

FUGITIVE EN FEMME

DIANE WOODS



ILLUSTRATIONS BY C. PITTS

AN 'ADULT TV' NOVEL

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FUGITIVE EN FEMME

By Diane Woods

Chapter 1

August 12 was the day my life ended. August 12 was also the day my life began. It was a day that saw a life end violently and senselessly, as well as a day that saw a new and ultimately fulfilling life begin to take shape.

But it didn't start in any kind of dramatic or unusual fashion. At least, not in any way unusual for me. I was living with my girlfriend in a small apartment. We were both 24, fresh out of college, and struggling with our first real jobs. I was selling insurance, and regularly had to travel out of town, as I had clients in the downstate area. She worked for a company that sold kitchenware by mail-order. And things were going along okay. Well, not really, I guess, not by a long shot actually, but I had managed to convince myself that things were fine.

But that particular day, as I did every so often, I planned to be out all evening. I explained that I had to see clients down in Peoria, and so would be driving down the night before. I didn't really have appointments in Peoria, though. But I wasn't exactly cheating on her, either. I would be getting a cheap motel room and dressing up as a pretty girl.

My secret life, you see, involved crossdressing. I hadn't ever told Jeannie about that, and I didn't quite know how to do it. For as long as she had known me, (we had met in college) I had kept myself always smooth and hairless all over my body. I just explained that that's the way I was, I just wasn't very hairy. (In fact, it took regular efforts with hair-remover lotion and an electric razor to keep myself that way. I mean, I was naturally blonde, and my body hair was fairly fine and sparse, but I still needed to work at it.)

I was fortunate in that I made a pretty good-looking girl, once I put on a nice wig and did my make-up well. In fact, I could pass easily in public as a girl, and I often did so. That was usually how I spent my evenings out, dressing up and then going out, maybe shopping, maybe to a movie, maybe just walking around my motel room or going for a drive.

So by the end of the afternoon, I had checked into an inexpensive motel, and was busy showering and changing myself into my femme alter ego.

I took my time with the process, luxuriating in the sheer sensual pleasure of letting my freshly-feminized body slip into my thrilling intimate wear. It's funny, but even our language reflects how much more sensual women's things are than men's. I mean, women wear "intimate" items, while men just have underwear. Just from the words we use, it's obviously no contest as to which is more sensual.

At any rate, I settled down into my cheap little motel room possessed by the usual anticipatory thrill that precedes my transformations. I had my own little rituals which I carefully observed, lovingly laying out the my luscious clothes on the bed. My hands trembled slightly with excitement as I caressed each beautiful item, and I felt almost lightheaded with delight.

"First things first, Lisa," I told myself as I gazed longingly at my black satin panties, complete with a little flourish of lace at the legs. I had already shed my coarse male clothes, and they sat rumpled in a chair, discarded and unloved. So I stood there, naked in the small motel room, every bit of me aching to feel the embrace of those exquisite things. Impulsively, I put the freshly-laundered panties to my face and breathed in deeply. Just the scent of them thrilled me deeply.

Tearing myself away from my treasures, I went into the bathroom and lathered myself with hair-remover. I liked using the cream depilatory, as it left my skin feeling not only hairless but smooth and silky. It even softened my hands.

After ten minutes of impatient waiting, I was under the shower, feeling the last stubbles of my masculinity rinsing off of me. After toweling off, I was ready to slip into my things.

First I stepped into those wonderful panties. My spirit exulted as they enclosed me in their cool sleekness. God, panties feel so good, I can't believe everyone doesn't wear them!

Next came my bra. There is nothing that feels so defiantly female as slipping one's arms through bra straps and fastening the hooks in back. There's just no male analog for a bra, it's one item of clothing that is quintessentially female. And putting one on always makes me feel like I'm making a statement to the universe about who and what I really am.

My bra was black satin-finish, and it made me feel so happy to know I had it on again. I slipped my breast forms into the cups, and checked myself in the mirror.

Next came my newly-purchased black sheer thigh-top nylons. I rolled them carefully and lovingly up each leg in turn, marveling at how my skin seemed become complete once I was encased in them. Legs that have been freshly Nair'ed just seem to need good expensive nylons about them.

