



Reluctant Press

Force Of Circumstance

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY C PAGANI

A 'HER TV' NOVEL

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Force Of Circumstance

By Maureen Glasgow

“This is the last straw, Steven,” Elaine said coolly, examining her elegant hands closely. “I really don’t know what to do with you, and to tell the truth I don’t think I care any more.”

I settled myself more comfortably back in my chair. Smiled. “Aw c’mon, mom! We going to go through this exercise in futility again? Jeez!”

She blinked. “That how you see it dear? Futile?”

I shrugged. “I’ve been naughty – again. You’re pissed off at me - again. I’m sorry – again. Come on, mom, do we have to go through the whole cycle EVERY time?”

She smiled, but there was little warmth in it. “Steven, I don’t know, I cannot even come close to fathoming how your mind works. To begin with, I am NOT your mom, I’m your stepmother. You are no blood relative of mine. I owe you nothing, absolutely *nothing*. Your father was a dear little man and I was extremely fond of him. You are dear, too, but in a different sense. You are *expensive*, and I’m coming to the conclusion that I can’t afford you. You’re not even pleasant. You show some half decent manners at times but you seem to have absolutely no appreciation of what I’ve done for you.”

I turned on the charm and gave her my best ‘naughty-but-nice boy’ smile. “Mom, don’t start crying poverty please. You’re loaded. So I got tossed out of college – what’s the difference? Pay college fees to one college or pay them to another, there’s not going to be that much difference, is there?”

She crossed her smooth, good-looking legs, I saw the expensive shoes. She really was a good-looking woman. Always dressed in expensive clothes, always immaculate in her appearance. She plucked a piece of imaginary lint from her sleeve. Looked up at me again. “Not this time, Steven, not this time.”

This wasn’t following our normal dance I thought. What was she up to? “What do you mean, mom?”

“You got yourself thrown out of college, again, and that’s what - four in three years?”

I nodded sullenly in agreement. “It’s not my fault, it’s these damn . . .”

“Steven, don’t swear, not in front of me!” Her voice was getting quite hard.

“I’m sorry,” I said brusquely. “But ...”

She held her hand up to silence me. “You are becoming a rude, nasty young man. I have put up with it for years, but no longer. It is going to stop, and it better stop NOW! Now apologize properly!”

I'd never seen her like this before. It was almost as if she was threatening me physically! There was no give in her facial expression.

"Mom. I'm sorry, honest," I said, giving my apology with all the sincerity I could muster.

"That's better," she said, her posture relaxing. "Now, if I may continue?"

I nodded.

"There are almost three months until the end of semester. You're going to get a job and start supporting yourself. It's about time you did."

"But mom, I don't have any job skills. Come on, be fair!"

"Tough, anyway I have a job for you. The pay's not good, but you'll get a nice apartment for free."

"Apartment? Why an apartment? Why can't I just stay here?"

"I'm going on a cruise with a friend for just under three months."

"That's even better then!" I said excitedly. "I won't be getting in your way, and I'll behave, I promise."

She shook her head. "Listen, you are NOT going to stay here. You've managed to get Molly, one of the worlds nicest people, to thoroughly dislike you."

I shrugged. "What difference does that make? She's only the maid for Chrissake.!"

Elaine shook her head slowly. "You know Steven, you really ARE a nasty little bugger, aren't you? Never done a days work in your life, yet you can sneer and mock a woman who would have done the world for you when you first came under my wing. For no apparent reason, you've turned her into someone who literally detests you. No. You won't stay here. Molly will be living here while I'm gone – a well-deserved break for her years of devoted service to me. As a matter of fact? You'd better start being pleasant to her – she's going to be making sure that the apartment you get is kept up decently."

"She's going to keep it clean for me?" I asked hopefully.

Elaine got an amazed look on her face. "Steven, I truly don't know where you get those ideas! *You're* the one that will be keeping it clean, and if you don't, Molly will have you turned out of there – real quick!"

She saw the disappointment on my face, I guess. "Steven, you have become an irresponsible, lazy, mean-mannered lout. You appreciate nothing. Let's face it, you're no athlete. You're no scholar. You're attractive – but you certainly have NOT the physical build to back up the macho man image you seem to be striving to project. I'm going on a long cruise with a friend of mine. She owns a small company that does a lot of data-entry things for other, larger, companies. She does NOT like men. She does not have any working for her at all."

"She the one . . .?" I started to ask.

Mom nodded.

"Then how come she's offering **me** a job?" I asked tartly.

"Her advisors are warning her that she's really flirting with sexual discrimination laws. That's the main reason. Also, she's a friend of mine and is hoping that giving you this job will help ME out. Finally, you'll actually be doing her a favor by looking after the apartment."

"Is it *her* apartment?" I asked hopefully.

Mom laughed. "Hell no, Steven! Think I'd even consider letting you into her place? No, it's an apartment she lets her favorite niece use when she'd not at college. She sometimes uses it as a guesthouse for friends when they come to visit. As a matter of fact, I think you know her niece – Andrea Molding?"

"Oh yes, that scrawny little thing. I was once in her class once at school," I started.

“That *WHAT?*” Elaine interrupted excitedly. “That girl is as big, if not bigger than you! She’s a straight ‘A’ student at a top college in the country. Captain of the cross-country skiing team. Where the hell do you get off talking about her like that!? What have you *ever* done to be able to talk disparagingly about someone like her?” She shook her head again. “Maybe I’m making a mistake. It looks like you’re *never* going to learn!”

