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The Emperor's Girls

by William Kincaid

The morning sun rose over the mountains on Italy's Amalfi Coast and caressed the walls and gardens of the villa overlooking the cobalt blue waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Birds sang in the bushes and the security guards stepped from the shadows of the main house to soak in the sun's warmth. A clatter could be heard on the expansive porch as a young woman, cute, blonde, well-tanned, smiling, with laughing blue eyes and bright red nails, walked an ancient bicycle down the smoothly polished marble steps. Contrasting with the antiquity of the bicycle was the new graphite casting rod and reel that she draped over the handlebars.

The young woman wore a straw cowboy hat, a white blouse, purple scarf, Capri pants and sandals; she breathed a heavy sigh as she prepared to embark on the precipitous trek down the steep and winding mountain road to the harbor that beckoned below. The bicycle became virtually uncontrollable as it

built up speed; twice in the past month the young woman had crashed into the bushes along the road.

At the foot of the steps the woman encountered a stocky man in running shorts, a tattered gray ARMY T-shirt, and sporting a military hair cut and a grin worthy of a wolf sighting a fawn alone in the woods. He was Matthew McAllister, the Emperor's right hand man.

"Good morning, Claudia. It's a beautiful morning, isn't it?" The man's savage grin eased into one normally found on a human face.

"Good morning, Mr. McAllister," Claudia smiled politely, but then continued on her way, aloof. Despite his position, he was still the help and she was one of The Emperor 's girls.

Despite his formidable reputation, McAllister looked hurt at Claudia's quiet rebuff. "Claudia is going fishing again at the harbor like she always does," he thought to himself.

Dripping sweat from his morning run, McAllister sprinted up the marble steps, then leaned against the railing, standing next to a bust of Marcus Agrippa. The Emperor's coastal villa had been extensively remodeled in classical Roman style, as if The Emperor lived in the First Century B.C. rather than the twenty-first century, albeit with all the modern luxuries.

With a pair of old, military issue binoculars that he kept at this spot on the railing, McAllister could follow Claudia's descent down the mountain through occasional glimpses as she took a curve on her bicycle. Then he watched her walk the bicycle onto the

ancient jetty of the harbor and cast her lures into the sea. "I don't care if she has a cock, she is beautiful." McAllister mused as he felt the morning sun dry out the back of his shirt.

McAllister was already out of Claudia's mind as she made her first turn, and after five minutes of careening down the mountain, she was breathless when she finally reached level ground. The sun had continued in its trajectory and now cast the waters of the harbor in a golden glow. Claudia laid her bike against the seawall and cast out a small spoon, hoping to hook one of the mackerel that usually corralled baitfish against the harbor walls at this time of the day. She was so intent on her fishing that she didn't notice a man wearing sunglasses, cargo pants, and a khaki jacket approach her on the end of the breakwater and draw a gun.

Observing Claudia with his binoculars, McAllister had noticed the man lounging in the harbor for several minutes. He was a stranger to the small town and definitely looked out of place, a real threat. "The harbor is 800 yards away down the hill," he thought to himself as he rushed inside. "It's a good thing I already took the range and the wind hasn't started to blow."

Seeing the man approach, Claudia watched him in slow motion draw a semi-automatic pistol and level it at her.

"You are one of The Emperor 's fairies and now you are going to die for it."

The right side of the gunman's head exploded in a scarlet mist as a bullet exited, but Claudia still heard

the gun explode and her young life passed before her eyes as she was drenched in the man's blood.

Two and a half years earlier, Claudia strutted into a drag bar in Greenwich Village in New York City, wearing a black suit dress with purple accents under a trench coat, and black pumps. All eyes turned to her and followed her as she sat in a prominent spot and ordered an Irish coffee to ward off the January cold of the street. Soon one of the patrons confidently walked up to Claudia, although it was one she did not expect.

An attractive blonde in her mid-30s, poised and exceptionally well dressed, smoothly sat on the stool next to Claudia.

