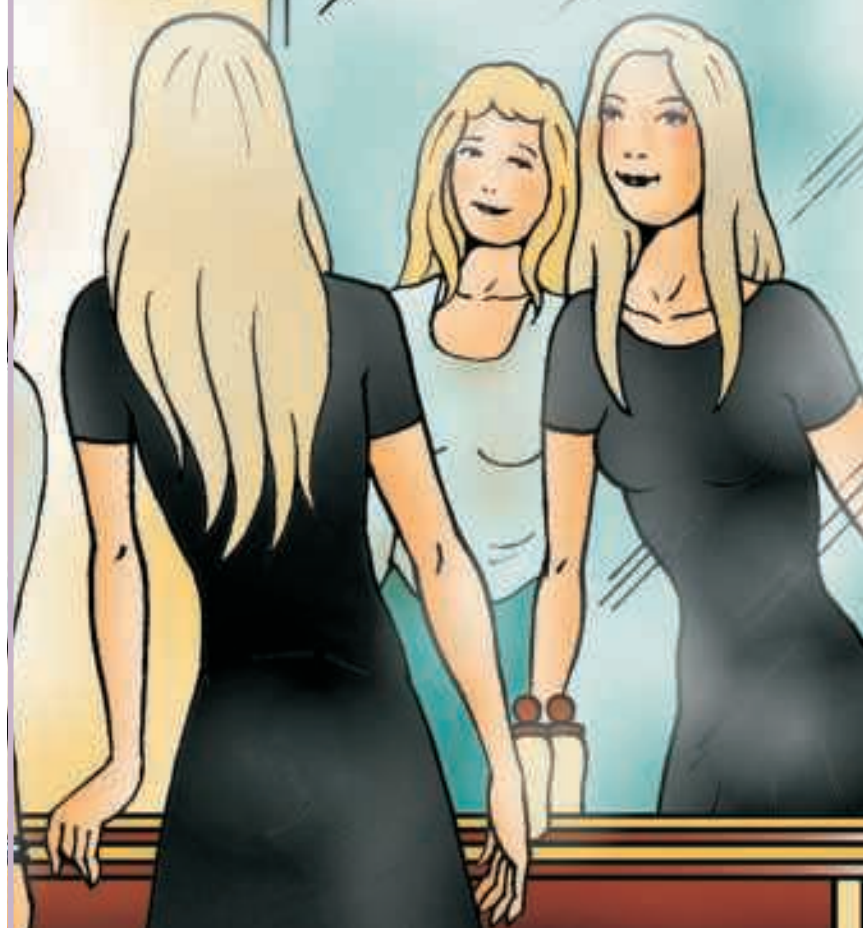


Stepmother in Law



Jessica Matthews



A "Her TV" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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Stepmother in Law

By Jessica Mathews

“I’ve a position waiting for you once you’re qualified.” My stepmother smiled as if it was reassurance rather than a command. “It’s what your father would have wanted.”

“I’ve got the grades,” I said. “I’m on the way to law school. I feel like it’s been my destiny since I was born.”

Of course it was. Bailey and Bailey had been long established in Belleville. Dad wanted me to be a small town lawyer just like he was. He wanted me to be part of the community, looking after their land deal, trusts, and such like. I’d always taken it for granted that I’d qualify and then join the family business.

It wasn’t Dad’s fault that he was the last of the line, so much older than my mother. It wasn’t his fault that he’d married Martha either. He was lonely after Mom got sick and died so it was natural that he’d look for comfort.

Martha had been a godsend. Just out of law school when she joined the firm and junior partner when Mom passed. Junior Partner sounds grander than it was. The firm was small, only the two of them, deal-

ing with small businesses and the occasional court case.

Dad and Martha were the fee earners. The rest of the staff consisted of a secretary receptionist, sometimes a paralegal, and me over the vacations. When Dad passed too, that left Martha and me.

And that's where it all started; with the vacations.

"Jonty, I need you to help me out," Martha called me into her home office.

