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# **In My Sister's Place**



**Philippa Peters**

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A 'NEW WOMAN' E-BOOK

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# IN MY SISTER'S PLACE

**By Philippa Peters**

## TWINS

That feeling of deep unease swept over me, Kenneth Rutherford, once more. It was that feeling which had become so much of a friend of late. I knew that it was Karen again. "What has she done this time?" I asked myself grimly, thinking of my twin sister.

With Finals just around the corner, I was in no mood to deal with whatever new, emotional turmoil Karen was going through. But study was impossible in the dorm with the familiar disorienting sensations that always came to me when Karen was doing what she ought not to.

As twins, it had been like this since I could first remember. We had always known what was in each other's minds, finishing each other's sentences to the smiles of the rest of our family. If we didn't do it so much now that we were grown up, I could still seem to feel her brain waves, when she was under stress, and I would feel the same as her.

I went to the Refectory to eat but the emotion was only building up inside me. Finally, I couldn't bear it any longer. I snubbed Pete, who didn't deserve it, and was only trying to be helpful about downside economic theory. But I felt it so urgently. I had to phone home and right then.

"It's about time that you called," snapped my mother angrily as I walked outside. It was a dead zone for my cell inside the building. "You know that we can't phone in to you in that horrible dorm."

"What's up with Karen now?" I asked my mother as patiently as I could. It was no use getting upset with her. Then, I would only have to endure the 'ungrateful' speech and 'what I went through when you two were small'.

"Karen is in jail," said my mother testily. "How come you couldn't sense that?"

A wave of nausea swept over me and I had to grip the phone hard to prevent myself from doubling over. Whatever Karen had done, she did certainly not like what was being done to her.

"I, I have to see her," I gasped into the receiver. It would be the only way to get relief from the emotional bond that tied us together. Seeing her, I could kind of download all the emotion back on her that she was pushing out to me.

“She’s in Canada,” said my mother, accepting without question that I would have to go. “But she isn’t there under her right name. She’s Sandra Something-or-other.”

I thought of Finals. The first exam, for heaven’s sake, was only three days away. I should be studying. I had to study to have any hope of passing Economic Theory. I decided that I wouldn’t go. I’d endure the pain and the unease for a few days.

I thought of my ‘summer-job’ money that should have bought me a car for the upcoming summer. I sighed and grimaced at the nausea overcoming me. There was nothing for it but to go to wherever Karen was. I wondered if I could get a direct flight to wherever she was and if I could study along the way.

“Tell me where she is exactly,” I finally said to my waiting mother.

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Seeing ‘Sandra Peskey’ brought almost instantaneous relief to me. The fair-haired girl across the table seemed very relieved to see me as well.

“I knew you’d come,” Karen said, smiling her familiar, crooked smile at me.

A friend of our family, a distant cousin, was whom I had said I was to her lawyer and the Canadian prison officials. It was why we looked so alike, even though we were boy and girl. I hinted at my parents contributing to ‘Sandra’s’ defence fund and so, finally, I was able to meet with my twin sister.

Looking at Karen, I could see why the lawyer and prison officials had been so dubious about my story. I

looked into a face that could have been my own save for the feminine shaping of fair eyebrows and the feminizing effect of permed hair and the little makeup she was allowed.

“Now I can go,” I said shortly. All the emotions, that had been consuming me, drained away as I looked at Karen. My disorientation was gone as I saw that she was well, even in the drab green overall she was wearing.

I would even be able to study in the plane back home and on the long bus ride to Gresham. I might even have time for a little sleep on the redeye local that would get me into the university town at six-thirty in the following morning, two and a half hours before my first exam.

“Not so fast, brother,” Karen snapped as I half rose from the chair on my side of the table. “I need to talk to you.”

“So talk,” I said, sitting down again. I’d gone through too many escapades with Karen, too many times, to rescue her once more from her own stupid mistakes. I didn’t feel any grief over the predicament she was now in.

“They’re going to hold me for trial,” Karen said very quietly. “My papers are good. They know that I’m Sandra Peskey. My lawyer says that it’s six months for sure on the carrying charge. I’ll cry a lot and be real remorseful. I might get less. You never know.”

I sighed. Just like Karen to be the eternal optimist. But carrying drugs across the border was likely to be more serious than that. The lawyer had already suggested to me that two or three years was more likely given the amount involved.

“Anyway,” Karen went on, looking me squarely in the eyes so that I got her message clearly. “The problem is Neil. He’s not to know that I’m in here.”

