

THE STUDENT

By Jessica Matthews



ILLUSTRATED BY MISTY MALVEAUX

A 'HER TV' NOVEL

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THE STUDENT

By Jessica Matthews

"I'm just so fed up of being used," Laura announced to the assembled staff room. They all knew she had been alone since her last relationship had broken up over incompatible ambition.

"You weren't used, Laura," observed the head of department. He had known her since she was a student. "You thought that two careers would follow the same path. They can't and they won't. You wanted too much."

"And I suppose he didn't want too much," Laura snapped. "He wanted me to be his trophy, to sacrifice everything to his career."

"That's just the way things are," he answered. "He needed a wife, not an equal partner, and certainly not someone who'd threaten to eclipse him."

"And I was those things." Laura could hardly believe what she was hearing.

"Of course," he replied. "You are the one with the real brains. He'll never have an original thought in his head, he just recycles things. Take my advice, Laura, you'll never be happy until you get a wife."

"What?" Laura gasped.

"Behind every successful man, there's his wife, that's what they used to say," he laughed. "You're the successful one, you'll never have a stable relationship until you understand that. You need a wife."

The whole staff room laughed. Laura knew she had been boring them since her partner of three years had walked out. He'd planned it so carefully, too: a new job across the country, with his secretary, a brainless typing machine if ever there was one, enjoying her status as the professor's wife.

To Laura, it was too much to bear. She'd helped him write the last papers which had gotten him the job, while her own career stalled. She should never have fallen for his pretense that he needed equal status with her before they married.

"Perhaps you're right," she admitted. "I do need a wife."

Six months later, with the pain of self imposed celibacy easing, Laura remembered this conversation. Perhaps it had all been silly, but it gave her an idea.

"Hello, Post Graduate Office," I said into the telephone that afternoon in early spring when it all began.

"Can I speak to Alan Riding, please," said a female voice.

“Speaking,” I replied. “You just caught me on the way out, so this will have to be quick.”

“Okay, this is Campus Dating Service, you registered with us a couple of day ago. We have a match for you, so could you come into the office when you get a chance, and we'll give you the details.”

“Couldn't you give me the details now, over the phone?” I asked.

“No, we do have a security policy, and in this case, the other party has asked us to conduct an interview before agreeing to a meeting,” she explained. “So if you'll drop by the office when you can, just introduce yourself and we'll go from there.”

“Okay,” I agreed, “I'll be in tomorrow. Is early afternoon all right?”

“That looks fine, we'll see you then.”

I put the phone down and hurried off to my last class of the day. Luckily, it was just an introductory survey which didn't demand too much attention, for my mind was on the vision of loveliness I hoped the Campus Dating Service had lined up for me.

I had registered with them after moving from the Midwest to continue my education on the coast. I had no family to speak of, and naturally knew no one at the other side of the country. An additional handicap to my social life was that I was the typical starving student. Anything I could earn went into my fees and books, with little left over for the little luxuries of life, like eating and drinking, or clothes that didn't come from the charity shops.

After a couple of friendless months spent settling into my new environment, I felt really lonely. When early in the New Year the dating service advertised a free service to students, I sent in my forms, never really expecting to get a reply. There was a question on the form about my income, which I answered truthfully as virtually nothing, and another question about my ideal date's income, to which I replied rather flippantly that I hoped she would be able to support a man with extravagant tastes in all the good things of life.

The rest of the form was factual, and I answered truthfully. I didn't exaggerate my five feet five inches, or my 130 pound figure. If I remember correctly, I even described my hair as light brown, unkempt, and below my shoulder blades.

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When I eventually got to the office of the dating service and announced my name, I was shown into a side room with comfortable furnishings, a desk and computer terminal. There was a large mirror on the wall beside a vanity unit. Being alone in the room, I went to the mirror and smoothed down my hair, which I had tied back in my customary loose pony tail. I turned right and left, hoping I didn't look too bad in my blue shirt, jeans and training shoes.

“Mr. Riding,” said a woman who startled me; I hadn't heard her enter the room. “I'm April, and I'm here to interview you on behalf of a prospective friend.” She shook my hand and indicated that I should sit in front of the desk. She took her place behind the computer.

“We regard all our clients as friends here,” she explained. “It avoids using words which imply different values.”

“That's fine,” I said. “I'm studying archaeology, not social sciences.”

“Right, let's get down to business,” April said. “I see you give your age as twenty three, is that correct?”

“Yes, all the details I put on the form are correct,” I assured her. “I may have lost a pound or two since I was last weighed, but that's all.”

“Well, I have to check,” April smiled gently. “Some of the guys tell the most outrageous lies. Now, we have an exact request for someone of your description and age. I can't tell you who the request is from until we've completed a questionnaire, and I've got approval to give you our friend's details.”

“Let's do the questionnaire,” I said, feeling a little surprised that anyone could have specified someone like me.

“First I have to certify that you've answered the questions on our form correctly, then we'll begin,” said April, taking a form from a sealed envelope which had been lying on the desk. “I haven't seen these questions before, they came from our friend, so please don't blame me for the content.” She fell silent as she read through the form, flicking over the page with first a frown, then an amused smile on her face.

