



Reluctant Press presents:

A Family History

E. B. Stevenson



ILLUSTRATIONS BY C. PAGANI

A 'NEW WOMAN' E-BOOK

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A Family History

by E.B. Stevenson

INTRODUCTION

During the spring of 1998, a number of things had happened in my life. For one thing, I had to end yet another relationship; the sixth failed relationship since I broke off my engagement five years before. Second, I sold my last two fixed base operations in Florida to a larger flight support company; I was left with five; two in Illinois and three in Missouri. I also donated one of the seventeen radio stations I owned to a local college. I could have sold out to a larger company, but I didn't want local programming to be taken off the station. My businesses literally ran themselves; therefore, I was able to take an extended vacation.

I was ready to take that extended vacation in June of 1998. It was the middle of the month, to be exact. I was thirty-two years old at the time; the youngest of ten children. My youngest brother, Steve, all of thirty-six, had just gotten married. His young bride, Jamie, was just twenty-two and getting started on becoming a licensed clinical social worker. Jamie was aware of our family history of one thing that most families don't want to talk about: our family consists of twenty members who are transgendered in various forms. That kind of history is rare in families, as far as I know.

In my own immediate family, it has affected two of my siblings' offspring. My niece Barbara, who was known in her male life as Roberto, is the offspring of my oldest brother Ron and his Mexican-born wife, Amelia. Barbara had left home after finishing college. She had become a gay transvestite, unsure of whether she wanted to go through the hormone therapy and surgery that could turn her into a total woman. My oldest sister, Wendie, had

her first offspring at age twenty when she gave birth to a son, Kenny. As a child, he had felt that he was really a girl. Wendie and her husband, Karl, fought the school board in the Dallas suburb where they lived to allow Kenny to go to school as a girl. Adopting the female name Katie, she started going to school as a girl at age ten. She was now fifteen years of age, and living full-time as a girl in anticipation of a sex-change operation in early adulthood.

On my father's side of the family, I count eight transgendered cousins. The number of my transgendered cousins broke down this way: three transsexuals, three crossdressers and two female impersonators. Of the three transsexual cousins, only one has already had her surgery. My cousin Shauna, daughter of Uncle Sherman and Aunt Belle, was twenty-six years old; she had her surgery just after graduating from college in 1994. Uncle Jim and Aunt Kimiko's daughter, Christie, had just turned twenty-four, and living full-time as a woman for two years; she had been saving up for surgery by working as a model and working on her master's degree in psychology. Aunt Jane and Uncle Nate's daughter, Hannah, had just started to live full-time as a woman.

Of my three crossdressing cousins, two were married. My cousin John, Shauna's younger brother, was twenty-four at the time and he had just celebrated two years of wedded bliss with his wife, Lauren. When dressed as a woman, he goes by the name of Joanna. Aunt Rita and Uncle Louie's son, Albert, had just turned thirty and married his longtime girlfriend, Tressa - he's known as Amber when dressed in female attire. My cousin Walter also dressed in female attire. The son of Uncle Walter and Aunt Josie, he was twenty-two and had dressed off and on since age twelve. He confessed that he only did this as an art form, not for some kind of sexual pleasure. He didn't select a feminine name until he was eighteen; he chose the name Gwendolyn. He had done some modeling en femme while studying to be a writer.

My two female impersonator cousins on my father's side have been very well-known on the circuit for some time. Cousin Walter's older brother, Oran, started as a female impersonator at age twenty-one; he was twenty-seven by that time, and had won several pageants in the process. His stage name was Organza Allen. The other female impersonator on my dad's side was my cousin Quentin, son of Aunt Cathy and Uncle Larry. He had just turned thirty; he has been performing for nine years. He took the stage name Jayne Quentin, and promoted himself as the only "lesbian" female impersonator in the show, as he was married with two kids.