My legs now properly clad, I stepped into attractive black pumps, with a two and a half inch heel.

"Much better," I told myself, as I continued to admire my continuing work in the mirror. Next, I had a gorgeous black slip which I lowered over myself, smoothing it carefully about me. In the mirror, the image I saw made my heart skip a beat.

Now it was time for outerwear. I had selected a nice two-piece boucle knit dress, not overly dressy, but still very sexy and feminine. When that was done, I set to work doing my nails. I kept them a bit on the long side, so I just filed them a bit, then applied pink nail polish. While I waited for it to dry, I turned my attention to the television I had left droning on.

It was so excruciatingly exciting, to be dressed this way, so vulnerable and pretty, waiting for my nails to dry. Part of me wanted to hurry on to the next step, but I knew that this couldn't be rushed. A girl had to take her time, or her nails would be ruined. So I forced myself to focus on the television screen, where some local news anchor was droning on about a fire somewhere.

Finally I could begin the final phase of my liberation. I set to work on my make-up.

My beard was naturally pretty light, which helped a lot. And being blonde, it made what little beard I had inconspicuous. No Richard Nixon five o'clock shadow for me, thank God! Regular make-up did a fine job of concealing whatever sign of a beard I had.

I liked to achieve as realistic a look as possible, so I never went overboard on make-up.

I always kept my eyebrows plucked and shaped nicely (without being too obviously thin), but I still touched up a few stray hairs as I began to work closely at my make-up mirror. I didn't use any eye shadow, just mascara to accentuate my lashes. I was fortunate to have a pretty face, one that really looked better as a girl than as a guy, and so I didn't have much of a problem going out as Lisa.

I applied lipstick, a pretty shade of plum mauve. Then I applied powder, and just a little blush.

I examined myself in the mirror. I looked almost complete. I got out my wig from my case and styled it a bit. It was my favorite wig, a gorgeous blonde shade that approximated closely, I thought, what my own hair would look like if I let it grow out. Once I had it on, I carefully styled it some more, then stepped back and looked at myself.

Staring back at me was my dream girl, my ideal woman. Slim, tall, with large wide eyes and long golden hair, I wanted to embrace her, then realized that I had done better than that, I was that girl, from the inside out.

I spritzed myself with my favorite perfume (Dream, it was called) and felt something deep and profound shift within me. I was Lisa now, and that felt very different from my usual everyday persona of Steve. When I was Lisa, I didn't ever want to stop being a girl. I felt so safe, so complete, so special.

By now it was six o'clock, and just about time to head out. I threw on a trench coat against the cool evening, and transferred keys and money to my purse. Then I was out the door, and out into the world once again.

Being out in public as Lisa was a wonderful feeling. The first few times I had done it, of course, I had been some combination of terrified and paranoid. I was sure that everyone could see me for what I was, that at any moment people would jeer or laugh. But instead, I found acceptance. And with that came, gradually, confidence.

By this time in my life, I felt assured that I was perfectly presentable as Lisa in almost any situation. My voice had taken a bit of work to get right, but even that I had managed, with practice and a tape recorder, to make acceptable. I was blessed, I knew, to be able to go out into the world like this, given my background and origins, and I didn't take it for granted. I worked hard to keep my weight down, through a combination of exercise and diet, and that wasn't always easy. No cheeseburgers or beers on my menu, that's for sure!

Of course, that's all a very small price to pay for the privilege of wearing skirts and dresses, heels and stockings, out in public. And in some ways it even felt right that I should have to pay some price for that privilege, for privilege it was, and a great one.

I knew my destination as I headed out the motel room door: Sullivan's, a sort of pub/bar/dance club that had a DJ and a dance floor. I guess it wasn't quite fair, but I knew from experience that I would have plenty of attentive male company there, and I wouldn't have buy a drink for myself all night if I didn't want to. And I could dance for hours as Lisa, losing myself in the music and the rhythm and the admiring stares of young men. To top it all off, tonight was Wednesday, Ladies' Night at Sullivan's.