“Right, the first question is about your family, it asks you to describe your immediate family, saying how close you are to them, how often they visit and any pertinent information.”

“That's easy,” I replied. “My parents split before I was born, my mother remarried when I was about seven, then went to Italy with her new husband. I've totally lost contact with her.”

“I'm sorry. I don't want to pry, but the questions aren't mine.”

“That's no problem, I'm used to my situation,” I replied, feeling a little hurt by my background. “I grew up with my grandparents, but they're both dead now. They died on a field trip to see the temples in Peru. They were both archaeologists, that's why I studied the subject. It was easy for me, since I'd been to all the main sites when they were excavating. I might be a little lost on popular music, but I'm good on native artifacts.”

“That must have been hard on a young boy.”

“Not really, it was a long adventure,” I said, remembering the friends I made in the various camps we had lived in at the excavation sites. “The problem is that I've no family left, at least, none that I'm in contact with, and no real friends in this country. That's why I'm here today.”

“I see,” she said, writing notes on the forms in front of her. “The next section asks how you would feel if your friend were more important than you. The form gives examples of greater earnings and wealth, status, fame, and the things that go with them.”

“I guess I'd feel proud,” I replied. “I want to be in a relationship which is supportive, I really want to belong, after being so rootless for the last few years.”

“Would you be willing to give up your career to travel with your partner, if you had one in this position?” April asked.

“Yes, I guess so,” I replied slowly. “It’s not something I’ve really thought about.”

“How would you feel if your partner were a little older than you?”

“I’m not sure how to answer that,” I replied. “I’ve never thought about it. A year or two, maybe five, seven would be okay. It depends on who it is, how it feels...” I felt myself running out of words.

“But you don’t rule it out.”

“No, not at all,” I replied.

“The next section asks about your domestic arrangements,” April said, moving along quickly before I could ask any more questions. “Can you tell me about that? It might be quicker than me going through all of the sections individually.”

“I live alone, and always have, so I guess I’m pretty good,” I replied. “I cook and clean for myself, I wash my clothes regularly, do the repairs and makeshift tailoring. I’m not good at any of these things, but I’ve never been able to afford anyone to do them for me. I have to repair clothes until they drop to pieces, just to avoid buying more.”

“Right, that covers most of this section,” April said, writing and ticking the form with speed.

Before she could speak again the telephone on the desk rang, and April answered it. She listened for a while and then looked up at me. “I just have to step out for a few moments, please excuse me.”

I didn’t have to wait long. She returned with a paper which she handed to me. “That’s the details of our friend who’s asked to meet you,” she said.

I read the name: ‘Laura Black’. The name should mean something to me; there was no address to give me a clue, just a telephone number. I looked up at April trying to remember why the name was familiar.

“Yes, that’s right, it’s who you think it is, the famous professor of social psychology,” April informed me, thinking I had recognized the name as instantly as she expected.

“But she’s so famous,” I stammered in surprise. “She’s on television and in the magazines, she’s so popular.”

“Yes, and she’s on our books. She says for me to tell you not to worry about that,” April assured me kindly. “She says she’s fed up with being hit on by men who want to use her for their careers, she wants to meet someone for herself. She says to tell you that she’s thirty three years old and well preserved. All she asks is that you meet a few times and see if you get along.”

“Well, I’ll do that,” I said, still surprised. “What do I do?”

“The details are on the paper,” April showed me. “Ring that number after eight to-night, and she’ll send a car for you. Dress casual. If you don’t call by then, she’ll assume you’ve decided not to meet and that’s an end to it.”

“No second chance,” I observed.

“And no time to think about it at length,” April finished my thought out loud, then professionally eased me out of the interview room and said her good bye, wishing me luck, whatever I decided.

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“Well, you saw him through the one way mirror,” April said when she had seen Alan off the premises.

“Yes, and I liked what I saw,” Laura admitted. “As I told you when I engaged your firm to find me a boy like that, I wanted to be as sure as possible that it would be someone gentle and inexperienced.”

“Well he certainly seems to be that,” April said. “Do you want all these questionnaires back?”

“Yes please,” Laura took them from her. “It may be silly, but I don't want anything which may be traceable. You assured me that none of this transaction would get onto your computer.”

“No, we'll have no record, and no one knows about this introduction but you and me,” April promised. “And your fee guarantees that I've forgotten everything. If you want to check the computer, there's no record there either.”

Laura smiled with satisfaction, then moved to the computer.

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That evening after I had showered and washed my hair, I sat in my room and looked at the paper with Laura Black's telephone number. I decided to stop just thinking about it, and went down the hall to make the telephone call. A man answered, and I nearly hung up, but he asked if I was awaiting the car from Miss Black. When I answered that I was, he told me that there would be a black Mercedes outside the door at ten minutes to eight to pick me up, and that I should just get into the back as soon as it arrived.

I went back to my room, pulled on a fresh white shirt and my only pair of decent chinos. I brushed my teeth for a second time, then five minutes early, went down to wait for the car. This would be an experience, I thought as I stood inside the lobby, not wanting to loiter in the darkness of the street.