It is more pronounced on my mother's side of the family. There are twelve members of her family who are transgendered. The most notable of my mother's transgendered relatives is Aunt Diane. She's her younger sister; she went through her transition in the late 1960s. She has had a successful career as a legal secretary since she returned to the United States after her sex-change operation in 1969. Of the other eleven transgendered relatives on my mother's side, five others are transsexuals. My cousin Karen, the daughter of Aunt Rae and my late Uncle Edgar, was twenty-nine and living full-time as a woman while owning two businesses. She had not yet selected a surgeon for her operation. Another cousin, Heather, was thirty-three and went through a sex-change operation twelve years before. She had just gone into the real estate business after retiring from her previous career as a showgirl. Heather was the daughter of Uncle Henry and Aunt Jeanne. Yet an-

other cousin, Jessica, the daughter of Aunt Rosa and my late Uncle Vito, had just turned twenty-three, living full-time as a woman since age eighteen, and had just become an art dealer. She had not yet had her operation. The fourth transsexual cousin, Lori, was about ready to turn twenty-nine and preparing for her sex-change operation. Uncle Larry and Aunt Gina were in the dark about Lori's transsexualism before she told them when she began the transition. I really kept up with one transsexual cousin in particular: Sarah, the daughter of Uncle Jeff and Aunt Paula. She was eighteen years old and had just had her sex-change operation late in May of the previous year. She had started her transition at the tender age of thirteen, and was preparing to enter college that fall.

Three relatives on my mother's side are crossdressers: Heather's older brother, Joe, was thirty-eight, married with a son and a daughter. His wife, Cathi, was supportive of his lifestyle; he goes by the femme name Jolene. George, son of Uncle Duane and Aunt Faith, had just turned thirty-six. He was single, but had a beautiful young girlfriend in Brenda, all of twenty-one. She encouraged him to dress up as Gabrielle as much as he wanted to. The third one is George's younger brother, Virgil. He was twenty-eight, dating Brenda's older sister, Brianne, and she also encouraged him to dress as Vanessa when he wanted to. All three were in successful careers as photographers.

Joe's younger sister, Olivia, was a thirty-year-old gay transvestite. Formerly known as Martin, she has dressed full-time as a woman since the age of nineteen, worked two jobs, and sharing an apartment with her male lover, Jim. Like Barbara, she was also unsure about going through hormone treatment and surgical sex reassignment. My cousin Thor, known as Theresa when dressed as a female, was a bisexual transvestite of twenty-five. He worked his job as a travel agent as a man, but became Theresa once he came home from work. He was living with another transvestite, Will, who was known as Caryn while in feminine mode. Thor is the son of Uncle Don and Aunt Nathalie. Another cousin, Michael, is a professional female impersonator of twenty-seven. The son of Uncle Mickey and Aunt Belinda, he adopted the stage name Michelle LaFemme. He had won several pageants in his career; he also was considered a lesbian by his peers, because of his supportive wife, Nancy.

I would be embarking on a trip that not many male members of a family with such a history of transgenderism would ever consider partaking. It would be an adventure I would not forget.

First Stop: Boston

When I departed St. Louis on the afternoon of June 17, 1998, my first stop would be Boston, where my niece Barbara and my cousins Heather, Oran and George were living. I had a smooth, two-hour and forty-five minute flight into Logan; I had a good meal and several cups of hot tea on the flight. While I was en route, I got a call from my sister-in-law Amelia, informing me that a surprise awaited me when my flight landed in Boston.

When I got off the plane, I was amazed to see a Latina woman with a slender build and curly, medium brown hair that cascaded down to her shoulder blades. She was wearing sleeveless and glittery navy blue dress with a skirt that extended to about an inch above

her knees. Jewelry was limited to a pair of rhinestone cluster earrings, a gold necklace with a rhinestone pendant, and a gold bracelet on her right wrist with her name on it. She was wearing three-inch high heels, which put her one inch shorter than my six-foot-one. Without the high heels, she was five-foot-nine. The only ring she had on her finger was a birthstone ring on the ring finger of her left hand. I looked at her, and she flashed me a confident smile.

"You must be my Uncle Eric," she said in a feminine manner.

"How are you, Barbara?" I asked her before giving her a hug and a kiss.

"I'm doing fine," she added; she then asked me: "How's life treating you?"

"Life's treating me great. I've just sold my fixed base operations in Tallahassee and Clearwater, clearing twenty million dollars. I also donated my last radio station in Georgia to a local college, realizing a tax deduction of \$900,000. I have left my lieutenants in charge of my businesses while I'm taking a vacation to see the transgendered members of my family," I replied.

After I claimed my luggage and picked up my rental car, I followed Barbara to her apartment near Boston Common. She had a femininely-decorated apartment with a view of the Common. "So, what brings you to Boston?" she asked while she was preparing hot tea for the two of us.