I groaned internally. I’d done it again, I thought, disgusted with myself. It was if I had an evil twin staying inside me – an evil twin with a big – BIG – mouth! I mean, I loved Elaine. She was a wonderful lady! Had never had anything but my best interests at heart – yet I acted the non-caring unappreciative idiot in front of her. I’m small. And delicately built – yet I threw my weight around as if I was some major jock.

I’d been thrown out of four different colleges for almost identical reasons. I’d always had the sense to recognize good people, nice people. Yet it was if I wanted to antagonize them immediately – which I was VERY good at. Then I’d see some others who were assholes – and I spotted them as such immediately – and it was as if they could do no wrong in my eyes. I’d follow them around like some goddam sycophant, then ‘something’ would go wrong – and those bastards always seemed to have a sucker willing and able to hold the bag – ME!

I immediately attempted to see if I could mend my bridges. “I’m sorry, mom. Tell me what it’s all about, would you? Honestly, I’ll try to listen for once – and not to disappoint you again.”

She caught the sincerity in my voice, looked at me narrowly, took a deep breath to compose herself. “Okay. Want to talk like adults?”

Dry mouthed, I nodded.

“She’s willing to give you a low level job. A data entry kind of position. You’ll be reporting to a . . . a . . . Ms. Wurr? I think her name is.”

“But doing *what*, mom?” I asked softly.

She shook her head. “I have no idea, Steven. It’s not a very high level position – but it’s not the lowest level either. You’ll live in the apartment that I mentioned. Not far from where you’ll be working. I think you can walk there quite easily.”

“What about a car?” I asked hastily.

“Steven, I don’t think you’ll be able to afford one.”

I instinctively wanted to complain – but for once, had enough sense to shut up.

“As I was saying,” she continued. “It’s not far. You should be able to walk it quite easily. And, it’s a nice big apartment – three bedrooms, so you’ll have plenty of room.”

“But what if it rains?” I asked.

“I’d imagine you can set up an arrangement with somebody at work to pick you up or drive you home if that happens.”

She saw my sour face. Spoke reasonably to me. “Look Steven. I’d thought you were safely away at college for the next three months. Plenty of time for me and my friend to get away on a nice relaxing cruise. This situation that you’re in now? You dropped it right in my lap a few days ago. I think I’ve done well for you in such a short time. Got you a job. Got you a place to stay. You haven’t raised a finger to help yourself – and now you give me nasty looks because I haven’t provided a car for you?”

She paused and stared me in the eyes, until I averted my gaze. “I think your take home wages will be around three hundred a week . . .”

“Is that all?” I protested. “Aw, come ON, mom! I can’t possibly manage . . .”

“Don’t forget, there’ll be no charge for the apartment – though they will be holding something – I think about a hundred - back . . .”

“For *what!*” I wanted to shout, but thought better of it.

“For any possible damage you do to the apartment – in case it has to be repainted or something.”

“That’s not FAIR!” I protested. “Charging me for something I haven’t even DONE yet!”

“Steven, would you tell me the balance in your checking account, please?”

I blushed, feeling some shame. “I Had to close it out. Nothing I guess.”

She nodded. “Thank you for being honest. The bank called me – you bounced some checks, didn’t you?”

I exhaled noisily. “Yes, I’m sorry mom. Honest, I’ll make it up to you.”

She held her hand up. “It’s okay, Steven, I fixed it. But it’s the last time. Now let me ask you. You have trashed your living quarters in the past, haven’t you?”

“Yes,” I admitted.

“So, I’m to let you go stay in a nice apartment that belongs to a very good friend – and trust you NOT to damage anything? And, if you do, who’s going to pay for it? You?”

I stood there, no answer available.

“That’s why I want a hundred taken out of your wages. If you don’t damage the apartment – keep it in the same shape as you got it, all of the money that’s been held back will come back to you. So I know that twelve hundred dollars is not much, but it’s an AWFUL lot more than you have just now, isn’t it?”

“Yes mom,” I said meekly, full of embarrassment. “That’s very generous after the way I’ve behaved.”

She was pleased, I could tell, but she said, “Steven, you’re on your own for three months. If you don’t try to do a good job, you will be fired. If Molly doesn’t like the way you’re keeping the apartment, she’ll have you evicted.”

“I thought that was why the money was being held back?” I protested.

Elaine looked at me, obviously dumbfounded. “You think I’m going to let a young man like you spend three months in a place and *THEN* check? You could do **THOUSANDS** of dollars damage – and twelve hundred wouldn’t come close to paying for it.”

“But mom, you said yourself that Molly detests me!”

Elaine nodded, a glimmer of a smile touching her eyes. “About time you joined the rest of the world then darling, isn’t it? Start learning to kiss a little ass now and then, and learn some manners?”

“That’s not fair!” I protested, but weakly. I could see that I wasn’t getting anywhere.

She smiled openly now, and nodded in agreement. “No it’s not, is it, but what’s that saying? You’re between a rock and a hard place? You don’t have to take my offer, but it’s the only one I’m giving you.”

“What other choices do I have?” I grumbled, though my brain was actively computing my options. I rapidly came to the conclusion that though three months was a long period to have to support myself, it really wasn’t *that* long.

She misread my silence. “Maybe contact some of your friends, the ones that got you INTO this mess? Maybe they’ll help you out.”

I shook my head, knowing there was no hope in that area whatsoever.

Then she surprised me. She got up from her chair and came over to me, and gave me a hug. “Oh Steven, what ever happened between us? You were such a loving little boy! Honestly, I may seem as if I’m being a real meany, but I only want what’s best for you. I think you just seem to admire those rough boys all the time. You need to get some nicer friends.”

