



Reluctant Press presents:

Climbing The Corporate Ladder



Louise Paynter

AN 'ADULT TV' E-BOOK

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CLIMBING THE CORPORATE LADDER

by Louise Paynter

I've always been ambitious. All the way through school and University and throughout my working life, I've always been prepared to sacrifice everything in order to reach the goals I set for myself. I've always worked hard to get the top grades in school and I have never let my social life take up too much of my time. In college I didn't join the big social societies or the sports clubs as they would have taken up too much of my study time.

Instead I joined a couple of smaller societies and restricted my social activities so that I could concentrate on getting the first class degree I eventually obtained. Not that I was a loner at all; I had lots of friends but was always conscious of needing to keep working hard. That work ethic has remained with me in my current job. I've worked hard and have progressed well in my career. Now, though, I've reached a point where I need to make the biggest decision of my life. How far am I prepared to go to achieve my ambition to reach the top of the ladder within my company? Am I prepared to make every sacrifice to achieve all I have always dreamt about? Let me tell you about my life to date and how I've reached this momentous decision point.

At University I got a first class Honours degree in Economics. I decided that, when I left, I wanted to work in the financial services industry in the City of London. However, I had my own ethical standards as well as wanting a good career with a generous financial remuneration. Therefore, I didn't want to work for one of those aggressive companies that cares little about their customers in the pursuit of profit. I attended lots of interviews and got short-listed several times, but no company seemed to meet my vision of the perfect place to work that wouldn't compromise my principles. Some of my prospective employers were obviously concerned about taking on a new employee with such high-minded ideals.

Eventually I joined a little-known but well-respected financial institution. It was fairly unique in that the CEO and the majority of the board were women, as were a lot of the senior management. The company prided itself on a female approach to business, avoiding the testosterone-fueled excesses of behaviour that

caused the global credit crunch we all experienced a few years ago. They took as their model an Icelandic bank run by women which survived the credit crunch, whereas most of the other mainstream banks in Iceland suffered meltdown.

I wasn't particularly concerned about the female majority within the company as I felt that I could shine in any situation, and their ethics seemed to fit with my own standards. As well as a good moral stance, they had excellent staff relations, a low staff turnover, and were based in smart offices in the City, which had a gym, sauna, unisex hairdressers and a beauty salon in the basement of the office block. And they paid well. Very well.

I settled in quickly and really enjoyed the job. The company seemed to live up to my expectations and I received lots of training and encouragement in my work, as well as being given a lot of responsibility in handling client accounts.

Two years after starting work, I had my annual review with my manager. "Jerry, we're very pleased with your progress to date and we think that you've got great potential to progress to the highest levels in this company. I'm putting your name forward to join our high flyer fast-track management training programme which will be starting in the New Year. The programme will run over the next three years with regular assignments to complete. In addition, there will be a series of workshops, team exercises, lectures from industry leaders and practical experience with a couple of adventure-style weekends thrown in. The course participants have been carefully chosen from across the whole company from the best young people we have working with us."

“Wow, I’m really grateful that my hard work and efforts have been recognized. I’m sure I’ll do my best throughout the programme. Thanks for the vote of confidence in me.”

“You’re welcome, but you got the nomination through your own efforts. There is also one other programme for you to attend in parallel with the management course.”

“Another programme? Will I have any time for work?”

“Of course. This other programme is a bit special and is only run for the male participants on the main course.”

“That’s a bit sexist, isn’t it?”

“Well, you could look at it that way but we recognize that it is sometimes difficult for our male managers to understand the female psyche that runs through our company from the top down, so we have designed a five-stage course to give all you men some extra orientation about the female world. I’m sure you’ll enjoy it. You know, it might even be life-changing,” my boss said, smiling.

The first course of the main programme was held on a Thursday and Friday in mid-January at a posh country hotel that had an annex housing a conference centre. It was hard work with lectures and seminar groups and exercises from breakfast time until dinner in the evening, plus some after-dinner presentations. We were all a bit shattered when we got back to work on Monday morning, but it had been a worthwhile course. I was looking forward to the rest of the programme over the next couple of years.

