

# MISS PERSONALITY

SUSAN HULBERT



*ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHAS*

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A 'HER TV' NOVEL

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# MISS PERSONALITY

**By Susan Hulbert.**

## **1. The Fund Raiser**

“The fund raising will be the biggest charity effort in this town for many years,” said Mrs. White. “I know I've not been here long, but it's so wonderful to be part of the community, even if it does mean working so.”

“Yes, I agree,” replied Mother, “and it's up to us all to contribute. All the parents have been involved, and the number of pledges is the largest we have ever had.”

“It's because we're working together to help raise the money for the scholarships, otherwise they would lapse since the trustees can no longer afford them,” said Mrs. White. “After all, it's for all the town's sake.”

With that, they parted. Mrs. White went to her car and Mother came back inside, suddenly looking tired with all the effort of her day. My sister Sally went to her and hugged her gently.

“We'll all help, too,” she said, “there's a meeting at school tomorrow, for the students to come up with their ideas about how to raise the funds.”

“I know, dear,” Mother replied, “and it's just wonderful to see how everyone's pulling together. This appeal means so much to me. It's the first time they've had a woman as organizer of the annual appeal. It's an honor for me, but I'm so nervous. I want it to be successful, it would mean so much to the business as well.”

“I'm going to the meeting too,” I said. “I just hope someone has a new idea. All the businesses have been drained of charity by our parents. It's almost impossible to think what else there could be.”

“Don't be so sure,” said Sally, “there's one idea which hasn't been included yet, but I'll let you wait until tomorrow.”

With that, Sally turned mysterious, and we changed the subject. As we prepared our supper, we naturally drifted into other interests. Sally was a year older than me, so mature and confident that I envied her. Despite the fact that I was her brother, I was both smaller and slimmer than her, a fact I never let her forget when I wanted to

torment her (especially the “slimmer” part). We looked a lot alike, too. I had no need to shave more than once a week, and had a complexion as soft as hers.

We had the same pale brown hair, and mine was almost as long as hers, falling to the middle of my back. There had been some rows about it a couple of years earlier when I announced that I wasn't going to cut it until I graduated. The family realized I was determined, and eventually it was accepted. Perhaps it would have been different if our father had been around, but he had been killed in an accident just after I was born. I guess because we were a close threesome, I was indulged more than would have otherwise been the case. As it was, I had the longest hair of any of the seventeen-year-old boys in school.

The next day, at the meeting, I took my place in a corner of the lecture theatre, intending to stay silent, and not become too involved. I wasn't good at the rough-and-tumble organized sports and games, so I was doing my utmost to stay out of the way. I guessed that things like games and exhibition sports would be discussed. I was not mistaken as these things were scheduled first, but I was unprepared for the way the meeting progressed.

“We need something more,” said Sally to the assembled auditorium, “and I've got a proposal. As you are aware, shops and businesses have given us pledges: hair do's, dry cleaning, that sort of thing, which are going to be auctioned. All the likely sponsors have been approached, but we can auction something else as well.”

She paused and looked round, sensing her audience was baffled by the thought.

“We can auction ourselves, pledge ourselves as cleaners, maids, chauffeurs, child minders, janitors...”

“Or slaves,” came a voice from the floor, followed by a big laugh from the assembled.

“Yes, why not offer ourselves as slaves for a day, or a weekend, or even a week?” said Sally. “If someone will pay, and we're willing to work, why not? Let's show we can raise money every bit as well as our parents. And if a slave auction seems like a good idea to everyone, I say we do it!”

There were a few demurring voices in the hall, then consensus seemed to emerge. A trawl for volunteers was arranged. If there were enough volunteers, the slave auction would be a special feature of the end-of-term festival.

I left quietly. My sister had come up with a different idea just as she had intended. I was happy for her, she wanted to be in the action at these events. I was happy to attend just long enough to be seen, then get out of the way. It wasn't that I was aloof, just that I always felt uncomfortable in crowds. I was happier left to myself.

I thought I had escaped. At supper that evening, Sally was telling Mother about her idea. I agreed that the students had liked it, it certainly seemed popular. Sally looked at me and smiled mischievously.

“I've put Mike's name down for the slave auction already,” she said, looking at me. “If we left it to him, he'd avoid doing anything.”

“That's not fair, Sally,” said Mother, “your brother realizes how important this event is to us all. I'm sure he would have volunteered without you jumping the gun, wouldn't you, Mike?” She looked at me questioningly.

“Of course I would,” I lied, “it sounds like fun. How long do I have to be a slave for?”

“I guess for as long as they're willing to pay you,” said Sally. “We haven't thought that out. You don't have a job for the vacation yet, so you can probably do two months if anyone's got the money to pay you.”

“They couldn't afford me!” I retorted. Sally knew I was frustrated by the fact that I couldn't get a job for the summer vacation now approaching quickly.