I smiled and relaxed a little. “He’ll never know from me,” I said calmly. I pushed my chair back from the table, ready to go. If I really got a move on, and there was a cancellation on that earlier flight ...

“Sit down,” hissed Karen, glancing at the bored remand center guard who showed little apparent interest in our conversation.

“What’s the problem?” I asked warily. The feeling of unease hadn’t entirely gone away, I realized. It was still there, in the back of my head.

“Neil and I became engaged last month,” my sister hissed at me.

That astonished me. Neil Martinson had pursued Karen for a very long time but it had seemed that nothing would ever come of it. Karen went out with him but was always chasing after other, more good-looking or dangerous boys.

Neil Martinson, though, was rich. He was the son of a wealthy cattle and oil family. His younger brother, Steve, was at State with me but in a very different social group.

“Neil knows that I’m away for a time on a hunting trip,” said Karen, darting a glance at the guard who was looking at his watch. “Dad will say that’s where I am for the present. But there’s the official engagement party on the seventeenth of next month. I promised to be back for certain by that day. I’ve put it off twice already because of this, this trip.”

A get-rich-quick trip, I thought, with a shake of my head. Karen nodded, picking up my thought when we

were this close. She threw out her hand to encompass the barely furnished room, the barred windows through which harsh sunlight poured, no curtains to bar its passage. Yes, this is what she had to get used to rather than the riches she had hoped for. And I knew why she had to cling onto Neil Martinson now. He was rich. He would become her meal ticket to the fame and fortune she had always craved.

"You have to be me, Ken," Karen went on, her large, blue eyes fixed on my face. I couldn't help the shock and amazement that I felt. She felt it as well and winced but went on anyway. "You can do it. Remember on Halloweens ..."

"That was years ago!" I protested, feeling very uptight that she would even mention that, even consider what she was asking me to do. I shuddered as she looked at me and I recalled instantly the most embarrassing moment or my entire life. I could feel sweat suddenly breaking out all over me.

"I can't pass this up with Neil," Karen went on, her eyes fixated on me as if she was trying to mesmerize me. "Neil Martinson is the catch of the year for me, Ken. He's our meal ticket out and he's off to Europe on the eighteenth for sales and stuff with one of his father's companies. You only have to be me for one night and you know how it was on Halloween. You'll be perfect 'cos I'll write and phone and tell you everything you need to say."

"But you're in jail up here," I stammered. "It took a lot just to get this interview with you."

"They let me write to what they think is my family," said Karen. "Daddy doesn't like it but he's setting it up. And you can buy cellphones in here if you have the cash and a connection, which I do now." Karen



smiled at me. "Don't shake your head at me, Ken. You know that you're going to do it and so do I. I'll send you cassettes of me just talking so that you can practise but you already can do me pretty good, can't you? You sure fooled Billy Stephens, anyhow, didn't you?"

My face was flushed in embarrassment. If I hadn't thought that Bill was putting me on, I wouldn't have gone along with being thought to be Karen, just to be a good sport as I thought I was being. Why did she have to bring it up? Then I realized by the intensity of thought coming my way that Karen was deadly serious. Karen actually wanted me to be her and to get engaged to Neil Martinson in her place!

## II. KAREN INSISTS

"Mom, I have job interviews from tomorrow on ... and since I didn't do that great on my Finals ..." I said as I tried to cut in on the long diatribe my mother was giving me. I held the phone away from my ear as my mother's ringing tones got louder and reverberated in my ear.

"Don't blame that on Karen, too!" Mom bellowed. "It's very important to her and to all of us, Kenneth, that she marry Neil Martinson. Now, you can do what she asked, can't you? It's not that much, really!"

Oh no, I thought wearily. Not that much. Just to dress up, be a girl, a believable Karen, for one day. Oh, that was nothing at all. But it wasn't just one day and it wasn't 'nothing' at all!

“Mom, you can’t be serious ...” I tried to protest but all I could do was swallow nervously as my mother brushed all of my protests aside.

“Karen says that you can do this,” Mom sniffed into the phone. ‘Sandra Peskey’ does as well, I thought, knowing why Karen clung to that identity. She wanted to keep her record as Karen clean though it was pretty smudged with minor raps anyway. “Your father and I didn’t know that you’ve been doing this all the time that you’ve been growing up, changing places with your sister ...”