I got there by 6:40 or so, and the place was already busy. The DJ was already busy, and lots of people were on the dance floor. Lots of guys immediately checked me out, which gave me a bit of an ambivalent feeling. But I was experienced enough at this to know that this was just a normal part of any girl's life, so I didn't let myself get too self-conscious over it. There were lots of people there, including lots of pretty girls, so I could just blend in without too much effort.

I settled in at the bar and ordered a glass of white wine. The bartender flashed me a smile as he took my order, and I smiled back. One thing I had observed was that girls smile more than guys do, and they do it more broadly. I had had to work a bit to learn to do a proper "girl's smile", but now I had it down pat.

My wine arrived in a minute, and I sipped it while I scoped out the place. It was such an interesting feeling, to be functioning as an attractive female in such a place, with all those guys trying to catch my eye. It was so much easier to be a girl than a guy in this situation. I mean, as a guy, I had always felt awkward and inadequate trying to come on to girls. But as a girl, you just had to make yourself look good, and then sit back and wait for the guys to line up. It was a great feeling.

I knew that Jeannie, my live-in girlfriend, sometimes got frustrated at what she perceived as my lack of passion. Jeannie and I had met in college, and she was really the only girl I had ever seriously dated. Sex between us was okay, if somewhat infrequent in recent months. The truth is, being Lisa was much more satisfying and exciting than regular sex could ever be. Most of my sexual energy, I think, got siphoned off into my crossdressing, I guess, and maybe that was what was behind Jeannie's frustration.

But I banished such thoughts from my mind. Tonight, I intended to forget all that sort of everyday detail, and concentrate on having a great time as a girl. Tonight, I could dance, flirt, let myself be a little wild and exciting, and then take my time back in my motel room to achieve a total release.

"Hello," said a tall guy as he sat on the vacant stool next to me. I looked at him a little carefully, making sure he hadn't "read" me. Even with all my experience, I tended

to be a little paranoid. But his gaze made it clear that he saw me as just a pretty girl, nothing more.

“My name's Mike. Is this seat taken?”

“Not as far as I know,” I said, in my best possible girl's voice. And I gave him just enough of a smile to encourage him a little.

“My name's Lisa,” I offered.

“Nice to meet you, Lisa,” he said. Then, as the bartender approached, Mike ordered a scotch.

“Can I get something for you, Lisa?”

“Ummm, okay, sure. Another glass of wine?”

The bartender nodded.

“I like this place,” Mike said as his head bobbed slightly to the music. “Nice, but not too pretentious. I used to come here a lot.”

“I like it too,” I said, trying to make sure I sounded feminine.

I spent a while talking with Mike, making small talk. Eventually, he asked me to dance, and I accepted. I liked dancing as Lisa.

We danced several fast dances, and I found myself enjoying it greatly. It was a harmless way of spending time, I told myself. Then the DJ played a slow song, and I suddenly had to adjust to the feeling of being in his arms. Part of me tensed up a bit, but in a few moments I relaxed. It felt rather natural, actually, considering how I was dressed.

We eventually found a small table to share, and we talked and drank for a while. With time, I relaxed more and more. It was actually fun to be flirting with him. He had on a black silk shirt, and I must admit that it looked good on him. He was in good shape.

We spent the rest of the night talking and dancing, and drinking. Mike clearly was in the mood to get a little drunk, and I kept him company on the way.

I have to admit, also, that I probably had more wine than I should have had. But I was enjoying myself so much I got a little careless. Soon, he and I were dancing together a lot, to slow songs as well as to fast ones, and I was just drunk enough to not care about where things were heading.

The dance floor was a lot less crowded now, as it was getting a little late for a week night. Mike pulled me close for a slow dance, and thanks to the wine I had been drinking I didn't resist at all. Honestly, it felt good to dance with him. He was tall, a good inch taller than I (even though I had on heels) and his body was trim but muscular. He made me feel very feminine and safe in his arms. Occasionally, I would catch a glimpse of us together, in the mirror behind the bar. We made an attractive couple, I thought.

I found myself relaxing more and more as we danced, feeling his body next to mine, surprised at how nice that felt. I caught myself snuggling contentedly against him several times, and that startled me a bit.