We argued a little more and Mother had to interrupt to stop it from becoming heated. Although Sally and I got on reasonably well, we would fight like any other brother and sister. It was easy to provoke a row, and neither of us liked to back down. On this occasion, I was trapped and I knew it. I gave in graciously and agreed to participate in the slave auction.

Sally was busy as the arrangements were new. As she had made the suggestion, she had been immediately delegated to make them. I served as door keeper at our house as a seemingly endless procession of friends, both male and female, came and went to do their bit for my sister. One of the callers was a girl I had never seen before.

“I'm Susan White,” she said, “I've come to join in, if I can. My mother sent me over to see Sally. Did she mention me?”

I stood dumbstruck at the vision standing before me. She was complete “California girl”, a total dream. I must have stood silent for too long; I felt stupid and awkward. Sally rescued me as she passed in the hallway, taking Susan with her into the den. I hung around, hoping for a second opportunity to see Susan, hoping that I would not seem quite so stupid the next time.

“I guess you met my brother Mike,” I heard Sally saying.

“Yes, does he always open the door and stand with his mouth open?” replied Susan. “You should get him trained to speak. That'd be really neat, you know, a boy with words.”

I went out into the hallway, just in time to receive a look of withering contempt from this dream girl. I felt small and childish and it hurt. I was desperate for her to like me. Sally saw my face and laughed.

“You should have helped Mother more if you like her that much,” she said. I started to deny my feelings, but she continued, “Susan's just joined her mother in town. You know, Mrs. White, the one you've been avoiding in case she gets you working for the fund raising. The lady who keeps coming to see Mother.”

It was true, I had been avoiding things. Mrs. White was new in town, but seemed like a dynamo of energy, and not short of money either. She had moved into town to take over the small dance and theatre school at the end of Main Street. The school had been there all my life, but I had never been inside. It seemed to cater to the small girls of the town, giving them dancing lessons.

"I think she's working really hard so that everyone will know about her dance and drama classes," said Sally, "and now that Susan's finished school back east, she's moved here as well. I think we'll be best friends since she'll be coming to classes with me after the vacation."

"You mean she's going to be here all the time?"

"Yes, stupid," said Sally. "Mrs. White used to be an actress and Susan lived with her grandparents. When she was about ten, Mrs. White went to live with them too, and studied to become a teacher. This school's her first business on her own."

"Have you been talking to Susan a lot?" I asked, trying not to sound too interested, although I feared Sally would realize my interest at once.

"Yes, I told you, she's going to be my best friend," Sally replied. "That means she'll be around here a lot. Don't think that means you'll get near her, little brother. She may be the most beautiful girl in town but already the richest and most handsome boys have tried, and totally failed, to impress her. You have no chance."

"What makes you think I'm interested?" I stuttered.

"You do," Sally gloated, 'I can read your thoughts, but I'll tell you what she's interested in. Mrs. White wants to expand the school, start more courses, and get older children in, boys as well as girls. She's working on the appeal to make herself better known and to meet people. Susan wants her to succeed."

"Well, that lets me out," I said, "I have no talent at all."

"I'll tell you one more thing. Mrs. White and Mother knew each other years ago. I've heard Mother say that she'd go over to the school and help out, after the appeal. I'll be over there too, with Susan. My summer job's arranged, and I'll be helping out there. I think it'll be exciting to learn a bit of theatre right here in town."

I changed the subject. Here was the girl of my dreams, but I had no idea how to get near her. We'd met once, and she'd gotten the impression of me as a complete nerd. Not only that, but she was the object of attention for all the guys. I was too puny, and too poor, to compete.

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## 2. Sally Takes Charge.

"The arrangements seem to be finalized," announced Sally, a couple of evenings later. "We're selling the slaves after the auctioneer has sold all the pledges on Friday. That way, there'll be the greatest number in the auditorium. The slaves will be handed over to their owners there and then and they can make their own arrangements for working out their contracts, to commence at nine the next morning."

"How long are the contracts for?" I asked.

"Well, they're asked for a bid for a day and if they want to extend it, then they can negotiate, as long as we get the funds," replied Sally.

"What if they want the slave for a year?" I asked.

“Don't be stupid, Mike,” said Sally.

“No, seriously, what if they want someone to do a particular job, over a week or two?”

“Just because you haven't got a job for the vacation...” said Sally. Then she thought for a moment and added, “If they want to extend a day or so, and the slave's willing to work for a good cause, that's up to them, but I doubt if any of them will do more than a couple of days at the most. They'll have to go to their summer jobs—that is those who've *got* jobs.”

Mother came in before the argument developed. She seemed quite tired, and I could understand why. After her work day at the real estate office which she had run since Father's death, she had all the extra work and worry for the fundraiser. Instinctively, Sally and I understood, and we abandoned our argument to allow her to relax.

“The auction's going to be the biggest event on Friday evening,” said Mother, “after that, I can relax and count the money. The slaves are going to be sold right after the pledges, so that they can work the weekend and get it over with.”