The first men's course was held a couple of weeks later at the same country hotel. I was curious to see what it was going to be about. On the Wednesday evening, we gathered in a conference room to meet our course tutors and for a short introductory talk about the two-day course before dinner. The lead tutor talked about team building and reducing the natural element of male macho-driven competitiveness that sometimes gets in the way of clear decision-making. That sounded reasonable and we asked a few questions about how they would achieve that, but didn't get any really clear answers. I hoped that it wouldn't be a psychological brainwashing type of exercise. She assured us it would not be that; it would be opening up a side of our personalities that was normally hidden. Most importantly, the course would be fun.

At the end of the introductory talk, the tutor told us that our numbers might reduce as the course progressed because people might want to drop out, or would not be considered suitable to continue further. This was not to be considered a failure as the full course would not suit everyone; individuals would benefit from the elements of the course they had experienced up to the point that they dropped out. It was also stressed that the course was non-competitive, there were no winners or losers. The company would be quite happy if all sixteen of us continued through until the end, or if none of us completed the full course.

The lead tutor then explained that they wanted to make sure that everyone was equal throughout the course and that we suppressed our individual traits. Therefore the course tutors had decided that all of us, including the tutors, would wear the same clothes; we would all wear a course uniform. We were given a small holdall and told to go and change into it before

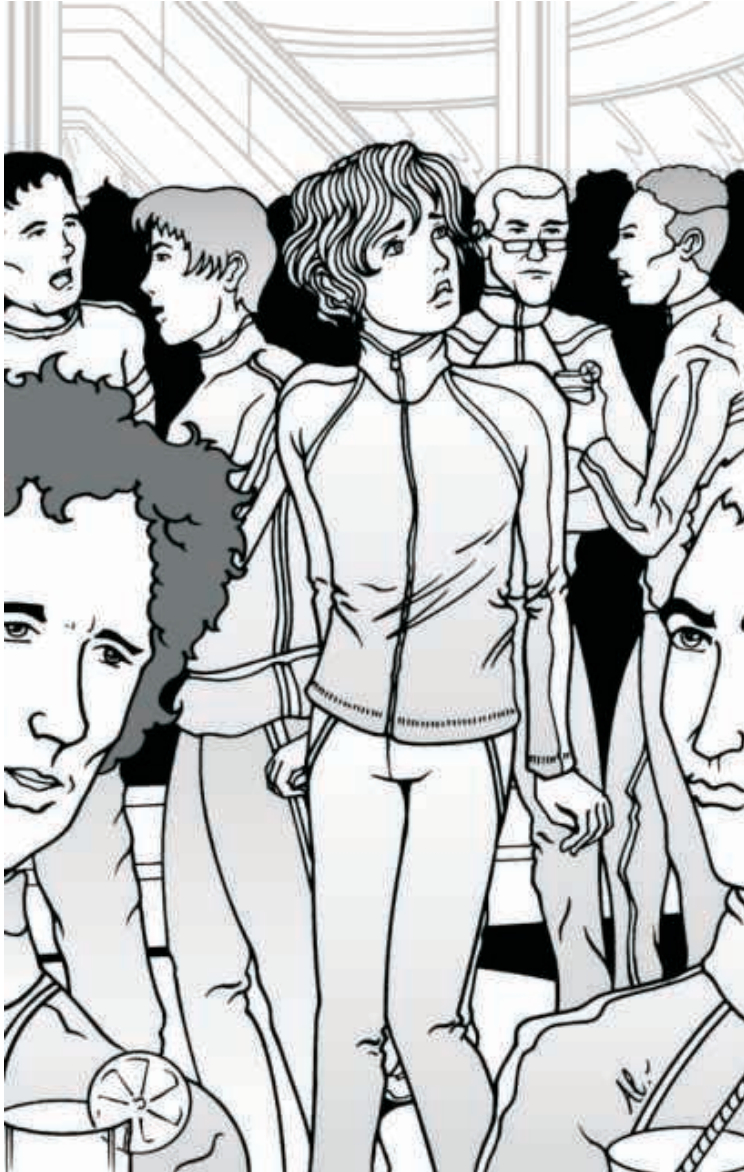
dinner that evening. I went up to my bedroom and opened the holdall. Inside there was a tracksuit and white trainers. The tracksuit was OK, but the colour was a delicate pastel pink. I thought this was some kind of silly joke, but there didn't seem to be any other option, so I shed my normal clothes and put on the tracksuit.

Fortunately our bedrooms were next to the conference suite annex and we would be taking all our meals in the annex facilities. I didn't have to dodge any other guests as I made my way to the bar where I joined fifteen other guys before dinner, all of us looking a bit sheepish in our tracksuits, some in lavender blue, some in primrose and some in an eau-de-nil colour, along with some in the same pastel pink colour as me.

