."

"I think you're right, I'll find someone to find that article. I will also start investigating the officers at that other station and find that mole. When I find him he will regret the day he was born."

Next day Larry decided to go back to work. He hoped that the his colleagues would treat him just like before. The newspaper Carla was writing for had promised to print an article that rebutted what Carla had written, so he felt safe. But as soon as he came to work he understood that nothing was all right. He was met by the producer that told him straight out that he was not wanted at the set. "What's up?" Larry asked.

"You of all persons should know what's up. Don't you have any shame? How dare you destroy a little girl's life! Get out of here! We don't want to see you around here any more. "You'll get the money we owe you, but that's that. Get the hell out of my sight!"

"But I haven't done anything. The whole story is a product of a crazy woman's imagination. Just check with the police. Besides there should be an article in today's newspaper denouncing the whole story."

"I don't trust the police. I think you just paid them off to let you go. Besides, there's no such article. Ms. Swenson is a well-respected journalist with great integrity. I don't think you should ever put your feet back here in Hollywood."



Larry had no other option but to leave. He walked downtown and soon noticed people staring at him. Some whispered behind his back, some were more open and called him different name. One woman went so far as to slap his face just there on the sidewalk. Then it dawned upon Larry that he had to move. He had to find work some other place. Maybe the East Coast would be better. He could always check it out.

As the days passed it was more and more evident that he had become increasingly unpopular. He couldn't go anywhere without being snickered at and scolded. It even happened that people attacked him and threatened to kill him. He was definitely a persona non grata. Even his family suffered. They decided to leave and take up a home on the reservation in Arizona. Larry didn't blame them, here in Hollywood they couldn't live. He called some of his friends on the East Coast, but no one had anything for him at the moment. Most of the people there knew him well enough to know that he was innocent.

Then one day a friend in Las Vegas called and said he had something for him. The friend's name was Phil Montrose and he worked as a stage manger. "Hi Larry," he opened, "I do have something for you, but you must do some changes in your style to do the job."

"Hi Phil, just tell me. I'm all ears."

"I've been engaged to set up a drag show here in Vegas, and I need someone to support the star of the show. I heard the problems you're into at the moment and thought about you right away. I remember that TV series you made some years ago where you portrayed a man who became a woman. So if you want to be second fiddle in a drag show, the job is yours."

"Only if the star is Frankie Montana."

"That's the one. He looks forward to meet you. He liked your role as well. I even have a house you can rent, or maybe buy if that's your thing. If you say yeas I want you here in a week. What do you say?"

"I have to think about it. You know I have a family and they must agree first. What you offer me also gave me an idea. I can use this to my advantage and introduce a female version of me, a person that can move freely amongst other people without being recognized as Larry. I will most probably sell my house here and move to Vegas permanently. I'll call you back in two days."

They exchanged a few more words before they hung up. Larry was back on the phone straight away and called his wife. She listened to him and said that this most probably was the best solution at the moment. It would also give Tanita a chance to go to High Scholl in Las Vegas in stead of on the reservation. Larry thought it was a great idea, living as a woman and with his stepdaughter as company might nit be too bad after all. Now he had to talk to David Miller.

He called him as soon as he hung up with his wife. David listened to him and understood right away what was on stake. He asked Larry to show up at his office the following day at ten. Then he might have something for him.