I'd never been in a Mercedes before.

The car which pulled up exactly on time was really big, really black and very shiny. As I stepped out onto the sidewalk, the driver got out of the car and wordlessly opened the door for me. I stepped into the rear and sank into the soft leather of the seat. A metallic voice asked me to fasten my seat belt, then we moved off. There was a partition behind the front seats.

It was closed and there was no attempt at conversation from the driver. I was left with my own thoughts and apprehensions. As we drove, the stereo played lilting music, violins with a Celtic theme, wonderfully soothing.

I didn't try to follow the journey. I didn't know enough of the area to be able to recognize the twists and turns in the road as we passed the main campus, then skirted the suburbs before a short stretch of open highway took the car into a more secluded road. The car climbed into a valley where the houses were palatial and well spaced apart. Finally we turned into a drive where lights came on as we entered, and I found myself getting out of the car outside a gracefully proportioned mansion, designed with a colonial elegance.

As I shut the car door it pulled away immediately, cutting off a last means of escape. I turned to the door.

I stepped towards the house as the door opened, and there before me was Laura Black. My first impression of her was the usual: how different she looked from the person I had seen on television. There she was stiff and formal, elegant and stylish. Here she looked taller and slimmer, still elegant, but more than a little intimidating as I held out my hand to her. She was dressed in a loose blouse of black silk, with long sleeves. Her trousers were of the same material, and floated above her low heeled shoes as she moved sinuously towards me.

"Hello, Alan, I'm so pleased you decided to come tonight," she said, squeezing my hand for just a moment longer than necessary. She stepped back for me to pass through the door.

"This is beautiful, Miss Black," I said, looking around at the sheer luxury of the house which I had just entered as if it were a dream.

"Please, it's Laura to you," she smiled, taking my arm as we walked towards the back of the house. "I thought we would talk just a little this evening, then you can decide if you want this to go further. Let's go into the conservatory, the view's quite wonderful."

The conservatory at the back of the house was large and open. There were lights outside in the garden which emphasized how large it was. I could see a small stream with an ornamental water wheel turning lazily. Squirrels ran across the lawn and into the trees.

"It's too cold to sit outside, or even with the doors open, but if we sit in those chairs near the door, and I turn down the lights, we can watch the garden as we talk," Laura said. "You relax, and I'll open some wine. I never drink alone, so I didn't open it in case you'd changed your mind and didn't come."

I sat in one of the chairs near the door and watched as Laura placed the bottle and two glasses on a low table between two chairs. As she moved, I watched her elegance and wondered what she could want with me. She was tall and slim, inches taller than I was even without her modest heels. She had money, reputation, friends and a career. I had nothing to offer.

"Please pour," she said, sitting opposite me. "You must be wondering about me. Let me talk, then you can ask me anything you want. Is that agreeable?"

“To say I'm wondering is an understatement,” I said, pouring two glasses of ruby red wine. I handed one to her, then sat as she remained silent. She watched me, then sipped her glass.

“I'm thirty three,” she began. “You've heard of me, and know a little about me. What you don't know is that my relationships have been a mess. My boyfriends have had big egos, big plans, and have never considered what I want. It's always been about what they want. That's why I'm alone again. I've taken my time, I'm not on the rebound if that's what you're thinking.”

She sipped again from her glass, pausing for me to speak.

“I'm not thinking that at all, I'm just curious. I mean, why me?”

“I'm coming to that,” she held my eyes with her gaze until I looked down into my glass. “I want someone for me, and you look the part, if you're willing to give it a try. I'm not easy to get along with all the time, but I have some needs and wants of my own. Forgive me for saying this, but I worked out that question sheet you answered because I didn't want to meet someone too macho, and you're not. You seem to have the gentle side I prefer. I won't harm you. I certainly won't eat you alive, although I may clean you up a bit. We could have fun, if you'll commit yourself to me for a while, no questions asked.”

“I'm not prepared for this,” I heard myself saying, unsure how to react. “I think I'd like to try, but I'm not experienced, I wouldn't know how to behave with your friends.”

“Don't worry,” Laura seemed amused at this thought. “They won't know how to behave around you either, but I'll enjoy watching them.” She gave a wry laugh. “Stick with me. I'll look after you, kid,” she said in a mock gangster's accent, pointing her fingers at me like a gun.

A silence followed as we drank some wine, and I refilled the glasses. “Come, let me show you around. I'm proud of this house, I just moved in last month.”

I followed Laura from room to room, thinking they would never end. There were two lounges, a large dining room and a big kitchen diner. There was a library and a study, a music room and a utility room with all sorts of appliances. There was a pool with a cover which could be recessed in warm weather, and a small sauna and steam suite at the back. I had seen the magnificent stair way as I entered the house, but we went up a small stair from the kitchen, Laura taking me by the hand since the light had blown. At the top of the stairs, I suddenly felt very self conscious and let her hand fall.

