

# BEING SAFFRON

*By Jessica Matthews*



ILLUSTRATED BY CHAS

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A 'HER TV' NOVEL

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## **BEING SAFFRON**

**By Jessica Matthews.**

“Is the photocopier going to be ready soon?” The lady's voice sounded a bit irritated as she stood beside the machine Matthew was trying to fix.

“I'm going to be about an hour,” he said. “The ink reservoir has to be changed and the paper feed has to be changed. I could call you when it's ready.”

“I'll come back!” she snapped.

“I wouldn't like to get on the wrong side of her,” Colin said, handing the circuit tester to Matthew. “Just one look and she terrifies me.”

“She's just busy,” Matthew said. “Not every woman has to make eyes at you. It's not in your contract.”

“I wish it was. It'd be better than working for you.”

“But you do work for me, so stop watching all the secretaries, and let's get this thing fixed.”

An hour later, he was fitting the final screws on the control panel, when she appeared again. He saw her coming out of the corner of his eye, tall and slender, walking like she expected the world to get out of her way.

“I'm sorry if I snapped,” she began. “I need these papers in a hurry.” Her eyes were hard and looked right through him.

“It's all ready,” Matthew assured her, standing back for her to feed in the documents and pressing the copy button with a flourish. She was sure elegant, over thirty but well preserved, he thought. He could see Colin staring at her, wondering why she wasn't talking to him, after all of the two of them, he was dark and handsome, the one the ladies usually wanted to speak to. Matthew was thin as a rake, with mouse colored hair scraped back into a ponytail.

“What's happening?” she asked. The machine made a groaning sound, tearing paper could be heard from inside. “You'd better not have shredded my accounts.”

Matthew listened in horror. This was his major contract, the best since he started as a franchised contractor. It didn't sound good. He stopped the machine and opened the service door.

“It's just the paper feed,” he told her. “I'll have it fixed in five seconds.” He gestured for Colin to do something.

Colin swaggered up to the lady only to be cut down by a cold stare. He turned away with a shrug of his shoulders. Matthew pulled out a few pieces of torn paper, and started the machine again. It worked perfectly this time and he stood back in relief. She took her copies.

"I hope the thing's going to be satisfactory," she told him. "If it's not, we can always get another repairman."

"I'll change the feed again." He was getting flustered under her scrutiny. She seemed to be looking through him. "I'm just a bit new to this model. I'll be able to fix it first time in future, please don't complain about me."

"Why shouldn't I complain?" she asked, an amused look in her eyes.

"It's my first franchise," he blurted out. "I really need the work."

"Okay, so fix it!" She turned and left him standing beside the machine, feeling quite insignificant.

"I think we could do without this contract," Colin told him as they worked. "That bitch is colder than hell."

"Hell's not cold," Matthew snapped back, "and this is my company, you're supposed to work for me, so let's try, shall we?"

Matthew spent longer on the machine than he intended. It was going to be perfect before he left it just took longer than he expected. He changed the printer cartridges, and cleaned everything, then tested every function. It was past their normal finishing time, so Colin made some excuse and left. As Matthew finished, the lady returned.

"It's perfect," he told her as she copied two sheets of figures. She looked at the papers in her hand, nodded then turned to walk back, tripping over the canister of waste ink powder. It flew over the corridor and settled all over the carpet, over her shoes, and as she tried to wipe it away, the greasy black powder spread over her hands, then onto her clothes. Her look said it all as she walked away.

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Matthew didn't return to that company for the next few weeks. Each day, when he went through his letters, then his e-mail, he expected to receive a termination of his contract, but none came. His business picked up, and to his relief, he was able to put another van on the road, and send Colin to attend to routine calls. All was running smoothly - or so it seemed.

He was beginning to breathe easily, when he got another call to the copier. Carefully, he selected the all the parts he could possibly need. He took clean dustsheets, and checked his tools. In the same corridor, he found himself feeling nervous as he removed the inspection panel and cleared the paper feed once more. He was just bending to the floor, reaching deep inside the machine, when he became conscious of a pair of black stiletto heels. She was standing beside him as he reached into the machine.

"You're back again," she said coldly. "I see you dumped your tame lothario."

"Thanks for not complaining," Matthew stammered. "I really need this contract, and Colin's not so bad, he just has a high opinion of himself."

"That's okay, I should apologize for being bad tempered. I was busy."

"I'm sorry about your clothes." His eyes were so close to her heels as he finally reached the last bit of paper from inside the machine. They were so tall, so pointed, and so high he wondered how she could walk in them.

"You like my heels?" she asked, noticing where his eyes were focused.

"I don't know what you mean," he stammered.

"It's all right, most men like them." She spoke with confidence. "Most men are fascinated when I wear heels like these, and I wear them all the time. Do you ever wear heels?"

Matthew blushed. "It's not a man's style," he stammered.

"That's not what I asked." She looked him in the eye as she spoke. "But perhaps we'll leave that question...If you want to make it up to me, you can offer me a drink."

"I'd love to," Matthew gulped. She was not used to being disappointed he guessed, and he didn't want to get on her wrong side.