“It was just on Halloween a couple of times,” I felt bound to interrupt and tell her. I felt a knot tightening in my stomach and that was not a sending from Karen. My head began to pound and I felt hot and dry. My head began to itch as it had in the wig I wore as I remembered the last time that I had been Karen.

“... which Karen just let us know about. She says that you’re identical even now when you are dressed in her clothes ...” my mother droned on and on.

“It was years ago, mother,” I muttered, trying to stop her. My hand felt wet as I gripped the phone. Karen had laughed when she came in on Bill and me and saw how far I was into being her. The look on Bill’s face when he realized whom he had been making out with had been priceless. Karen had arrived at the perfect time for me to be able to say, “Gotcha!” and make Bill think that it had all been a practical joke.

Karen wouldn’t let me forget that night which had all been her idea in the first place, caught as she was with two boy friends. I shivered as I remembered Bill’s smiling and squeezing me and my own feelings as we sat together on the sofa and Bill’s hands and then his mouth ... It took an effort of will that made me trem-

ble. I forced the images, the recalled situations, away out of my mind.

“... now it can do some good, anyway,” my mother was going on. “You don’t have to sneak around behind my back and dress like your sister. Have I already seen you dressed as Karen? How would I know with you two? You never ...”

“Never, mother, never,” I said between gritted teeth. “Look, Mom, I have to go. I’ve an interview ...”

“... after Karen went to the trouble of writing out what you are to know and taping lots more for you to listen to. She says that it won’t be difficult for you to be her. And I trust my daughter,” Mom finished with another sniff.

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask what Karen was doing in jail then while I was just graduating from university.

“I’ll have to call you later, Mom,” I said bitterly.

“Just be here this weekend, Kenneth,” my mother responded. “Tell me you’ll be here on Friday night.”

She knew me too well, I thought. If I said it, I’d do it. It was almost a fetish with me, a totally stupid reaction to all the times that my mother and Karen had disappointed me.

“All right,” I said at last, a heaviness descending over me, a foreshadowing of doom that made me shiver all over. “I’ll come home this weekend.”

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None of the interviews had yet paid off for me. There were a couple of “We have other applicants to

interview and it's only fair that we talk to everyone" types of responses. But that was only to be expected. If they couldn't get anyone better, they might take me.

The feeling of dread was still on me as I arrived at the family house on Aubrey Street. I paid off the taxi with one of my few remaining twenties, my student loan now totally exhausted. I headed up the narrow pink pavestone walk to the two-storey frame house beyond. My father was clipping the overgrown ivy at the front of the house. He nodded to me and didn't speak. I hadn't expected anything, anyway, but polite disinterest. So, I went into the house, ringing the doorbell as I went in.

My mother came grimly into the hallway, wiping her hands on her apron. "You took your sweet time," she said, her words coming out most snappishly.

"There were no flights," I began huskily, putting down my suitcase, expecting a cursory hug at the least.

"Bring it up to Karen's room," said my mother, turning on her heel and heading up the dark staircase that led to the upper bedrooms.

"Karen's room? But mine ..." I began, shocked as my stomach started constricting at the suggestion that I knew was there.

"Your father's back is bad again," my mother said, clumping heavily in front of me in her old, black, lace-up shoes. "He has your old room."

Karen's room was a delight to the eye, if you were a teenaged girl or older. It was pink, feminine, and frilly, unlike my own Spartan room. It had always seemed warmer than my own and was filled with exotic scents. Karen's room still was femininely scented even though she hadn't been there for months.

"I left her last tape in the machine," said my mother, pointing to the recorder beside the bed. "She said that I wasn't to listen to it. It was only for you. Well, I do as I am bid, a least." Mom's mouth compressed to its familiar thin line. "I'll see you later ... when you have changed," she said, nodding at the bed as she closed the door.

It was only then that I realized that it wasn't a new quilt on the bed but one of Karen's dresses, a dark-blue, white-dotted thing. It looked like, I thought wildly, but it couldn't be! My hands trembled as I reached out and touched it. No, it wasn't the same as the Halloween dress I had worn four years ago, but it was much like it, and no, I wasn't going to put it on, not now or ever.

I pulled my suitcase to the side of the bed and saw the tape in the recorder.

"No, Karen," I thought, rejecting sensations that lurked at the back of my mind. "It was the most embarrassing moment of my life with Bill which is why I remember it so vividly. I never want to go through anything like that again!"

But I knew that I would have to listen to one last wheedle of hers and so I put on the tape.