Upstairs there were three luxurious bedrooms with dressing rooms and en suite bath and shower rooms. They had a sun terrace overlooking the pool and the garden. There were some smaller rooms, and some rooms which she said were just storage. A small stairway went up to the loft, which was just an open area with a few roof windows. This was more storage when the fitters finished, Laura explained, as we walked into a large bathroom with a round sunken bath in the center and mirrors everywhere.

“Do you always wear your hair tied back?” Laura asked suddenly.

“Yes, these days I do. It's a bit eccentric, but I like it long. It's a leftover from my undisciplined youth when we were traveling everywhere,” I replied.

“May I?” she asked and moved around me. I felt her gently tugging at the elastic bands which held my pony tail. I was relieved that I had washed it earlier that evening. She ran her fingers through the strands, taking some hair over my shoulder so that it hung across my shirt pockets.

“A bit out of condition,” she noted, looking into my eyes, “but I love it long. It has possibilities.”

Before I could ask what she meant, we were on our way through the rest of the house, and the opportunity passed. Laura talked about the house, how she decorated it all for herself, and how the designers had done just what she wanted. It was all hers, with no bad memories. The last place we went was into the garage where she kept her cars. There was a little red convertible two-seater sports car, which I immediately fell in love with. There was also a small Mercedes and a Jeep.

“I’ve always liked cars,” Laura said, watching me stare at the sports car. “You must come over Sunday and try this little one. It’s quite wicked.”

“If that’s on offer, I’m hooked,” I joked.

“You’ll like being hooked,” Laura said, staring into my eyes steadily. “That’s what I want this time. I warn you, I’m strong, and the relationship I want is on my terms, but I want you to enjoy it too. It’s no use otherwise.”

I felt the tension in her as she spoke, but before it became a warning she turned away. Looking over her shoulder she smiled back at me disarmingly. “You must think I’m terribly wanton,” she said.

“That’s an old fashioned word,” I laughed. “I think I could live with that, especially if the car’s part of the deal.”

“So if I throw you out now, you’ll come back Sunday?” she asked, walking me towards the door. She continued without waiting for an answer, “I’ll send the car for you at two.”

She opened the door and I saw the limousine waiting for me.

I turned to say good-bye but I was too late, the door had closed behind me. I got into the back seat again and hardly noticed the journey back, there was so much to think about.

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“Laura, do you really mean you took him seriously when he said you needed a wife,” Susan Grey asked when Laura confided in her what she had arranged.

“Well, yes,” Laura admitted. “At first I thought it was stupid, then I thought it was an interesting exercise in social psychology. I thought about it for a while longer, then decided that it would be fun.”

“But now you’ve found this boy, how on earth are you going to persuade him to take part in the experiment?”

"I haven't a clue," Laura admitted. "You're my research assistant, so you can contribute any ideas, thoughts, schemes, or whatever... That's not part of your official duties, though."

"I think you should keep it a secret," Susan offered.

"Yes, I agree," Laura said slowly. "I think I know what I intend. I'm just going to start off strong, I'm not going to give him an opportunity to object. I'll have to vamp the details as we go along."

"Well, keep me posted." Susan was more intrigued than she would have cared to admit. "I'll see if there's anything published to help you."

"Promise to keep it secret."

"I promise." Susan made the sign of crossing her heart.

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The next couple of days passed uneventfully and slowly as my anticipation grew. Friday was exceptionally long as I tried to concentrate on the photographs of reliefs carved into a Peruvian temple, the interpretation of which was central to my thesis. I was relieved when finally I could switch off my computer and gather my papers for the walk to my room. When I got there, I found a note asking me to collect a package from the office a couple doors away.

I picked up a small package and returned before opening it. Inside I found a note from Laura on pink paper. 'Use these on Saturday morning,' it said, with a drawing of soap bubbles escaping from a shower. I looked inside to find bottles of shampoo, conditioner and finishing rinse for my hair, and a wonderfully sweet citrus body spray. They were far nicer than I could ever have afforded for myself. I dismissed a slight feeling of guilt and allowed myself to look forward to the next day.

I slept only a little that night, anticipation having gotten the better of me. I showered and used the gifts lavishly as I took a long time over each stage of getting ready.

Carefully I combed out my hair. I marveled at how soft it was and how smoothly it fell across my shoulders as I waited for the rising heat of the day to dry it. It was still damp as I dressed in a clean white shirt and blue jeans. It was almost dry as I stood waiting for the car to pick me up.

In daylight, the drive out to Laura's house was much simpler than it had appeared in the darkness of the last journey.

The approach, once the main roads had been left behind, was through lush scenery. Though nervous, I was beginning to relax when the car finally pulled into her drive. The car drove away as soon as I got out, leaving me in the murmuring sounds of the countryside as I rang the doorbell.

"Well, hello," said Laura, stepping aside from the door which she had just opened to allow me to enter. "Did you use my present?" She took my pony tail and smelled the hair. "You did, I can feel and smell the difference. Come with me, I've something else for you, then we're going for that drive."