"Good, you may wait for me in reception. I'll be down in half an hour."

"I've only got the company truck," Matthew heard his voice trailing off.

"We'll take my car," she told him. "Get washed and wait for me."

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Matthew sat uncomfortably in the reception area, watching the staff leaving the office at the end of the day. There seemed to be no one left in the building when she appeared. He hadn't seen her coming, hadn't heard her, and now she was standing over him, waiting for him to get out of his seat. Her dark suit was tailored to fit her slender figure closely. In the light of reception he looked closely at her for the first time. She was elegant, her dark hair scraped back into a severe pleat, her make up perfect and fresh.

She walked slightly ahead of him. Matthew almost ran to keep up with her, for despite the heels, she walked quickly. Outside the sound of her heels clicking on the pavement, then on the walkway to the car park exuded authority. He walked beside her, unable to think of anything to say. She seemed to be enjoying his discomfort. They approached a black BMW; he heard the click as the doors unlocked. She opened the passenger seats and waited for him to get in, then closed the door.

She drove to the outskirts of the town, then turned into the car park of a small club. The handbrake rasped as she put the car in the park position, then she was out of the car and opening the door for him to get out. He felt embarrassed as she stood and waited, offering her arm to him. She closed the door behind him and hurried him into the club where it was so dark his eyes took a few moments to adjust. Matthew saw her wave to the bar man, then they were seated in a booth, and quite private.

"I like to come here after work," she told him. "It's easy to stay for a few minutes, or to stay all night."

"I don't know anywhere around here," Matthew confessed.

"That's why I decided for you. It's kind of you to bring me for a drink." She softened her tone. "I didn't intend to be so mean to you in the office."

"That's okay," Matthew replied. "You must have such a lot to do."

"That's right, but now I'm not in the office, and there's nothing to do, just relax." She stroked his arm as she spoke. "Tell me why you're fixing office equipment."

"I was going to be an athletics coach," Matthew explained. "I was on a scholarship, but then I got injured, I took a year out to recover, but the recovery never came. I couldn't do the distances anymore."

I guessed you were something athletic. You're so slim, hardly a spare ounce of flesh to be seen, you must have to work hard to do that."

"It's just habit," Matthew admitted. "I run every day, but I've never had to work at keeping slim."

"Your skin is so smooth too, you must work hard to keep it like that."

"It embarrasses me," Matthew admitted. "I shave every day, but it's so soft, when I tried to grow a beard and mustache, I failed miserably."

"You're not too tall either," she said, still stroking his arm, looking intently at him as if this was her most interesting conversation ever. "How tall are you?"

"Five foot seven, ...I feel dwarfed by you though."

"There's no need to feel dwarfed," she laughed. "I'm five foot seven too."

"It must be the heels," he said.

"You could wear them, too. You'd be as tall as me then."

"But I'd look pretty stupid," Matthew laughed.

"Not to me, you wouldn't." There was a joke and a challenge in her voice, which he ignored.

Their drinks came, then another round followed. A plate of pasta came, with a bottle of wine, then more drinks. Matthew lost count, and began to feel the effects of too much alcohol. He found it easy to talk to her, although he had no idea of what he was saying any more. He loved the way she listened, the way she just kept stroking his arm as he talked, the way she looked at him. He drained another glass, a fresh one appeared almost at once, he drank that, and so the evening continued into the night.

Matthew was quite drunk when eventually she suggested they leave. He tried to stand and found his feet would not go where he wanted them to go. It didn't seem to surprise her, or to be any problem, for two of the waiters gently supported him, and guided him to a taxi. The next morning, his head remembered the drinking. He could remember nothing else, not even going home, yet his van was waiting outside.

And he didn't even know her name???.

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The day was hell. Colin didn't make it any better with his clever comments, which got more obscene when he learned who his boss had been with. Matthew's head ached

and his mouth seemed to have been filled with grit. His calls were all difficult, and by the end of the day when he had time to drive past the office where she worked it was all locked and closed. He drove some more, trying to remember where she had taken him. He pulled off the road a couple of times to consult the map, but it was no use, nothing fit together. He was about to give up and go home when he spotted a familiar car on a parking lot. It wasn't as he remembered it, but then he thought he hadn't really been in a condition to remember much.

He parked the van and looked around. There were two or three bars; none looked like the one in his memory. He sat and tried to think of a recognition point. It was no use. He sat back in his seat and waited. An hour passed, then a second. He was on the point of going home when a tall blonde woman walked to the BMW. He saw the lights flash as she operated the remote control to open the doors. He saw her look at the van and then look again. She locked the car and walked over to his window.

"Hello Matthew," she said. "I didn't expect to see you so soon!" Her makeup was different, big false eyelashes and red lips emphasized just how blonde she was tonight.

He recognized the voice.

"I love the way you look tonight," he said. "That's a beautiful wig!" She didn't answer, just looked at him, cool and predatory. "I was wondering where you took me last night."

It sounded feeble as he said it. He should have thought of a reasonable excuse when he parked here.

"What makes you think it's a wig, Matthew?" There was a mischievous glint in her eye. "I took you home, nowhere else, and I had help."