We were alone and just at the stage of getting used to each other. Martha had been shocked when Dad passed. She's come into the firm expecting to be shielded by Dad until she found her feet. Now she was thrown into everything.

"You know I have to keep the law firm going," she explained. "If it fails, all the loans come due, and we'll lose this house. I don't want that to happen."

"I know you love this house," I replied. "I love it too and it's my last link to Dad. I'll help when I can. You don't have to ask."

"That's really good of you to say that, Jonty." She smiled at me with those big brown eyes. I could tell why Dad fell for her.

"Catherine's on holiday from Monday," Martha explained. "She's away for three weeks, and I've no receptionist."

"That's going to be hard for you," I said. "Do you want me to do the cooking?"

"No, I need you to do more than that," Martha continued. "I need you to take her place for those three weeks."

"Won't your clients think it's wrong if they see me there? I'm sixteen and they'll think I shouldn't be there."

"I know; that's why I've come up with a solution."

"A solution?" I couldn't believe it.

"Yes, you're going to become Catherine's younger sister, just filling in while she's away. I can't afford to pay a staff agency for a replacement."

"But I don't look anything like Catherine," I said, probably sounding puzzled. "Did you say her *sister*?"

"Yes," Martha replied. "I can't have a young boy running the office, although I'm sure that with your computer skills you could do it easily. The clients would wonder if they saw a boy there."

"So how do I look like Catherine's sister?" I asked.

"Easily." Martha smiled as if I was being stupid. "Catherine doesn't have a sister, so no one's going to worry about what she looks like. You, on the other hand, could look as if you *were* Catherine's sister."

"I don't see how."

"Don't worry about it." Martha sat back as if explaining to an idiot. "The right clothes, some makeup and padding. All you have to do is sit behind a desk, take messages, and answer the phone calls. How difficult can that be?"

"It's going to be very difficult." I couldn't believe what she was suggesting. "It's going to be impossible. I don't want to be a girl anyway, not even for three weeks."

"I really need you to do this," Martha said. "Please don't make it difficult. I'll pay you Catherine's rate."

"But I don't look anything like her."

"Listen to me; I already told you that Catherine doesn't have a sister. If she *did* have a sister, she'd be from out of state anyway. All you have to do is look something like a young woman for three weeks."

"I don't think I could do that. I'd look so stupid trying to make like a girl for three weeks."

"I don't think you'd look stupid," Martha said. "I think you'd look really cute."

"I'm not sure I want to look cute," I said, laughing at the sheer stupidity of the idea.

"I'll make you a deal," Martha said. "Let's try to make you look like Catherine's sister and if you still don't think you look cute, I'll have to close the office for three weeks."

So I was under no pressure there. I knew the business was running on a shoestring. I knew we were just clearing our bills and starting to get into profit. I was trapped.

"Okay," I said slowly; reluctance obvious as I said it. "It might be fun to try, but if it's a disaster, I'm not doing it."

"All I can ask is that you try. I realise that it's a big ask, but it's so important that we don't risk losing any business." Martha relaxed a little. "If you're not happy that you look the part after a makeover, you don't have to do it. Agreed?"

"Agreed." We shook hands on the deal but I crossed my fingers, hoping it would fall through.

"I'll make some arrangements," she said.

I put it to the back of my mind, trying to ignore it. I'd never wondered about how girls saw their world before, but I watched them more closely during the next week. I saw them in class. I watched how they walked and how they held their hands. I looked at their clothes and listened to the way they talked.

It was an education all of its own. Their language was so different from mine and their body language was incomprehensible; a gesture or a look could replace a thousand words, but they never stopped talking either.

It wasn't that I didn't find girls attractive; I did, but I didn't know what to say, or how to approach them. I was getting to that stage; some of my friends were starting to date already and more.

I wasn't interested in boys; please don't think that. I'll admit that I was a little immature. I guess I was a late starter, the way some boys are.

Martha was ever so solicitous and kind for the next couple of weeks as the term was coming to an end. She reminded me of my agreement, but didn't push it or make a big deal out of it.