Careful, girl, I told myself. Remember who you really are. But it felt so good that I finally stopped inhibiting myself. It's just dancing, I told myself.

Even so, when Mike stared into my eyes as the song ended, I couldn't identify what I was feeling inside. Honestly, I was probably pretty confused. This felt so nice, and yet part of me knew I was playing with fire. Part of me kept saying that I wasn't supposed to be doing this, that it was wrong to be dancing with another guy, wrong to be pressed up against him, wrong to be enjoying the scent of his cologne. But I didn't really feel like I was a guy at that point. I felt like a girl, and it wasn't wrong for a girl to dance with a guy, was it?

While I was thinking about all that, Mike leaned in and kissed me.

And I didn't resist. *Interesting*, was all I thought to myself. *It isn't so terrible*.

I didn't even realize my mouth was slightly open, until I felt his tongue lightly touch mine. *What the hell are you doing?* screamed a voice in my head, but I didn't stop letting him kiss me. Then I realized that Mike was getting into this, because I could feel him getting erect. Even more alarming, I realized that I was, too.

"It's getting pretty late," I told him lamely. "And I have to work in the morning. I really should get going."

"Me too," Mike said. "But can I call you sometime?"

I thought fast. "I've just moved, my phone isn't hooked up yet. But if you give me yours, I'll call you."

Mike took out a business card, and wrote his home number on the back. And then, even though part of me didn't want to, I got out of there pretty quickly. Mike insisted on walking me back to my car, and I let him.

Out in the parking lot, part of me knew what was coming, part of me didn't care. Mike and I kissed again as we stood by my car, and the feeling was just as intense as before. Frankly, I really didn't rush him at all, as he held me really close and kissed me passionately. I kissed back.

Then, my head swimming, I got in my car and drove off. Luckily, my motel room wasn't far away. Once inside, I double locked the door and tried to make sense of what I was feeling. In the bathroom, I saw my reflection and saw the shocking image of a very attractive woman who was obviously aroused. The look in my eyes was startling.

To try and relax, I put on the television. One of the local channels rebroadcast their newscast at midnight (in the Midwest, the evening news is normally shown at ten.) As the anchor person chattered away, I lay down on the bed and kicked off my heels. I was so horny I couldn't stand it! But then, through my haze of excitement and tipsiness, the words from the television reached out and seemed to slap me across the face.

What? What did he just say?

According to the television, there had been a terrible and savage murder that evening. And the victim's name was Jean Lyon. My Jean, my Jeannie, the girl I lived with, was named Jean Lyon. And then I saw the image our apartment building on the screen, with a reporter standing out in front of it, and I realized that something terrible had happened while I had been out dancing. Everything drained out of me, every

warm feeling, every pleasurable sensation, to be replaced with a cold numbness. Jeannie was dead.

“Dear God,” I said out loud. “Dear God, no.”

“...responding to a neighbor’s phone call...” the reporter was saying, “police found the body of twenty-four old Jean Lyons in her suburban Bridged apartment. The caller told police they had heard loud arguing and the sounds of a struggle. When police arrived, they found the door to the apartment ajar, and Miss Lyon dead. She had been beaten and strangled, police say, and they are currently seeking Miss Lyon's boyfriend for questioning.”

What? Why would they want to question me, I wasn't even there.

Then my muddled thoughts clarified. *They think I did it.*

“Oh shit,” I said to the empty room.

I thought about the message I had left on the answering machine at the apartment, the message where I told Jeannie I was down in Peoria on business and that I would call later. And I thought about how embarrassing it would be to explain where I really was, and what I was doing.

My motel room was in a false name, and I had paid cash. Still, the desk clerk would be able to say that I had checked in.

Then I realized, it wasn't a good thing that I was in a local motel room, twenty minutes from my apartment. That would just look suspicious. And the only way I could explain would be to go public with the details of my secret life.

With a sinking feeling, I realized that I would also have to explain the truth about me to that guy I had been dancing with. What was his name—Mike? I knew he would be just thrilled to learn the truth about the girl he had kissed. I'd be lucky if he didn't try to beat me up.