“It's really up to the buyers,” said Sally, “perhaps they'll chain Mike up in some galley for the summer. Hey, that's an idea! Mom, can I borrow some money to buy Mike? I'll have him chained to a boat on the river to row Susan and I around while we work on our sun tans.”

I threw a cushion at her and Sally launched herself at me. I just wanted the humiliation to be over; then I could get back to looking for a job and dreaming about Susan.

Friday evening found me standing at the back of the hall whilst the auctioneer prepared to sell the pledges. The hall was crowded and good humored. From the start, people paid way beyond expectations for everything. The tennis lessons went for three times their cost, the car wash contract for twice its value, and a pattern was established which was to last through the pledges.

Mrs. White stood out in the bidding. She bid on everything; I guessed it was just to draw attention to herself. From some things she retired, but she seemed quite happy to pay ridiculously large sums for other things. She bought a facial and make-over at the town's best beauty salon, then she bought a hairstyling appointment at the same salon, and two sessions with the finger nail technicians who had just opened a new salon in the mall.

I didn't realize it at the time, but the things she was buying were all feminine services. With everything else, she dropped out of the bidding before an item was in danger of becoming hers. All the same she still spent a lot of money. If her intention was to draw attention to herself, and therefore her school, I guess she was succeeding. Later, I was to learn that this was just part of the plan.

The slave auction came last. There was an interval, during which we slaves got into position. Sally had a rough cage set up on the stage behind the auctioneer. There were three girls and two boys, besides me. We were dressed in mock Roman togas. The girls wore them draped decorously, if not modestly, over their shoulders, while the boys had short ones fastened around the waist. We all were shackled by plastic chains, specially

sprayed with bronze paint. I felt stupid, but the girls were obviously enjoying being the center of attention. The other boys were happy too, posing, showing off the results of their work outs at the gym.

The auction commenced with one of the girls and, as I watched, I saw Mrs. White sitting silently, looking at me, as if she was sizing me up for something. I caught her eye several times as the first girl, then the first boy, was sold. The girls were encouraging boys to bid for them, they'd entered as if they were in a popularity contest and were giggling and enjoying the experience. They were "bought" without exception by their boy friends. Then the first two boys were "sold" to the local ground maintenance company, so I could guess what work they were going to do. Then it was my turn.

"Last, but not least, here's Mike," said the auctioneer, leading me forward, to some laughter, and a few jeers from my classmates. The bidding started slowly, and I seemed to be about to go to the ground maintenance company as well, when Mrs. White joined in. Everyone was surprised, not least me. The auctioneer took a few bids, each going up by a dollar, then fifty cents, amid much hilarity. I was worth less than half of what the other's had raised. Then Mrs. White stood up, smiled and raised the bidding.

The audience gasped, the auctioneer held out his hands for silence and swallowed in shock and surprise.

"Did I hear you correctly, Mrs. White? That's a very generous sum."

"You heard me, Mister Auctioneer," she said, "I'll employ him all through the vacation and pay the fund for the privilege. I've an idea he could help my business and if Mike hasn't another job, I'll pay the equivalent of his wages to the fund, for every week he works for me."

She had bid more for me, than the other five had raised combined. No wonder the auctioneer doubted that he had heard correctly, but he quickly recovered his composure, announced the bid again, then brought his hammer down with a finality I did not comprehend at the time. The hall burst into applause, leaving me standing in my toga and chains at the side. I stood there, not knowing what to do, as the hall emptied. Then, Mrs. White and Mother came across to me.

"Mrs. White has quite a few plans for you," said Mother, smiling mysteriously. "She's been telling me about some of them already. You'll have your work cut out this summer, Mike, and you've got a job as well."

"Thank you, Mrs. White," I said, not realizing then just what I was thanking her for, "I was worried about getting a job."

"I hope you'll enjoy it, Mike," said Mrs. White, "you'll be helping me to publicize the school, that's all I'm going to tell you now. Come 'round on Monday and we'll make some preliminary arrangements, but I want to discuss a few things with your mother first."

With that, she smiled and shook my hand gently. Susan and Sally came up to me, giggling conspiratorially.



“That was a surprise,” said Sally, “I never guessed my brother was so valuable.” I knew she was mocking me, but I bit my tongue.

“I know my mother wants to do something different,” said Susan, “so be prepared for anything,” I detected a little warmth in her smile as she said this, more than I had seen before. Usually, she just looked through me when she was with my sister. This was progress.

I went home that evening, a little curious about my future occupation for the vacation, but more relieved to have a job. Over the week end, I did my chores as usual. Mother spent some time with Mrs. White; I knew they were discussing me, but she told me nothing. I guessed Sally overheard a little of what was intended for me from Susan. She didn't exactly give any hints about what was in store for me, but I knew she was intrigued.

On Monday morning, I was up early and was getting ready to walk down to the theatre, just for a look 'round, when the telephone rang. Mother answered it and then handed the receiver to me. It was Mrs. White.

“Hello, Mrs. White,” I said, “I'm just on my way down to the theatre.”