I let it ride and whatever she said, I agreed without taking too much notice of the things I'd agreed to. Maybe that was a mistake.

"It's time to prepare for Catherine's sister," Martha said as we were finishing dinner on that fateful Wednesday evening.

"I guess," I said, showing no enthusiasm. "I promised I'd let you try, so I'll do it, but I don't think it's going to work.

"I think it will," Martha said. "I saw you in the school drama club play. You've a talent for acting. Maybe all you have to do is to think yourself into a part and use a bit of imagination."

"But I was playing an old man," I protested. "This is nothing like that."

"It's the same skills; acting a part that's miles away from your everyday life," Martha tried to encourage me. "Think of tomorrow as your audition, or maybe your camera test."

"Camera test?" That scared me.

"I didn't mean that literally," Martha reassured me. "I've arranged for you to go to Mirabelle's Salon after hours."

"You go there, don't you? That's where the rich kids all want to go." Even I'd heard of the place. "They say it's the best in town."

"So there's nothing but the best for my girl," Martha laughed. "The owner is Anna, a friend of mine from way back. I've told her what we're trying to do and she's really excited. You're to go after hours on Friday, and Saturday, and then on Sunday she'll do the big makeover."

“But there’s another week of school.”

“This is a test on Sunday. If you approve, then the next Sunday, Anna will make you over for the three-week period when you’re going to be working.

“You promised that I can back out if I don’t look right,” I reminded her.

“Yes, and we’re going to stick to that.” Martha smiled. I think she was pleased that I didn’t argue. “If you don’t look like a girl that you’d like to date, it’s all off.”

Thursday evening and Martha had me using a depilatory.

“I want all that hair off you,” she said. “Everything below your eyebrows. We’re lucky that you don’t have any beard growth yet.”

“I’m not hairy,” I protested, wondering what she meant by “lucky.”

“It doesn’t matter; I need you to be smooth all over, even down there.”

I stood as she smeared the cream over the bits I couldn’t reach, then stood in the shower for the time the packet said it needed to work.

It did work, and as I dried myself, I could tell that every little hair had vanished. Even though I’d thought I had no body hair, this felt really different and told me that I *really* had no body hair now.

Friday evening came and Martha drove me to Mirabelle’s.

“Can we go round the block again please?” I asked. “There are some boys from school about to walk past. I don’t want them to see me.”

We circled the block and Martha parked. I took a quick look round and then as she got out of the car, I bolted to the door. Fortunately it was unlocked.

“That was some entrance.” I burst into the salon as fast as I could. Martha followed to find me breathless in a bit of a panic.

“Anna, meet Jonty; Jonty, say hello to Anna.” Martha had followed me and found us staring at each other as she calmly walked in and closed the door,

Martha walked past and flipped the lock. “No one else can get in, if that’s what you’re worried about.” Anna took my hand and smiled genuinely.

“I didn’t want those boys to see me,” I said.

“I’ll make sure they don’t see you, even if they’re looking at you,” Anna replied. “Martha sent me some pictures and your sizes. I think I can make you totally unrecognisable to anyone who knows you.”

“That would be good,” I gasped.

“You may get bothered by some of the boys.” Anna looked at me carefully. “With those eyes and that facial structure, I think you’re going to look stunning.”

“Not too stunning, I hope,” I said lamely.

“I’m a beautician,” Anna replied. “It’s my job to bring out the best in everyone.”

“What are you planning for this evening?” Martha asked.

“I asked you to come so that I can meet Jonty,” Anna said. “I want to take a few pictures and check his measurements. I know that you’ve sent me a lot of information already, but being with the person is always better.”

“I’m really doubtful about this,” I said.

“I can understand why,” Anna agreed. “It must seem like a horrible thing to do.”

“It does.”

“It’s not such a big deal. I think it will go easier if we know each other a little, you can tell me some things about yourself.” Anna nodded to Martha as she spoke to me.

“Shall I come back later?” Martha asked, taking the hint.

“I’ll call you,” Anna said as Martha unlocked the door and went out. Anna locked it again.

