

# CUSTODY

*By Deena Gomersall*



*ILLUSTRATED BY MISTY MALVEAUX*

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**A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL**

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## CUSTODY

By Deena Gomersall.

### Chapter One: Reflections

“You bloody fool, You stupid bloody fool.” The tall twenty-six year old man mumbled to himself as he walked from the courthouse.

He knew it had happened because he was just unable to control his temper. As he walked to the parking lot he felt crushed; his world was torn apart, he had just lost contact with the most important thing in his otherwise worthless life.

When he reached his car, he opened the door and climbed in. His forehead slumped onto his arms which rested upon the steering wheel. His eyes became moist as he began to recall all that had happened since the time his wife Judy confronted him and told him she no longer loved him.

At first, he tried desperately to keep his wife, to win her back. He just could not accept that her love for him could die after more than eight years of marriage. He had suggested a marriage counselor, he had even been prepared to try a trial separation “Let’s give each other a bit of space,” he had suggested. Then he discovered just how much a woman can change, how cruel and scheming she can become in order to get her way.

She had him served with a divorce petition. Within it, her lawyer wrote that his client wished to remain in the matrimonial home and she would like her husband to move out. It was then that he really began to believe his marriage was truly over.

Judy was becoming so cold, heartless and cruel that his feelings for her were rapidly waning; he was reaching the stage where he no longer wanted to remain married to her. She wasn't the beautiful woman he had walked down the aisle with. What he couldn't come to terms with, though, was the thought of being separated from his six-year-old son Donny.

Andy had so many dreams of guiding his beloved son to manhood: playing football with him, taking him to a bar for his first drink, watching him develop into a young man, shaving for the first time and giving him paternal advice when he started showing an interest in girls. Andy wanted his boy to be like himself, who could take his pick of the best-looking women around.

When they first separated he had been able to visit the house in Leeds, Northern England, to see his son and enjoy a full days access with him on weekends.

He thought Judy was amicable to the arrangement. She did not expect her estranged spouse to continue seeing Donny so regularly; she believed he would tire and go off to find some other woman to share his bed.

He didn't. He sincerely cared for Donny. He soon began to realize that Judy would prefer him to just disappear from both of their lives and have no further contact with them.

She made the point by being cold and hostile every time he knocked on the door to see his son, the door to the house that he worked so hard for and had furnished using every penny he'd earned.

He was resentful of her attitude but refused to be intimidated. Although he gave no reason for Judy's aggressiveness, he just put up with it. Nothing she did would deter him from seeing his son. It was important to him that Donny never lose contact with his Dad; in order to ensure that, he would put up with anything, take all that she could throw.

Then along came Charlie. Andy felt stunned, his heart sank the first time he saw another man in his house. Judy had found somebody new, someone to take his place and he found it *very* hard to accept. He now realized deep inside that he had been hanging on in the hope of reconciliation. He still loved Judy in spite of all she had done to him, the hostility she had shown and the way she had put him down and slandered him to their friends. His access to Donny was greatly reduced that day.

Although he felt great jealousy over Judy being with another man, somehow he managed to keep those feelings to himself. He was learning to control his rather volatile temper, accept situations and adapt to all the changes that were taking place in his life.

Judy had expected him to make a scene so she could get access restrictions against him but he did not rise to her bait. He knew that was just what she wanted. The plan was to get him to threaten her or her new partner in order to sever his contact with their son.

Andy had controlled himself marvelously and continued picking Donny up for the following five weeks, putting up with the sarcastic remarks from his estranged wife, even swallowing all the lies and accusations that she spread around about him to all his former neighbors.

Then, one Saturday as he called to collect Donny, he saw Charlie walking around his former home in just a dressing robe. Upon questioning his son, he discovered that Charlie had now moved into the house with Judy permanently.

Andy was very bitter about this and complained to his lawyer, saying it was unhealthy and confusing for his child.

If things had been a little less than friendly prior to this, they now become totally hostile.

Judy received the lawyer's letter outlining her estranged husband's complaints and she let fly the moment Andy arrived at the door. Charlie took her side and, at this, Andy finally flipped and lost his self-control. The argument between Judy's new man and Andy turned to pushing and the police were called.

Judy wasted no time in using the situation to her advantage, immediately initiating proceedings to prevent Andy from having access to his son. The case was going to

court. While they awaited a hearing, Andy's lawyer filed an application for Andy to continue his visitation rights.