He didn't know how to answer and stood there tongue tied, feeling awkward.

"Are you waiting for me? If you are, I'm flattered."

"In that case, I was waiting for you. I really do love the blonde look."

"I like to be blonde sometimes. It reminds me how easy it is to manipulate men. Are you easy to manipulate, Matthew?"

"I don't think so, but I'd really like to see you again, we could work out the answer to that question over another drink, perhaps." He waited for a response, as she looked him up and down.

"That's dangerous," she replied. "I'm not a nice person."

"I don't believe you," Matthew said. "I'd like to see you again, properly, I mean."

"That's nice, but I'm a lot older than you."

"I don't care, I didn't ask how old you were."

"I'm trying to warn you, Matthew," she said slowly. "I'm thirty-five, I've had a few boyfriends, but I live alone. I have a business, I don't need a man in my life, and if I allow one in, then it's going to be on my terms. I know what I want, Matthew. It may not be what you want."

"Are you trying to warn me off?"

"That's for you to work out," She said firmly. "I'm telling you that I get what I want, if that doesn't warn you off, don't be surprised by anything."

"I do like the blonde wig," Matthew said, again trying to change the tone of the conversation, to make it lighter.

"I told you, it might not be a wig, perhaps I'd be insulted if you thought it was." She said, her look challenging him to disagree. "You'd look good as a blonde. You should try it sometime."

"Don't make it difficult for me," Matthew said. "Give me a break. At least tell me your name."

"What would you like me to be called?" she persisted. "I could be called anything you like. What's your favorite name for a girl?"

"Something exotic, like Jasmine or Saffron," Matthew's imagination fired.

"Then I shall call you Saffron," she announced. "You can call me Susan. If you want to see me again, leave that van here and get in my car." She turned and walked away without waiting for a reply.

What if she meant it, Matthew thought? She wasn't the kind to joke, or was she. He was confused, but fascinated. He thought for just a second, then jumped out of his van and ran towards her car as the engine started and she pulled away with a squeal of tyres. He ran after her, the car pulling away fast. She stopped and the passenger door opened. He flung himself inside as the car pulled away, forcing him hard back in his seat.

"I think you should fasten your seat belt," She instructed. "You're in for a bumpy ride."

She drove too fast. He was lost in the maze of urban streets until they drove out of town. She threw the BMW round the rural roads like she knew them so well. Suddenly she pulled into a dirt road with a skidding turn, which stopped the car, and left them facing the way they had come.

"Do you trust me, Saffron?"

"I'm *not* called Saffron."

"If you want to be with me, you are," Susan said. "Anyway, I asked if you trusted me. I want you to answer."

"I only just met you," Matthew answered. "I don't know anything about you."

"And do you trust me?" Susan insisted. "All real relationships are based on trust. Do you want to have a relationship with me?"

"Yes, I do," Matthew was confused.

"So if you trust me, reach in there, see what you find and use them," She pointed to the glove box and waited for him.

He opened it and reached inside. He felt a soft bag, with something hard inside. He took it out and pulled the bag away. Something heavy fell onto his lap, and lay there, silver and shiny. He looked carefully and saw it was a pair of handcuffs. The metal was



thin and round, almost like an item of jewelry, but the molded locks told him they were functional as well as decorative. He looked at them and then at her in shock.

“What are you waiting for?” Susan snapped. “If you trust me, put them on. If you can't, just get out of the car...and do it quickly.” She laughed at him with her eyes, the challenge flashing strongly. “You've never been asked to do this before, it could be fun. You could be going somewhere exciting...or you could get out of the car. You need to trust me.”

Matthew turned over the handcuffs in his hands, they felt real, strong and cold. His mind was blank, she was persuasive, but this was not something he had done before. It was a shock; this was the stuff of cheap novels, not real. Her voice told him it was real.

“I need you to trust me. I'll take them off later, you'll have no ill effects, I promise, but you'll have learned to trust me.”

Still he hesitated.

“Do it or get out,” she snapped.

Matthew watched his hands working as if they were not under his control. He snapped the cuff onto his right wrist, feeling the cold steel resting heavily against his skin, then as she still watched, he snapped the second cuff closed. The single link between them gave him no room to move. Susan checked he had tightened them properly, then set off again, driving out of town.

“Where are we going?” Matthew began to get worried.

“You'll see, just trust me. You've got to learn that trust is the basis of this relationship, if it's going to continue.”

“Okay I trust you, so tell me where we're going.”

“We're going for you to buy me a drink,” she smiled at him and stroked his knee with her hand. “That's what you offered.”

She pulled off the road with another skid, towards a dimly lit roadhouse, with just a couple of cars outside. As soon as the car stopped, she was out and closing the door. She strode towards the building, leaving Matthew watching in amazement. He pulled at the handcuffs, but they were both real and tight. He looked in the glove box, maybe the key was there, then in the door pockets, but they were empty. He looked around; there was nothing to give him any comfort. He looked out, and saw Susan in the window of the roadhouse, looking out at him.