“Jonty, I’m really happy to have this chance to do a full makeover. Usually people come in here and tell me what they expect to look like when they go out, and I can’t always do it.”

“It’s like they’re asking the impossible?”

“Exactly; I have to run through the possibilities, without letting them down too far. In your case, you’re not telling me anything.”

“Does that make it difficult?” I asked.

“In some ways, it does.” Anna sat opposite me. “I have a few ideas from the pictures and now that I’ve met you, I can see how things might work.”

“So you’re there already.”

“I’m nowhere near it,” Anna replied. “I’d like you to tell me what kind of girl you’d like to become. You must have thought about it.”

“I don’t know what you want me to say,” I replied. “You’ll probably have all kinds of strange thoughts about me if I could tell you exactly.”

“Telling me exactly could cause problems because I may not be able to do it.” Anna stood and came to stand over me. “Your hair is quite beautiful. How long have you been letting it grow?”

“I always liked it long,” I replied as she took out the band which held it in a low pony tail. “It’s not been cut for ages.”

“I’d guess you keep it in good condition too.” Anna fanned it out as it hung between my shoulder blades.

“I do like it to feel nice,” I said. “And the smell of greasy hair is awful.”

“That’s good. There are a lot of possibilities.” Anna combed it through. “How do you feel about the colour?”

“I haven’t thought about it,” I said. “You’re not planning to dye it, are you?” I felt apprehensive at the thought.

“I think that would be really nice,” Anna said. “I could do something really special and you can always dye it back afterwards. It would help as a disguise too.”

“How would it do that?”

“If you were to choose a colour that girls really love, it would shout that you *were* a girl. It would also say that you couldn’t be a boy in disguise, because a boy would never risk a colour like this.” Anna held out a strip of colour swatches.

“I’ve never thought of that,” I replied, with a tremor of something running through me. I couldn’t tell if it was excitement or fear.

“Would you let me try it?” Anna thumbed a couple of the shades and held them out to me. “I think it would be great if you would. Your hair could be one of your best features and one of your best disguises too.”

“I’ll think about it,” I said.

In truth, I liked the idea. It was the concept of disguise that appealed to me, but then I wondered if Anna was only saying that to lead me on.

“You don’t take care of your nails.” Anna took my hands and scrutinised them. “You’d have to do something about that. Let’s walk round the salon and I’ll show you where we do things.”

She took me round. I saw the backwash stations and the seats in front of the huge mirrors. I saw the driers, then in another part of the salon, the place where nails were treated.

“We can make your nails look really nice.” Anna showed me some colour charts in nail shapes. She held one and then another over mine.

“They’re a bit long.”

“That’s fashion.” Anna laughed at my naivety. “It’s no use having tiny nails when you can have striking ones that catch the eye.”

“I’d never get my hands in my pockets,” I said.

“You don’t have pockets,” Anna replied. “You have a purse, big enough to carry all your makeup and anything else a boy might think to put in your pocket, except it’s not boy stuff, it’s girl stuff.”

I looked at the display of jewellery as we passed it. There were display cases at the side of the salon. Anna saw me looking.

“Have you got pierced ears?” she asked. “Most boys your age do.”

“I never got enough courage.”

“It doesn’t need courage,” Anna said. “There’s no pain and it’s done in an instant. Would you like me to do yours? I can right now.”

“What would Martha say?” I asked.

She’d probably congratulate you.”

“Okay, let’s do it,” I said on impulse.

Before I had time to change my mind, I had two sets of gold studs in each ear. “There’s a lot to this girl stuff,” I said.

“There’s a lot to learn but I think if you look the part, people will treat you as if you really are what you appear to be.”

“Do you really think that, or are you just saying it to make me feel better?”

“Not at all; if you look like a pretty girl, you’ll be treated like one. I think that the prettier I can make you, then the easier you’ll find it. Other people will react to you and keep you in character,” Anna said.

“My drama teacher said something like that,” I replied. “We got a lecture about getting into character

and method acting. I didn't really understand it at the time, but you're saying something like that now."