"Buy you a drink, sailor?" she said in accented English.

"German," Claudia thought.

"How about I buy you one? Do you like Irish coffee?

"I'll have one thanks, I'm Elizabeth Verstraaten, I'm Dutch."

"Nice to meet you, Elizabeth. I'm Claudia, Claudia Hughes."

"Nice to meet you, Claudia. I hate to be forward, but I have a proposition for you."

A look of shock came across Claudia's face. She had been with plenty of men and expected one to make his move soon but but she had never been with a woman, and she so liked to be taken in the ass.

Elizabeth, however, was gorgeous, stylish, and smiling.

Elizabeth laughed, seeing Claudia's alarm. "It's not that kind of proposition."

Claudia looked relieved and disappointed at the same time.

"I work for a very successful Italian businessman who adores women like you. I'm sure he would love to meet you."

"If he is ever in New York or Philly, I would be happy to meet him if he's nice."

"He's very nice, but you would have to come to Italy. He's not looking for a quick thing. Meet me at the Met tomorrow at 10:00 if you are willing. I'm set to return to Italy soon."

"I didn't bring any other clothes for this weekend. Do you mind meeting me as a guy?"

Elizabeth grinned as she stood up to leave. "If you take up my proposition, you won't be one for much longer."

On a frigid Sunday morning with snow flurries blowing at the entrance to the Met, Jim Hughes met Elizabeth as scheduled.

"Well, are you intrigued?" Elizabeth smiled warmly, thawing winter's bite.

"Can we call this a date?" Jim joked.

"A business date," Elizabeth laughed.

The two walked through the Classical Art galleries marveling at the marble sculptures and frescoes from ancient Rome and Greece. Elizabeth wanted to see how Jim would react. Seeing him intently study the art, she was confirmed that she had found the right girl.

"My boss is very wealthy and has a villa on the Amalfi Coast. You know Amalfi?"

"Between Salerno and Naples. But I have never been."

"You'll love it."

"I'm sure I will. How is the food?" Jim joked.

"My boss has several top chefs at his villa. But to the matter at hand."

"OK."

"My boss lost his wife many years ago and loves transsexuals. He usually has around twenty or twenty-one at his villa. They entertain him."

Jim laughed, "So I would be a part of a harem?"

"You could call it that. We prefer to think it's something more. He would put you on hormones, then send you to Thailand for breasts and facial feminization surgery to complete your transition. In return you would be one of his girls for three years. Then you can go at your own will and he would give you a gift of \$50,000 American to help you start your life as a woman."

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"Sounds like a dream come true, how does your boss afford this?"

"He's very wealthy."

"From what?"

"He's very wealthy."

"OK. So why me?"

"Like I said. He is very wealthy and he wants the best."

"I'm sure in Italy he could have his pick of transsexual women or in the international pageant circuit, so why me?"

"Because he wants the full package; looks, intelligence, education, and someone who is nice. The pageant girls can be insufferable narcissists. I already have learned that. I have done this often enough to know someone that he would like."

"So it's kind of like being in the Playboy mansion?" Jim's face lit up in anticipation.

Elizabeth laughed, "Again, we try to be more classy, and we are more selective."

"And my family?"

"Do they know about your crossdressing?"

"No."

"Eventually you will have to come out to them. I also believe if you could, you would transition to being a woman immediately."

"Yes, but I was planning to come out on my own terms and my own timeline. My Dad will freak."

"But we can't help who we have for parents or family. Now you have a golden opportunity to do what you want to do and a huge source of support. Look Jim, I know this is a huge surprise and seems too good to be true and I want you to take all the time you need. I think you would enjoy life at the Aerie. All our girls love it there and you would too."

"The Aerie? The Eagle's Nest. Hitler and your boss have the same taste in naming their dream houses."

Elizabeth laughed, "I knew you were worth choosing. I'll have to tell him that. I know a good place in Chinatown, do you want to go there for dinner? It has great dim sun. We don't get that in Amalfi."