After all, he would have to tell the police that I was with him all night, albeit dressed in a short two piece dress and heels. He probably wouldn't be happy about having kissed a guy, or that I had fooled him so completely. In fact, he would likely be rather upset.

The card! I suddenly realized that I needed his business card to find him. What had I done with it?

I tore through my purse, but couldn't find it. Then I frantically searched the motel room. I had clothes and various items flying all over as I searched everywhere for that card. But I couldn't find the damn thing.

Shit! I don't even know his last name!

This would be interesting, explaining to the police how I had actually spent the night dressed up as a girl, dancing with some guy whose name I didn't know.

That was when I started to get really scared, as the scope of my predicament became clear to me.

Can't do much about it until morning, I told myself. Get some sleep, and figure out what to do in the morning.

I changed out of my dress and underthings, and slipped into a cool, slinky black nightgown. Normally, that would have been enough to distract me from almost anything. But this night, not even its hypnotic touch could drive away my worries.

Try and I might, sleep would not come to me. I tossed and turned for hours, thinking about what a mess I was in, trying to find some way to make things work out. There had to be a way I could establish my innocence, to make the police see that they had to look elsewhere to find the real killer.

God, poor Jeannie, I thought. Who the hell would want to hurt her?

I knew that the police would probably first look to someone like me, the boyfriend. But once I established my alibi, they would have to look elsewhere. *Wouldn't they?*

Sure, a voice said in my head, as long as they believe your alibi. As long as you can find out who the hell Mike is, and as long as he's willing to admit that he spent the night with a guy dressed up as a girl.

“Okay, so I'm fucked,” I said to myself.

In the morning, I put the television back on, but there wasn't much local news in the morning. So instead I turned on the bedside radio to an all-news station. Eventually, I heard more about Jeannie's murder.

“Police now confirm that an arrest warrant has been issued for James Tellander, boyfriend of Jean Lyons, the woman who was found murdered in suburban Bridge-wood last night. Although details are sketchy, police indicate that they have found physical evidence linking Tellander to the crime.”

I leaped to my feet in a panic. “That's impossible,” I said out loud. “That's crazy.”

My first instinct was to call the police, to let them know this was all an insane mistake. Then the radio report grabbed my attention.

“According to police, Tellander was seen fleeing the apartment last night shortly after nine o'clock. A witness has told police that he appeared upset and disheveled. Tellander's whereabouts are unknown at this time, although police expect an arrest shortly.”

An arrest? What the hell was going on?

It was pretty difficult to think clearly at that point. I was apparently the prime suspect in the murder of Jeannie, and it was going to be a little tricky (not to mention embarrassing) to establish my alibi. To clear my head, I took a long, hot shower. It helped, but only a little.

Over and over again, I thought through how I could establish my innocence. I had been at Sullivan's all night, and I could prove it, if only I could track down that Mike character. He wouldn't be too happy about it, but it couldn't be helped.

But even though I searched the room thoroughly in the morning light, I couldn't find the card.

“I must have dropped it in the parking lot. Or in my car,” I told myself. But a search of my car turned up nothing. Cursing to myself, I returned to my room.

If the police picked me up now, I would end up sitting in jail, unable to make bail, with some public defender handling my case. Frankly, those prospects didn't sound attractive. But if I could find the business card with Mike's name on it, or at least find out some information about Mike, I could then turn myself in.

“What if Mike doesn't want to back up my story?” I said to myself, as the thought hit me. “He might not want to admit he was dancing all night with a guy dressed up as a girl. What then?”

Then you're screwed, I thought to myself.

But I forced myself to stop thinking about that possibility. My first order of business, I decided, was to get out of that room, away from my car, and try and track down Mike. And I knew how I would have to do that. After all, I told myself, the best way to avoid a manhunt is to not be a man.

So I carefully returned to my Lisa persona. I dressed in a black skirt and white blouse, did my make-up and wig properly, and then phoned for a cab in my best feminine voice. While I waited, I packed up all of my feminine items into the suitcase that I transported it around in. My male clothes I left in the room. I wouldn't need those, I felt, until I had worked this mess out.