I had to laugh. “By the sound of it, there won’t be too many rough boys around where you’ve got me a job. Just think, there *I’ll* be the rough boy!”

“Good!” she said, giving me another hug. “Get somebody else into trouble for a change!”

That night was one of the pleasantest evenings we’d spent together in a long time. I truly was ashamed of my behavior – and at my seeming ingratitude towards her. Resolved firmly to behave as well as I could. Actually was quite relieved at being sentenced to working in an all-female environment – because there was no doubt about it – I’d always headed right for the rougher elements whatever school I’d attended. I knew this wasn’t a school I was going to, but felt that I needed some protection - from myself, if nothing else.

The following day, she took me to see the apartment. It was a nice one, no doubt about it – *nice* being the operative word. “Oh God, mom!” I said. “Jesus, this is a girl’s apartment, don’t you think?”

Even Elaine had to smile. She shook her head as she looked around. “Can’t disagree, it is very pretty.” Then she laughed. “And, if you *ever* want to play with dolls?”

“Mom! They’re banished, just as quick as I can find a box to put them in!” I said looking at the profusion of stuffed toys and dolls that seemed to be all over the apartment.

“Fair enough – but do take care with them – please? I’m sure that Andrea will have some emotional attachment to them – so PLEASE take care, okay?”

“Sure, no problem, mom, but can I repaint the apartment?” I asked, not really expecting approval.

“No, I’m afraid not. Don’t like the nice pink and white color scheme?” she said, smiling. “Sorry. No can do.” But the smile suddenly left her face and she stood pensively for a minute.

“Something wrong, mom?” I asked.

She shook her head and thought for a few seconds more. Took a long look around the room before saying, “Steven, I want to ask a large favor of you.”

“Sure mom, what?”

She wasn’t smiling now at all. She was dead serious and was obviously choosing her words with care. “No, I don’t want to tell you what it is. I want your promise first. It’ll mean a LOT to me and I swear that it’s an easy thing for you to do. As a matter of fact, you don’t have to do anything at all. Honest. Just promise that you’ll do what I ask, please?”

I knew I was going to do it, but had to play her along for a minute. “I don’t trust you, you’re up to no good!” I said sternly. Then I pretended to relent. “Okay. I’ll do it. What do you want?”

“Promise?” she said, seriously.

“Yes. I promise.”

She took a deep breath. “I want you to leave the apartment just the way it is – dolls and everything.”

I couldn’t help it, I laughed. “You’re kidding, right?”

She shook her head, eyes bright. “No, Steven, can I explain?”

“But you said I could store the dolls away, mom, you said...”

“Yes dear, I know, but then it hit me.”

“What?”

“You’ve got to have guessed that my biggest fear is that you’ll fall in with another bad crowd, right?”

“Yeah. I think you’ve made that clear enough.”

“And my next fear is that you’ll wreck this apartment – or, more likely that some of your friends would do it for you.’

“That’s not gonna happen, mom . . .” I started, then saw what she was getting at. I had to smile in admiration of the trap she’d laid for me on the spur of the moment.

“And a lot LESS likely to happen if you don’t bring them back up here, right?” she said, confirming my idea.

I looked around at the ultra feminine apartment – dolls in silks and satins strewn all over the place. Stuffed toys – oh so *cute* ones – perched in other spots. Color scheme in pinks and whites. The master bedroom decorated in the same fashion – with a canopied four-poster – transparent curtains hanging down to ‘protect’ a bed cover of flounced pink satin – with four dolls in crinolines all arranged there as if talking to each other.

I had to laugh. “Mom, you play dirty pool. You know I keep my promises – most of the time. Can’t I just promise not to bring anybody up here instead? I’ll give you that promise in a minute. At least – for heaven’s sake – let me take these stupid dolls from the bed!”

She shook her head, grinning. “I believe you dear, but this is safer. Molly will know if you’ve fooled around with those pretty accessories. Much better this way. Sorry – you’re ON the hook dear boy! I *especially* want you to keep those dolls on the bed!”

I sighed, little realizing what was to transpire from that simple promise.

She was to leave on her cruise on the Monday I was to start work. She drove me to the office on the Friday so that I could meet Ms Wurr and get the necessary paperwork done. Owing to the fact that I was to be a probationary employee for three months, I didn’t need a medical exam, but as there were a lot of forms to be filled out, mom left me there on my own.

The building was a fairly solid, rectangular two-storied brick edifice with a relatively large parking lot on either side. I pushed the double doors at the front and walked in, feeling strange at the thought that the whole place had nothing but female employees – other than myself of course. There was a receptionist at a desk who smiled at me as I entered. When I asked for Ms Wurr, her eyes widened a trifle, but she spoke into her headset and told me that Ms. Wurr would be with me in just a moment.

Ms. Wurr was one of those birdlike women. Small – even smaller than me – and quick and nervous in her movements. A sort of full-layered blouse, and a tiered skirt. Lots of costume jewelry on her wrists, frowzy hair and blood-red fingernails.

She seemed surprised to see me. “I never thought a man would have the nerve to work in this place,” she admitted thoughtfully. “But it’s okay! Mrs. Molding has been threatening to bring men in for a long time. Maybe you’re just the first, eh?” She gave me a nervous smile.. “But, you’re quite a lot smaller than I thought you’d be.” Mrs. Molding was my step-mom’s friend. I chose to ignore this tactless remark.