As she took me by the hand and started to lead me to the stairs, I looked at her, slightly less overawed than before. She was wearing white jeans, so tight that there was nothing left to the imagination. Her top was pale yellow, with no sleeves and a square neckline which just allowed the top of her ample breasts to be seen. It ended above her waist, leaving a glimpse of a firm, tanned midriff as she moved. She was a lot taller than I, even though her gold shoes were flat. It was a curious sensation as she held my hand. Her arm was straight, mine bent and raised in a submissive gesture.

“Here you are,” she said as we entered one of the bedrooms.

“I wanted you to look a little more fashionable, to match the car, so I had these sent over.”

“You shouldn't have,” I gushed, partly in pleasure, partly in shock at the clothes on the bed. “I mean, if we don't get along, I can't repay you.”

“Nonsense, this is my fun and I'm allowed to spend a little on indulging myself,” Laura said. “Now come on, get out of those clothes and then we can go.”

“Are you sure?” I asked. “They look a little too fashionable for me.”

“I'm sure,” Laura said, with a firmer tone in her voice. “I think you'll look wonderful in tight white jeans. You like mine, don't you?”

“But you're a girl, Laura.”

“What's that got to do with it? Lots of men wear white jeans, and I want us to match, as if we belong together,” Laura said, tugging at my belt, then standing over me as I removed my jeans and shirt.

“These are tight,” I gasped as I pulled the waistband and fastened the button, then stood for her to see.

“Yes, they're tighter than your usual jeans,” Laura said with a smile. “I should have guessed that your under pants would spoil the look. I didn't get you any panties to match either. Never mind, get those off and I'll get you some of mine, they're much thinner and won't show a line through the jeans.”

“Laura, I don't think...,” I started.

“Now don't be silly and don't spoil my day,” Laura said with a wink that melted any thoughts of opposition I was forming. “Here, I've some plain black panties in silk lycra. They should be comfortable and thin enough not to show through. You can go in the bathroom to change if you're too modest to do it here.”

She handed me the panties and I accepted her challenge. I removed my shorts and pulled on the thin black panties, feeling the lycra stretch to accommodate and then constrain my rising manhood. Laura noticed it too, and I saw a smile play across her lips.

“We might find a use for that later,” she said teasingly, “but not now. Here's your shirt, let's hurry.”

I removed my shirt as she opened a package, then allowed her to help me into a pale yellow shirt. It felt so soft and new against my skin; it was a long time since I had

worn something new, let alone so wonderful to touch. I say shirt, although that hardly describes it. The garment was short, without a collar, but with a neckline rather more square than I would have liked. She quickly fastened the buttons on the front and I looked down to see it just reached the top of my jeans. It was not the same shade of yellow as hers, but it was nearer to her style than any man's shirt I had ever worn before.

“This isn't a shirt,” I protested.

“Don't be silly. You just don't know what fashion is.”

That was true, I'd hardly had any new clothes in years. I gave up my protest and allowed her to guide my feet into some espadrilles trimmed with gold straps. I didn't complain when she loosed my hair and tossed the band which I had used to tie it back onto the bed. She brushed my hair back gently, then sprayed it into place.

“I like your hair loose,” she said, “even though it needs some style trimming into it. I'm not going to let you wear it tied back like this. It doesn't go with the car.”

I saw my reflection in her mirror: it didn't really look like me. The person I saw looked... a bit more girlish than me. The white and the yellow, the loose hair and the gold strap of the sandals were all wrong. I felt a shiver run through me. They may be all wrong, but this was what Laura had planned. I felt a little excited at that thought, as much as I felt strange with what I was seeing.

“Hey, beautiful,” Laura drawled in a mock gangster's accent again. “Let's hit the road before we get caught.”

Before I could think of an answer, she took my hand and was pulling me towards the stair. She dragged me into the garage where the little red sports car stood waiting. Once I saw that car, all my doubts disappeared. If I looked a little different- I was afraid to bring the word effeminate to mind- then what did it matter today? The top was down, and Laura opened the passenger door for me step in, then gently guided me into the seat before closing the door. She jumped around the back and got into the driver's seat, then looked at me.

“If you're very good,” she said, “I might let you drive it back.” She touched her finger to her lips, then softly touched it to mine with a kissing gesture. I shivered.

Slowly the garage door in front of us raised in obedience to a signal from the controller in the car. With a deep roar from the powerful engine we were off, racing towards the main road where we turned toward the coast. My hair started to blow all over the place, and I used both hands to gather it, then had to use one to hold it as the wind increased. Laura smiled across at me and took my other hand in hers as she drove faster than I would have dared. We headed towards the beach and entertainment area, where the traffic grew heavier and slowed us down. The wind was stronger as we got nearer to the beach, so that I still had to hold my hair to prevent it blowing everywhere.

“Laura, I need to get a hair band,” I said as we stopped at a traffic light.

“I think your hair's beautiful. If you want to tie it back, there's a scarf in the glove box. I haven't brought any money.”

“I can't use a scarf!”

“Oh, of course, you don't know how to tie it,” Laura said. “I'll help you.” That was not what I meant, and I guessed she knew it.

Without leaving a moment for me to argue, she pulled to the side of the road where people were passing on the pavement, looking at us. She had me turn my head to the side while she gathered, then tied my hair back using a vividly printed scarf which she had produced from inside the car. Of all things, it was a leopard skin print. I suddenly felt the stares of the men on the sidewalk and I knew my face colored in embarrassment.