The rest of the course passed without any other surprises and we had sessions on teamwork, the female approach to business, and the caring nature of management. We had several very lively sessions when we were split into three groups to discuss particular issues.

One of the guys got very heated as he argued that he was quite entitled to strive to maximize his own salary, provided, of course, that it wasn't to the detriment of the company. Another attendee declared that salary was very important but it was even more important to be seen to be earning more than his peer group inside and outside the company. He would do anything to achieve that. We had some difficult ethical problems to discuss about misrepresenting financial products and the profit motive of our business, but the session was also very enjoyable. The main message seemed to be that men are genetically programmed to be hunters so they tend to be aggressive and competitive which makes the working environment a difficult and vicious

place to be, with each individual working for their own benefit. Females, on the other hand, are more conservative and are genetically programmed to create a family unit which works together for the good of all.



The object of the whole programme was to encourage the female approach to working together and creating a family type of business instead of an organization of alpha-males working for themselves, often to the detriment of the overall organization. However it was stressed that they didn't want to suppress the male characteristics of competitiveness in the business area; we needed to stay focused on maintaining and improving our company's position relative to our competitors.

Although it all sounded complicated and a bit strange, I could follow their arguments which were backed up by a lot of evidence of good practice in our own company and in other businesses. I found all of this quite interesting and thought-provoking but some of my colleagues were less impressed and were not comfortable at all. I don't know if it was the odd choice of clothing we had been given to wear or the programme content, but some of the other guys present had a few arguments with the tutors. At the end of Sunday, I was no longer self-conscious about the pink tracksuit. In fact, I even thought the colour suited me. A bit.

A few days after the course, my manager called me in for a post-course review. "Jerry, you did well at the weekend. I'm pleased to tell you that you've been selected to move through to the next stage. I've got a reading list for you to look at before the next course. I suggest that to keep you in the right frame of mind when you're doing that at home, you should wear your course uniform."

"Do you think that's really essential or even useful?" I asked.

"Oh yes, absolutely. You must allow your mind to think in a feminine manner. The pink colour will sup-

press your natural male thought processes and remind you of the aura of learning you had on the course.”

So she knew about the pink tracksuit. That was OK just so long as the story didn’t get out through the office, I thought.

“And I think that you could do with using the gym to improve your fitness and health and to lose a few pounds. I’ll talk to the gym managers; they’ll put together an exercise programme that will suit you. We just want to get you fit, not turn you into a bodybuilder,” she laughed.

“Thanks, that sounds great.” I felt that I’d made a good impression. I was also pleased that my managers were so interested in my future career, and that I had started on the career progression track. I had to admit, though, that the first stages of the programme did seem a bit odd and I didn’t know where things were going for the next four stages.

One month later, the joining instructions for the second course arrived in my post. The course would be held on a Thursday and Friday at the same hotel as last time and we were asked to bring our tracksuits from the first course. Oh well, it’ll be another two days sitting around looking silly in pink, I thought. I was fairly neutral about the idea, it didn’t matter too much what I wore in the privacy of the course and I was willing to go along with it if necessary. Interestingly, there were only ten addressees on the mailing list so six of the guys had apparently been deselected or had dropped out.

As before, we met in the conference room for a briefing by the lead tutor on the Wednesday evening. “Welcome guys, I’m pleased to see that there weren’t too many dropping out from the first course. We’re go-

ing to have a thought-provoking two days ahead of us and we will be building on from our previous weekend. The objective of this stage of the programme is to get in touch with, and understand, your feminine sides."

There were a few ribald comments from some of the guys and a general sense of shock or disbelief from us all. What had all this got to do with management? The tutor had anticipated this mood and quickly said, "it's not about the nuts and bolts of management. You'll learn that in the main programme. This programme for guys only is all about management style. We want you to learn how women managers may operate because of their female outlook on life. There's going to be a bit of role-play throughout the weekend; you'll be glad to know that you won't have to wear the tracksuits, unless you really want to.

"Instead we've got several sets of clothes that you can choose from to wear throughout the weekend. They are in the small suitcases on the table by the door. Make sure you pick up the case with your name on as you leave. You'll need to change into something appropriate for dinner at seven o'clock."

The briefing session then turned to general instructions for the course, but the tutors wouldn't reveal the course programme or talk about what we were going to do. "We'll give you the full details tomorrow after breakfast," was all they would say.