The area where I was to work under her was like a small bull pen – rectangular in shape with two rows of three computer terminals – all manned by girls with fingers flying over the keyboards – then another four small computers, all manned by women against the wall. Most of the women seemed older. Some in their late twenties, but I guessed that most were in the late thirties, early forties, and older. Down at the end of the office though, I did see a rather pretty girl who looked quite young. She sat at a desk with a PC on it. Beside that was another desk with a PC. It appeared vacant, and I got a sudden surge of hope that it was for me – I mean, that girl was VERY attractive from what I could see. Behind her was a bank of three drawer filing cabinets that stretched across the total expanse of the wall.

Ms Wurr had a square office built into a corner, lots of glass and one window to the outside world.. Her secretary sat outside the office with a PC and a two-drawer file cabinet. On the near corner I could see what seemed to be a fairly large lounge with comfortable looking chairs scattered around, a TV and a microwave. Overall, the office looked comfortable, with some thought obviously given to the comfort of the employees.

Under the furtive scrutiny of what looked like every woman in the room, I was introduced to the secretary, Emily, a somewhat plump, cheerful woman, and put under her care. I was given a handful of forms and given the use of Ms. Wurr’s office when she then went about her business.

As I sat at the desk, answering all the questions on the forms, I gradually became aware of a steady parade of women coming up to talk to Emily. Many of them were sneaky in their appraisals of me, but some just stared at me openly, half smiles playing about their lips. I felt like something

on a lunch buffet. Then to my delight, Ms. Wurr returned with the pretty girl I'd seen earlier on. This girl wasn't just pretty – she was beautiful! Clear blue eyes framed with silky blonde eyelashes, and wavy blonde hair falling to her shoulders. Soft hands when she shook mine – immaculate makeup and nails. A floral dress, very demure, but that did nothing to hide a figure that wouldn't quit.

Her name was Priscilla – Priss for short, I learned. She was the office girl, but would be my 'trainer' until I got a hang of the place. Her voice was soft and melodious, and she was very, very, feminine – so sweet and shy. I think I was in love before she even left the office a few minutes later. I was already wondering how 'stupid' I could be so that I could extend the training for as long as possible.

Mom came into the office to pick me up just as I finished the formalities. Immaculately dressed and groomed as always, she created a small but noticeable stir amongst the other women. I could see them eye her up. As always, I wondered if she knew of the interest she seemed always to generate in members of her own sex. She seemed unaware of it, but I wasn't too sure.

I said goodbye to Ms Wurr and Emily, after being told where I had to clock in at eight thirty – sharp – the following Monday. Then Mom took me to one of her favorite haunts for lunch.

It really was very pleasant sitting in the patio. The food was good and the service was excellent – nice looking waitress – and then I started to realize something. Apart from two swarthy looking bus boys, I was the only male in the place. Looking at the elegantly dressed females lunching all around me, I got a vague idea that my life seemed to have entered a stage where I was surrounded entirely by women.

I promptly forgot this feeling in the press of getting home and packing for my move to my new quarters. But it came back – in force – when Molly and I talked. At mom's instigation, I had suggested that we chat – leaving at least one avenue left for arbitration before mom left for her cruise. But, unusual though this was to my mind, there couldn't surely be enough disagreement to warrant anything of that nature. I was surprised at first by Molly's appearance. Knew that 'something' was askew.

Then it dawned on me. It was the first time I'd ever seen her out of uniform. She wasn't anywhere close to mom's level of fashion of course, but I was surprised to see that she was quite an attractive woman – probably in her early forties, slim, nicely turned out in a soft gray dress. Another thing, she didn't have the deferential manner she normally had when talking to me.

This took me a little time to figure out and, if truth be known, I was a little put out by it – but by that time other considerations had come up in our conversation that were giving me other points to chew on.

She had sat quietly enough when I'd started explaining that I felt it was time we mended our fences, so to speak, listening to me without interrupting, her eyes fixed steadily on my face as I did my best to charm her. Sometimes, I could have sworn that a glint of amusement showed in her eyes, but figured that she was far too sober-sided to see anything funny in what I was saying.

Finally I finished. She sat quietly, her eyes still fixed on me. Finally she made an enquiring sort of sideways nod – and I concluded that she wanted my permission to speak. "It's all right, Molly," I said quite grandly. "You can speak – I want us to be friends while mom's away. No need to stand on ceremony."

"Thank you Steven. I'm sorry if I appeared too formal. I just wanted to ascertain that you had finished talking?"

"Yes, Molly, I had. Go on."

Her first words rattled my composure immediately. "I don't like you, Steven. Your mother maintains that you have – or had – admirable qualities before I came to work for her. I can't say that I've been exposed to them. I find you arrogant and rude. I am a servant in this house – a maid – but you seem to consider me some sort of lackey. Your stepmother is a wonderful woman, and a great employer. Warm and generous. *You* are the major problem in my employment here. If she weren't the lovely person that she is, I wouldn't stay here for five minutes."

“Well, if you feel that way, why don’t you quit? I certainly wouldn’t stop you!” I sputtered.

“You’re not worth quitting over, Steven,” she said calmly. “I admit that I could have problems in trying to improve my picture of you – but I’m afraid it’s YOU that is going to have to work at making that improvement, not me.”