"I'm here to check up on you, Heather, Oran and George. I've been wondering about you all the past few years," I replied.

When she set the tea service down on the coffee table, she poured a cup for me and one for herself. She then explained: "I'm finally working as a girl now; I work as a clerk at a women's fashion store in Lynn. My boss understood my need to dress as a woman; so she allowed me to come to work as Barbara. Heather has just sold her first home; a three-story mansion on Cape Cod. Oran is performing this weekend at a club I frequent in Boston, while George and Brenda are going out someplace special this evening. I don't know what's up, but I won't be surprised that he'll propose marriage to her tonight. He hasn't been out as Gabrielle in four months."

"Have you decided to have the hormone therapy yet?" I then asked.

"I started hormones a week ago; I don't know if I'll have the surgery, though. I'm becoming more and more convinced that I am a woman," she replied.

"Were these hormones prescribed by a doctor?" I inquired.

"Yes, they were. The effects of hormone therapy are reversible, although the surgery isn't," she then replied.

A couple of minutes later, I decided to crash on the sofa in the living room. Barbara sat in a swivel chair across from where I laid down, and crossed her legs femininely. "Do you still live alone, Uncle Eric?" she asked me.

"Yes, I still live by myself, Barbara. I've just broken up with my sixth girlfriend in five years; it's been a tough road since I dumped Kara," I replied.

"You just haven't found the right one yet," she added.

"Do you live by yourself?" I then asked her.

"I have a roommate; like me, she's a gay transvestite. Her name is Charo Baez; she's a professional female impersonator here in Boston. She is living full-time as a woman and taking hormones, although she hasn't decided whether or not to have surgery," she replied.

"I'm sure she's beautiful, just like you," I added before she gave me a framed photo of Charo.

"See for yourself," she added before giving me the frame.

I looked at it for a minute, before telling her: "Barbara, she's a beautiful young lady."

I was also reading some of their transgender and female impersonation magazines before Charo walked in the door. She was five-ten, with chestnut brown hair that cascaded past her shoulders, a slender build and a face that even a fashion model could die for. She was decked out in a navy blue skirt, matching jacket, white blouse, matching stockings and navy blue pumps. The only jewelry she wore: a pearl necklace, gold bracelet and rhinestone earrings.

"How was your day, Barbara?" she asked before embracing her.

"My day was fine, Charo," she replied before asking Charo how her day went.

"I had a long day today; I spent nearly the whole day modeling ball gowns for a Boston bridal shop," Charo replied.

"I'd like to introduce you to my uncle," Barbara added.

"I'd love to meet him," Charo then added.

I got up from the couch, while Charo and Barbara sashayed over toward me. "Charo Baez, this is my uncle, Eric Fletcher. Eric, this is my roommate, Charo," she said in an introductory manner.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Charo," I said with a smile.

"The pleasure is mine," she said with a sweet, seductive smile.

I decided to rest the balance of the afternoon, as Barbara invited me to a show that evening. I took a long nap before waking up around six-thirty to the smell of perfume. Little did I know that Charo was in the show that Barbara invited me to. She emerged from her bedroom a few minutes later, wearing a red cocktail dress.

While I was still in a daze, she asked me: "How do I look, Eric?"

Her looks shook me awake. "Smashing," I replied before she gave me a kiss on the cheek.

Barbara emerged from her bedroom just as Charo was walking out the door to a personal appearance at a local bookstore. She was wearing a red sleep shirt. "What time should we leave for the show?" I asked her.

"We should be leaving around eight-thirty; the place opens at nine o'clock. However, I must tell you that the ladies, both genetic and transgendered, will be looking for a single guy like you," she replied.

"Thanks for the heads-up," I added.

"Your cousin, Oran, is in the show we're going to see tonight; he's now a regular cast member under the name of Organza Allen. He's been dating this younger girl named Raina. She's twenty-one years old, working as a beautician at the beauty shop where he gets his wigs. She'll be with us tonight. Heather will also be with us tonight to celebrate her first sale," Barbara explained.

I decided to wear a red golf shirt and a pair of khaki slacks for the night at the show, along with a pair of brown loafers. Barbara changed into a curve-hugging pink dress. When she emerged, she asked me how she looked. "Very sexy," I replied before we stole a smooch. After that, we walked out of her apartment, arm-in-arm.