Andy was allowed to continue to see Donny but now he was permitted to do so only within the confines of his former home so that Judy could oversee what went on and what was said. She was no more pleased at having Andy in her home than he was to be there now that Charlie had moved in but, that *was* the ruling. These visits were, understandably, always strained.

Donny complained to his Dad that Charlie wouldn't allow him to play with the toys Andy brought for him and that he disliked watching his Mom and Charlie kissing on the settee or listening to them making nasty comments about his Dad.

Andy gave his son a loving cuddle. "Pay no mind, Son. They are just trying to belittle me and alienate us from one another. But, we know it will never work, don't we? Who knows, with all that they are doing in front of you, I may win custody yet, Little Buddy. How does *that* sound?"

Andy tried to encourage his son even though his anger was welling like a volcano ready to erupt and it was taking all of his self-control to prevent a real showdown with the two of them.

Andy's lawyer compiled quite a dossier to take to court which included ill treatment of Donny, neglect, withholding gifts and causing emotional stress to the young boy.

Andy really began to believe he could win his son back through the courts. Donny *had* said he wanted to live with his Dad; surely the court would take *that* into account?

Eleven weeks passed before the case went to court. Andy's hopes were dashed when he learned that a welfare officer's report suggested the child would be better off remaining in the "home environment". It would be better for the boy, the report continued, to attend his own school with his friends instead of one on the other side of town where his father now resided.

Now that Judy had a new partner, the report said, this would give more stability to the young boy. A couple could care for the child better than a single father. It went on to raise the question of who would look after Donny while the father was at work all day long?

"I'll work shorter hours," Andy offered in response. "I'll start work after I've taken Donny to school and finish in time to pick him up."

The court expressed doubt at the practicality of this. Even when Andy then offered to quit work so as to look after his son full time, it was to no avail.

"It's bloody ridiculous," Andy protested to his lawyer. "How on earth can Donny be expected to live a normal life with some guy taking the place of his natural father?"

Despite losing the "war", Andy won a small battle. His lawyer managed to reestablish full access rights so long as there was no further animosity when he picked up or returned Donny.

Andy knew that was playing right into Judy's hands and. As expected, sarcastic remarks were hurled at him every time he arrived at the door.

On one occasion Andy took Donny out to a theme park for the day. Donny looked sad on being picked up; naturally, Andy asked the reason.

"Mommy says I have to call Charlie 'Daddy' now, but I don't *want* two daddies. *You're my Daddy!*" Donny started to cry.

"That's right son, *I'm* your Daddy. Charlie can *never* be that. He isn't even married to your Mom. Don't you worry. You tell him and Mommy next time that *I* say you are *not* to call him 'Daddy', Okay?"

Donny seemed reasonably happy with that but Andy had a hard time hiding his own feelings from his son. He was seething inside. No man was *ever* going to take his place as Donny's father.

No mention of the situation was made by Judy the following week when Andy came to pick Donny up. As soon as the boy was in the car, though, he started to cry.

"What's wrong, Donny?" Andy asked.

"You know how you told me to say that I didn't have to call Charlie 'Daddy'? Well, I did, but Mommy said that Charlie will be my only Daddy after we move." The young boy sobbed.

"Move?" Andy stormed. "Move *where*?"

Mommy said we're going to live in London because Charlie just got a job there," Donny continued, "She says you won't bother traveling all that way to see me so, Charlie will become my *only* Daddy."

Andy had really had enough of all this. Now, he finally snapped.

"She can't *do* that! She cannot just move without consulting me," he said angrily. He pulled up the car and stormed back into his former home.

He banged on the door until Judy answered it. She was followed close behind by Charlie. Andy confronted them.

"What the hell do you think you're doing? You can't just move away with my son without first sorting things out with me!"

"I think you will find I *can*. Charlie has to relocate to London and I intend to move with him."

"Well, damn it, leave Donny here with me, then," Andy spat back, not noticing that Donny had followed him and was running up to the door."

"I'm his Mother, I'm the one who carried him for nine months. He's coming with Charlie and me."

"No he is *not*, you bitch! What happened to all that Welfare bullshit that he would be better staying in his own locality, his own environment around his friends?"

"Hey! Watch your mouth, pal. Don't go calling Judy a bitch!" Charlie joined in.