“Stay there,” she said, “I'll send Susan in the car to collect you. Bring an overnight bag, I've made arrangements with your mother for you to spend a couple of days over here. Don't bring much, I've got some things here you can use.”

As I waited at the door, I wondered why Mother had said so little about the arrangements to me, but I guessed she had forgotten. I didn't think for a moment it was to conceal anything sinister. I was just excited at the idea of Susan coming to pick me up. I never thought *that* would happen. The prettiest girl around was coming to pick me up in a car! That would do a lot for my status this summer.

The car arrived and I pretended not to see it. The doorbell rang, Sally answered and called me. As I passed her at the door, she and Susan exchanged glances which said they knew more than I did.

“I'll call you later,” said Susan, “and then I'll pick you up after...you know....”

Just what she knew, and I did not know, was about to be revealed. We got into the car and Susan set off towards town. She turned and smiled at me; I felt my body go weak as I looked at her. She had left her hair loose and it fell in gentle blonde waves over her bare shoulders. As the sun caught it, silver highlights glistened entrancingly across the car, catching the light from the big gold hoops which swung from her ears. She took one hand off the wheel and lightly touched my thigh.

“I think it's great that you're going to be with us through the summer. We'll be seeing a lot of each other if everything goes well, and I want us to be friends,” she said.

“I'd like that,” I said, “do you know what my job's going to be?”

“I know a little, but you've got to accept the job first. Your mother's coming to the theatre to hear what you'll be doing if you stay with us. I'm sworn to secrecy until then.” She smiled across the car at me as we turned into the small car park attached to the theatre. I grabbed my small bag and followed her inside.

“Good morning, Mike,” said Mrs. White. “I’ll be with you soon, and tell you what we have in mind.”

“You can wait in here, Mike,” called Susan, and I followed her into a small changing room. “Will you help me to lift out all these boxes and old cans of paint first?” she asked.

Together we carried out all the old junk which had been left there for ages. It was so dusty, I was soon feeling quite scruffy. Then disaster struck.

“Look out, Mike, I can’t hold...” It was too late. There was a crash and a splatter of sticky white paint fell across me. Susan came up to me looking more amused than I considered appropriate.

“It’s only water paint,” she said. “It will wash off. There’s a shower in the first dressing room. If you throw your clothes out, I’ll put them in our machine to wash.”

I allowed her to lead me to the dressing room, and obediently threw my sticky clothes out of the room. I stood under the shower, allowing the warm water to sluice away all the paint which had covered my hands and arms. There were some splashes in the front of my hair, but fortunately I had tied it back in a pony tail, so most of it escaped. I washed my hair carefully all the same.

“Here’s a robe,” I heard Susan shout above the noise of the water, “and a couple of towels.” Then the door closed again.

I emerged from the shower and dried myself quickly. I wrapped a towel around my wet hair and reached for the robe. It was pale peach colored, of a satin material and very long. I knew it would be the only one they had, yet I still felt uneasy at wearing something so obviously designed for a woman. I pulled it on and saw that my shoes and shorts had been removed from the room. There was a pair of plain mules with peach trim on the floor, but I ignored them.

I sat for a few minutes, then noticed that there was a hair drier on the vanity unit, so I began to dry my hair, letting it hang loosely, running my fingers through it in the absence of comb or brush. As I did so, I saw myself in the mirror, and I remember thinking how glad I was that none of the guys could see me here.

I finished drying my hair, and still no one came. I opened the door and called. No response. I called again, still with no response, so I stepped out. The corridor floor was dirty and rough so, impulsively, I went back for the mules and put them on. Then I set off in search of anyone who might be in the building.

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### **3. A Change is Proposed.**

“Hello,” I called.

No response.

I wandered along the corridor, trying all the rooms. They were locked. I arrived at the door which I had entered with Susan and tried the handle. It was locked too. I

seemed to have been locked in the empty building. Perhaps they'd had to go out suddenly, I reasoned. I walked 'round, feeling quite spooky as I looked out from the stage over the empty auditorium. I went back to the dressing room and sat to wait.

I was not kept waiting long after that. I heard Mrs. White calling my name and I went out to meet her in the corridor.

"What on earth happened to you, Mike?" she asked, seeing me emerge. I explained quickly and asked where Susan had gone. She ignored my question.

"You come with me," she said, "your mother's coming over in a few minutes, I've just been explaining to her what we have in store for you over the next few weeks."

We walked into a large dressing room which had been locked before. It had obviously been modernized recently, and still smelled of paint and new carpet. There were empty racks standing around, and some clothing in boxes nearby.

"Do you want to get something to wear?" Mrs. White asked. "You will have to get used to wearing all kinds of things while you're with us, so you might as well start now."

She waved me in the direction of the boxes, and as she did so, I heard a bell ringing at the other side of the building. With a gesture, she was gone and I was left to look over the boxes. I looked in one after another, and found only dresses, skirts and blouses, period and modern, but nothing suitable for me. Not that I was wearing anything suitable in the first place.