Around nine o'clock, we arrived at the club. A pair of female impersonators and the front door attendant greeted us. After we paid our cover, one of the female impersonators, Daphne Peters, approached us. She was a heavy-set, medium brown-haired girl of fifteen, wearing a royal blue chiffon dress, matching high heels and rhinestone jewelry.

"Are you Eric Fletcher, Organza's cousin?" Daphne asked me.

"Yes, I am. This is my niece, Barbara Valencia," I replied.

"Organza has reserved a table for your party by the stage. Your cousin Heather has already arrived; she's waiting for you at the table," she added.

Barbara and I were shown to the table, where Heather was waiting. She was nothing short of stunning; five-eleven, slender build, blonde hair down past her shoulders, and an infectious smile. She was wearing a pink party dress that was hiked up an inch and a half above the knee, matching flats, a gold necklace with a diamond pendant, and a pair of diamond earrings. I hadn't seen her since she was transitioning from man to woman. When I noticed her, she immediately flashed a big smile.

"Eric, is that you?" she asked me excitedly.

"It's me, Heather...you're more beautiful than ever," I replied before we embraced and stole a smooch. "How have things been with you, Eric?" she asked me.

"As far as business is concerned, I'm doing quite well. I sold off my last two fixed base operations in Florida, and donated my last radio station in Georgia to a local college. I'm now down to five fixed base operations; the two Illinois operations in Peoria and Kankakee, and the three Missouri operations in Sedalia, Joplin and my newly completed operation in Farmington. I now own sixteen radio stations in four states, and just bought a television station in Arkansas. Personally, I still haven't found Miss Right; I've pretty much suspended the search for my true love for now," I explained.

"I was tiring of the whole showgirl routine, Eric...five nights a week of dancing in high heels and wearing skimpy outfits just wasn't for me anymore. I had to fend off more than my fair share of drunken guys in the eleven years I was a showgirl. I wanted a more normal life; therefore, I decided to leave Las Vegas and move to Boston, where I studied for my real estate broker's license. I've been with a local realtor for just two weeks, and I made my first sale this week," she explained.

"I'm glad you've decided to take a more everyday type of career," I added.

"I heard you took a job at a women's clothing store, Barbara. How do you like it so far?" Heather asked her.

"I enjoy it thus far, Heather; I took the job because I really wanted to work a job as a woman. My boss understood my lifestyle, so she let me come to work wearing women's clothing. I work as a sales clerk; what I do is help balance the books, since I have a degree in accounting, help the ladies with their dress fittings, and model for the store's advertisements. We carry career wear, party and formal dresses and even bridal wear," Barbara replied.

Daphne then showed Oran's girlfriend to the table. She was a brunette-haired girl of twenty-one, five-foot-six, with a slender build and hair extending down to her shoulder blades. She was wearing a lipstick red party dress.

"You must be Eric Fletcher," she said, unsure of who I was.

"I'm Eric Fletcher," I said assuringly.

"My name is Raina Pyatt, Oran's girlfriend," she added.

"I'm Heather O'Leary, his cousin, and this is Barbara Valencia, Eric's niece," Heather added.

"A pleasure to meet you, Raina," Barbara added.

"How did you and Oran meet?" I asked her.

"We met at the beauty shop where I work. He was looking at several wigs for his act. I was struck by his handsome looks; he is so dashing and so gentle when he's in male attire. When he becomes Organza, he's an entirely different person. He does have the gentle personality when he's in drag, but he's also good at teasing both the guys and the gals when wearing a dress. He's very good friends with Daphne, the show director, who, unlike Oran, lives full-time as a woman," Raina explained.

"What attracted you to him?" Heather then asked.

"He isn't like other guys. All of the other guys I met prior to meeting Oran were basically jerks. I knew that he was different from all other guys, and not because of the fact that he wears a dress on the job. He's an incurable romantic. Every time we go out together, he would always buy a bouquet of flowers; the last time we went out together, he bought me a dozen roses. He really knows how to treat me like a lady; we've done so much together in the two years we've been going together," she then explained.

"What would you do if the two of you decided to get married?" Barbara asked.

"We plan to have a traditional wedding with our families in Danvers, where I'm from; then have a double-gown ceremony at a local nightclub," Raina replied.

After we finished that conversation, a tall, African-American girl named Brittany approached us. She was wearing a curve-hugging tiger print dress, black high heels and a gold necklace with a heart-shaped pendant. "What can I get you tonight?" she asked us.