"And you can butt out, this is between me and her," Andy responded. "And don't go telling *my* kid to call you 'Daddy'!"

The two men were squaring up. So angry was Andy that he failed to hear little Donny crying behind him, scared by all the shouting and the ugly scene he was witnessing.

“Look what you are doing to your so-called precious son, you bastard!” Judy screamed. Her words went unheard as Charlie threw a punch at Andy.

Andy easily ducked the shot. He had always been able to handle himself. It wasn't long before Charlie was flat out on the floor with blood streaming from his nose.

Andy piled on top of him aiming a flurry of punches; the anger that had been suppressed for weeks was being unleashed in a blazing fury as Judy desperately tried to tug him off by his hair.

He might well have done lasting damage to Charlie, so wound-up was he, but he soon felt himself being roughly pulled away from his cowering victim by several men who had been passing by. They joined in to separate the two men.

At that moment a squad car pulled up.

His mind in a whirl, Andy caught sight of one of the police officers as a second grabbed his arm from behind and forced it up his back in a lock.

Back in the present once more, Andy groaned at those painful memories as he lifted his head from the steering wheel. As tears welled in his eyes, he continued to be haunted by visions of that fateful day.

They took him to the police station where he was charged with violent conduct and of causing actual bodily harm. He could deal with those charges, but Judy had immediately filed a complaint with the welfare authority via her lawyer detailing the “emotional stress” that such a “violent attack” had made on her son.

Andy had been prohibited from seeing Donny since that day, eight weeks ago right up until the preceding Monday. That day he sat in his car, waiting. Eventually, he caught a glimpse of his boy coming out of school. A neighbor, Mrs. Dennison, spotted him sitting in the car and came over to speak to him. She informed Andy that Judy and Charlie were soon planning to move south, that very weekend in fact.

Andy's heart felt very heavy as he continued his wait. Then, there he was, riding on Charlie's shoulders and laughing. Charlie was taking his place in the parental role and. It seemed that Donny was now accepting the new man! That hurt but Andy would *not* let Charlie have him. He would not let this stranger take over the role of father to his beloved son.

From that point forward, his memories were hazy; he couldn't recall clearly what happened next. He had been so blind with rage and jealousy. He knew that he had snatched the child from Charlie's shoulders and that he had beaten Charlie again. He only knew this, though, because the police had told him so.

He could only really recall bundling Donny into his car and driving away without any real plans as to what he was going to do or where he was going to go. He pulled off a freeway to take a rest and was spotted by a patrol car and arrested.

“What the hell were you *thinking* of, you asshole? Why did I play right into the hands of that manipulating bitch ? She wanted me out of the way and now she's *achieved* it.”

The magistrate announced a formal injunction against him, forbidding him to go anywhere near his son, Judy or her boyfriend. He could appeal the decision but by the time it went through, even if he was to win it, Judy could have moved to London with Charlie and Donny.

He had to be back in court again in three weeks' time to answer the assault charges against him. Heaven only knew how *that* was going to go.

Andy sat in his car feeling sorry for himself. The dark evening sky began to draw in at which point he drove slowly and sadly away, feeling as though he had no purpose left in life.



## Chapter Two: That's not my son

A knock on his door woke Andy from a drunken slumber. He had been hitting the booze for three years, ever since his ex-wife left the area with his son. He had lost his job and his self-respect, his home was a dump and his clothes were crumpled and dirty.

"Who the hell is it ?" his slurred voice demanded.

"Andy, it's Jim. Open up, you drunken slob. I've got some news for you."

Andy raised himself from his seat, knocking over a half-full can of beer in the process. He glanced into the dust-covered mirror to pat his hair into a more acceptable shape and noticed his five-day growth of beard at the same time.

"Come on Andy, I ain't got all day," the voice called again.

"Yeah, Yeah, all right, I'm comin'," Andy replied as he approached the door and turned the key. Standing on the step was a tall, smartly dressed man of roughly the same age as Andy.

Jim worked with Andy until his friend was given the sack because of his deteriorating work, untidy appearance and lateness over a two-and-a half year period.

Bright sunlight caused Andy to cover his eyes and screw his face up. Jim stepped into the dully-lit living room.

"Mind if I pull these curtains open?" Jim asked cheerfully.

"What...? Er, yeah, I guess it's okay," came the slow response. Andy blinked at the bright light that filtered in as the curtains were pulled back.