"Kendra," came Karen's voice from the old machine. "If you are listening to this, it means that you came home. And that means that you are half way to saying, 'Yes', to help me out. You know that you are. Now, I've got to convince you to go the other half of the way. I hope Mom put out my blue and white dotted dress. You'll know why it's there for you, won't you? You should feel comfortable in it, just as you did before."

It was years ago! But I protested to no-one as the tape ran on silently for a few moments as if to let me have time to remember. I remembered the lightness, the airiness, the seductive touch of silk from my stockings. I thrust that thought away. I'm not that type of guy, I thought angrily. I won't ever be in that position again!

But Bill's words kept popping up into my brain. That dress makes you look real, Kenneth! My lips quivered as I recalled Bill Stephens' attempt to 'date' me as a girl, weeks after the Halloween humiliation. I turned frantically about and sat down weakly on the bed as I recalled Bill's stammered apologies and his final words, "You kiss so much like a real girl."

I beat at my forehead, wishing I could excise that memory. I rolled on Karen's bed, trying to drive away the persistent recollections of that awful night.

"Now, Kendra," came Karen's voice, just when I thought that there was nothing else on the tape. "Some things you don't know. Number one, we are adopted. That's right. Mother and Dad aren't really our parents, despite all that talk Mom does about what she went through to have us. They wanted to adopt a little girl, a blonde cutie. They picked me out. But I was a twin. They took you reluctantly, thinking you were a baby girl at first. They tried to give you back when they found out what you were.

"Mother told me all this when you went to university. They had to keep you to have me and they had to raise you right. The adoption agency kept tabs on them after they tried to give you away to Aunt Irene and Uncle Val."

There was a pause again and I rose, noting how I had disturbed the dress on the bed. Strangely, I felt

nothing about Karen's revelation. Why not, I quizzed myself? Because you always knew that they weren't your real parents, a part of my brain answered silently.

"Now, about Neil Martinson," Karen went on. "Well, you know he's been obsessed with me since high school. I hadn't seen him in two years when he showed up at Danny Ray's where I was working for a while. Neil tells me abruptly that he's just come into a lot of money since his father died.

"You see, I wouldn't go out with him once because he couldn't afford tickets to the Eagles' concert when they were in Minneapolis. He got all choked up and said he would marry me one day when he was rich enough for me. One thing led to another and I said then that when he came and put one million dollars in my hand, I'd marry him.

"Well, Kenny boy, he takes my hand in Danny Ray's, right there in front of Frankie Green and the other girls and shows a check made out to me for a million dollars, right in my hand. It had August fifteenth as the date on it. He's set that for our wedding, Ken. He put the money already in the bank already. It's waiting for me and the days are sliding by! All I have to do is marry Neil to get it!

"Well, after a while, I start seeing how sexy Neil Martinson really is with all his money. I start really beginning to like Neil and he loves me, of course.

"And he's suspicious of me. He doesn't want to make out right away. Neil thinks that would be cheap and tawdry, but I know he's checking me out. Neil says he's going to wait until we're married, even to kiss me. I don't know how we got to talking about Billy Stephens but we did. Neil told me how crazy it made him when he saw me out with Billy. He was crazier

still when Billy told him that he had kissed and kissed me and that I kissed him more sweetly than any other girl he ever had.

“Now you and I know, brother, that I never in my life went out with Billy Stephens and I never kissed him. That was all you Neil was talking about, Kendra, about seeing you and being jealous of your kisses. Billy told him this two years after you and he were locking lips and playing tonsil hockey. He seems to have convinced himself that you really were me.

“Anyway, Neil said that he’d waited long enough just to kiss me and he could wait a little more. I’ve never seen anyone in such a state as he was and I was trying to be so demure as he was about to kiss me. I laughed at him as he was so worked up and I told him that if I had to wait for my million, he had to wait for his kiss until he put a ring on my finger.

“Kenny, you know what the future holds for me if I’m found out. You’re the one with the brains. The best I can do with my life is slinging hash and balling the boss of some sleazy drive-in to get that. This is my big chance, Ken, and I have to take it.

“Stupid me, though. I’d already told Danny Ray’s friend that I would mule for him on this run. It’s so easy getting into Canada and back. I thought that this would be my ticket out before I met Neil again. I told Neil that it was a fishing trip and I was guide to these women. Heck, Kenny, it was five grand and I barely make that in tips in a year. I didn’t think I’d get caught. It’s always been so easy to cross the border. Anyway, I’m co-operating with the cops here, on the quiet, and I’m gonna be out with a slap on the wrist, I hope, by August.