"I'll have rum and water," Heather replied.

"May I see a wine list?" I asked her.

Brittany immediately produced a wine list. Barbara, Raina and I looked it over. I chose the red wine, while the girls chose the blush wine; all from vineyards in California. Brittany then sashayed toward the bar with our orders.

While we were waiting for our drinks, a lady of six-foot-four, wearing a blue dress, approached us, matching flats, a rhinestone necklace and earrings, and a birthstone ring on the ring finger of her left hand. This was no ordinary girl, but my cousin, Oran. The first person he went to was Raina.

"Hello, darling," he said to her.

"Hi, babe," she cooed.

He then sat down next to his girlfriend, and immediately noticed me. "It's good to see you again, Eric, after all these years," he told me.

"You look great, both as Oran and Organza," I added.

"Why, thank you," he said with a smile.

He then put his arm around Raina, while I asked him: "How well have you done as a female impersonator?"

"I've been doing quite well. Last year, I was voted the Most Stunning Female Impersonator in New England. I've been mainly doing shows and some modeling of fashions for the taller woman the last few years; I've been struggling to pay off my college debts for the last several years," he replied.

"Let me guess...you couldn't find a job," I added.

"I majored in mass communications with an emphasis on public relations in college. When I graduated five years ago, I went looking for a job with a public relations firm. I was searching for two years, during which time I worked as a short order cook, clothing salesman and a supermarket stocker. One night, I put on one of the dresses I had from a masquerade party I went to while I was in college, and I was stunned to find out I still fit in that dress. I went to an amateur night at a club in Atlanta, and it was there that I not only won the talent contest, but also got hired by a Boston club to perform in their show. I'm now at the point where I can pay off those debts inside of two years," he explained.

"I'll tell you one thing...mass communications is a very difficult field to break into," I then added before Daphne called him away to get ready for the show.

The show was nothing short of spectacular. It started with Daphne telling some of the bawdiest jokes I ever heard. Then, it followed with Organza lip-syncing to a song by Madonna. The shortest girl in the show, a five-four pre-op transsexual named Lori Love, did a dance routine to a song by the group Real McCoy. That was followed with an African-American named Lyrica Song, who lip-synced an African-American spiritual song. Daphne returned with more bawdy humor, followed by Organza, this time lip-syncing a song by Cathy Dennis. It was during a break in the show that Barbara told me that she had a surprise.

"What is it?" I asked her.

"Shhh! He's introducing her now," she whispered.

When the introduction was completed, Charo came out on stage, wearing a bridal gown. The only male member of the cast, Robert Michaels, accompanied her. They lip-synced a romantic duet; once it was over, Charo and Robert exchanged a smooch before the lights dimmed.

During the intermission between shows, I was able to pose for pictures with the cast. Charo was still in her bridal gown when she posed for photos with me. We all had a fun time that night; it was a shame it had to end. In all, I took enough pictures to fill a scrapbook, and then some.

When I returned to Barbara's apartment around two-thirty in the morning, I was exhausted, and so was Barbara. I went and changed into a pair of camouflage shorts and an olive drab green T-shirt, while Barbara changed into a sexy babydoll nightie. She sashayed out into the living room, and showed it to me. "That's very sexy, Barbara," I complimented.

"Thank you, dear uncle," she cooed before she sashayed off to bed.

The next afternoon, I went to lunch with George and Brenda; they had some news of their own to tell me. "While you and Barbara were out at the club last night, Brenda and I went to a very intimate restaurant on the Cape. We made a decision on our future while we were there," George said while we were waiting for our meals.

"What did you decide?" I asked them.

"Look on my finger," Brenda clued me.

"It's beautiful," I complimented.

"George and I are getting married this fall. We haven't selected the place where we plan to tie the knot yet, but we have also decided in favor of also doing a double-gown ceremony when we get back from our honeymoon," Brenda added.

"Where do you plan on having that one?" I asked with a dash of sarcasm.

"We plan to have the double-gown ceremony with the local gender support group," George replied.

The last day of my trip to Boston was spent with Heather; we went shopping for new clothes. I needed a few new suits; she bought several new dresses. After resting the night at Barbara's apartment, I was all ready for my train trip to New York to visit relatives there. I left Boston at eight o'clock in the morning, headed for New York's Grand Central Station.