As I carried my case upstairs, I thought, maybe it would be another tracksuit. I hoped it would be a different colour. Upon opening the case in my bedroom, I was surprised to find there wasn't another tracksuit, but there were two pairs of ladies trousers, flat pumps, two ladies blouses and sweaters for day-wear, and two

sets of trousers, silk shirt/blouses and flat satin pumps for evening. This was getting a bit weird. I went out of my bedroom and knocked on my friend Garry's door just along the corridor. "Have you got the same things in your suitcase as I've got in mine?" I asked. "What on earth is going on?"

"Haven't got a clue, mate. They must be joking if they think I'm going to wear those clothes."

There were several others in the corridor now who had heard us talking and came out to join us. Several of them were like Garry and couldn't imagine wearing ladies clothes for the weekend. At the other end of the spectrum, I noticed that Kevin was looking pleased with himself and said that he didn't mind at all. I had always suspected that he was a bit queer and this proved it.

"Let's calm down and think this through rationally," said Andrew eventually. "If we don't go along with the instructions we've been given, the only option is drop out completely. I think that we've got to do as we've been told and see what happens. If it's a load of old cobblers, then we can jack it in on Friday and tell them what to do with their stuff. But if it works out alright, then we haven't wasted an opportunity. At worst, all we will do is lose a couple of days of our time. We're all in this together so it won't be too embarrassing."

"I'll go along with that," said Charles. "If we don't stay here, we'll have to go back to work, so I might as well stay and be well fed, even if it does mean wearing these silly clothes."

After some further discussion and argument, everyone agreed to Andrew's suggestion. "Let's all agree to a vow of silence. None of this gets out to colleagues

back at work or we'll never hear the end of it," said Bill. There was rapid and full agreement to this. No one wanted this course to be the subject of office gossip around the water cooler.

We went back to our rooms and I examined the items in my suitcase a bit more closely as I hung them up in the wardrobe. What would go together best for the evening? Are they expecting me to co-ordinate things? Is this some sort of test to see if we can coordinate the clothing in some way? This was difficult as I never normally thought about what I was wearing, often just putting on what came to hand first. After trying a few things together on the bed, I chose a pair of black trousers in a soft fabric, a wide black belt and a plain ivory blouse with some fine, ivory embroidery on the front.

On my feet I put a pair of black velvet pumps with a few beads embroidered on the fronts. I was pleasantly surprised at how soft and delicate the fabrics felt. They were so unlike my own thicker and rougher clothes. The trousers were cut quite tightly around my bottom but draped down into wide legs that flowed with my movements as I walked. It was a completely different experience of wearing trousers, absolutely nothing like wearing my own clothes, and I rather enjoyed the feel of them.

I went down to the bar, thinking that I needed a stiff drink before dinner and wondering how my fellow students would be feeling. Most of us were looking a bit confused, not with the weird setup of the course, but with their own feelings, which seemed to be just the same as mine. But we had all decided to play along with the instructions and to see what happened. Although we were all wearing women's clothing, we still

looked and behaved like men. Everyone was drinking pints of beers and there was no mincing around or ordering tonic water or white wine to drink.

The course was a very strange mixture of topics ranging from discussion sessions on female value sets and attitudes in business and social environments to workshop sessions on traditional female pursuits or interests such as flower arranging and embroidery. The discussion sessions were good and for the first time, I realised that I was very narrow in my social skills. I could enlarge them by taking other people's needs and ideas on board better. I thought that was something I could practice doing when I got back to work next week.

I had never done any flower arranging before but I found it a lot of fun playing around with different colours and shapes and trying to make a pleasing arrangement out of them. I had never thought about being creative in an artistic sense before and this was very enlightening for me.

The scariest part of the course was a long individual interview with two psychologists who asked loads of probing questions to find out about my personal attitudes to life, my career aspirations and commitment to attaining my career goals. They also asked a lot of personal questions about my sexual preferences and experiences, and about what male/female characteristics and attitudes I had. We also had a talk from a beautician about general grooming, which included skin care recommendations and hair care tips, so it was a pretty wide-ranging weekend. I had gotten over my initial resistance to wearing my course clothes; by Friday lunch-time, I was very comfortable in them as if I had been wearing them forever.