Jim carefully chose the cleanest spot of the settee to seat himself. "I've, er, got some news on Judy."

"I don't *want* no news on that bitch," Andy blasted.

"No, but you *do* want to see Donny again, don't you? Some of the girls at the club say that she's back living up north again, over in Halifax."

Andy now began to pay attention. What...?"

"Yeah. Apparently she's been back up here for the past few years."

"The bitch, the bitch! Why couldn't she have the decency to let me know so that I could see my son ?"

"Well, I guess that the injunction still holds, not to mention the fact that you didn't really part on the best of terms, did you ?"

"No, I guess not. What about that other bastard ...What's his name ...Charlie? What about him ?"

"I don't have all the details, but as far as I can gather, she's living on her own."

Andy tried to clear his head and think. "So, you figure they've split up then? Listen, Jim, do you think you can get hold of the address where she's living for me ?"

Jim smiled broadly. "Already done, pal," he announced, handing his friend a slip of paper. "I figure you owe me a few beers for *this*. One thing though... don't go to the

door. If I were you, I'd observe the situation first, then see if you have a chance to approach your kid on his own."

"But, Judy will be with him all the time, I wouldn't get to speak to him alone, would I?"

"I dunno," Jim replied, stroking his chin. "He'd be nine years old now and a little less dependent on his Mother. Like I said, go and make observations first. Whatever you do, don't get caught. You don't want to end up before a judge again."

"No, I don't. But what if there's nowhere I can stand without being seen?"

"I have been told she lives in a street of semidetached houses with front gardens. The best thing would be to watch from a car. You can use mine—so long as you stay sober that is. It'll also get you over there."

"Thanks Jim, you're a real pal! I owe you one."

"Then pay me back by getting your life back in order, you bum. Get yourself smartened up before you drive over there, okay?"

Andy would have gone to Halifax that same day but Jim suggested that he go on a school day first, around the time that kids come out of school. "Get to know the area, find out which school your boy goes to, what time they leave the house and the time they arrive back home," he suggested. It was four days before Andy finally made his journey. That morning he had been feeling very nervous. Not a drink though, had passed his lips during that entire period.

He was at the sink washing and observing himself in the mirror. He realized he needed a shave but found that he didn't have a single razor blade in the house.

"Oh well, I won't be actually talking to Donny today, anyway," he thought as he pulled on a crisp white shirt and combed at the unkempt hair that was much in need of a cut.

At a quarter after three, Andy glanced from his newspaper into the wing mirror of Jim's car. He saw two women walking up the street on the opposite side of the road.

"Shit!" He slumped down into the car seat upon realizing that one of the women was Judy. Soon, the two shapely, attractive women were passing alongside the car.

Andy glanced at his ex-wife. She was smartly dressed in a white blouse, pink mini skirt that gave a good account of the long, shapely legs adorned in black pantyhose and white stiletto-heeled shoes upon her feet. Her long flowing mane of blonde hair cascaded softly over her narrow shoulders. She really was a remarkably good-looking woman.

Andy found himself wishing he could turn back the clocks, rectify all that he had done wrong to cause their marriage to end the way it had. He couldn't deny he still harbored a lot of love for her.

He noticed that the other woman was Andrea, Judy's younger sister. He watched as both women entered the garden of number 23 and Judy turned the key in the lock. At least the information had been good, Judy really did live here.

It had just turned four. Andy was still observing from within the car, when three schoolgirls walked up the street. Andy was not paying much attention to them until one of the girls left the other two and went into the garden at 23 and opened the front door.

The girl was reasonably tall and had long dark hair. She wore the same clothing as the other two which was obviously a school uniform composed of a plain white blouse with a red tie; green, pleated knee-length skirt, white ankle socks and black front lacing shoes. She had a red hair band on top of her head and carried a red satchel that matched her tie.

Andy couldn't recall Andrea having a daughter but then again he hadn't seen much of her since he and Judy married eleven years ago. She wrote and phoned frequently in order to keep in touch but all that Andy could really recall was that she had a live-in boyfriend and they both worked at a market stall.

Andy held his position for some time before deciding that Donny was not going to show up. Perhaps he was home from school sick or was staying back to play games or any number of other reasons. Rather disheartened, Andy decided to call it a day and return again the following afternoon; he'd already been there for an hour and forty-five minutes.