“Laura, it's a girl's scarf,” I hissed.

“What else do you expect me to have?” she asked, tying it in a bow.

“It's too feminine, I'll look stupid,” I whispered back.

“Nonsense,” she replied, then we were off again, through the streets, more regularly delayed by the increasing volume of traffic. Having become conscious of the looks I was attracting, I was now very sensitive to glances from people in other cars. I guessed why they were looking and did not like it.

“Laura, they're looking at me,” I complained as we pulled into a space at the edge of the beach.

“That's okay,” Laura said as she touched my hand. “You look good.” She smoothed my hair back over my shoulder. “Have you got pierced ears?” she asked.

“No,” I replied unnerved. “That's girls stuff.”

“Not any more,” Laura laughed. “Lots of guys wear gold hoops or studs these days. I think it looks sexy.”

“Not on me,” I answered.

“Is that a challenge?” Her eyes were bright, daring me to say anything.

“No, it's just my opinion,” I replied.

“Well, I like my man to have earrings, so that's what we'll do next.” She opened the car door and stood at the side. “Come on, there's a jeweler there across the street.”

I hesitated, then she came and opened my door. “Come on,” she demanded, taking my arm.

“I thought you had no money,” I said lamely.

“I don't, but I have my credit card,” she grinned.

“I don't think this is a good idea,” I protested as I was propelled across the street by Laura. She was talking loudly now, encouraging me so that everyone passing by could hear and figure out what we were talking about. I knew she had planned things this way, and I knew that I had no possible escape. I shriveled inside with embarrassment as we entered the jewelers. Before I knew it, I was seated in a rear booth while my ears were marked and, at Laura's direction, they were pierced. A gold hoop was inserted in each lobe. I watched them being pushed through the holes and felt the new weight. I

knew they were bigger than most men outside of rock bands wore. They certainly were not discreet.

“There, that didn't hurt at all,” Laura said. “There was no need to be so frightened.”

“Don't worry,” said the jeweler, handing Laura the receipt. “You'd be surprised how many ladies are afraid when they come in here. Once they have the first hole pierced they realize it's painless, and they usually come back so that they can wear several sets of earrings. It's as if they have to catch up by wearing more.”

“Is that so?” said Laura. “We'll probably be back soon then.”

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As we left the shop I felt violated, confused and shamed. Laura had made me do something I didn't want to do. Now here I was, standing beside her amongst lots of people, with big heavy gold hoops in my ears for all to see, a scarf tying back my hair, and worst of all, the jeweler had seemed to think we were two ladies. I was so shocked and confounded, I could not speak. Laura took my hand and began to lead me through the crowds.

“I can't believe what you've done,” I said, struggling to hold back a tear. “They thought I was a girl as we drove into town, then having my ears pierced, and now I'm wearing these and...” I could not continue. I was walking with Laura. She was holding my hand as we walked, and again I was conscious that my arm was raised to reach her hand. It was as if she was leading me. I felt confused.

Laura turned and walked to the railing which separated the beach from the promenade, then leaning back against it, turned to me. She took both my hands. “Look, I want this to be special. It is special for me, and I want you to enjoy being with me too,” she said quietly, looking into my eyes. “I meant what I said. I think earrings are sexy, they turn me on.”

She touched my ear and ran her finger around the lobe until it rested on the golden hoop. She gently made it move, and I felt its weight as if for the first time. There was a little tenderness where the post ran through my ear. It was not unpleasant, it was a new sensation, and as we stood there, I knew that if Laura liked it then it would remain there.

“I guess I'll have to get used to them,” I said weakly.

“You heard the man. In a week or so you'll have three or four sets, maybe more,” Laura said. “...I hope.”

Then she took my hand again and we walked on, more casually than before.

“Laura, why are they staring at us?” I asked.

“You're very fashionable,” she replied.

“I think I'm a bit too fashionable,” I said. “I think I look a bit, well, you know...too feminine. Dressed like this, with the scarf tied round my hair.”

“Not really,” Laura replied dismissively, not answering the question. “We're going here,” she announced and pulled me through a gate into the open air section of a res-

restaurant and bar which overlooked the beach. It was full of the most fabulous people, and clearly Laura was a regular customer the way the staff greeted her with smiles and friendly words. I wanted to hide, and was really grateful that there was no one there who could know me.

“This is my friend,” Laura said to the waiter. “We'll be coming in for the party next month together, and maybe some more times, so you treat my friend like you treat me.”

It made me nervous that she chose not to use my name. I felt my hand being taken and shaken warmly by a Hispanic man. “We'll be pleased to see you any time,” he said. “There's always a table for such a beautiful friend of Laura's.”

“It's on my tab whenever,” Laura said. “Is there a table now?”

“Anytime for our favorite investor,” he said, leading us towards the terrace overlooking the beach, where we sat facing each other across a small table. Orange drinks were served.

“I told you, I have ideas for this relationship,” Laura said. “If you want to get off, you can, but it'll be more fun if you stay.”