“I’m going to tell mom what you just said!” I said spitefully. “I’m not going to stand for YOU coming around and examining how I keep the apartment. You’re totally *biased!*”

“I don’t think mistress will be surprised. I’ve said the same thing to her many a time. But Steven, she at least knows that I’m fair. I won’t manufacture lies to hurt you. I won’t lie myself and your mother knows this. I’m biased, yes; I seem to have acquired a little bit of power over you – and I’ll enjoy it to the hilt. But your mother charged me with checking that you keep that apartment in decent shape.” A flash of sly wickedness crossed her face. “I hear there is a *beautiful* doll collection there?” Then she composed herself. “And that is what I shall do; If I ever find that you have that place in a mess, I’ll have you evicted. I’ll drop in and inspect it when you least expect it – I have a key, and I have been given legal power.” She stood up and smoothed her skirts with her hand. “Is there anything else, *Master Steven?*”

I could only look up at her stupidly. Another woman – a *servant* this time, was indicating that I would be responsible to her? Another flash of the claustrophobic feeling that I was being totally surrounded by women, flashed across my mind. I shook it off however, busily searching for words that would put this particular woman down – let her know her *PLACE!* She was long gone before I even came close to finding something. I didn’t see much sense in telling mom about this conversation, so kept it to myself.

Mom was busy packing but found the time to drive me over to the apartment on the Sunday afternoon. After she left, I got one pleasant surprise – she’d stocked the fridge and pantry for me, and one unpleasant surprise – the closets seemed to be *FULL* of clothes – women’s clothes, naturally – and the drawer space was also clogged with all sorts of lingerie. My first tendency was to just dump a lot of the clothes into a trash bag and stick them in another closet, but I was pretty well sure that this would not be received too well by anybody, so later that evening, I carefully folded some of the underclothes in the chest of drawers and moved



them to drawers in the spare bedroom. I had to admit that it was strangely pleasant and exciting to be handling and carrying the items of flimsy and silken undies. Strangely enough, I found that lot of them had never been worn – still had the manufacturers tags on them. While I did this, I ruminated about a conversation I'd had with mom.

She had left shortly after I had moved my stuff up to the apartment, and before I started to unpack. She came and stood in front of me, then placed a hand on each of my shoulders and looked me straight in the eye.

“Steven, I have to tell you that the last few days I've enjoyed your company. I'm truly praying that you'll make a success of this little experiment. I know that it must be humiliating for you to be treated in this manner – but I want you to think deeply before you go making new friends. I also know that just about every parent of a problem child tends to blame his friends. In that respect, I'm no different than any parent – I'm positive that you have repeatedly let yourself be swayed by your companions. Please? Just for me, pick any new friends, very, very carefully. Okay?”

I blushed with embarrassment at her insinuation that I didn't have a mind of my own. At the same time, I knew that without a doubt there was truth in what she said – a LOT of truth!

“I'll try mom.” I said, sincerely.

She beamed and came and hugged me. “That's all I ask.” She said. “And now I must be off. have to get up really early for the limo tomorrow morning and still have a lot to do. So I'm off. Behave now!”

And for the very first time in my life, I was all on my own. Master of my fate. I did my unpacking, still somewhat embarrassed by the femininity of my new quarters. Then I found a pizza in the freezer. Blessed mom for her foresight – there were a couple with different toppings in there – and had my very first own home-cooked meal. Nervous about what was facing me on the following morning, I didn't sleep too well, but was up, showered and dressed in plenty of time.

It was only a ten-minute walk – maybe even a little bit less, and as I got to the office, I was only one of a group of employees going in the front door. I got quite a few looks, and more than one friendly ‘Good Morning’. Again, I got the feeling of being inundated by females.

Ms Wurr didn't have much time for me, but managed a welcome to the club sort of thing, then took me down to the end of the room and motioned at the desk besides Priscilla's. “This'll be your home away from home Steven. Now Priscilla is going to show you the ropes, so listen carefully dear. Alright? And? I want you two to be friends now – understand?”

Priscilla gave up a dazzling smile. “Of course, Miss Wurr. Steven and I will be best buddies starting now, right Steven?”

I grinned and agreed immediately.

That morning, I thought I had died and gone to heaven. I'd been so concerned about being cut off from male contacts. Now, here I was – drowning in femininity and LOVING it! She was SO pretty – slim in a sort of Alice blue gossamer dress that brought her eyes alive. Little puffy sleeves, tied with thin pink ribbons. Blonde hair waving down to her shoulders, secured with a pink ribbon to match. Pale white, girlish arms, layered petticoats that made the most wondrous rustle when she moved her gorgeous legs – and her perfume! Wow!

She, naturally, had to sit close to me while showing me the data entry procedures used for varying jobs and her dress rustled about me, her arms brushed against mine frequently – as did her legs, and her perfume – the sweet smell of her, engulfed me. She had small soft hands that she'd often lay over the top of mine when she'd want to make a point, and her touch was driving me crazy.

Priscilla, being the office girl, had duties to perform – like making the tea and coffee and setting everything up for the ladies when they came in to the lounge for break. She took me in with her and pointed out where everything was kept and, giggling about how efficient she was at everything, showed me the ‘sheet’ on each individual lady giving their individual preferences for one thing or another. She put a pretty floral apron on over her head, then had me tie her into it at the back, laughing at how terribly I made the bow, then having me practice until she was satisfied.

Then, at ten o'clock break that morning she introduced me to everyone in the lounge. I felt extremely shy about taking break with nothing but ladies, but no one seemed to mind. The women were mostly very pleasant, teasing Priscilla about her 'conquest' for some reason. It was there that I heard the term "Prissy's pet" used for the first time, though I didn't see that it pertained to me.