On Friday afternoon, we had the course review with the lead tutor. Apparently we had all done well and had displayed the right attitude and learning skills to progress to the next stage of the programme. She told us that she had decided to take eight of us onto the next stage and she read out our names. Garry and Charles were the two missing from the list. They left us with a cheery wave and, I think, a sigh of relief that they had gotten out so easily. After they had gone, Bill and George stood up and said that they had decided that they didn't want to proceed onto the next stage for personal reasons. That left only six of us remaining in the room: Andrew, Kevin, Peter, Ken, Harry and me.

"That's fully understandable, we would expect to find some students uncomfortable with what we are doing, although I sure that they will have learnt a lot about themselves as well as about the course content, so their time has not been wasted," commented the tutor. "Now, let's discuss what you all need to do before the next stage. Your clothes from the weekend here are yours to keep. I suggest that you wear them at home to continue to get closer to your feminine side. Try out some of the techniques you've learnt about in your work situation, maybe even try to do some flower arranging, or think of something else that you'd like to do that is not male gender-specific. Most of all, enjoy being the new you who can encompass the female and male aspects of life."

On the Tuesday of the following week, my manager asked me in for a chat about the course. "I've had some very good feedback from the course about you," she said. "The learning and practical sessions were fine. On top of that, the report back from the shrinks was highly positive, so it looks like you're all set for the next stage."

That sounded good, but I was a bit worried about what the psychologists had said. I never did trust these questioning sessions but as long as they were happy, then I would be too.

“As a follow-up to the grooming session on the course, I have arranged for you to have regular appointments with the health and beauty club downstairs to ensure that your personal grooming is top notch and your personal appearance is as good as your work performance.”

That sounded pretty good to me, especially when I realised that the company would foot the bill for the visits. It was a very smart salon. I had never been in there before but I found the girls very friendly. It was so much easier to get my haircut there rather than rushing around at a weekend. On my second visit, they persuaded me to have a facial and a manicure, which was so good I made a regular appointment to keep my nails and hands looking smart. The hair stylists recommended I wear my hair a little longer and with a slightly layered style. To be honest, I had never thought much about hairstyles before so this discussion was in new territory for me, but I could imagine what they were proposing and it sounded good so we did this as well.

About this time, I was given a small promotion to a team leader role in a different department. I was extremely pleased about it, as I was keen to take on more responsibility. After two weeks in the new job, my new manager invited me round for supper at her house in order for us to get to know each other better. She had asked me to wear my course clothes so I wore the same set as I had worn on the first night. It was the first time that I had been outside of the house with them on, but

it was only a quick dash from my flat to the car then into her house so I wouldn't be seen by anyone, especially as I was wearing a long overcoat as well.

The evening went very well as she was good company, but at times it felt more like an interview than a general chat as she asked me long strings of questions about my attitudes to working with women in work-place, and about my personal and sexual life. It felt like the interview with the two psychologists on the last course, but in a slightly friendlier environment. Certainly the influence of a couple of glasses of wine and her friendly personality made me talk a little more freely about my personal life than I intended.

I told her that I have had several relationships in the past but they had never lasted long as I had never managed to find the full commitment to take it further. That doesn't mean that I don't like women. Quite the opposite, I adore them and have always been entranced by their innate beauty, their beautiful bodies, their smooth, soft skin and their wonderful long hair. I confessed that I had always been jealous of their ability to wear lovely clothes in so many different styles and colours compared to the rather drab clothes that men normally wear. I think that she thought this all rather intriguing as she nodded her head in approval when I was explaining it to her. "I think you're going to enjoy the next stage very much," she said, as she wished me goodnight at the end of a pleasant evening.

Course Three came along in two months' time and was held in a different venue from the two previous courses. My good friend Peter and I drove down together on a Tuesday evening, as this course was to be three full days. As he drove up the drive lined by neatly clipped yew trees to the hotel, we both gave a

gasp of amazement. The hotel was a very grand old country house with vines growing up the outside walls, magnificent gardens and rose beds in front and a pergola festooned with wisteria all around the car parking area. Judging by the quality of the other cars in the car park, this was a very classy location. "Do you think we've come to the wrong hotel?" asked Peter.

"I think this is the place. At least this is what it says in our joining instructions. What bothers me is that this looks like a very popular and exclusive hotel. It will be full of other people. I hope they have a secluded area for conference rooms like the last place did, so that we don't have to appear in public."