“I'm just not up to speed with you,” I said.

“If you catch up, I'll just have to race ahead of you,” Laura said, stroking the back of my hand and smiling into my eyes. “Go with me, don't analyze, just accept the moment. It's me you're with, not anyone who stops to stare at us.”

“I don't know, Laura. You have your post with tenure already, I've still to complete my doctorate, then get a career.”

“I promise I won't interfere with your study time,” Laura said. “And I can help far more than you realize.”

“But we're in completely different fields of study,” I pointed out.

“I know, but whereas you have to struggle for any extra computer time, I have unlimited access,” Laura replied. “And what's more, I have a computer link at home. You could maybe use the terminal in my study any time.”

“Do you really mean that?” I asked. Getting computer access was really difficult for me.

“Of course, just tell me when,” she reassured me. “That is, if this relationship doesn't hit the rocks just because I like my man to wear earrings for me. I told you, I don't go for macho any more.”

“I don't know how to take that,” I replied.

“Don't think about it. This is my relationship, I want to be in control. That's not a threat, just a statement. Are you strong enough to stay with me?” Laura challenged.

Before I could answer, we were served with food and wine. It was wonderful sitting there in the warmth of the late afternoon. I could never have afforded to be there by myself, and I felt the idea of being with Laura becoming more and more attractive, whatever her terms. After all, I was the man in the relationship, even if she was taller and older. I could still take control where it mattered.

The journey home was exciting. As promised, I was allowed to drive. And what a car. Once I got the feel of the acceleration and handling, I felt like a tiger. There was a car with two young men which gave us the eye at a stoplight. They made some remarks which made it obvious that they thought we were two women, but I hardly cared. I knew who I was, and I bet they were really sad when they found they could not keep up with me. Laura laughed as we drove, knowing the same things as I did.

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“They thought we were girls,” she said. “You never said a thing.”

“No, but we didn't drive like girls,” I said as we pulled into her garage after a long drive.

“I'm not sure how to take that remark,” Laura laughed, “but you certainly drive fast.”

“Sorry, it's such a wonderful car and I don't get to drive very often. I guess the power went to my head.”

“Like me, this afternoon when I made you get your ears pierced,” Laura reminded me. It was my turn to think just how I should take that remark.

“I guess I'd better go change,” I said. “I've got my computer time from six in the morning, so I'd better get back.”

“No, you don't escape so easily. You can go straight from here. You can use the guest room, or maybe somewhere else. Let's see what happens.”

She left me in the conservatory. I sat watching the sky darken and my reflection become clearer in the glass. My hair was still tied in the scarf with its bow, and the gold of the earrings danced as I moved. I rocked my head again and again just to watch and feel the sensation.

“I guess you're getting used to them.” Laura's voice startled me. How long had she been watching?

“I guess I'd better take them out and give them to you to keep before I leave,” I said, reaching to feel how the earring was fastened.

“No you don't,” Laura replied. “You mustn't disturb them for at least four weeks, or they'll be really sore. You have to let the holes heal open.”

She walked towards me, dressed in a low-cut baby doll, in ivory silk, with panties and high heeled mules to match. She towered over me, and I had to look up into her eyes. I knew I would have to do as she asked if she insisted.

“But I've got things to do, I can't hide for that length of time,” I protested.

“So do the things. No one will notice, lots of men wear earrings now. You're new in town. No one will notice, I promise.”

“But Laura, these are much heavier, much bigger than most men wear.”

“So what? Let your hair fall over them if you're embarrassed, but I bet no one notices at all. Trust me.”

Laura looked directly at me, willing me to agree.

“Okay, you're the boss,” I said, wanting to end the conversation, I knew when to give in.

“Now that's agreed, perhaps we can get to know each other better,” she said, holding out her hand to me.

Silently we went upstairs, into her bedroom where she slowly undressed me, then untied my hair. She sat me on her stool, with my back to the mirror. She pulled my hands over my head, and as I kept them raised I felt her slip something silky over my head and watched as she arranged the folds of a dark pink nightgown over my body. I sat there almost in a trance. I knew I should protest, but perhaps it was the earrings exerting some mysterious influence on me.

I was enjoying being seduced. This is what I should be doing to her was the thought that flashed through my mind, then a second thought: this is more delicious, give in. I did.

I wonder if she felt that I was having these thoughts, and knew which would win. She did nothing to break the spell, she did not speak, accepting my compliance. Silently, except for the gentle hiss of the nozzle, she sprayed a light lavender perfume around my neck, then brushed my hair smoothly over my shoulders. Satisfied, she took my hand and led me to her bed.

As I walked, I felt the dress brushing against my thighs and heard the gentle rustle of the material as she gently pushed me to the bed. I knew her role was the one I should be playing, but I could not break the spell. In my mind, I knew I was playing the girl's part. I lay back, and felt her mounting me, climbing over me. I felt the cold chill as her heels dug into my thighs, and as she lowered herself to me, I knew instinctively what she wanted my tongue to do.