*What the hell do I do now?* He thought to himself. He sat a moment longer, then opened the car door and walked into the building and sat beside her. There were only five customers, all men, all looking tough. They all saw his handcuffs and stared hard, making him blush and look away.

“See, I told you he wasn't dangerous,” she said to the men.

“That's all right, detective. He gives you any trouble and you can fasten him to my tractor for the night.” The bar man looked as if he ate tractor parts for a snack.

“I just need to freshen up, and the law says I have to give the prisoner some refreshment, so if you'll watch him, I can go to the bathroom.”

Matthew listened in amazement. He seemed to have walked into a bad movie, where the plot was incomprehensible. He watched Susan disappear towards the back of the bar, and the men came closer. The barkeeper put a gun on the counter, it's message clear. Matthew sat back, held up his hands to show they were cuffed and then put them on the table and sat quite still. Susan was gone for ages, whilst his terror and then his anger grew. She came back, smiled to everyone and thanked them, paid for two coffees and came back to the table.

“Drink up, then we can get you back to the warden before morning,” she said loudly, then more softly. “Try and look mean, I told them you were wanted for armed robbery. They'll be disappointed if you look like a mild mannered repairman.”

“But I *am* a repairman,” Matthew's voice was rising in anger.

“Not to them, and maybe not for much longer,” Susan said. “We'd better be going.”

Grudgingly, Matthew got up and walked towards the door. Any thoughts of arguing disappeared when he caught a glimpse of the men watching them leave. In the car, Susan kissed him quickly, and then they were off, leaving an astonished audience to wonder what on earth had been going on.

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“You'd better come in,” Susan said, parking the car outside a low bungalow on the edge of town.

“I need to collect my van,” Matthew retorted. “If you'll just take off these handcuffs, and take me back...”

“All in good time,” Susan said, getting out of the car and leaving him to follow.

Matthew followed her into the house and waited in the hallway. “Aren't you going to get the key?”

Susan came back with a set of keys and made a show of searching for the right one. The cuff released on his left wrist, and she walked away, leaving him to struggle with the other one. When he finished, he followed her through to the rear where she was reclining on cushions spread on the floor. The blonde wig was lying on the table; her dark hair fell over her shoulders, making her skin look whiter than ever.

“So, did you enjoy your first little masquerade with me, Saffron?”

“Did you plan that?” Matthew asked, moving to sit beside her on the floor.

“Not minutely. When I plan a game, it's much more fun than that, and it goes on for a long time. That was just on the spur of the moment. I wanted to see if you could improvise a character.”

“Did I pass?”

“In the context of what may come, you will pass, I'm sure. Now did anyone ever teach you how to make love to a woman? I think you should undress, and then you can undress me.”

Matthew fumbled, feeling clumsy as she directed his every touch. She took the handcuffs again and gently fastened them so that his hands were behind his back this time. She lay him on his back, then straddled him, ignoring his penis. He could smell her scent, as she lowered herself, urging him to use his tongue. She raised and thrust herself onto his tongue. The wetness of her covered his mouth and lips. All her weight was lowered onto him, then in a shuddering climax; he could feel her muscles contracting deep inside her. He licked harder as she went on and on. Finally she relaxed and lowered herself onto the floor at his side, ignoring his erect penis for a while, then taking her panties; she wrapped them around him and without ceremony manipulated him quickly to climax within the material.

She reached for him again and pulled him down to her. He knew enough of her desires to start licking her again.

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"I think you did reasonably well tonight," she said. "You need to work on your skills as an actor, though. You hardly looked the desperado they thought you should be. Perhaps you need a costume to be able to get into the role next time."

"What makes you think there'll be a next time?"

"That's your choice. If you want to be with me, then you'll do what I want. The alternative is not to follow me round. It might be better for you if you didn't see me again. If you do, it has to be on my terms, and you might not like them. If you don't want to play my games, don't come back. If you want to play, I'll call by your house and pick you up about ten on Friday morning. We're going away for the weekend."

"And if I want to come, what do I bring?" Matthew asked.

"Just yourself. It's my game we're playing...and make sure you shave very carefully. I hate to feel whiskers. You could shave your legs and arms too, I love a smooth man."

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The next few days went slowly for Matthew. He wanted to think rationally about Susan. She was warning him not to get involved and at the same time inviting him into her world. He knew he shouldn't get involved, but the work was boring as he made his way from one defective copier to another. A bit of nonsense in his life would be exciting compared to the mundane but essential needs of his own business.

He knew in his heart that he would not take her seriously. She was older than he was, and much more experienced. For Matthew that was not a great disadvantage. His fumbling relationships had been neither successful nor satisfying. With Susan, all that was easier, she knew what she wanted, and he was not unhappy to be directed. He just hoped she would let him take her properly. As he had that thought, he knew she would not surrender, it would be on her terms or not at all.

He rushed through his work, clearing everything, so that Friday would be free. Even though he was working so hard, the hours were passing slowly. He had no idea what Susan expected of him. He knew she would have something planned, and that he

would be expected to fall in with her ideas. He tried to envisage what it might be, and if he should call her to cancel the date. He knew it would be safer, but safety wasn't what he wanted right now.