The Emperor had ruled his domain from his mountaintop perch for thirty years. He had been born in Milan five years prior to World War Two and vividly remembered seeing the bodies of Mussolini and his mistress, Clara Petace, hanging in the city square. His family was left impoverished after the war and he joined La Cosa Nostra in his late teens as an errand boy. Paolo San Luca killed his first man when he was twenty-one in a gun battle in Naples against a rival gang. After that, his superiors recognized his intelligence and ruthless efficiency and he quickly worked his way through the ranks.

Now he literally sat on the top of his world. He ruled a drug empire from Austria to Istanbul, had a

battalion of prostitutes that traveled the world, and smuggled art, weapons, and persons into Europe. He had assumed the veneer of a respected business man, financing numerous construction and civic projects throughout Europe. He also had a son, the Crown Prince Guillermo, who would one day inherit the empire. Now in The Emperor 's waning years, what he valued the most was his exquisite collection of transsexual young ladies who shared his bed and made him feel young and powerful.

Six months after his meeting with Elizabeth at the Met, Elizabeth had obtained the necessary visas for the first leg of Jim Hughes's odyssey. He was going for it. He was finally going to become a she. Jim arrived at the Leonardo Da Vinci Airport in Rome and seeing him, Elizabeth gave him a hug and helped him with his luggage, pitifully small for three and a half years, but his wardrobe would soon become much more sizable and stylish.

The Emperor had a condominium in Rome boasting an impressive collection of Renaissance art that served as a way station for young men to transition to young women. The transsexuals who had been on hormones and had developed breasts went directly to the Aerie whereas Jim would remain in a holding pattern for six months as his body became more feminine. Jim let his hair grow, practiced his makeup and Italian, took the train to Milan for shopping, and took dance lessons at a local studio. The estrangement from his family was assuaged by the anticipation of becoming one of The Emperor 's women. Elizabeth regaled him with stories of dancing, wild parties, and The Emperor 's affections towards his women.

Finally, the day came for Jim to shed his male existence. He would fly to Thailand as Jim but return as Claudia.

"Signorina Di Vittoria? Welcome back to Rome." A hulking man in a suit greeted the pretty young blonde woman emerging from the escalator of the arrival terminal in terrible, heavily American-accented Italian. He was one of the security guards at the Aerie and he not so subtly scanned Claudia from head to toe. Claudia felt affirmed at his approval, even though he was definitely off limits. She was no longer just an attractive cross dresser, she was a woman at last.

"That's me," Claudia beamed.

"Nice to meet you," the man extended his large paw to the young woman. "I'm James Henley, I work for The Emperor. One of our other guards, John Mabry, is in the car. The Emperor thought you might be more comfortable riding with somebody who spoke English. We have some take-out for you in the car, clam linguine if I remember right. It should still be warm. We don't want to delay your arrival. The boss would be pissed."

"Thank you. I don't want to get you in trouble with the boss. I'm sure the linguine will be delicious. I just hope you two have eaten."

"No problem. We both had potato chips and a couple Oranginas at a kiosk."

"The dinner of champions," Claudia laughed.

Sitting in the driver's seat of The Emperor 's BMW, John Mabry greeted Claudia. In contrast to Henley, he stood 5'6" and had an intense but sincere air about him.

"A regular Mutt and Jeff," Claudia laughed to herself, guzzling a bottle of Orangina to slake her thirst.

After midnight the car pulled up to the colonnaded entrance to the Aerie, and Claudia was awestruck by its size and beauty, even in the depths of the night. The villa was sleeping and the moon shone brightly over the sea which men had sailed for thousands of years. Claudia looked at the motif in the classical arch above the doorway, a marble Roman eagle with the letters PSL above it and underneath the word IMPERATOR. A huge guard, even bigger than Henley, stood at the entrance with a semi-automatic rifle and infrared scope. His ebony skin and dark clothes made him almost invisible, except where the moon glinted on his gear, or when his shadow on the marble wall moved.