Second Stop: New York

My train arrived at Grand Central Station around eleven-thirty on the morning of June 20, 1998. Waiting to meet me there was my cousin, Shauna. Five-foot-eight, with shoulder-length chestnut brown hair and average build, she was wearing a pair of blue jeans and a white blouse. We hugged each other, before she asked me: "What brings you to the Big Apple, Eric?"

"I'm visiting all of my transgendered relatives on this trip," I replied.

"How's everyone in Boston?" she asked just as we began our walk toward the street.

"Barbara has just started working at a women's apparel shop; she's living full-time as a woman now. George finally popped the question to Brenda three days ago; they plan to get married in the fall; they are planning a second ceremony where he will dress as Gabrielle. Heather has just sold her first home as a real estate broker, after eleven years as a showgirl, and Oran's still working as a female impersonator while trying to pay off his college loans," I replied.

"I'd take it Oran has a girlfriend now," she added.

"He's been dating Raina Pyatt, a beautician, for the last two years. They met at the beauty shop where she works; Oran was there looking at wigs for his female impersonator act. The two hit it off immediately; she's attracted to his gentleness and sense of romance. She's the best thing that happened to him," I then added.

When we came to the street, Shauna hailed a taxi. We got into one of the Yellow Cabs, where I loaded my bags into the trunk. Shauna gave the driver an address in Greenwich Village, where she was living. I got into the back seat with her.

"What are you doing these days?" I asked her.

"I'm now a stock broker for a Wall Street firm; I'm making good money there. After I got my degree in accounting, I realized that I should wait to search for work until after I had my surgery. I also went for my stockbroker's license while I was recovering, and passed the exam on the first try. I share my apartment with Travis, my boyfriend. He's a clerk for a law firm on Long Island; we've been together for four years now," she replied.

"Are you considering marrying him?" I asked her.

"I have considered it; yet, he hasn't popped the question," she replied.

"I ended another relationship about two months ago; it hasn't been easy since Kara and I split five years ago," I added.

When we arrived at her apartment, Shauna guided me up to her apartment. Three of my transgendered relatives from the New York area: my cousins Christie, Jessica and Virgil; the latter dressed as Vanessa. Brianne accompanied Virgil/Vanessa. Christie was wearing a red sleeveless dress; Jessica was wearing a blue skirt, matching jacket and a white blouse, Vanessa wearing a blue dress, and Brianne in a pair of navy blue slacks and a white blouse. The other two transgendered relatives in the New York area, cousins Quentin and Olivia, were not able to make it; Quentin did a show the previous night, while Olivia was at a photo shoot in Manhattan.

The first one who greeted me was Christie. "Let me look at you, Eric," she said, as if she hadn't seen me in ages. "I'd like a look at you, too," I added, looking at her, wearing a plaid skirt and a white blouse. I studied her for a moment, before complimenting her on her feminine beauty. "Why, thank you, Eric," she said, her facial expression showing an indication she was blushing.

"How's your transition coming along?" I asked her.

"It's coming along great; the only thing I'm awaiting now is approval for a sex-change operation," she replied.

"I'm not looking at surgery for the foreseeable future," Jessica added.

"How's life been treating you, Jessica?" I asked her.

"It's been treating me okay. Business has been fairly brisk the last three months; I had just come back from Italy, where I picked up several paintings at starving artists' sales. They're for sale at a gallery in midtown Manhattan. I haven't had much luck finding a good man, however," she replied.

"It's very difficult for a woman like you to find a man who loves you for the woman you've become," I added before we sat down.

"It's not just my transsexual nature that keeps many men away. It's also that I have such high standards for the men I date. I prefer someone who is muscular, has lots of money, and keeps himself in shape. Most of the single men in New York who understand what I've been through don't usually fit that description. They're either on the heavy side, like you, or in a lower socio-economic class than me. I still hope that the man of my dreams will come, but I'm not holding my breath on it," she lamented.

"It would help you if you lowered your standards a bit. Open your mind up to dating heavier men like me, as well as men who are even in a slightly lower socio-economic class than you. Many of the men you're looking for are more interested in women who were actually born female. You'll find that heavier men, along with less affluent men, have had somewhat similar experiences to what you've had, as far as dating is concerned. There may be one big guy who would be honored to have a girl like you on his arm. Trust me, Jessica. Open up your mind; you'll be a better person for it," I assured her.