"You going on a hot date or something?" Colin asked, collecting his work schedule far earlier than normal.

"If you must know, I'm meeting someone," Matthew admitted.

"Anyone I know?" Colin probed, looking at him hard. "I know, it's that ball-buster you liked. Be careful there, she scares the hell out of me!"

"That's just because you don't like your women to speak in words of more than one syllable."

"I don't want them to speak at *all*," Colin replied. "They just have to...."

"I don't want a description of your sordid affairs," Matthew cut him off.

"I thought you might need some advice," Colin suggested. "Anytime, just ask. I'll see you after the weekend."

Matthew was glad to see him go. He cleared up and set out to pass the time before she was to pick him up. He knew he was getting out of his depth, but this was a woman who fascinated him, and at the same time made him a little frightened. He didn't know how far to go with her, but couldn't make a decision not to see her, so he did as she asked. He shaved his arms and legs, taking time to clear every hair from his armpits. Then he waited nothing else to do. The evening seemed endless.

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Promptly at ten next morning, there was a car horn sounding outside his window. Matthew looked out and saw the BMW. He grabbed a denim jacket and a bunch of red roses he had bought the night before. He locked the door behind him, remembering for the first time that he had no idea when he would be back. With a dismissive shrug, he walked to her car and got in. Today she was different again. Her hair was short and fiery red, her make up pale and her eyes shaded behind gold rimmed glasses. She wore a skirt and a crisp white blouse, a heavy watch and no other jewelry. Matthew made no comment.

"Well, Saffron," she kissed him proprietarily on the cheek and accepted the flowers. "These are lovely. Every girl should have flowers bought for her. I got you some, too."

"You shouldn't," Matthew blushed as she gave him a delicate lily corsage. "I'm not a girl."

"Let's just say that to me you're as important as if you really were my date for the weekend," Susan said. "Just because you're a boy doesn't mean that I shouldn't treat you as if you're really special to me. I think I could get to enjoy having you with me, and it's a long time since I had that feeling. I want to work at it."

"And the warning you were giving me, telling me you were older than I am?"

“The warning still holds. I know what I want, and I'm not going to compromise. If you don't like the way I live, then I can't help it. You'll have to fit in with me for this to work.”

Susan put the car into gear and set off with a roar. Silently she handed him a black velvet bag. It was heavy, and he knew instantly what was inside.

“I still need you to show me that you trust me,” Susan said as the handcuffs fell onto his lap. “Put them on.”

“Do I have to?”

“Sure you do, you want to, really. Last time was a rehearsal, today we'll do it better.” Susan looked at him, daring him to disagree. Matthew clicked the cuffs shut on his wrists.

“There, that wasn't too hard,” She said. “I just need to stop for some coffee.”

He knew what was coming when she pulled into a dusty lot. She told him to get out of the car, then with her hand in her bag, followed him inside the dingy diner at the side.

“Detective Hunt,” she shouted. “Who's in charge here?”

“I am, ma'am,” a fat middle aged man stepped from behind the counter.

“I need you to look after this prisoner for a few moments,” she said. “I have to go to the bathroom. Keep this gun pointed at him, and don't let him get up to any tricks. He's got to be back in the city to see the judge tomorrow, and he doesn't want to be there.”

She pulled a snub nose revolver out of her bag and handed it to the man. He took it nervously and held it with both hands, pointing it at Matthew. The look in the man's eyes told him he should be really afraid right now. Susan walked calmly into the back.

“Don't move,” The man said, the gun shaking in his hands. “I'm not afraid to shoot.”

“I'm not going to move,” Matthew said, placing his cuffed hands flat of the table in front of him.

They stared at each other like that for what seemed like ages until Susan returned and took the gun. She motioned for Matthew to get up and leave, then made a show of sitting him in the car, before waving to the man and driving off.

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“I love the lake at this time of year,” she said, as she parked the car and opened Matthew's handcuffs. “And I love the way you're beginning to trust me. I've got a small cabin hired for the season, we can change there.”

“Change?” Matthew asked.

“Sure, it's wonderful to swim here, and you can sit on the deck and work on your sun tan, tell me about the exciting world of copier repairs,” Susan teased.

“I'd rather listen to you,” he said. “I know nothing about you.”

"It's dangerous to know too much," she replied, leading the way along the lake side path.

The cabin was a single room affair, with bleached wooden floors, a small kitchen at one end and a sleeping alcove at the other. In the cabin, the red wig was pulled off, and her dark hair fell over her shoulders once more, then Susan stripped her clothes off, no hint of embarrassment, and pulled on a dark green swimming suit with thin straps, which emphasized every curve. Matthew stared at her perfect figure.

"Aren't you going to change?"

"I haven't anything to change into," Matthew replied. "You didn't tell me..."

"You're right. Never mind, Saffron, you can wear my black suit. It's Lycra so it will fit easily."

"I can't wear that, it's a girl's swimming suit!"

"But you're swimming with a girl."

"But I'm not a girl," Matthew was stunned into near silence.

"So where's the problem? I'm just asking you to swim with me, not to change sex, not *yet*, anyway. There's no one here but us. You'll love the lake."