He so wanted to see his son. Seeing his ex-wife looking so beautiful rekindled the love he'd once had for her; he was depressed mood when he arrived home. Almost immediately, he pulled a can of beer from the fridge and, before nightfall, he was once again slouched in a drunken slumber in his armchair.

Andy stirred the following morning, his head in searing pain and his neck stiff from having slept all night in the armchair. Stumbling to the bathroom cabinet looking for aspirin, he splashed water over his face.

He had dropped the car off at Jim's on his return the day before and now was thinking he would have to make his own way over to where Judy was lived if he wanted to keep up his observations.

It was midday when he felt sober enough to make an effort. He quickly dressed and ran to catch a local service into the city so as to catch an outward bus to Halifax.

By 2:50, Andy was standing at the bottom of the street where he had parked the day before. On the main road that ran along the bottom of Judy's street was a small field with a billboard bordered by a three-foot stone wall. Here, he thought, would be his best vantage point to stand and watch.

He couldn't see the house from there but he could see a good third of the way up the steep street. It was from this road that Judy, Andrea and those three girls had all approached.

Initially, there was no sign of Judy or Andrea but at 3:55 he spotted two of the same three girls walking down the road along with a group of other school children.

One of them was the girl who had gone into Judy's house. This time both girls walked up the street, then stood talking at the gate to Judy's garden for some ten minutes.

Andy had to leave his cover to observe this and he was feeling a little uneasy, fearing that Judy might come out and see him. Eventually, the two girls parted company and the first one again went into Judy's house. Andy remained where he was, still watching for any signs of Donny.

A half-hour passed by with no sign of his son when Andy saw the second girl, now changed from her school uniform, enter the garden of 23 and knock on the door. The door opened and promptly the first girl, Andrea's daughter or whoever, came out.

She was now dressed in a red jumper, light blue jeans and pink tennis shoes. Her long brown hair was pulled into a pony tail. The two girls walked past Andy on the opposite side of the road and headed toward a row of shops.

Andy decided to cross to that side of the road himself so as to get a better view of anyone entering or leaving the house. He felt sure that Judy was in the house.

He was still in the same position, at the corner of the street, when the two girls again passed by him carrying some groceries and this time he took a good look at them as they walked by.

The first girl looked familiar to him. It had to be Andrea's daughter; though he didn't know her, there was a definite family resemblance. Both girls had gone back into the house while Andy studied the girl's face in his mind's eye. She didn't look too much like Andrea really, more like Judy. Wait a minute! *Donny!*? The thought struck Andy like a bolt of lightning. It seemed crazy but, the face was Donny's, three years older, longer hair but still...

"What the hell! I've *got* to be wrong. It *can't* be Donny!" Andy muttered to himself.

He left feeling shocked and uneasy. He immediately walked away, heading for the bus back to the center of town.

By the time he arrived home he had almost, if not quite settled down. Of *course* it hadn't been Donny, how *could* it be? Judy and Andrea were sharing the same house, after all. The girl would be Andrea's daughter, even if she did bear a greater resemblance to Donny than she did her own Mom; they were cousins, after all, and such things did happen.

At home, Andy made straight for the fridge to get a beer. His hand reached for the can, then withdrew again, empty. "No, no. I'm staying sober. It's probably the booze in my system that has me thinking some girl is my *son*, I'm a stupid idiot. I need to get sober," he told himself.

That night Andy slept uneasily, his mind still seeing the girl who bore such a striking resemblance to Donny.

The following afternoon once again found Andy standing stationary by the billboard opposite the street where Judy lived. He reasoned that he had only actually seen Judy there once; maybe it was Andrea's house, not Judy's after all.

He didn't want to be hasty and make any mistakes and he certainly didn't want to get into trouble with the law again. The last time, after punching Charlie, he'd had to sell his car in order to pay the fine, already having been sacked from his job.

Things began well enough this day when he saw Judy leave the house to go into the garden at 2:35 PM. Then, at about 4:00, the girl that looked like an older, female Donny came into view, walking down the main road, again with her friends.

Andy crossed the road to take a good look at the girl's face. As she approached this time, she looked at Andy who was obviously looking back at her. She came to an abrupt halt and stared back, her expression changing to one of surprise and shock.

Quickly casting her eyes onto the sidewalk pavement, she hurried her friends past the watching Andy. They quickly walked up the street to her house. Andy heard one friend asking what was wrong.