"I had no idea that I was talking about acting, but I've dealt with makeovers and actors before. They say that looking the part is really important," Anna replied. "It's something to do with security in the role."

"Start with the shoes." I remembered a quotation that went something like that.

"Give a girl the right shoes and she can conquer the world," Anna said. "I think Marilyn Monroe said that."

"I knew I remembered it wrong."

"You were almost there and it's something to remember," Anna said. "The right shoes transform your body language. If they feel right, you'll feel right too."

"I'm really worried about that," I said. "Girls wear heels. Martha wears heels to the office; so does Catherine. How do I cope with that?"

"Practice and balance," Anna laughed. "And they'll nip your toes and make your ankles ache."

"That's awful."

"Maybe it is; but once you've mastered heels, you'll never want to wear anything else. They have a power all of their own."

"Why do they have power?"

"Men don't wear them," Anna replied.

"Do you want me to call Martha?" Anna asked. "I'd like to talk to you a little more if you don't mind."

"I'm happy to stay," I said. "I was really scared of meeting you, but somehow it doesn't seem so daunting when we're talking it through."

“One of the main differences you’re going to get used to is makeup,” Anna said. “I’m not going to do much tonight, but I’d like you to experience something.”

“What did you have in mind?” I asked nervously.

“I’m going to put some mascara on your eyelashes; nothing else.”

Anna took a tube from the side and came to me. She told me how to hold my eyes and where to look as she stroked a black wand over my lashes. I blinked a few times, feeling the weight of my lashes. I was suddenly very conscious of it.

“That’s amazing.” I looked in the mirror. “I never thought something so simple could make such a big difference.

“So, you’re suddenly a girl,” Anna said. “What’s your name?”

“I’ve no idea,” I replied. “Is it important?”

“Of course it’s important. It’s what you call yourself. Is Olivia too serious, is Charlotte too common?”

“What about Madeleine?” I don’t know why I asked that.

“That’s really good.” Anna replied. “That’s your name, now we have to decide what sort of girl she is.”

“That’s difficult,” I replied.

“I think you’ll find your personality when we’ve decided on your look,” Anna said. “You said that your drama teacher said something about getting into character. You can be dark and serious, sandy haired and flaky, blonde and play it cool; anything you want to be.”

“Do I have to decide?”

“It would give me some idea of how to make you over.”

“What do you think?”

"I would love to make you into a tawny blonde or maybe one of these really fashionable grey blondes; the sort of girl with precise makeup and perfect nails. You'd wear something figure hugging, with heels of course in the office. You'd wear tasteful jewellery and good perfume. You'd act a bit haughty and untouchable."

"Could I do all that?" I asked.

"Think about it." Anna closed her eyes to make the picture. "You'd be a bit dismissive if anyone, any man that is, tries to get your attention. It might save you from problems."

"But I'm too young for that," I said. "I'm sixteen, not twenty-six."

"I understand. I was letting my fantasy get the better of me." Anna nodded wisely. "So you'll be something similar; but we dress you younger, and you're going to look a bit less refined."

"I think I'm going to wait until you've done everything." I said. "I can work out my character when I know what I look like."

"That's a good idea." Anna thought about it. "I'd better let you work it out yourself."

"I'll call Martha." Anna reached for her mobile. "We've done a lot tonight."

"I didn't think we'd done anything," I said. "We've only been chatting."

"You've got your ears pierced."

"I know, but twice? That's going to cause a problem at school."

"They'll think nothing of it," Anna assured me. "Lots of boys have more."

"But we've done nothing," I persisted.

"You've been lovely," Anna said. "We've talked a lot through and I know what I'm going to do. Wait until tomorrow."

"Is that a threat?"

“No, it’s a promise and you’ll enjoy it all; I promise.”

“Wow, just look at you.” Martha picked me up outside Mirabelle’s salon. “Love those eyes.”

“Don’t embarrass me,” I said.

“I’m sorry, I was so surprised at how big your eyes look,” Martha said.