I was especially worried because we had been told to bring our clothes from both Courses One and Two with us. We were to change into the Course Two clothes at the hotel in time for dinner. After the traumas of the last course, that seemed quite acceptable by now, especially as I had gotten used to wearing them at home in the evening. When we all met in the private bar for a pre-dinner drink, no one seemed to be particularly upset or nervous, although I think we were all glad that we seemed to be away from the general part of the hotel and all the other guests. In fact, I was looking forward in to finding out about the course as we hadn't been given any running order for the events.

After dinner, we adjourned to the conference room and sat round a boardroom table to listen to the course leader. "Good evening, gentlemen. I'm glad to welcome you to Stage Three of the course, which is the key stage in developing your understanding of the woman's point of view in our society. You've listened to the lectures and you've tried your hand at different female-oriented pursuits, but do you actually know

what it is like to be a woman? Do you understand how society treats people differently depending on what they look like, whether they are tall or small, whether they are white or coloured, whether they are able-bodied or disabled? And most importantly for us, whether they are male or female?"

We must have looked a bit puzzled as she continued, "in order to understand how women view the world, you need to appreciate how the world seems from a woman's perspective, thus you need to appreciate what it is like to be a woman in the real world. Therefore the whole course, from tomorrow morning, Wednesday, until teatime on Friday will be a role play in which you will be fully dressed as ladies all the time, and you will learn how to behave as ladies. During the weekend, there will be carefully controlled and safe sessions when you will be exposed to real world situations and will be expected to act as a woman at all times. Now I'm sure you've all got lots of questions and comments. Who'd like to go first?"

There was a stunned silence as the full implications sunk in for us. Then there was a general hubbub of questions and cries of "not likely" or "over my dead body." Several guys said they didn't look like ladies and couldn't possibly look like one.

"Nonsense," said the course leader, "you have all been vetted for the inherent facial features that can be made to look feminine and each of you has been assigned a personal tutor for the weekend to help you. We have full use of the hotel's well-appointed spa and beauty salons. I am sure that we can guarantee that you will look and feel like a group of very glamorous ladies by tomorrow evening. And then the fun can begin."

I wondered what she meant by that, but I was too dumbstruck by what we had been told to think about anything. There were lots of questions asked and protestations that it wouldn't work but I was quietly thinking it might actually be good fun. At least it would be a different experience. The course leader wouldn't take any excuses from us to change the course and she brought the meeting to a close with one final instruction. "Your homework for the evening is to choose a female name to be used for the rest of the course. Goodnight ladies, don't stay up too late in the bar. We've got an early start in the morning."

The talk in the bar was naturally about the odd situation we had found ourselves in and what we were going to do. We all agreed that this was the oddest course we'd ever heard of, but we had no real options other than to play along with it. So we all eventually retired to our rooms, wondering what on earth was in store for us tomorrow.

When I got back to my room, I could see that the maid had been in to turn back the bed. But someone else had also been in, as my male clothes had been packed away and there was a full-length silk nightdress laid out on the bed. It was black with a low neckline with lace around it and over the cap sleeves. This was no doubt designed to put me in the right frame of mind to be a woman for the weekend. I had to admit that it was working as I held the nightdress up in front of me and looked at my reflection in the wardrobe mirror. The next surprise came when I looked in the wardrobe and found several dresses and other ladies clothes hanging on the rails, several pairs of shoes on the floor of the wardrobe, and female underwear in the chest of drawers. This was certainly looking serious, but I was getting a little excited by the prospect of the next few

days. Anyway it would be just for the course and then we could get back to normal on Monday at work, I thought.

We had been told to meet at the Spa for breakfast at eight o'clock and to just wear our tracksuits, so the pink tracksuit came out of the case and I put it on for the first time in months. I remembered the first time I had worn it and how embarrassing it felt. Now, however, it seemed to be fairly ordinary. I considered that it was going to be very ordinary compared to what I might be wearing later that day. When I got down to the Spa, our breakfast was set up in the small refreshments area.

The course leader and three of the other guys were already there and Harry joined us a few minutes after me. Ken didn't appear. The course leader told us that he had talked to her earlier in the morning and had decided not to continue with the course for personal reasons. Our personal tutors arrived after breakfast, and we all introduced ourselves using our new female names. I had decided that I would like to be called Deborah, and my tutor introduced herself as Chloe.

Our course leader talked us through the programme for the day. "You'll have heard female colleagues talking about going on a Pamper Day at spa hotels and how they enjoyed it. Well, here's your chance to have the same experience and a few extra things as we've got a bit more work to do with you to get you looking good."