I don't know it was managed, but Priss had coerced me into helping to serve the women – sure she made a comment about it helping me to become better known on the floor, but frankly, I found it rather embarrassing. When I commented on this though, she gave me such an unbelieving look that I backed off. Then, not only did I serve the ladies, I also helped Priss clear away all of the dishes and then wash, dry, and put them back in the cupboard.

She was a good teacher, but very bossy. Lovely, soft, feminine, she was – but had a willpower that was practically impossible to withstand. She spoke gently, but there was absolutely no denying her. For example? Early in the morning, she had commented upon how nice my hands were – but thought my nails needed shaping up. At lunchtime, she looked out some nail care implements – file, emery boards etc.

I had thanked her for them, and put them in the center drawer of my desk. She had got a weird expression on her face. Then, when I asked her what was wrong, she'd just said "You're doing nothing just now? Why not use them?" Not long after that, Ms. Wurr came by, just to check up on me. I felt myself blush, using the long file that Priss had given me. Felt effeminate I guess.

At afternoon break, I felt even sillier when Priss examined my handiwork in front of the other women. Shook her head smiling, as she gave me some tips on how to shape them properly. Then, she totally humiliated me by 'doing' my nails with a clear varnish in front of everybody. I'd have made a fuss, but didn't want to embarrass her in front of her friends.

Shortly after break I was intent on an assignment that Priss had given me – a sort of test actually, when I felt, rather than saw somebody sit down on top of my desk. Looked up to see a rather tough looking girl – spiky, very short, blond hair. Black pantsuit with a white silk 't' – dark hose. Heavy looking heeled shoes. She didn't wear much makeup, but a very dark lipstick and heavy brows gave her a very tough exterior.

"Well, looky here!" she exclaimed, false surprise in her voice. "See what I see, Pammie?"

I jumped a little when a deep female voice spoke from just behind me. "Jo, I think so! My god! Can it be? A *man*? Holy shit! What **is** this place coming to?"

Once more I had the sense of being hemmed in, but certainly not by femininity. The woman behind me was wearing a black tailored skirt suit with a red shirt front blouse, taller her than companion. Dark hair, dark lipstick and horn rim glasses.

"Guys, leave Steven alone! Don't get him nervous!" Priscilla laughed in a teasing sort of way.

"They're not! Making *ME* nervous?" I snorted, though was there a tiny squeak in my voice?

"Hi! I'm Steven I said in as deep a voice as I could muster, and held out my hand to the blonde.

"Hi! - I'm Jo," the tough lady said, taking my hand in hers and shaking it. She had a surprisingly strong grip and I could feel her testing mine, but I managed to hold my own – though barely.

When she let go I stood up and turned around to face Pammie. She had a slight scar running under her right eye that gave her a sort of sarcastic expression, but she gave me a nice enough smile as we shook hands and introduced ourselves.

It turned out that they were members of the computer support team assigned to help the data entry people with problems relating to new equipment or software – and sometimes used to design data entry procedures for non-standard contracts.

We chatted for a few minutes, then I saw Ms Wurr heading our way. "Are you ladies looking for assistance?" she said as she approached.

"Oh, for *Christ's* sake, Wurry!" Jo said, aggravated. "We just came to meet the new boy! Finally, we get a man in here! Can you blame us?"

“You are support personnel,” Ms Wurr said stiffly. “I don’t remember requesting your services. Please don’t be distracting my employees!”

Obviously, neither of the visitors had the slightest respect for Ms Wurr and made this clear both by word and by gesture, but they ambled off – making their disgust evident as they left. She stood, glaring at them as they left, then turned back to us. “Priscilla, I know I can’t blame you, this time – but please don’t allow your friends to disrupt Steven from his work. Let’s not start any bad habits here!”

“I’m very sorry, Miss Wurr,” Priscilla apologized softly. “I think they just wanted to meet Steven.”

I felt somehow that I was being reprimanded as well, but didn’t know what to say, so was quiet. Nonetheless, I felt as if I was a little kid who had been involved in a contest between adults – too juvenile to be chastised. I truly WAS going to speak, but Prissy’s apology obviously did the trick. A small smile crossed Ms Wurr’s face and she left.

I felt strange that night going back to my feminine apartment that night – it just seemed so apt somehow. I saw a bottle of nail polish remover in my bathroom, but figured that removing the polish from my nails could breed problems the following day. And anyway? It wasn’t as if it was *colored* polish! I really felt like going out and buying some booze that night, but a couple of things held me back. First, I didn’t have a car and had no idea of where the closest liquor store was. Second, I was very low on money. Mom hadn’t left me much, and warned me that I’d better stay within my income – taken away my credit cards as a precaution. Third? I’m a lousy drinker – can’t hold my booze at all. My ex-buddies had always laughed and called me a real lightweight.

The rest of that week flew past, and I felt as if I was caught in a crossfire. On one hand, I had this job, which seemed by Priscilla’s understanding to be as fill-in office girl – and yet Pammie and Jo were treating me as if I were a real STUD! Deferring to me as if I was the epitome of manhood, asking me all sorts of questions as to what did I think of this football player – or that size auto engine built onto that size transmission – how many gigabytes would this take in storage?

They even got me to start going out to lunch with them – sneering at the bunch of old women who congregated in the lounge. They were *amazed* to discover that I didn’t have a car – even offered to drop me off or pick me up if it was raining. Thankfully, I had already made arrangements with Priscilla – the thought of this pair of holy terrors seeing my girlish home was too much to even think about. But they were never back on time! I protested, mildly, but they looked askance at the very idea that any employee could be scared of “Old Worry Wurr!” (Being a male stud, I naturally had to agree with this outlook and swagger in after lunch as if I didn’t care about being late). Ms Wurr did not take to this kindly and started to lecture me about punctuality.