We drove in silence for some time. I could tell that she was bursting to ask questions but didn’t know how to start in case she upset me. Did I tell you that she was pretty supportive and usually on my side?

“How did you like Anna?” she said at last.

“She was really nice,” I said. “We talked and talked. I was really nervous at first but she chattered and seemed interested in whatever you expect her to do.”

“I haven’t given her any precise instruction.” Martha squeezed my hand and smiled at me. “I asked her to help you along, that’s all.”

“But you did tell her that I was going to be a girl?”

“Of course, but I asked her to let you be your kind of girl. I didn’t want her to make something out of you that was too uncomfortable.”

“You think I can be comfortable with this?” I asked. “I’ve agreed to do it, but I’m not sure that ‘comfortable’ is the right word.”

“I think you’re really intelligent and talented,” Martha said. “I’m grateful that you’re doing this. It’s going to save the firm a lot. What I meant is that I wanted you to have some choices within what we agreed.”

“I think Anna was really interesting.” I thawed a little at that point. “She listened and asked me all

sorts of questions that I never ever thought could be relevant.”

“Did you come to any conclusions?”

“Not really. I’m going to be called Madeleine when I’m a girl, but you can call me Maddie for short. Tomorrow is a tryout day whatever that means, then Madeleine is going to emerge on Sunday.”

“And she’ll be ready for work on Monday week,” Martha said. “I think that you’ve decided that you can be cute as a girl?”

“Yes,” I admitted. “I’m going to be really cute.”

I hadn’t really thought that through, but having met Anna, I thought it could be interesting; scary but interesting.

I was like a cat on a hot tin roof all through the next day. I couldn’t settle at all. I tried the computer; then I tried Facebook, but what can you say to anyone when your whole world is going to be changed.

“Who is Madeleine?” I asked Martha. “I’m going to be asked for some backstory at some point. We need something to say to people who’re expecting to see Catherine.”

“She’s my cousin’s daughter from out of the state,” Martha replied. “She’s finished High School and she’s having some time out.”

“She’s thinking of drama school,” I said. “That’s so I can talk about something I know a bit about.”

“She’s broken up with her boyfriend and it’s too painful to talk about. She caught him cheating with her best friend.”

“She’s come to fill in here because she doesn’t want to keep bumping into him and his friends back home.”

“If anyone wants to talk about her past, she won’t reply. It’s all too painful.” Martha said.

“That sounds good and if anyone asks me, I can say that Maddie hasn’t confided any more than that.”

“We may have to compare notes when it happens but that sounds believable.”

Martha dropped me at Mirabelle’s early that evening. Anna was waiting for me and this time she hugged me and kissed me on both cheeks like I’d seen girlfriends doing when they met. It seemed kind of nice in a way that I wasn’t used to.

“I’m going to get you to try several outfits and shoes today,” Anna said. “I want to get sizes and lengths right and walking in heels is a big thing to get used to.”

“I thought I was going to be made over today,” I said.

“We have the luxury of a bit of time,” Anna said. “I don’t want you looking like you’ve put on a dress for the first time when you have to go out of here. You’re sixteen; girls of your age have spent sixteen years of practising to be girls and young ladies.”

“Except for those girls who out jock the jocks for being tough,” I interrupted.

“Not every girl is a princess,” Anna laughed. “But it’s a good thing that some want to be or I’d be out of business.”

“I understand.” I looked at the rack of clothes at the back of the shop and the bags underneath. “It’s a dress rehearsal.”

“That’s right.” Anna waved at the clothes. “I get a lot of samples from several manufacturers. I sell a lot of clothes and shoes through the shop. Mostly it’s through direct orders, but there’s always samples and things to try on here. Shoes too, but some are far too small to be useful.”

“So where do we start?” I asked.

“With you naked.” Anna grinned. “Don’t worry; I’ve seen it all before, so no false modesty. Let’s be business-like.”

“I’m really pleased that Martha didn’t hang around,” I said as I stood in my birthday suit and Anna watched me pulling up a tiny elastic thing called a gaff.