Matthew gave up. He accepted the black swimming suit from her, stripped and pulled it up as she watched, an amused look on her face. It hugged him tightly, but moved and gave as he moved. It felt like a second skin as she adjusted the front, where the built in bra cups gave a little shape to his flat figure, then the straps over his shoulders, untangling the cross over back pieces.

"You've not a spare ounce of flesh, have you? Most guys have a *little* flesh over to put in the cups."

"Most guys don't wear these things," Matthew wondered if he had heard her correctly.

"Maybe," She replied, turning then striding out onto the deck. Without a backward glance, she dove into the water, her neat dive hardly making a sound to disturb the peace of the lake. Matthew followed, not daring to look around in case there was anyone to see him. His dive was not as neat, and the cold of the water made him gasp as he came up for air, then he saw her swimming strongly towards a raft moored some distance away. He was gasping as he pulled himself out of the water. She kissed him, then lay back to enjoy the sun.

They lay there for most of the afternoon, applying coat after coat of sunscreen, talking and joking their day away. Matthew talked about his background, admitting his failure as a professional athlete, and his lack of family and friends. It was what Susan wanted to hear. For her part, she gave out little information, beyond admitting the things that she thought Matthew would like to hear, admitting them regardless as to whether they were true or not. As the sun started to dip behind the hills that surrounded the lake, it was time to swim back to the shore. Once in the cabin again, they towed dry quickly. She took out a hair drier and quickly dried her hair, then Matthew's, brushing it straight.

“Take me for a drink before we change,” Susan demanded when they were back at the cabin. “There’s a small bar round the next bay.”

“I can’t go like this!” Matthew was shocked at the suggestion.

“Sure you can. Are you ashamed to be seen with me?”

“No, I mean I can’t go wearing your bathing suit,” Matthew explained. “I need to change.”

“I don’t think you need to change. I think you need to work on your appearance a little, but not to change.”

“Oh, come on,” Matthew started.

“Come here. Sit down,” Susan commanded ...and he obeyed. “You need to look a little softer, then you’ll succeed. Just a touch of lipstick, then a little mascara, and you can wear the red wig, we need to do something with your hair before you can wear it in public and look anything like feminine.” She worked on him as she talked. Matthew sat obediently still, wondering why he was allowing her to dictate to him, but so fascinated that he couldn’t argue.

“Look at that,” she told him. “You really look like Saffron now. Unless you tell them, no one will guess you’ve only been a girl for a few minutes.”

Matthew looked in the mirror. She was right, there was a feminine reflection there, a girl who moved when Matthew moved, and smiled back at him with wonder at this changed appearance. The red bobbed hairstyle seemed to have changed him completely. He was still wearing the swimsuit, now he put his arms into a huge over shirt, white and loose, and then put his feet into flat mules with thick heels. He turned back to look at Susan, who was smiling with approval.

“Stick with me, and you’ll find yourself doing all sorts of things you never imagined. All you have to do it trust me. Now let’s go.”

They walked the short distance to the bar in the cooling night air. Inside the lights were kind, the crowd small. Matthew sat back gratefully and let Susan do the ordering. Soon they were eating pasta, and sharing a bottle of red wine. It seemed easy, if only he could get rid of the nagging fear that all this was leading him somewhere he might not like. The bar filled slowly, until there was quite a crowd. Some drinks appeared at their table with a message that said two men had sent them over in the hope that they could join them for a few minutes. *Matthew blanched when Susan agreed.*

The two were older than he expected and looked respectable. Matthew tried to stay out of the conversation, and almost said something wrong when he was introduced as Saffron, but as the conversation flowed, he found himself being more open, speaking more easily, and doing so in a naturally lighter manner than he would have used. The realization made him wonder how much of Saffron there was within him, it was not a conscious decision to act as he was doing, ...maybe it was self-protection. He was relieved when Susan made their excuses, saying they had to drive back to town.

His reward was to come when she took him back home. He knew it was coming when she handed him the handcuffs again. He put them on without a word, then sat back as she drove with him shackled and still feminized. Once in her bedroom, she fell

upon him like a tiger untamed, demanding everything from him until he was quite exhausted. He fell asleep, still wearing handcuffs, but contented.

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The next morning, he woke to find himself alone in the place. It was half past eight and he was still handcuffed, still wearing the swimsuit and over shirt that he had been wearing the night before. The red wig lay on the floor. He knew there was nothing he could do to change, as his arms were tightly locked together. He wandered through the other rooms, and into the kitchen, looking round, until he saw a note on the table, with a gleaming silver key. Gratefully he struggled and unlocked his hands, then stripped off and went in search of the shower. He found it, with a new shaver tied with a red ribbon to the faucet. "Shave twice" a note commanded.

Cleansed and refreshed, he went in search of his clothes, almost certain that she would not have brought them. He thought of telephoning Colin to bring some, but what could he have said? Instead, he settled for wearing some loose trousers with a drawstring waist, and a tee shirt that were in the bedroom basket, then settled down to wait.