"Maybe that's what I'm doing wrong," she told me, as if she was admitting defeat.

"I've been after unattainable women myself, Jessica...however, most of the women I have been after in recent years were closer to my age. Kara was four and a half years my junior; I left her because there were simply too many problems in her family. The women I had been dating were more interested in finding someone who was muscular, wealthier than I am, and marrying into families of higher status in society than ours. I had to open my mind up as well; the first girl I dated after I broke up with her was a transsexual. I only dated her a few times, before she found someone else. The longest time I have been in a relationship in the last five years has been six months. So, I've had just as tough of a time finding true love than you have had. You're not alone," I said reassuringly.

"Thanks, Eric," she whispered before kissing me on the cheek.

Jessica then sat down on the loveseat to talk about her transition with Christie, while Vanessa and Brianne pulled up their chairs. "How has everything been with you?" I asked them.

"I've been doing great. Brianne and I are about to open a bridal shop in Greenwich Village; it will be transgender-friendly. I'll be able to model both tuxedos and bridal gowns for the larger woman. We've been looking forward to opening this business ever since we met two years ago," Vanessa replied.

"From the beginning, I've learned to love both Virgil and Vanessa. When I was growing up, I had an uncle who worked as a female impersonator in Los Angeles. My aunt was very understanding of his work; he also modeled both men's and women's fashions on the

side. They owned a dress shop in West Hollywood for years, before they retired in 1982," Brianne added.

"Which one is prettier?" I asked her.

"Well...I think Vanessa is prettier," Brianne giggled.

"Don't you think I'm handsome as a guy?" Vanessa asked.

"You're also a handsome guy," Brianne replied before sharing a laugh and a kiss.

The get-together broke up before five o'clock. Shauna wanted me to meet Travis. "I'm fixing him something special for dinner tonight," she informed me.

"What are you planning to prepare?" I asked her.

"His favorite; meat loaf," she replied.

Around six o'clock, Travis walked in the door. He was six feet tall, with a slender, but athletic, build, light brown hair, and wearing a navy blue suit. He had a long day on the job. He walked in with a bouquet of flowers for his beloved Shauna.

"Hi, honey," she whispered.

"Hello, sweetie," he whispered before they exchanged a kiss. He gave her the flowers.

"They're beautiful! Thank you, baby," she cooed before kissing him again. I walked to the cupboard to get a vase for the flowers, and fill it half way with water. Travis then walked toward me.

"You must be Eric. I've heard a lot about you from Shauna," he said.

"I've also heard a lot about you from Shauna. You picked yourself a winner," I added.

"I think so," he then added.

I helped Shauna set up the table for dinner, while Travis went to the master bedroom to change into something more comfortable. We finished setting the table by the time he emerged, wearing a gray golf shirt, a pair of khaki pants and a pair of brown loafers. He was surprised at what Shauna prepared for him.

"It smells delicious, darling," he whispered.

"It's time that someone other than you found out how good my meat loaf really is," she cooed before kissing him.

While having dinner, I asked them how they met. "It was four years ago, just before I had my operation. We were in an American History class together; we spent the first few months studying together and going out for lunch every once in a while. When he wanted to get more serious, I told him that I was transsexual and I was preparing to undergo a sex-change operation. Travis was very sweet about it; he loved me as the woman I had become. He was with me when I had my surgery in Montreal, and he was the first man I made love to as a woman. We've been living together for the last year and a half," she replied.

"Before I met Shauna, I had never met a woman as loving, romantic and feminine as she. It was just before we graduated from college that she told me about herself; I assured her that it didn't matter to me what she was or what happened to her in the past. I told her

that she was the most beautiful woman in the world to me, and I loved her for the woman she had become. Four years later, I'm still madly in love with her. I look forward to spending the rest of my life with her," he added.

"What were the other girls like...I mean, the ones you dated before you met Shauna?" I asked him.

"They weren't very friendly; many had no sense of romantic adventure, some weren't very loving at all, while others weren't very feminine at all. They were absolute nightmares. I was looking for someone different, and I found that girl in Shauna," he replied.

"That's sweet of you to say that," she added.

I took an extra room at their apartment for the night. Before turning in, I set up my laptop on the desk, and wrote my impressions into my electronic diary before plugging into an Internet connection to get my E-mail. I then got into bed with a good comic collection. Shauna checked in on me before I went to bed. She had changed into a red negligee and matching nightgown.