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I'd never had much experience with girls, and I guess even if I had it would all have been useless that night. Laura knew the things she wanted and knew how to make me do some of them without direction. Where I was lacking, she told me exactly what to do. Even when I was exhausted, she urged me on, draining me, never letting me have a moment to rest or think. I was there solely to do whatever she wanted. I cannot remember falling asleep, but I do remember being woken up by shaking. I felt sore and awkward. I was unable to look directly at Laura; whatever could she think of me, allowing myself to be so used? I need not have worried.

“That was a wonderful evening,” she said gently. “We shall do it again, next time it will be more enjoyable, I promise.” She watched me struggling into my own clothes.

“The car's waiting outside. I'll call you later.”

With that I was dismissed, and by the time the car deposited me outside the computer suite, I was doing my best to be wide awake and ready for my research.

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“Well, how did it go?” Susan was bursting with curiosity.

“It went fine,” Laura said. “He was more than a little in awe of me from the start, so it was easy to push him along.”

“So how feminine is he now?” Susan asked.

“It's not like that yet,” Laura admitted. “I got his ears pierced, and insisted on big ear rings. He's going to be reminded of me every time they impinge on his consciousness. He'll be self-conscious for a while too, but it will wear off, and that will set him up for the next step.”

“Can I see him?” Susan asked. “After all, if I'm going to do your research, I need to see the project.”

“If you really mean that, I'll arrange it,” Laura said. “The library will tell me which computer he has allocated and the times.”

“I wouldn't miss this for the world.” Susan thought she could get to enjoy watching Laura turn this young man into a wife.

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During the next few days, I worked through my allotted time and was really getting somewhere. It was a productive time, interrupted only when I had to give up the library computer to the next student. It was frustrating, and it was at that moment that I decided to think seriously about Laura's offer to use hers. I knew that she had been in control that night, but then it never occurred to me that her control could take me where I would be unable to make decisions for myself. After all, I was the man.

When Laura had not called me that day, or the next, I began to wonder what was going on. I called her office but left no message. I didn't have her home number and when I asked for it the office said they were not allowed to give it out. I called again the next day, and the day after that, but all they would say was that she was not available.

Meantime, Laura was proved right. No one noticed my earrings, and gradually my self-consciousness about them subsided to the point where they seemed to be a part of me. I almost forgot about them, but wearing them made me look at other people's ear rings too. Mine were the biggest worn by a man, bigger and heavier by a long way. It wasn't just that they had a bigger diameter, but they were thicker gold. I saw what the girls were wearing, and understood what the jeweler had meant. Lots of them had multiple pierces with two, three or more sets of rings. Some were horrible, cheap plastic things which looked wrong, others were gold and silver, with diamonds and other stones which looked real, although perhaps they were fakes. I saw lots of girls with a single ring high on the fold of the ear lobe, and guessed that this was the latest style.

I got another computer period the following Friday, and again worked productively until my time was up. I still had not heard from Laura. I was worried that she had dumped me. The thought saddened me and amused me at the same time. I was afraid of her using me, but I was more afraid that she wasn't going to use me again. What did it all mean? Having nothing else to do, I wandered across the campus to see if her car

was parked anywhere near her faculty building, but it was not. I went into the nearest phone booth and called her office. They told me she would be back, but they did not know when. I had nothing to do, and went to stand where I could see the parking lot and the building entrance.

To my surprise, the little sports car was there. It had not been there earlier, and I wondered how I had missed her arrival. I walked back to the faculty building, but by now it had been closed and locked for the week end. I had a dilemma. If I walked back to a telephone, she could leave and I would miss her. The alternative was to wait near the car, but it was starting to rain. I decided to stand there; after all, there was no one else hanging around in the building on a Friday evening. I knew she would be out soon.

By the time Laura appeared, I was thoroughly soaked. She saw me, did a double take and laughed. She wore gray pants that may even have been tighter than her white jeans. Her shirt was white, and again bared her midriff.

“So that's why you weren't answering your phone,” she said. “You're soaked, why didn't you come in?”

“The building was locked and I didn't want to miss you,” I replied. “You didn't call all week.”

“I told you I'd call,” she replied. “I've had a lot to do this week, and I told you I tried to call you just now.”

She stepped into the car, then opened the passenger door. “Are you going to get in?”

“I'm wet,” I said, stating the obvious as I eased myself into the seat. “Can we pass my place, I'd like to change?”

“Oh, just come with me, I'll find you something dry,” Laura said as we roared across the campus. “I enjoyed our last weekend, and I decided I wanted to enjoy this one more, so I've made a few preparations.”

“Am I going to like them?”

“You will,” Laura assured me, then added, “at least when you get used to them you will.”

She drove furiously, jumping lights, barely stopping at junctions, as if she were afraid that I would leap out of the car. Nervous as I was, I also had a feeling of anticipation.

We pulled into the drive and she operated the garage doors, revving the engine with impatience. As soon as the door was open sufficiently, we were inside and the door was closing again. She kissed me roughly. I tasted her lipstick briefly, then she was out of the car, and opening my door for me to follow.

“Get out of those wet things,” she demanded as soon as we were in the warmth of the house. “Right now, I'll get a robe.”