"Mike," I heard a voice calling me. "Mike, come up here." Susan's voice was my only clue as to where she was. I followed along a corridor and then up the stairs. Seeing an open door, I walked toward it, and was reassured to hear voices getting louder as I approached. I went in and saw Mrs. White and Mother sitting at a table; at the other side of the room, Susan and Sally were lounging on a couch, looking through fashion magazines.

"Okay girls, can you go and do something downstairs please?" said Mrs. White. They left, giving me a mysterious look as they closed the door behind them.

"Well, Mike," said Mrs. White, "I guess you're wondering what we have in store for you. I've arranged everything with your mother. She's happy with my plans, and if you co-operate, then the fund will benefit from your contribution more than from all the rest combined."

"Mike, I want you to know that I think it's worth it, and I'll support you through this....er....project. And I'll see that Sally does, too," said Mother. "Now, I'll leave you with Mrs. White." She smiled at me, touched my shoulder through the robe which I still wore, and left.

"I'll not waste any more time, Mike," said Mrs. White, looking more business-like than I had seen her before. "I've a new business here, and I want to get a lot of publicity quickly, as well as doing my bit for the community. I've placed a bet on you in Atlantic City and I'm going to win. The winnings go to the funds. I get the publicity."

"And I do the work," I smiled, trying to lighten the atmosphere which seemed to be getting a little heavy.

“Yes,” she smiled back, “I guess you do, although you'll have help. You see, I'm an actress and teacher, and I've bet that I can train you, in just a few weeks, to act a part perfectly in any situation, even though it's completely foreign to you now.”

“I don't understand, what do I have to do?” I asked.

“You have to enter a contest and win. If you come in second or third, we still win something on the bet. But you'll have to work at it. Are you the sort of person who has a determination to succeed, Mike?” asked Mrs. White.

“I'm not afraid of working,” I answered, wondering why she was being so evasive, rather than telling me just what she wanted me to do.

“Right. That's settled, we start preparing at once.” She smiled at me. “You're going to win the Miss Personality contest at the State Fair in four weeks time.” She paused to let the words sink in. I felt my mind tumbling, had I heard her right? I must have looked really dumb, for she spoke again. “Did you hear me, Mike? I said you're going to win the Miss Personality contest.”

“Yes,” I heard myself reply. I was in shock, what could she mean? “What do I have to do? I mean, I know we've got sexual equality and all that, but surely, the contest is for girls.”

“Yes, it is,” she replied, “and that's the part you're going to learn. You're going to act the girl's part in the contest so that you'll win.”

I guess I was still in shock. “But I'm not a girl,” I said.

“That's the point. By the time we've finished with you, no one will ever guess, no one will know outside those of us working with you, unless you tell them.” She laughed, perhaps to reassure me, but I wasn't feeling at all easy.

“Does Mother know about this?” I asked.

“Yes, we're old friends, and she likes the project. It will occupy you through part of the vacation, then I'll employ you for the rest of the time. You won't lose. She won't have to worry about what you're doing with no job and no money, and you'll be raising money for a good cause.”

I hesitated, it wasn't sounding too good for me. “What will happen when all the guys find out?” I asked.

“They'll think you were braver than them, and that you fooled them all. Everyone will be happy that the money's been raised,” said Mrs. White.

I thought desperately for a way out of this, as panic rose within my chest. “What if I can't win? What if I get found out? What if we...?” She cut me off.

“Never mind the what if's,” she laughed gently and smiled for the first time. “I'll take care of those.”

“I really don't think..,” I started.

“Let's not go into the reasons why not, Mike,” she smiled. “Let's just try, and see if there are reasons why we *can* do this. Susan's really excited at the prospect of working with you.”

At that, my objections paled into insignificance. Did this mean I would be spending some time with her, and more important, with her interested in me?

“Does she know about this?” I asked.

“Why yes, it was partly her idea,” said Mrs. White. “She's going to theatre school if she can get a place. She wants to specialize in make up, hair and costume. She loves the glamour of it all, and a project like this may help her to get a place in one of the better colleges.”

I couldn't object. I was apprehensive as to what I was letting myself in for, but the butterflies in my stomach were telling me that I would be with Susan. That's what excited me, not the thought of what she would be doing to me.

“Okay,” I said, “when do I start?”

“You've started already.” Mrs. White smiled and pressed a button on the intercom on her desk.

Seconds later, the door behind me opened and Susan came in smiling, followed by Sally who was wearing a wry look of amusement.

“Well girls, he's all yours,” said Mrs. White. “You heard all that on the intercom. Mike has agreed, and you've got four weeks to get him into shape.”

“We'll do it, won't we, Mike?” said Susan, giving me a gentle hug. I could hardly believe it. I'd been wanting her to notice me ever since I first saw her, yet the first time she actually did so was now. And I was agreeing to be a *girl* for her. ‘Sally's going to be working with me, it's going to be a joint project.’