Fortunately, I had a decent supply of cash with me. Enough to at least get a motel room and food for the next two days or so. And I felt sure that I would be able to track down Mike in that time. At least, I convinced myself that I would.

When I saw the cab pull into the motel lot, I headed out the door quickly, lugging the suitcase.

I knew another inexpensive motel not too far away. In fact, it was within walking distance of Sullivan's. It was a really seedy kind of place, the sort of motel where people checked in for a few hours in the afternoon and then left guiltily, but it was cheap, and I could stash my suitcase there, and crash for the night.

The driver didn't pay much attention to me. He didn't even help me with my suitcase, the lout. But he got me to where I needed to be without asking any questions, and that was enough for me.

Once I had a new base of operations set up at the “No-tell Motel” (as I thought of it) I got a small hamburger for lunch, killed a little time back in my room, and then headed for Sullivan's around two o'clock.

First thing, I checked around the parking lot. There was a lot of trash and junk there, but I couldn't find Mike's business card. So I headed inside, hoping for the best.

There was a different bartender working there. Instead of the guy who had been there the night before, now I found a woman in her late twenties. I ordered a glass of wine from her.

“You know, I was in here last night,” I told her when she brought my drink. “And I met this guy I'd like to meet again, but I lost his number. His name was Mike, he was about my age, tall, with brown hair. Ring any bells?”

“Nah, honey, it could be a million guys here. Last night was ladies' night, too, so the place had to be pretty busy. I don't...wait a minute. There is a guy who comes in a

fair bit lately. I think his name is Mike. And he is on the tall side. He usually comes in around seven, if he's coming in at all.”

Oh God, please let it be him!

I thanked her, and then silently downed my wine. The place was a little busy, but I didn't see Mike there at the moment. Still, the wine helped to calm my nerves. When I had finished it, I left. I didn't want to hang around the place for hours, waiting for Mike to return. He was probably at work in the afternoon, anyway. But I figured I would return a little before seven, and hope he came in.

The afternoon dragged on pretty slowly. This crummy little room didn't have a radio, although it did have a beat-up looking television. By four o'clock, the local news broadcasts began, and I started to learn more about Jeannie's murder.

“We've just learned that police have apparently found the car belonging to James Tellander, the man police are seeking in regards to the Jean Lyon murder in suburban Bridgewood. With a report, here's our Monica Mendez, at the scene...”

The picture on the screen changed to a well-coiffed woman with very dark hair, standing in the parking lot of the motel room I had just left earlier that day. It made me want to jump out of my seat when I saw it. They were pretty hot on my trail, hotter than I had wanted to think.

“The vehicle, a 1991 Pontiac, was abandoned in the parking lot of this suburban motel, only fifteen minutes from the scene of the crime. Police have towed the vehicle, and will be checking the car carefully for potential evidence. Tellander apparently stayed the night at the motel, although no one seems sure when he left. Police aren't providing too many details yet, saying only that they have `physical evidence' linking Tellander to the brutal slaying of his girlfriend, 24 year old Jean Lyon.”

I wanted to just run out of the room, run and keep running. The thought that they were so close on my trail was terrifying. And now, I thought, they figured I was running from them. I only hoped that the cab driver didn't connect the young woman he had picked up with this report. I had gotten out of the door of my room as soon as I saw him pulling into the lot, so he probably couldn't tell which room I had come from. Probably.

But then again, was I really willing to chance it?

I gave myself a fresh, close shave, then redid my make-up. I had to be careful, as my hand was trembling a little as I worked. But I got myself looking presentable, packed up my stuff, and snuck out the door. Once outside, I looked carefully about, half expecting the police to be waiting for me. But all seemed peaceful and normal. Once gone from here, I knew, even if that cab driver told the police he had driven a woman from my original motel to this second one, the trail would end here.

“What the hell is this physical evidence they're talking about?” I wondered to myself, as I walked as casually as I could out of the parking area. “That's nuts, there can't be any physical evidence, because I didn't do it!”

I headed over to Sullivan's.

Sullivan's was a little quiet, the after-work crowd just starting to arrive. I found a corner booth, ordered another glass of wine (along with a julienne salad) and waited. I kept my suitcase stashed under the table.