“You just gotta help me, Kenneth, by being me at the engagement party. It’s half a million dollars to you as your share, Ken, and more, lots more, when I divorce Neil and get the property settlement.

“If you don’t help me, you know, Kenny, what will become of me. You can guess why Danny’s friend got me to carry for him. He threatened me anyway when I said I didn’t want to do it again. It was the last run. I gave in only so that Neil wouldn’t hear of the things I’ve done before. You know what I’m talking about.

“Help me, Kenny, Please.” There was a catch in Karen’s voice and I knew that she was crying but trying not to as she undoubtedly twisted and pulled a Kleenex to ribbons. I had seen her do that so often. “You’ve always come through for me, Kendra,” she went on brokenly, “even with Billy Stephens. You got the brains in our family of two, Kenneth, and me, I, I got nothing.

“Well, that’s not true, exactly. Mom and Dad’s will leaves everything to me. Can you believe that? I’d have cried but there’s nothing there, really. Dad’s already spent his life insurance.” She went on, begging, talking herself out of actual tears, I knew. I reached over and stopped the tape.

I shuddered as I thought about my sister, my only family, I suppose. She was half-way into the drug community now. She was known to them. Karen was a criminal and she didn’t seem to think that there was anything wrong in what she was planning to do to Neil Martinson. It was just another crooked plan and she was dragging me into it as she had done so often before.

But she was my only family and I couldn't just let her rot in jail with nothing to come back to that might lead her out of drugs.

### **III. THE SECOND COMING OF KAREN**

I nervously pulled back the lace curtain as I heard my mother call. Mom called my father in to supper. I saw him start in grumpily and I could almost hear what he was thinking. He had seen me come home and I hadn't as yet put in an appearance to help him with his work in the garden.

I could hear his usual complaint. "It's always book learning with that boy," he would be saying to Mom. I could hear him as I went gingerly down to the kitchen. My mother saw me and gasped. I put a finger to my lips and shushed her as Dad was going on. "Never likes to get his hands dirty, that one," Dad said. "He's far too high and mighty for us now he's got his degree."

He stomped over to the bathroom to wash his hands and so I helped my silent mother to lay four places at the kitchen table for supper. Only on special occasions would we use the dining room with the chandelier over the long, oak, dining table. Dad came out and saw me then standing beside Mom. He looked at the four settings at the table. He hadn't expected Karen to be at dinner with him.

"When did you get here?" he asked me angrily.

"This morning," I said softly, trying out my imitation of Karen's voice. I went over to the stove and

picked up a tea towel as my parents stared at me. I put the warmed plate on the table at Dad's place.

Dad stared at my nails. They looked as they did when Karen was home all day, primping herself and never getting asked to do anything as I always was. Karen liked them long and red and had several acrylic sets of nails. It had been simple for me just to borrow one set and attach them to my own.

Dad always like Karen in blue as well and called her his 'little doll'. He looked at the blue and white dress that I'd put on. Dad always said blue made Karen look classy. Some of her clothes he said were blatantly sexy but blue, that was 'it'. Those modern fashions, he would say with a smile, that Karen wore lately made her look like she was 'on the make', whatever that meant.

"And where's Kenneth?" Dad asked as I served him potatoes and stew as he liked it. He took my arm then and sniffed at the scent, Karen's, that I had put onto my wrist. I had used the delicate lavender scent rather than the heavy musk that Karen wore when she was going out on a date. My dress swished as I moved around the table and sat down opposite him, smoothing the skirts beneath me as gracefully as I could.

"He's here," I said softly, smiling crookedly in a way that I hoped was Karen's, looking directly at my Dad. He stared at the makeup on my face, the eyeliner and eye shadow at my eyes, the lipstick at my mouth, the darker eyebrows I had. My hair was curled slightly after a bout with the curling iron and I had brushed it neatly about my head, a parting down the middle. It wasn't the mane of curls that I had seen on 'Sandra Peskey' in the Winnipeg jail but she had only grown into that very recently. I wore her charm bracelet on

my wrist which jiggled as I took the napkin and spread it over my lap. The bracelet was silver like the tasseled, clip-on earrings at my ears.

“So they let you out anyway?” grunted Dad as Mom brought the rolls from the oven and set them on the table, sitting down heavily, studying me just as intensely as Dad did. Her chair creaked as she glowered at the plate I was filling for her as well.