He felt the same as he had the previous day when he first thought the girl might actually be his son. She had now definitely recognized him and she appeared scared. It seemed impossible and yet, it *must* be. As the girl hurriedly left her friends to rush into her garden, Andy set off, running up the street toward number 23.

Breathless, he hammered on the door. It seemed like an eternity before the door opened and Judy stood before him.

She looked hard at Andy, slightly frightened and yet not completely surprised to see him; his arrival had obviously been announced.

"Where is he? Where's Donny?" Andy demanded angrily as he pushed his way past his former wife and entered the hallway.

"Just stay right where you are, Andy," Judy screamed after him. "I haven't a clue how you traced me here but you seem to be forgetting that there's an injunction on you."

"I want to see Donny!" Andy continued, heading toward a door to look for him. Judy grabbed his coat in an effort to stop him from going any further. "Get out of my house, Andy, or I'll phone the police," she shouted almost hysterically.

"By all means, call them!" Andy replied, continuing his way through the house. He was dragging Judy along with him; she was still clutching onto his coat.

Soon, Andy was in the main room. There, he saw the figure of a nervous-looking girl standing by the window. Andy stopped and looked at the girl. His expression softened as he spoke. "Donny? Donny, it's okay now, I'm here."

The child did not reply, but merely bowed her head. No words were needed, the look on the child's face said it all. Andy turned his gaze to Judy who was now quiet and looked just as worried.

"What the *hell* is my son doing dressed up like a girl?" Go take those stupid clothes off, son," He said, turning back once more to the frightened and embarrassed child.

Donny remained where he was, tears in his eyes, desperately trying to keep from crying.

"I don't know what the hell you're playing at here, but you've dug yourself one *hell* of a big hole!" Andy snarled at Judy. "Does he actually go to *school* like that? Hell, he must! Do they know at school or do they think he's a *girl*?"

Judy now had tears in her own eyes; she too remained silent. "Have I lost my voice or something ? You'd better start talking because you're in deep trouble here. Donny, I told you to get out of those clothes *at once*. Get some proper boy's clothes on!"

Judy broke her silence. "He can't. He doesn't *have* any boy's clothes."

"What ? You're masquerading my boy as a girl full-time ? You're trying to raise my son as a *girl* ?" At these last words, Donny ran out of the room, crying bitterly.

"Donny, Donny, come here. I need to talk to you," Andy called after the distraught boy.

"Just leave him alone! Can't you see what you're doing to him?"

"What *I'm* doing to him!?" Andy exclaimed. "Boy, that's rich. After I get child welfare and the health authority onto you, you can kiss your custody good-bye."

"You better stop and think about what you're doing before you try contacting anybody!" Judy said.

"What do you mean by *that*?"

"If you go phoning the Welfare or anyone else, it's highly likely the newspapers will get hold of the story. Can you imagine what damage you would cause to Donny? You realize how badly it would affect him ? You would cause him permanent damage; he would never dare show his face in public again. Plus, don't think that you would automatically win custody. He would probably be made a ward of the court. Then, neither of us will see him."

As angry as Andy was with her, he could see that what she was saying made some sense. Donny's name would be made public, he would be ridiculed wherever he went and, he would probably be put into care, too.

"Well you'd better at least tell me why the hell you have him living and dressing like... like *that*, Goddamn it!"

"I don't really know why," Judy sobbed. "I suppose I was trying to hide him from you after we moved up here. I also wanted to make things better for him. I could give him so much more if he was my daughter, rather than my son."

"Well he isn't *staying* like that, I can tell you that much! Okay, for Donny's sake I won't report you to the authorities but you had better get him out of the school he's in and into another one as his real self. And get him some boy's clothes. Oh, and you had better drop that injunction against me, too. I want to be able to see Donny every weekend to make sure he is being treated all right."

"But Andy, he has been living as a girl for two and a half years now. All of his friends are girls. I can't just change him back like that."

"You better find a way, Sweetheart. I'm warning you, I'll have the police on you if you don't. I'll leave it for now. Donny is obviously upset at having me see him like that, I'll come back over the weekend and I want to see him in boy's clothes and with his hair cut. He may have lived for two and half years as a girl but he has the rest of his life to live as his own sex again." With that, Andy stormed angrily out of the house. He

felt angry, yet inwardly he was very pleased. He could now, oddly enough because of what Judy had done, renew his acquaintance with his son.