“I'm not going to give you a hard time, Mike,” said Sally. “I know how important it is for us to raise the money, and for Mrs. White to advertise the school. I've got my summer job here with the school, and I'm going to make it work, so you'd better be good, you hear?” She was laughing too as she tried to sound severe. To tell the truth, it seemed we were all a little shocked with the suddenness of it all. Now when I look back on those moments, I realize that it was only me who was shocked. They all knew what the deal was going to be.

“Now, practicalities,” said Mrs. White. “Mike, you'll be living in the guest rooms at my house until this is over. It would hardly do for you to turn up as a girl at home. The story your mother will tell everyone is that I've asked you to go back to my old house to tidy up the gardens and outhouses, and do some other jobs there as caretaker, until the place is sold.

“I've told the neighbors here that Susan's cousin is coming to stay for a while, and that's the story you'll use if you have to talk to anyone. Oh, by the way, your name is Michelle from now on. No more Mike under any circumstances.”

“When do I start?” I asked, a little dumbfounded by the rapidity of it all. “I'll have to get a few things.”

“You've started already, Michelle. There's nothing of Mike's to get,” said Mrs. White. “Mike has gone east to work. You're here visiting with your cousin. You're going to have to work quickly, we need to send your photographs into the Miss Personality contest organizers in the next couple of days, so there's no time to waste.”

I recoiled a little. The thought of all that I had agreed to was just hitting my consciousness. I sat quite still, and must have looked really stupid.

#### 4. Creating Michelle.

“Come on, Michelle,” said Susan, gently shaking my shoulder, “we'll go down to the dressing room and make a start. Susan's going to do some shopping for us.”

I allowed myself to be guided out of the door. “Come on, this is going to be really exciting,” she said, smiling at me, not just with her face, but with her eyes as well. I really wanted to please her.

In the dressing room, there were all the clothes I had seen before. Now I realized why there were only girls clothes.

“We have to get you used to being Michelle very quickly. Mike has gone away, and it wouldn't do to have anyone see him around, least of all at my house.”

“I guess not,” I said. It felt good to be alone with her.

“Now, get out of all those clothes, we have to get you ready. No modesty, Michelle, we're all girls together from now on.” Susan turned as I got out of the robe which I had been wearing all this time. I held it against my nakedness.

“Put this on first,” she said, handing me small garment with dangling straps. I didn't know what it was, and looked at it, puzzled.

“It goes like this,” she said, turning me around. She held it out while I stepped into two spaces. She began to pull it up my legs. It was so small and tight, I wondered how far she intended it to go, but I knew the answer. She eased it up until it was almost across my groin.

“Now, the instructions say that you have to tuck everything carefully back before it goes into place. Are you going to do that?” I looked at her, slowly understanding that if I demurred, she would do it for me. I reached down and did as I was told, then stood still as Susan pulled the garment up into place.

“That's it!” She stood back to admire my new profile. “I've read about these things, but I've never seen one until this and a couple more like it, arrived last week. I'm amazed at just how well it conceals your profile, Michelle.”

“It's doing more than that,” I croaked, “it's cutting off my circulation.”

“Don't worry,” Susan said, “the instruction book said it would be uncomfortable for the first few days. After that, you'll hardly notice it's there at all.”

“I wonder if I'll survive the first few days,” I said, really in pain.

“It will become second nature,” Susan said confidently. “The book said that you would feel wrong without it, once you got over the initial strangeness. It says you should rest for a few minutes after first putting it on, then keep it on all the time, except in the shower.”

“What about, you know, when I need to go?” I asked.

“Oh, *that* sort of ‘go’.” Susan was laughing at me again, though kindly, and gently. “You just sit down, like all us girls. It just comes out at a different angle,”

I sat down carefully, feeling tears rise into the corners of my eyes. The pain from my groin was still severe, but I could feel it subsiding slightly as I struggled to breathe normally, instead of in the short gasps I had been using. Slowly, I felt calmer, easier and then I felt myself breathing normally. My eyes seemed no longer protuberant, no longer watering freely. Experimentally, I stood and then walked ‘round the chair, taking little steps, feeling more comfortable and confident with each one.

Susan watched me with amusement and something more in her gaze. I began to feel strangely excited. I had really wanted to be with her ever since that moment when she first came to our house. Now I was with her, but not in the way I imagined. I was being controlled by her; it was almost as if I had been given to her as a plaything. It felt wrong, yet natural and exciting.

“Okay, you can move again, can you?” she asked. “Are you ready to continue getting into Michelle?”

“I guess so,” I said cautiously, “although I'm getting more unsure every moment.”

“Nonsense, you'll love all the things I'm going to do to you. By the time we're finished, you'll be the cutest girl in the contest. You just wait. In a few weeks, I'll make you forget you ever were a boy,” said Susan.

“I don't know if that's a threat or a promise,” I joked.

“Why, it's a promise, of course,” she replied. “Come on, we'll get you dressed before Sally comes back. I'm sure you'd prefer to be transformed before she comes to watch.”