So, on one hand I was the docile little underling of an extremely feminine girl. On the other, a swaggering stud with two tough ‘buddies’.

To be perfectly honest, I was becoming uncomfortable in both of these roles after that first week. A few times, Priscilla had asked me to fill in for her in preparing the coffee and tea at the break times – and serving it up. I refused – to her puzzlement – to wear her aprons while doing this, but it didn’t prevent a small amount of teasing from the other women. My name, “Prissy’s Pet” had become a commonplace term – though it had been shortened to “Pet.” On top of this, Prissy even took me out shopping with her a few times – she was required to do the occasional errand for the other women. Wanted me to know where I was to go – “Just in case.”

Then, on the Friday, I made a terrible goof. I made a disparaging remark about my lousy salary, wondering aloud how I was going to survive on it – boasting a little actually. Priss looked funny and walked up to Ms Wurr’s office. A few minutes later, Emily called and said that Ms. Wurr would like to speak to me. Wondering what was going on, I walked down there quite quickly. When Pammie or Jo weren’t around, I obeyed any orders of hers with alacrity.

She and Priss were sitting at her table when I came in. I was told to close the door and sit down, and did so. “Steven, it seems we have a problem here,” Ms Wurr started.

Within the next few minutes, I learned how stupid it was to discuss one’s wages with fellow employees. Priscilla was incensed at the fact that even though she was training me, I was earning

more than she was. Ms. Wurr admitted the unfairness of this, but said that Mrs. Molding had determined my salary – I was the son of a friend – and that she, Ms. Wurr, had no say in it. She apologized to Priscilla, but wanted me to know how my thoughtlessness had disturbed by friend and co-worker. Thoroughly chastised, I apologized humbly. That afternoon, I wore Prissy's apron to serve the beverages to the ladies. Strangely, there was no teasing to speak of.

On Saturday morning I got a shock. About ten o'clock, the doorbell rang. It was Molly!

"Good morning, Steven! May I come in?" she said cheerfully.

"Why, yes. Of course Molly. Come in." I answered, pleased that I'd made the bed and tidied up.

She was dressed in an attractive jumpsuit – sort of Royal Blue with a scarlet metallic thread in it. Her hair looked lighter and she wore red patent leather shoes – high heeled! Confidently, she smiled at me. "Care if I take a look around?"

"That's fine. Be my guest," I said smugly.

She walked through the apartment, then came back. "Steven, MUCH better than I thought it'd be! I'm very surprised. Very pleased."

And damned if I didn't blush!

"But," she continued. "The place needs a good dusting – your pajamas are lying out in full view on top of the bed – should be either under the pillow or in the dirty wash – and you haven't placed the dolls on top of your bed."

"Aw Molly, come on! I've only been in the place for six days – can't be that much dust. Okay. I'll tuck the pajamas away – but the dolls? You kidding?"

She didn't answer me but stared for a moment. "While I was here, I thought I'd offer to take you out shopping for groceries, if you're interested, that is?"

"Wow, Molly, that would be great. Let me see, what do I need?"

Nicely, she taught me there and then the value of building up a shopping list as you find shortages, then took me shopping. When we got back, she offered to teach me how to make an omelet, then stood over me while I cooked it. We then had lunch together and had a fairly pleasant conversation. I discovered that she had actually worked for the Molding family before coming under my mom's employ. She had even worked with Ms Wurr at one time. They were old friends!

She left shortly after that and I spent the rest of the day watching football on TV then a movie on cable that night.

Sunday, ten o'clock in the morning, the doorbell rang again. Molly again! She is carrying a shopping bag with her.

"What is it Molly?" I asked, half smiling, half aggravated. "You were here yesterday!"

"I came to check again, may I?"

"Don't see why? But go ahead."

I left her to her own devices and went back to watching the news on TV. She came back into the room, marched to the TV and turned it off.

"This place needs dusting. Your pajamas are just as untidily placed as they were yesterday, and there are no dolls on top of your bed."

"Aw Molly!"

"I can leave and start processing your eviction, or stay until you've done what I told you to do. Which is it to be?" She said this in a very firm tone of voice, and I knew she wasn't kidding.

I sighed. "I'll do what you want."

"Right now?"

"Yes."

“Okay then, I brought these with me,” she said pulling something white and bulky from the bag. “Proper attire for dusting and doing housework – and some cleaning materials. Here, put this on.”

“You’re kidding!” I said, as she advanced on me a full white apron in her hands.

“Of course I’m not!” she snapped. “Here! Hold out your hands!”

Dazed, I did as she ordered. Seconds later she had run my arms into the apron and was now tying it at the back. Then, satisfied with the bow, she reached into the bag and came out with something else, much smaller, and turned towards me again.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Your dustcap, dear. What you wear to keep your hair clean while you dust.”

“I am NOT wearing this shit!” I said indignantly, starting to untie the bow at the back of my apron.

“STEVEN, leave that ALONE!” she barked.

I left the ties of my apron alone as the bow disintegrated.. “No need for that tone of voice!” I said, but weakly.

“Yes there is,” she replied. “Now come here!”

“Aw Molly. Please don’t” I said meekly as she re-tied me into my apron.

Then she turned me around to face her, put her hands inside of the cap to stretch it out a little, and lifted it up towards my head. Gently pulling it down to fit. She then used a black satin ribbon that was sewn into it to tie the cap more firmly to my head, then tied it in a pretty bow.