For the rest of the week, Andy felt on edge. He had the greatest desire to go back to Halifax and make sure that Judy had Donny dressed as a boy again but he restrained himself until Saturday.

He confided with his best friend Jim about what had happened. Jim felt as incensed about it as Andy did and offered to drive Andy over there on the weekend.

Saturday morning, the two men parked outside the garden of Number 23 and walked up to the door.

"Hello, Andy." It was Andrea who opened the door to them.

"Uh, hello, Andrea. Judy's expecting me."

"Well I don't think you'll be seeing her. She packed up everything and moved out yesterday."

"What!" Andy yelled, torn between disbelief and anger.

"I said she's not here. You can thank yourself for that."

"Well then, where is she? Where has she gone? What about the house? I still see furniture in the house."

"Of course you can, it's *my* house! Judy and, er, Donny, lodged here after moving back from London. As far as where she is, she didn't tell me where she was going and I wouldn't tell you even if she *had*!"

"A likely story!" Jim butted in. "Listen, Sweetheart, you may as well tell because this matter is going to be reported to the police and they'll find out from you."

"Can't tell them what I don't know, can I?" Andrea replied obstinately.

"What was Donny wearing when he left?" Andy asked.

"Clothes obviously, what else?"

"Don't play games with me, Andrea. I'm serious. If they've been living in your house, then you must have been a party to what's been going on."

"Going on? I really don't know *what* you're talking about, Andy."

"You know damn well what I'm talking about! I'm talking about Donny wearing girl's clothes!" shouted the irate Andy.

"What! Really, Andy," Andrea exclaimed in mock surprise. "You know, you really should lay off the booze. Everyone knows you have a drinking problem. Heaven knows *what* you'll be saying next!"

The argument raged on for some time but it was obvious that Andrea was going to stick to her story that she neither knew where her sister had gone or that Donny had ever worn girl's clothes in his life. In fact, she put her argument across so well that even Jim began to wonder if his longtime friend had just imagined what he said he'd seen. He *was* drinking a lot these days. Nevertheless, he supported his friend.

Andy was crushed and he remained silent and solemn all the way home. He had no sooner located his son than he had lost him again.

"Listen Andy, mate." Jim began. "I know you want to protect Donny in this but, we really do have to report this matter to the police. If we don't, you may never see him again and you'll lose the one chance you have of getting custody of him. And, if Judy is raising him as a girl..."

"If? You mean you doubt what I say?" Andy turned on his friend. "Why the hell do you think she's packed her bags and fled? Because I found out where she's living? Come on!"

"Of course, I believe you, but we have to take the same view as the police will take. The bottom line is, you have no chance of finding them on your own."

Andy finally relented to Jim's suggestions and both the police and local authorities were contacted. Andy was known to the police, not only because of his assaults on Charlie but also because of various drunk and disorderly charges over the last few years. They carried out a few inquiries, but with little commitment.

Andrea was interviewed by the police and a child welfare office but she'd had time to work her story well. One thing in Andy's favor was that the investigating Child Welfare officer failed to find the name "Donny Bates" registered at any school in the area, something Andrea was unable to explain.

The police ordered Andrea to let them know if she had any contact with her sister either by phone or letter, though they didn't really expect her to comply with that order and had no way of proving that she did.

"I'm sorry, Sir," apologized the police sergeant. "But that's about all that we are able to do. As far as we can prove, there has been no crime committed. We've instructed your sister in law to..."

"*Ex* sister-in-law," Andy corrected.

"...your ex-sister-in-law to let us know if she has any contact, but we cannot enforce that and we doubt she would comply. We cannot take any action against her until we have sufficient evidence supporting the allegation that your ex-wife is raising your son as a girl and that she was a knowing participant. I have put out a circular to other forces around the country to check anyone registering under either her or your son's name, though it seems she used a false name up here and presumably will do so again."

Andy resigned himself to the fact that he might never see his son again and feared what might become of him in the hands of his demented wife. It seemed certain that Judy would continue raising him as a girl and that fact gnawed away at Andy. He couldn't begin to imagine what mental damage that could cause. It choked him up to think about what was happening to his son and that he was unable to do anything about it.

He felt like having a drink, getting stoned, but he knew that was not the answer; it would not help. What he *should* do was get his life back in order and dedicate himself



to searching for his son. He'd promised Jim he would get on the wagon; in return, Jim offered all the help and support that he could give.