In the driver's seat, John Mabry turned around and looked directly at Claudia, then spoke in a deep South Carolina accent, "Claudia, you are a beautiful and nice young woman and I know you will be very happy here. Don't be intimidated by The Emperor. Sure, he is a rich and powerful guy, but he is just a man like me and Henley. Well, not quite like Henley, nobody is. But remember he puts his pants on one leg at a time, and takes them off the same way as the rest of us. Just be yourself, Claudia, and you will be fine."

"Thank you, Mr. Mabry."

"It's just John. Now let's get you inside."

Claudia's high heels clacked across the marble portico while Henley and Mabry hustled her luggage into the women's dormitory area. She wore a short, white silk cotton dress with a flower print she had purchased in Thailand. Her outfit was perfectly adequate in the sweltering heat and humidity of South East Asia but now the night breezes gave her a chill as she gazed over the railing at the inky black sea. The setting was perfect and she did not want to go to her room just yet.

Muffled footsteps behind her barely disturbed her reverie until a man wearing a white blazer, slacks, and expensive Milanese loafers emerged from the shadows. Claudia then felt a cotton shawl placed delicately over her shoulders.

"The night air on the coast is chilly, even in summer. You will get used to it," a man said in a deep, authoritative voice with Italian-accented English and then stood next to Claudia overlooking the sea.

"Thank you. I'm sure I will."

"So, what are your first impressions of the Aerie?"

"It's like being in a dream. Actually more like finding your dream."

"So I trust you had a good flight."

"I did."

"And I hope your journey felt like more than just a plane ride."

Claudia smiled and paused, "Yes. Yes it did. Like I was traveling to my destiny. That's the way this



whole thing has been since I left my family and the States."

"Soon enough you will be part of the family of the villa, and I'm sure you will be happy."

Claudia studied herself from head to foot like Henley did at the airport. "So far it's been beyond my wildest dreams. Even now, just looking at the Tyrrhenian, it's like going back two thousand years in time. I can't help thinking of all he history that has passed this place. The evacuation of Pompeii from Vesuvius, the Greek colony at Paestum, the invasion at Salerno, maybe even Odysseus himself passed by this mountain."

"You know your American Rangers used this very mountain top as a command post during the battle?"

"I thought so. I looked at the maps and figured this was the peak."

"I appreciate a young woman who knows her history."

"Thank you, and I have never felt more connected to it."

"I know that I will truly enjoy getting to know you, Claudia di Vittoria. It will be like reading a great novel or visiting an art gallery for the first time."

"You do have a way with words. Who are you, Signor?"

"Paolo La Duca, but here they call me The Emperor. Sleep well, my dear Claudia. Your new life will start tomorrow morning."

Claudia could barely sleep, her excitement was so tangible that her body and mind would not shut down. She now had breasts, womanly curves, softness, and a refined face, and she wanted to embrace her new world with her new self. The Emperor was charming and seemed to like her already. Finally, she drifted off to sleep feeling extraordinarily fortunate that Elizabeth had encountered her at the bar in the Village and saw something worthwhile.

An avalanche crashed into Claudia's small dorm room just after dawn. Twenty young women, Italians, French, German, Dutch, Belgian, American, British, African, Turkish, Thai, Venezuelan and Colombian, all in various states of undress, some with dangling cocks readily visible under baby doll nighties, all with perfect manicures and pedicures, barged into the sleeping woman's room with cries of delight, welcoming their new friend.

"So you're Claudia?" Kristina, a beautiful blonde German girl, was the first to speak with a wicked smile on her face.

Barely conscious, Claudia started to formulate a response when Alessandra, a petite Venezuelan girl warmly hugged her. "Welcome to the Aerie. We are all sisters here."

The girls got in a line and each did the same, until Claudia was well squashed, but at least wide awake.

"And we are all going on the yacht to Monte Carlo tomorrow," Dominique, a dark eyed Parisian announced. "Luis overheard The Emperor and McAllister talking about that. It looks like The Emperor wants to show you off."