“Let who out?” asked Mom as she waved a hand to indicate to me that I had put enough on her plate.

“Who’d you think?” asked Dad in his usual grumpy manner. He pointed at me, who had just taken a little of the salad. “Karen!”

I looked at him directly and smiled, holding his gaze. I didn’t say anything which was unlike Karen. She’d have been gushing with details about her arrest and especially about her release if she had been sitting in her familiar spot at the table. Even Dad frowned a little then as my natural reserve took over. He looked at me more closely, probably seeing that my makeup wasn’t as vivid as the makeup that Karen always used. My lips were a softer, plum color, hardly red at all, and my eyes had basically just eyeliner and light makeup over my eyelids. I had none of what he called ‘that liquid glop’ on me as I sat opposite him and smiled.

“This isn’t Karen,” said my mother in disgust. “Anyone but an old fool could see that this isn’t Karen. Kenneth might look nicer than Karen in that dress but that’s because he’s padded himself to fit it just right. He has to put on a lot more makeup, though, if he wants to fool anyone that he is really Karen. I suppose he’ll have to wear dresses like that one as well with high necklines. But anyway, if he can fool you for a few minutes, you old coot, I daresay he can fool Neil

Martinson when he comes calling after he hears that Karen is back."

Dad slowly pushed his chair away from the table, his supper untouched. His face showed such a picture of revulsion that I began to shiver. He stared at me, across the table from him as Karen always was, still daintily picking at the salad as Karen did.

"Kenneth?" he asked with a snarl in his voice.

I nodded, feeling the earrings I had put on swinging at my neck. I hadn't been sure that I had fooled him but it seemed that I had.

"I always knew that there was something wrong with you," Dad said, turning on my mother. "See what I told you? It's all that book learning and that crowd of pansies that he likes to run around with."

Geeks, Dad, I wanted to tell him. At school we were always called 'geeks' because we liked to do well at school, not like Karen. He always laughed away her Ds in Math and Science with comments like, "I never did well in school in those things, either, and it didn't hurt me none."

For once, Mom came to my defence. Perhaps she saw the line of defiance on my lipsticked mouth and could see that I was about to tell them to get used to Karen being in jail for a couple of years.

"Now, Donald," she snapped at him. "You know what Karen told us about her engagement party with Neil. It's very important to her and she can't be there as she promised Neil she would be. She told you Kenneth would have to take her place ..."

"She didn't say he'd be wearing her panties and stockings!" said Dad thickly. "You are wearing her panties and stockings, aren't you?"

I nodded. Well, I had to if I was ever going to pass as Karen. It was being her from the inside out with Bill Stephens that had reminded me all the time of the part that I was playing and the inevitable consequences of being found out.

"It's Karen's chance to marry rich," said Mom. "Now you lay off Kenneth and eat your supper. And Karen honey, pay no mind to your father. He's just angry at all the hoops he's had to jump through to get you a lawyer and stuff under another name."

My father got up from the table and stalked off to the living room. We heard the television turn on and the clicking of the remote until he found some sports program. He turned up the volume then and we could hear someone getting very excited about someone else who "could ... go ... all ... the ... way!"

"Is that all you are going to eat, Karen?" asked my mother, forcing a smile as she looked at me.

"I think it's all that I can, Mommy," I told her, addressing her just like Karen did.

"Then be a good girl and put your father's plate in the oven," said Mom. "He'll come back for it later when he's got over the shock of having his little girl home."

There was a knot at the base of my stomach as I got up and walked in Karen's low-heeled shoes about the kitchen, the dress rustling and swishing about me as I did supper chores with my mother. All the remembered feelings that I had, how dainty I felt when I was in stockings and a dress, flooded back and overwhelmed my mind. I felt as if I was on Halloween again, awash in delight at being Kendra, Karen's sister, all over again.

“Let’s go up to your room and I’ll show you the makeup that Karen should be using,” said my mother as if I hadn’t seen all the vivid reds that Karen had partly used, far outweighing the gentler tones in the makeup cabinet in her bathroom. Dad had built her a private bathroom off her room when she was a teenager. I still used the same one as Mom and him at the end of the second storey.

We reached the first step of the stairs and there was a ring on the front door. “Now, who could that be?” asked my mother, turning on the inside and outside light. I should have run up the stairs quickly in my swishing dress, the padded bra shaping my chest, making it fit me well, as Mom had said at the supper table.