"I've brought coffee and croissants," Susan said as she breezed into the room as if nothing had happened, and she was used to seeing a man wearing her clothes. "Come and eat with me, I want to talk to you."

"I think you owe me an explanation." Matthew tried to sound severe, but dressed as he was he knew he sounded ridiculous.

"Sure I do," Susan said. "But I don't think I want to give you one. If you want to see me again, just ride with it. I've asked you to trust me, haven't I?"

"You have, and I do," Matthew said. "I just don't know where I am with you."

"You're with me, isn't that enough?"

"Sure, but I want to know where I stand."

"Okay," Susan put her hands flat on the table. "I was in a relationship, I had to do things I didn't want to do, I had to do things I didn't enjoy. I don't want to be there again. I need to be in charge in a relationship, and above all, I need a man who's not going to be a threat to me. I need a man who has a feminine side, one who can accept being the weaker partner."

"I'm not going to ask you to do anything you don't want," Matthew said, surprisingly grateful to learn that he was perhaps in a relationship with Susan.

"I know," she stroked his hand, "and you're a gentle person, but I might demand that you do things you don't want to do. Like I made you take me for a drink last night."

"That was just a game," Matthew laughed.

"I like games like that," Susan replied. "I like the thrill of turning a convention on its head, and I love being in charge of a man in a position like that."



"It was okay," Matthew agreed. "I was scared when those men came over, I was afraid they would see through the disguise and make a scene."

"That's the thrill," Susan said. "It's a game, play it with me, and you'll have a great time. If you don't want to, that's it, just walk away."

"I don't have any clothes," Matthew pointed out.

"And if you did have your clothes?"

"I guess I wouldn't want to walk away. I'll stay and play the game with you."

"I have to say one thing. I have a real hate of feeling the roughness of a man's face. Promise you'll always make sure you stay as smooth as possible, all the time."

"I promise."

Matthew stayed with Susan through the weekend, there were no more challenges, no more masquerades. They spent the time talking, being together, cooking, eating and drinking. They did all the things that a couple getting to know each other would do, until on the Sunday evening, she dropped him back at his own home, promising to call him when her work schedule permitted.

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Matthew went into his office. Colin had left a note saying he had been in, and had hurried out to deal with a problem in one of their main client's state of the art installations. He asked that Matthew join him there, as the problem was going to need four hands to fix. Matthew checked the rest of their schedules, called Colin and told him that he was on his way.

The job was complicated, and involved replacing a small part in the middle of a huge machine. The designers couldn't have done a better job of making things inaccessible, and by the time they were finished, Matthew was covered in waste ink powder from head to toe. He stood beside his van, found clean overalls and began to change.

"You've had a different weekend," Colin laughed as he watched. "I bet you were with that ball-buster again."

"I don't know who you mean," Matthew tried to act cool.

"Yes you do, the woman who scares the hell out of me. We've talked about her before, you seem to find her attractive," Colin persisted. "She'll not be satisfied until she has you on a collar and lead."

"That's not true," Matthew blushed.

"Sure it isn't, but have you seen the pattern in your sunburn?" He asked. "What kind of dress were you wearing all weekend?"

"Dress? I don't know what you mean," Said Matthew who realized exactly what he meant.

"You got sunburn, except where the straps of a dress would fit," Colin smirked. "I know what it looks like, I've inspected lots of backs like that before, though usually they're women's."

"I borrowed a swimming suit," Matthew said lamely. "I didn't have one with me."

"Sure you did, and that woman just happened to have one that fit you," Colin's grim became wider. "Just so long as you pay me, I don't mind what you do at the weekends."

Matthew watched him leave for his next call. He kicked himself for not being more careful.

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The week passed uneventfully. Matthew tried to call Susan but she was out of town. He left messages, but there were none returned. Colin remained smug all week. He knew he had discovered something that Matthew wished had remained hidden, but he got on with his work at the same time. Matthew could hardly sack him for being observant when he was such an asset to his small company. On Friday, Matthew received another contract and had to act quickly to take on more staff, buy a couple of vans, and rent premises that he intended to use as an office rather than fill his back room. He was fast reaching the point where he would have to get someone to run the administration, he thought as he struggled into the night with the accounts and the appointment book. On Saturday, just as he was thinking he would be spending the afternoon alone with the figures, his telephone rang.

"Are you shaved real smooth," The voice asked.

"Naturally, I was just waiting for your call," Matthew lied.

"I was wondering if you'd like to play a game with me this afternoon," Susan asked. "Then we can spend the rest of the week end together."

"Do I have to be handcuffed?" Matthew asked, hoping the flippancy in his voice would elicit a negative response.

"Only for a while," Susan said in all seriousness. "I need to know...well you know what I need to know without me explaining. I'll pick you up in an hour or so."

Matthew closed his computer and put the papers he had been working on into some order, then quickly washed, shaved very carefully, and changed. He was just ready in time to hear a familiar car horn sounding, and ran outside, climbed in and as the car set off, recoiled in shock, The driver looked nothing like Susan. This was a fat, shapeless woman, dressed in a loose flower print dress like a bell tent. Badly bleached hair and daubed make up did nothing to improve the sight before him as he sat speechless in the passenger seat. He looked closely at her, wondering if this really was Susan under all the padding and make up, and wondering if there really was a trace of beard growth under her chin.