“There!” she said happily, pulling some tendrils of hair out from under the cap and finger curling them over my brow. “Now here’s some dusters and stuff in this bag. But before you start your housework? Would you like to make poor old Molly a cup of tea?”

While I made the tea and served it up, she explained. “See Steven, if you’d been a good little boy and did what I’d told you, I would have apologized and left. Now? You’re wearing a maid’s uniform and cap- and it won’t be the last time you wear them either.”

“What do you mean, Molly?” I asked, cowed.

“Tell you what,” she said. “I promise never to visit you here before ten o’clock in the morning, or after eight at night. But if I do visit and find this place anything but spotless, you’ll be in trouble.”

I started to speak, but she lifted her hand to stop me. “But say you’re actually cleaning the place when I arrive? You’ll be off the hook.”

“Thanks a ton!” I said sarcastically.

“You’re welcome,” she said ignoring my tone. “But when I ring that doorbell, if you’re doing your housework at the time? You’d better answer it in your apron and cap dearie.”

“But there’s no way I can tell who’s at the door!” I said desperately, plucking at the skirts of my apron helplessly.

“So? Easy solution. You don’t want to wear your pretty apron and cap? Do the housework early in the morning” she shrugged. “Wear anything you like then.”

She stayed on the couch, reading, for the few hours it took me to dust and vacuum the place. I tidied away my pajamas, then spent a few embarrassing minutes setting the dolls up on my bed. After she had done her final inspection she motioned for me to come closer. “Steven? I want to say something. I don’t know what having a job has done for you, but you’ve changed. Not such a nasty little bugger now. A lot sweeter. Think I’ll call old Wurry – see what she’s done to you to effect this change.”

I shifted on my feet nervously. Didn’t know why, but I had an instinctive feeling that I didn’t want those two women discussing me. Molly smiled. “I see she’s got you taking care of your nails anyway. *That’s* a nice change.”

She left a little while after that, making sure to let me know what kind of trouble I'd be in if I let MY apron or cap get untidy looking or dirty.

The following Friday was the most humiliating day of my life. It was raining heavily and Priscilla called to see if she should drive me to work – an offer I accepted gladly. She was in a very bad mood. Had seemingly been fighting with her step mother and was talking out loud about the lack of viable options she had – too little money and Apartment rents too expensive for her.

Unlike her normally sweet disposition, she carried this over into the workplace that morning, constantly criticizing and chastising me – did it in front of some of the others as well – to the extent that some gave me some very sympathetic looks as I stood there getting a tongue lashing.

I had learned to truly dislike going out with Pammie and Jo for lunch, but that morning I was grateful when they came by about eleven o'clock and invited me to join them. Ms Wurr caught me just as I was leaving and whispered that I should make a special effort to get back on time that day. My two companions were grinning at me as if I was a wimp, so I just replied "Sure! Don't **worry** Wurry!" and had to grin myself at the expression on her face and when Pammie let out a loud guffaw of laughter.

Naturally, the two girls with me kept prodding me and prodding me to "show that old bag she can't boss YOU around" and so we were thirty-five minutes late getting back to work. Giggling and laughing, the two of them headed off to their own department, while I was left to enter my own workplace nervously. I knew right away that I was in trouble. There had been a certain amount of chatting as I came into the area, but the minute I was recognized everyone stopped talking, and a hush fell over the whole office – all the women now intent on the jobs in front of them.

All I wanted was to keep my head down and make it to my desk, but I had to look over at Ms. Wurr's office. She was standing in her doorway, her face as grim as death, crooking her finger at me. Then, she took the door in her hand and waited for me. I felt as if I had a tail hanging down between my legs as I slunk into her office. Was quite surprised to see Priscilla sitting there, biting her lip.

"Please sit down for a second Steven." Ms Wurr said. "This will only take a second."

"What can I do for you Ms. Wurr?" I asked meekly.

She snorted. "Nothing. Effective immediately, you're **fired**. Clean your desk out, then punch out at the time clock. You'll be paid through that time, whatever it is. But please don't dawdle. I want you out of here! I understand you don't have a car. I've asked Priscilla to drive you home."

To my total mortification, I started to *cry*! "Miss Wurr? I'm sorry. Please give me another chance! You won't regret it – honest! Please let me have my job back!"

She looked at me in amazement. "What happened to the big tough guy who told me not to *worry*?" she asked sarcastically. "Huh? And anyway, I couldn't give you your old job back if I wanted to – it's filled already!"

"What? Who?" I stammered.

"I promoted Priscilla. She's far more competent than you were anyway and deserves a raise. Now you don't have to complain about the lousy salary you were making" she added viciously – "Now you can go and find a new job – but I wouldn't use ME as a reference if I were you!"

"Miss Wurr?" Priscilla spoke quietly. "It's not really his fault – I wasn't very nice to him this morning, and I think he's kind of scared of Pammie and Jo, so he was just too glad to get out of here. Please don't fire him. I'll take my own job back. No problems"

"That's nice of you Priscilla!" Ms Wurr said gently, then snapped at me. "But no way! On your way out? Ask Emily to come in and see me. I need to get her to get an ad into the paper for an office girl now. You?" she turned to me. "You had the makings of a good employee. Priscilla spoke highly of you and you fitted in with all of the ladies very well. I had been worried about bringing a *man* into my organization . . ." she paused and shook her head. "Now I don't know. I just don't know."

Then I got an idea. "Miss Wurr? May I make a suggestion?"