Mom flung open the door as she usually did and gaped as Neil Martinson was standing there. “Mrs Rutherford,” Neil began formally. “I wanted ...” Whatever he wanted was never said because he saw me in Karen’s dress on the first step of the stairs, petrified, as I looked at the boy whom Karen had promised to marry and whom she was soon to become engaged to.

“Karen!” said Neil, delight on his handsome, boyish face. “I didn’t realize that you were back!”

Neil stepped in past my mother who was just staring at him in stupefaction.

What could I say or do? “Neil!” I said in surprise, hoping that my Karen imitation held. “I just got back. I was just going to call you!”

Neil strode forward then and did something that Karen said that he never did. He put his arms about my waist, swung me off the stairs, and kissed me, the skirt of my dress swishing all about us.

It was so totally unexpected! Neil pressed me to him and his hand pressed on my head when I tried to pull free. His mouth moved over my lips and he didn't seem to want to stop kissing me.

It was only a cough from my mother and then one by my father who came to look disgustedly at the pair of us in the hallway.

"Sorry, sorry," gasped Neil, his arms about me while I looked up at him in fright. "I, I just haven't seen Karen in so long." He smiled as he looked down at me. "I said that I would take you by surprise next time, Karen," he went on. "So, Karen, surprise!" And then he kissed me again.

This time, Neil was much more tender which only made it worse as it roused memories of me and Bill Stephens in my mind and what tender, gentle kisses had led to, and worse, what they might have led to if Karen hadn't come back in the nick of time.

I felt dazed as I swayed in Neil's arms and he asked my parents permission to take me out on the front porch.

"Of course," said my bemused mother while my father gave us a look that would have scorched paint off the wall.

"I suppose fathers have to be like that," said Neil with a grin, as I shivered and shook and minced daintily out on the porch to sit beside him on the swing seat, his arm about my silk-covered shoulders. "They have to be protective of their little girls."

"I, I suppose so," I murmured as his hand stroked mine in my lap. Belatedly, I remembered that I was Karen and I crossed my stockinged leg in my dress. The



petticoat rustled, making Neil smile and lean over to squeeze me and kiss me lightly again.

“You want to know why I’m so affectionate,” Neil whispered to me as we rocked gently together, tingles all over my body, my stockings and my skirts making feminine noises each time we moved together on the swing.

“I, I thought ...” I began with a shiver.

“That we should wait like I said,” said Neil, “but ...” He leaned forward then and really kissed me. I shuddered but the moving of my lips only aroused him more and more. He drew me to him, lifting my arms about his neck. It was just like being with Bill Stephens all over again. A boy was kissing me fiercely while I was so femininely dressed and I reacted just as I did when I kissed a girl. Well, that wasn’t very often but the girls always said they liked kissing me.

But Neil kissing me led to such different reactions. I was aroused but in such a different way to kissing a girl. “Oh, Karen,” Neil moaned and his hand fell onto my dress and my thigh. I had to grab his hand in my distress at what he might arouse me to do if I let him fondle that, as I had Bill Stephens.

“I love you, Karen,” said Neil, “so much.” And he kissed me ardently again. I could scarcely breathe. It was lucky that my mother brought lemonade out to us or I would not have been able to cool down.

“You’ve cut your hair,” said Neil as he kept his arm about me as he took one of the glasses of iced lemonade.

“Being out in the bush, I had to,” I told him, building on the story that Karen had already created about her absence.

“You must let it grow again, but it won’t be long for our wedding,” said Neil. “That’s what I wanted to tell you about.”

“Tell me about?” I murmured, concentrating on getting Karen’s voice right.

“The trip to Paris that I have to go on,” said Neil. “Well, as I told you in my last letter, if it worked out as I thought it would, we could move the whole thing to Paris. You, your mom, your dad, your brother, all of you and all my family on the Champs Elysée! We can get married just as they do in France at the Town Hall. It will be as romantic a wedding as you’ve always wanted.”

Karen wanted to get married in Paris? Why didn’t the girl tell me?

“It must have taken you so long to arrange it,” I murmured. “I’m not sure that I can be ready in two months ...”

“Not two months!” said Neil. “We have our engagement party on the seventeenth and we all fly together the next day to Paris and we’re married on the weekend! You have to be fitted for your dress at *de Brasseur’s* on the nineteenth and they promise to work overnight to any changes that you have to have made. My sister and her kids are doing the same with their dresses while us guys will just rent. Your mother will have to find a dress in Paris as well. *De Brasseur* will outfit her, if she wants that, and guarantee we’ll all be ready for the wedding on the twenty-first! Isn’t it marvellous! Should I talk to your parents now?”