"Are you comfortable, Eric?" she asked me.

"I'm comfortable, thank you," I replied.

"What are you planning to do tomorrow?" she asked me.

"Olivia has another photo shoot in Manhattan; this time, Quentin will be taking part. He'll be in both male and female attire," I replied.

The next morning, I went down to the photography studio where Olivia and Quentin were having their photo shoot. They were doing a spread for a bridal magazine; the morning shoot involved Olivia as a bride and Quentin as a groom. Olivia was five-eight, with long, strawberry blonde hair, slender build and fashion model looks. Quentin was five-nine, with short, medium brown hair, slender build and a look that came right out of the pages of a men's magazine. I arrived about eleven-thirty, just as they were breaking for lunch. I brought them a salad and a bottle of lemonade; I also got myself four pieces of fried chicken.

"What brings you to New York?" Olivia asked.

"I'm visiting all of my transgendered relatives on vacation," I replied.

"Are you staying in a hotel?" Quentin asked.

"I'm staying with Shauna and Travis," I then replied.

After we ate our lunch, a makeup artist arrived. Her name was Kari; she was a tall, red-haired girl who looked no older than twenty. "Would you like to see Quentin transformed into Jayne for the second half of this photo shoot?" she asked me.

"I would love that," I replied.

I was taken into his dressing room, where he changed from male attire into female prosthetics. He put on a pair of life-like breasts and a prosthetic vagina; he covered them up with a pink strapless bra and a pair of pink bikini panties. Kari then applied beard cover, foundation, blush, eye shadow, mascara, lipstick and lip-gloss. She asked me to hand a lavender bridesmaid's gown to Jayne; she was able to get into it with no problem.

She also gave her a pair of pearl drop earrings, a pearl necklace and two pearl bracelets. Topping the look was a shoulder-length, platinum blonde wig.

They did their afternoon shoot as two girls; Jayne started with the lavender gown, with a bow tie in back and a skirt that extended to the floor. Olivia wore a white, mermaid-style bridal gown. After an hour doing photos in these dresses, Olivia changed into another bridal gown, this one a sleeveless design with a cathedral-length train. Jayne changed into a pink bridesmaid's gown, again with a skirt extending to the floor. They switched roles for the last two rounds of the shoot; Jayne wearing a pink bridal gown with puffed sleeves, lace bodice and a cathedral-length train, followed by a long-sleeved design with the same-length train. Olivia was first in a baby blue bridesmaid's dress, then in a red, sleeveless bridesmaid's gown.

That night, Shauna and Travis invited Quentin and his wife, Lynne, over. Lynne was also five-nine, with long, blonde hair and a slender build, like her husband. I decided to take Olivia to dinner at a nearby restaurant.

"How has life been treating you, Liv?" I asked her.

"It's been treating me very well. I've been asked to join Virgil and Brianne in their business; since I know the transgender community of New York quite well, they thought I would be a natural for their new venture," she replied.

"I'm sure that they will have a large clientele among the transgender community of New York," I added.

"I'm feeling more and more comfortable living and dressing full-time as Olivia; I'm not sure if I'm a gay transvestite or a straight woman. I'm feeling more and more that I am really a transsexual," she added.

"Are you exploring these feelings with your therapist?" I then asked.

"I've been exploring these feelings with my therapist for the last year. The more I explore these feelings, the more I'm beginning to realize that I really should have been a girl. I've always liked guys, but I have always felt that it is more appropriate to express these desires in the role of a woman. To express these desires meant assimilating into the world of women: learning how to apply makeup, wearing the latest female fashions, having my ears pierced, growing my hair longer and having it styled in a feminine manner. One of the easiest things I've learned is to flirt with and tease the guys; I'm quite a tease," she explained.

"Have you dated a man?" I inquired.

"I've dated several men; some are nice guys, like you, while others are real jerks. I've only dated one man more than once; we went out on several dates before he was transferred back to Los Angeles," she replied.

"Olivia, if having a sex change is really what you want, I'll be behind you all the way," I added before our meals were delivered.

Olivia and I took in a female impersonator show in Greenwich Village later in the evening, before she took me back to her apartment around midnight. She lived in the same building as Shauna and Travis. "Won't you come in?" she asked me.