“You're right,” I admitted, “the thought of having my sister watch all this is not something I'm looking forward to.”

“She's going to be so supportive to you,” Susan replied. “I've talked all this through with her before she set up the auction. We've got it all worked out, there's nothing to worry about.”

Susan turned and began to sort through one of the clothes boxes. As she did so, I pondered what she had just admitted. All this had been planned some time earlier. Susan, Sally, Mrs. White and my mother all knew what was going to happen long before anything was revealed to me. I was just the fall guy, or rather I was going to be the fall *girl*. I felt uneasy, but really excited at what was to come.

More than that, I was beginning to get a thrill out of being told what to do by this girl who was little older than me. I looked down, all the way toward my feet. There was nothing masculine in sight, just a smooth contour, and none of the hairs which I knew should be there. I felt strangely submissive, ready to do whatever she told me.

“Step into these.”

I was pulled back to the present, to see Susan holding out some plain panties for me to step into. Obediently, I lifted first one foot, then the other, watching as she pulled them up to my waist. They were high-cut on the leg, and if I looked carefully, I could just see where the clinging fine elastic material of the restraint garment

overlapped it. I looked again and saw that it blended so well against my skin that it was almost invisible.

“Now for the bra,” said Susan. “Hold your arms out and I’ll help you, but you’ll have to get used to doing this yourself.”

Obediently, I did as I was asked, and felt the strangeness of the material being fastened around me. If this was different, I was hardly prepared for what was to come next. Susan came towards me, holding out two flesh-colored shapes, each as big as the palm of her hand.

“Say hello to your first pair of tits,” she said. All at once, I recognized what these shapes were, and where they were going, but not before she showed them to me in more detail.

“Look how they’re shaped so that they follow the contours of the body and the natural form that my breast takes.”

She turned and held herself in profile for me to look at her, and I enjoyed the opportunity to stare by invitation. I had been doing so surreptitiously ever since I first saw her. I almost fainted at what came next.

“Just feel here.” She took my hand and guided it. “Feel how the breast shapes out from my chest.” She pulled my hand further ‘round. “Feel how it hangs in my bra, then feel how the space between my breasts rises naturally up towards my breastbone and then my neck.” I was almost fainting with pleasure. I wasn’t meant to be, but how do you turn off your feeling when the girl of your dreams is inviting you to touch things you thought would remain forever out of reach?

She placed the pads in either side of the bra I was wearing. I was unprepared for the weight which now fell from my chest, and I took the cups in each hand, feeling the weight which was attached, yet was not really part of me.

“Strange, isn’t it?” Susan stood back, watching me. “You’ll learn how girls feel about their breasts before we’re over. These are fine for today, but for the contest we’ll have to do something better, and bigger. Padding’s no good for the swimsuit part of the contest. There’s no time for hormones to work, so you can’t grow your own. Implants would be ideal, but we’ll try some permanently adhered prosthetic breasts first.”

I could not believe what I was hearing. I had only agreed to be a girl for a silly contest, just to be near Susan, yet here I was, calmly listening while she made plans to give me a girl’s breasts. What was happening to me? Why wasn’t I running out of the building as fast as I could? I was finding all this more exciting than I would ever have imagined. I was starting to enjoy being changed, in a way I would have thought impossible, just a few hours previously.

“Michelle,” I heard, and turned. “You were miles away then; I’ll not ask what you were thinking. Sit down here in front of the mirror.”

“Gosh,” I gasped, rather weakly, as I got my first glimpse of Michelle in the mirror. It was a female reflection, not one I recognized as mine, which looked back at me.



"I'm going to do something with your hair and then a little make up. Then when you're dressed, we can start getting some training on how to be a girl for real."

"It's all so sudden," I heard myself say. "I don't know what I'm supposed to do."

"Let me worry about that," Susan said. "If you like, I'm the manager and you're the project. Let me do all the worrying, you just concentrate on doing the things I tell you."

Susan took the pony tail band out of my hair and combed it out so that it fell loosely across my shoulders. Some fell over the shape within my bra, then she combed it again, sweeping it across to one side. Taking all the hair in one hand, she twisted it, and with a couple of deft wrist movements, my hair was swept up and pinned on the top of my head in a neat chignon. What a paradox. I had always felt quite masculine and secure with my hair down, but now with it pinned up, I did not know what to think. The reflection in the mirror was looking less and less like the one I remembered from my bedroom that morning.

"That seems pretty good so far," said Susan. I guessed that no reply was expected. "Now for the make up. I'm just going to give you a little, nothing special or dramatic, just something to remind you that you're female when you look in the mirror."

I sat totally still as she worked, using a whole range of cosmetics. I recognized a foundation and powder that Sally used, but all the rest was totally new to me. I watched as my eyes were made up most carefully, the lids darkening and contrasting significantly against the way the mascara made my eye lashes look twice as long as before. My lips were outlined with a dark pencil; then with a brush, Susan colored my lips. The shape of my lips was not a shape I recognized, and the total effect was simply that everything I expected to see in the mirror had disappeared. It was a girl who looked back at me.