That sounded like a nice relaxing day of just lazing around but straight away we were led into the first session, which was a full body wax. I've seen news clips of men having this done to them for charity events, and they all try to look brave as if it only hurts a little bit.

Believe me, it hurts a lot, especially when it gets round to the very sensitive bits. But as the lady doing the waxing said, "You've got to suffer to look beautiful."

"That's the most painful bit over," said Chloe when she came to collect me after the waxing. She handed me a luxuriously soft and fluffy dressing gown to wear instead of the tracksuit. "I don't know why they made you wear that this morning. This is much more feminine looking for you. Now I suggest that you have a relaxing shower, then join the others in the jacuzzi."

We had a good soak and swapped stories about how brave we'd been and how it hadn't really hurt as much as we thought it would. Fortunately I didn't have a hairy chest but Andrew did have. I noticed he looked a bit sore. The next session was aromatherapy and a massage. It was sheer bliss. I've had a massage before in a Turkish bath which was very invigorating, but this was a different style altogether with sweet-smelling oils being rubbed into my skin, and a gentle massage to make me relax. I could have stayed there for hours but Chloe came along to haul me out to join the others again for a light lunch. We all agreed that the massage was superb, and that we would love to come back for another one if we had the time, but it would be a long time before we would think about a waxing session again.

There was no time to sit around after lunch; we were led into another room where the girls told us to lay down on the couch and then proceeded to slap and spread some oily brown grunge on our faces and cover our eyes over with cucumber slices. This apparently was a facial to moisturize and tone up our skin and to combat any wrinkles. I had to lie on my back for 20 minutes, which seems like a long time when you can't

see anything. The girls didn't stop working and they gave me a manicure and a pedicure whilst I was lying there. Chloe was also hovering around; I could feel her spreading something over my chest, then putting something on each side. I asked her what she was doing but all she would say was, "Wait until you get up and then you'll see."

At last, the girls wiped off the mud pack; I have to admit that my skin did feel softer and tighter. Still lying on my back, I looked at my feet and saw that the toenails were a deep pink colour. Then I looked at my hands to see that they had put artificial nails over my own and had painted them a very glamorous deep red colour. I was surprised as I hadn't realised what they were going to do. I liked the look, although it felt odd having long fingernails instead of the short cut I normally had. I sat up to get off the couch and was immediately aware of two weights attached to my chest. I looked down and saw there were two silicone breasts sticking out in front of my chest. So that was what Chloe had been doing. I stood up and tried to get used to the difference in my balance and the strange sensation of having something there in front of me.

"You might want to put this on," said Chloe. She handed me a plain, non-wired white bra. "Here, let me help you," she said, then slipped my new breasts into the cups and clipped the two hooks and eyes together at the back.

What a weird feeling it was with the band of the bra going around my chest, the straps tightened on my shoulders and the weight of the boobs lifted up by this flimsy bit of underwear. I was beginning to understand what it felt like to be a woman, and I was beginning to like it. But there was little time to think any more about

it as I was led to a waiting chair and told to lean back a little. The beautician neatened up my eyebrows using a thread that she wound round each hair to be removed and jerked it out. "Don't worry," she said. "I won't do too much so it will still look OK when you return to being a man on Monday."

When she had finished all that, she turned my head round and made a pen mark on each ear lobe. "What's that for?" I asked, but she didn't reply as she reached onto the bench and came back with a gun-like thing and proceeded to pierce each ear in turn, leaving a small gold stud in them. "Ow, that hurt," I said.

"I know. That's why I didn't tell you it was going to happen. By the time you've had your afternoon tea, you'll have forgotten all about it. You can join your friends over by the pool now. Bye."

The penultimate beauty session was with the hairdressers who trimmed my hair a little, then fixed a hairpiece in place that perfectly matched my own hair colour and gave me long hair down to my shoulders. Once again I experienced sensations I had never felt before as the hair swirled around my face and touched it as I moved my head. We had one more session to complete and that was learning to walk properly in heels. None of us had ever done it before. Even though they started us off in low heels, we were a pretty frightful bunch with great mannish strides and completely off balance all the time. But with a bit of practice and instruction, we all mastered it and some of us graduated to one and a half inch or two inch heels. I thought I did quite well. Chloe was pleased with my progress, but I was a bit daunted when she said, "But just wait until we get the four-inch heels out for you."