Time crawled by, and still no sign of my friend from the night before. I had another glass of wine, praying silently to God and all the Saints that Mike would show up.

I'll do anything you want, I prayed as intensely as possible, I'll never put on another dress again, if you'll just get me out of this mess.

Around seven, I saw the bartender talking to someone at the bar. Suddenly, she pointed in my direction.

I froze, utterly convinced that the tall man she was talking to was a policeman, here to arrest me. I could tell already, just from his back, that it wasn't Mike. He was too tall, and a little too thin, and his hair was a dull blonde shade.

But when he turned to look at me, I got another shock. He was, nevertheless, familiar. And his name was, in fact, Mike.

It's just that it wasn't the Mike from the night before. Instead, I recognized Mike Milan, my oldest and closest friend from my youth. Just what I needed, a further complication!

Mike and I had been absolute best friends from the second grade all through to high school graduation. We had drifted apart after that, each going to different colleges, but still I would recognize him anywhere. I just hoped he didn't recognize me.

"Hello," he said as he walked up to my booth. "The barmaid said that you were looking for me?"

I smiled a thin nervous smile. "Well, actually, I was asking about someone else, someone I met here last night."

"Oh." His face fell a little. "I was here last night. Does that count?"

My heart skipped a beat. *If he was here, he could provide my alibi!*

"Ummm, maybe," I said, trying to think my way through this. He asked if he could join me, and I told him, "Sure."

"Thanks. I kind of noticed you last night, but you were busy with someone else. My name's Mike, by the way."

"Lisa," I replied, smiling again.

"Nice to meet you, Lisa. It's funny, I noticed you because you reminded me of my wife, actually. Or soon-to-be ex-wife, actually."

I didn't even know Mike had gotten married. But that didn't matter to me at that moment, I had other things on my mind.

"That guy I was with last night, you wouldn't happen to know him, do you?"

"Honestly, no, never saw him before. I've only been coming in here the past week or so. And I'm afraid that most nights, including last night, I kind of overdid things. Drowning my sorrows, and all that."

"But you did notice me?"

“Oh, sure, like I said, you remind me a lot of my...my ex. Very pretty, with that blonde hair.

A waitress brought Mike's drink then, and he sipped it thoughtfully.

“Mike, it could be kind of important to me that you remember seeing me here last night. So forgive me if I seem a little...I don't know,...preoccupied with that.”

He looked at me a little oddly then, but kept smiling.

“Always glad to help a lady in distress,” he finally said.

“So you could definitely identify me as having been here last night?”

He took a deep breath and knitted his eyebrows together. “Yeah, sure. Well, pretty sure. Yes, I'm sure. You were wearing ...you were wearing...” He closed his eyes to concentrate.

“You were wearing a green dress, right?”

I winced in agony. “No, a red dress, two piece. Remember?”

“I thought it was green. You sure? You had on long dangly earrings, too.”

“No, I had on gold wedding-band earrings.”

“Oh. Well, there were a lot of people here. And I must confess, I did have a bit to drink last night. But I do remember your face, and your hair.”

Great, just great. He'll make a terrific witness.

“I remember you because you look so much like Valerie. My ex. And at first I was kind of angry, because I thought you might be her. But then I saw that you weren't her.”

I let out a long sigh. *I was screwed, all right.*

“You do remember seeing me here, though, last night?”

“Yeah. Although I really thought you were wearing a green dress. You talked to me, briefly. I think.”

I knew that I hadn't talked to him, I would have recognized him instantly. *I was screwed, no doubt about it.*

“Oh shit,” I said absently.

“What's wrong?”

“Nothing. Never mind.” I wanted to change the subject, find some way to distract him.

“So what happened with this Valerie?”

He shook his head angrily. “I don't know what I was thinking. I married a girl I hardly knew, just some kind of crazy infatuation. We got married in Vegas, I told everyone at work — in my family, too— that I had gotten married to this incredible woman. Then she dumps me a week later. Just disappears, with several thousand dollars of my savings. I feel like a total idiot. And when they find out at work...”

He stopped and just shook his head again.