"Now for some clothes," she said, reaching into one of the baskets. "Step into this skirt."

Obediently, I stepped into a straight denim skirt and stood while she fastened the zipper. The skirt felt tight against my thighs, and reached little more than halfway to my knees. I

Would have looked twice at any girl wearing this on the street. That thought didn't comfort me at all.

"Just put your arms out," said Susan, "I want to get this over your head without catching the make up, or having to put up your hair again, so be careful."

I did as I was asked and she carefully placed a black and gray patterned top over my head. It was short, just reaching to my midriff, and had thin shoulder straps which were little more than adequate to cover the straps of the bra I was wearing. I looked in the mirror again.

"I could really go for me, if I was a girl," I said.

"Just wait until I've had a few weeks to practice with you," Susan said. "I'll have everyone going for you." She paused to let this thought register. "Now sit down again, we have to try some shoes next."

Obediently, I sat and allowed her to place a couple of pairs next to my feet. Both had heels of a kind I had never worn before.

“Can't I just wear trainers?” I asked.

“No, you can not. If a thing's worth doing, it's worth doing well, especially when ‘well’ means a bit sexier. Now try the lower heels and let's see you walk.”

I slipped my foot into the shoes and stood. Although the heels were much lower than those I have worn since, I still remember that first time. How unsteady I was, as I stood and walked a few paces.

“Try putting one foot directly in front of the other,” Susan instructed, “and use smaller steps.”

“If this skirt was any tighter, I couldn't take any steps at all,” I replied.

“Nonsense,” laughed Susan. “You can do better than that.” She walked a few paces in demonstration. I stood and tried to do the same. “I can see we shall have to work on that walk,” she said thoughtfully as I walked past her for the fourth time in succession. “Anyway, we have no time now. Let's go and meet the others.”

## 5. A New Home.

“What, you mean go out like this?” I felt panic rising.

“Yes, of course.” Susan seemed amused at my question. “You're Michelle now. There's no alternative, especially as there's only four weeks to the Miss Personality contest, and you're going to win. I'll see to that. Now come on, head back, chest out, look confident. You're with me now, and I'll look after you.”

“Okay if you say so.” I followed her into the corridor and down toward the front door. Fortunately, there was no one else there. I think I would have died if Sally had been waiting to see Michelle's debut, but she wasn't,



and we went out of the building, across the car park, and into Susan's car.

“Come on, look up, the world's not going to bite you.” Susan had noticed how I tried to look small and inconspicuous as we drove slowly through town.

“I can't,” I replied, “what if someone sees me?”

“They're *all* going to see you, that's the idea!” Susan replied. “By the time we're finished, they'll all want to see you. Remember that little contest you're going to win.”

“I think this was all a mistake.” I felt bad. “I just agreed...well, because I wanted to be with you. Since I first saw you, I wanted to be with you, but I know I can't go through with this. I'll make us all look stupid.” Then taking my courage in both hands, I asked, “Please, would you come out with me when I look like myself again?”

I knew it was a mistake as soon as I said it. “Never. I could go out with anyone in this town. I've had all the offers, from all the boys your sister thinks are real cute. And what would they do if I did go out with them? They'd soon be going camping or fishing with the boys. Come the football season, they'd be going to games, or training. I don't want that sort of relationship.”

“I'm not that kind of person,” I said, feeling suddenly very insecure.

“I know you aren't. As a boy, you're a wimp, nothing special. I'm too strong for you, and you couldn't keep up with me.” I looked at her, feeling afraid at having been dismissed with so much contempt, but then she smiled. “But on the other hand, I'm getting to like you right now.”

“What do you mean ‘right now’?” I suddenly felt excited. I hadn't expected these words to follow her outburst.

“Well, I mean, how would you like to be my girl?”

The suggestion hit me without warning. I must have looked dumbfounded.

“What, how would that work?” I was confused. “What could we do...I mean, have we any future?” The thoughts tumbled from brain to lips in no particular order.

“Of course we have,” Susan smiled gently at me. “After all, you're going to be a girl for a while, why not be my girl? I'd really like that. As a boy, I really have no interest in you, despite your obvious devotion, but as a girl, I could really go for you. I don't want machismo, I want tenderness. I don't want sweat and coarse behavior, I want perfume and femininity around me.”

“I guess we could try,” I said, still a little uncertain as to what she wanted.

Susan reached across the car and placed her hand on my bare thigh, just where the tight denim skirt ended and gave it a gently squeeze. In that instant, I wanted to be her girlfriend, whatever it meant. Suddenly too, I felt confident, and I lifted my head as we came to a halt at some traffic lights in the middle of town. All the boys would hang around in the car park at the side when they wanted to watch the girls going by. There were several I recognized there, and I saw them appraising us, appraising *me*. I met their gaze and didn't look down. After all, I was somebody special's girl, and I couldn't let her down.