“She had her instructions.” Anna helped pull it up at the back. “It should be really tight so that your equipment doesn’t bulge at the front. If you try later, not now, you should be able to push your testicles into their cavity and tuck things back so that it’s really smooth.”

“That sounds like it’s going to make my eyes water.”

“That’s why I said to try it later, maybe at home when you’ve time.” Anna looked critically at my profile. “If you can do it, keep it tucked for the whole day, or as long as you can.”

“Then it should get easier,” I said, wincing at the pressure.

“That’s what I’m told, although I have no direct experience.”

I stood, tightly confined and took a few faltering steps. It didn’t feel so good.

“I think you need a break.” Anna saw me trying not to stand in a stupid posture and handed me a robe.

“Feeling better?” Anna passed me a coffee.

“I’ve felt better, but it’s much easier now,” I replied. “Are you sure it’s necessary?”

“You’ll see when you’re trying on the clothes later,” Anna said. “I want to see what kinds of things suit your frame. But first we have to decide what size bra you’re going to be wearing, and if we need to squeeze your waist in with a corset.”

“That’s very female.” I wasn’t sure if I was comfortable with the idea. “Would a girl of my age wear a corset anyway?”

“You’re going to be pretending to be a girl about twenty-two,” Anna said. “You can’t be a sixteen-year-old doing the receptionist’s job.”

“Do you think I can do that?” I wondered out loud. “Twenty-two; I’ve no idea what a twenty-two-year-old girl would be like. I’d guess all boyfriends and hairstyles.”

“You may be right but when I’ve finished with you, you should be able to talk hair and makeup, maybe dresses and shoes; I don’t know about the boys though.”

“So there’s a flaw in the planning,” I said.

“I’m sure you’ll manage. It’s not as if you’ll be meeting anyone you know.” Anna stood and walked to the rack of clothing. “Let’s get on with it, shall we; underwear first.”

“I don’t know anything about girl’s underwear.”

“My, we have led a sheltered life, haven’t we?” Anna smiled knowingly. “I’d bet you know far more than you’d admit. There’s bound to be some of those magazines floating around in school, and if not, the internet and movies will have given you some idea.”

“Okay, you win,” I admitted. “I have some ideas.”

“Think of this as your practical instruction.” Anna held out a bra. “You never know, learning how to put this on may come in useful when you’re trying to persuade someone to take theirs off.”

Before I had time to say anything more, the robe was removed and the bra was fastened behind me. It felt strange around my chest. It felt even stranger a moment later.

“These are breast forms,” she explained. “They come in all kinds of sizes and some different shapes. Ladies with tiny breasts use them to pad themselves out.”

“They feel like stiff jelly.” I gingerly squeezed one.

“They’re silicone-filled, just like implants. They’re meant to mimic a real breast.” Anna slipped one into each side of the bra. The weight on my chest and shoulders was instantly making me alter my posture.

“Won’t they fall out?” I asked.

“They won’t if they’re glued to your chest.” Anna took them out and replaced them with different ones.

“These are much heavier,” I complained.

“What I want to do is find a size which looks proportional and that you’re happy with.”

“Happy could be a relative term.” I adjusted the way the cups lay on my chest.

“These will make you unhappy.” Anna slipped really heavy ones into the cups. They were far too large to fit inside. “I can get a bra to fit these if you like them.”

“You’re kidding.”

“It’s some people’s fantasy.” Anna took them out and replaced them with tiny ones. “These are some girl’s real size.”

“They hardly show,” I said. “Is that for real?”

“Would I lie to you?” Anna joked. “That’s why some girls buy these silicone enhancers.”

“I’m confused.” I took them out. “What size should I be?”

“I think these will look right. They’re what a girl would call a B cup. They’re smaller but still noticeable.”

“They’ve got to be noticeable?” I asked.

“It’s pretty standard. You don’t want to be too big; it might attract the wrong sort of attention. Men can be pigs sometimes.”

“I read about that.” I thought a moment. “You don’t think I’m going to be harassed, do you?”