"Susan ...is that *you*?"

"You were expecting someone else? I thought I'd do ugly today, just to see how it turned you on." The voice was familiar, but when she turned to smile at him, her eyes were dark brown, almost black. She didn't have Susan's pale blue eyes.

"Your eyes..." Matthew started.

"Are contacts," Susan smiled, even then there was little familiar under the heavy makeup. "You need some contacts too."

"But I don't wear glasses," Matthew missed the point.

I didn't mean that," She replied. "They can change your eye color instantly. I'll make an appointment for you with my optometrist. It's fun changing things, I'm going to change *you*, today."

"What do you mean?"

"Handcuffs," she said in a familiar voice, leaving his question unanswered. He opened the glove box, knowing they would be in there and obediently snapped them onto his wrists. "Good boy," she said, just like he was a dog. What was it that Colin had said?

"We're going shopping," she told him. "I want to drag you up."

"What?" Matthew didn't understand.

"I want to get you a girl's outfit. I want you in drag. I want you to look like you're a boy in a dress trying to look like a girl. Don't worry, I want you to be pretty. What bit don't you understand?"

"I understand what you mean," Matthew said. "I don't understand why."

"Because I want to... Because you'll let me."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Who's wearing the handcuffs? Who's got the key?" She looked at him out of the corner of a badly made-up eye. "And who likes to be forced into situations?"

"What if I argue?"

"Well that would be fun," she dropped her voice to a hoarse pitch. "You're shackled, I look like a bad drag queen. We might attract more attention than you'd ever believe. Think of the pictures. No one would recognize me anywhere, but your identity wouldn't be in doubt."

"You wouldn't!" Matthew gasped. "You'd make me a laughing stock, my business is just taking off, I can't afford that."

"So you understand what you have to do," Susan replied. "Now we're going to the mall. The quieter you behave, the less attention you'll get. Everyone will be looking at me, I look terrible, like a fat man in a dress, so the sooner you get into some disguise, the less likely it will be that anyone will recognize you."

"Okay, I can't win," Matthew replied. "Do I have to be handcuffed in the mall if I promise to go along with everything?"

"I think you should be, but we'll compromise. If you promise to go along with everything, I'll loose your hands. I mean absolutely everything, no going back on the promise, or I'll start such a scene in public that you'll wish you could melt into the floor."

"I promise," Matthew agreed, as the car pulled into the mall parking lot.

"Remember, the more cooperative you are, the less attention you'll attract," Susan said, as she released his right hand from the cuffs and then to his surprise she

snapped the cuff over his left wrist so that the two rested heavily on the same arm. "That's just to remind you what we're doing. You call me mother or mummy all the time from now on, and I'll call you my daughter. Go along with everything, and show some enthusiasm. You'll get a reward for good behavior."

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The walk from the car into the mall was a nightmare. Susan took his hand and waddled slowly rather than walked towards the entrance. Matthew tried to hide behind her, but she wouldn't allow him any breaks. The cold steel of the handcuffs reminded him that the power in this relationship was not his. He kept his eyes down and tried to look small. Susan waddled in the center of the aisles, swinging her arms in a masculine way, talking loudly to him. He was too distracted to hear what she was saying, but followed obediently as she pulled him into the first department store. The makeup counters were in the front of the store with the glamorous assistants ready to pounce on anyone showing the slightest interest in their employers' products. Even they stepped back as Susan waddled up to the counters, until she shouted for attention.

"I want my drag daughter fixed up real pretty," she said loudly. "I want the full works ready for tonight. He's going to attract a boyfriend or I'm not his mother."

"We don't do men here," The assistant told him.

"Sister, you do people here, just people. Have you never heard of discrimination?" Susan asked, getting louder, the voice deepening with every syllable. "You don't do him, and I'll scream so loud, we'll all be on the front page."

"Please give me a break," Matthew intervened. "I don't want to cause a scene."

"Perhaps you should have thought of that before you let him bring you here," the assistant sneered.

"I didn't have a choice," Matthew replied, holding up his left arm to show the cuffs fastened there. "She only let me free on condition I got a makeover."

"And is that what you want?" she asked, watching as Susan, hands on hips, stood just to one side.

"Yes, please I want that," Matthew couldn't believe what he was saying; he was desperate to avoid a scene with the crowd that was gathering around them. The makeup assistants looked at each other, then whispered a few words. Heads nodded and shook, and then they turned back to Matthew and Susan.

"Okay, you asked for it," one said, leading him to a chair and draping a robe over his shoulders. "There's no escape now."

"Please, I don't want to escape, I just don't want all this attention," Matthew pleaded. "I just agreed to it as a stunt."

"Okay, sweetheart," her voice softened. "Just for you, we'll do a real good makeover, all you have to do is sit back, relax and cooperate. Your mother will love the result. It's a long time since I had a chance to practice on a new face anyway." She turned to Susan. "You wanted something for evening?"