“I think so,” I gasped. Oh Karen, I thought, what have you got me into this time? Why didn’t you tell me

and I could have thought of some wonderful excuse why I couldn't go to Paris. My passport!

"I've got your passport still," said Neil, his arm about me as he hugged the girlish me and we went in to talk to Mom and Dad about me marrying him in Paris.

"You want us to go to a place where they don't even speak English?" asked my mother doubtfully.

"Morton's would never give me time off," said Dad, putting down the knife and fork at each side of his heaped, steaming plate.

"I think that we talked about this before, sir," said Neil mildly. I could have told him that that wouldn't work with Dad. He much preferred people to be as strong and as opinionated as he was. I had to be two people all the time when I was home. The regular guy could relax with friends but at home I was almost monosyllabic like Dad. I saw his eyes go to Neil's arm about my waist. Make that three people, I thought, as I blushed as I saw Dad looking at my mouth and my mussed lipstick.

"I intend to pay for all the expenses for my party," said Neil forthrightly. My heart sank a little as I saw Dad look at Neil in surprise. "It's actually going to be about twenty people going, what with all my sisters' family, my brothers and my aunts and uncles. I think you know my Uncle Frank, sir, and his wife, Aunt Velma. They're going to pull themselves off that farm of theirs and come for a once in a lifetime visit to Paris, France!"

"Nah," said my father, leaning forward and starting his supper. His mouth was full as he said something

about America being good enough for his family and we were all going to stay here, thank you very much.

"I think that I would like to go," said my mother then and Dad looked at her in consternation.

"With her," he almost sneered, pointing at me. "To see her married to him?"

I felt Neil's arm hug me tighter as I prayed for Dad to end this farce right then and there and forbid me, Karen, to see Neil any more. But my mother had other ideas.

"Don't listen to this old goat, Neil," Mom said and she even tried to smile, to my shock and astonishment. "He's never been beyond the end of Main Street. My folks used to take me regular to New Orleans and St Louis when I was a girl. I loved the French Quarter and all the queer words folks were using. I'll go with Karen, Neil. I can't have my daughter marrying and her mother not being there. What would people think of me? Leave it to Karen and me to talk to Donald tonight and he'll be coming as well."

"And Karen's brother, Ken," said Neil, relaxing and rocking me against him again, so that my dress rustled most provocatively.

"Oh, Kenneth won't come," said my mother, looking at me and shaking her head.

"But he's Karen's twin," began Neil.

"He's changed a lot, being at the University," said my mother. I felt tingles all through me as she said that. "He doesn't get along with us small town folk any more."

I looked at her, aghast. That wasn't true at all. All of my friends at State came from little towns just like Dar-

lington. And if Karen could get out of prison and marry Neil, I would love to have a free trip to France.

"Hasn't got time for the likes of us," grumbled my father with his mouth full, still giving me furious looks. Flabbergasted, and on the point of protesting loudly and giving myself away to Neil, I looked at my mother who had parroted my father's opinions of me so easily, to cover for me, I supposed, if Karen wasn't back.

But she couldn't really suppose, could she, my mother of all people, that I would go to Paris with Neil Martinson as Karen. No, that wasn't in the deal! Imagine what would happen when Neil demanded his conjugal rights after marrying the substitute 'Karen'!

I didn't want to think about it. It was bad enough as it was to be standing there in Karen's clothes and being her as Neil hugged me to him every now, caressing my hand as if I really was a girl.

My father looked at me in disgust as he ate his supper, gravy running down his chin. "Well, if you will excuse us, sir," said Neil with a rigid smile. "Karen and I will leave you for a little while. There's dancing down at Lodge tonight and, with Karen looking so pretty in her party dress, I thought that we could look in on it for a little bit. I'll have her back by ten, Mrs Rutherford. I promise!"

Mom got up right away. "You can't go out, Karen," she said to me. I thought with relief that I was relieved. Neil's arm tightened about me and I saw his jaw clench in disappointment. "Not until you have been upstairs," she went on, "and fixed your makeup and found your purse, young woman."

Neil relaxed and it was my turn to feel distressed. "Don't be long," he whispered to me as my mother came after me and followed me upstairs.

"You should have forbidden me to go out with him," I whispered to her as she began to put different cosmetics into a black purse, my mind definitely in a 'tizzy', whatever that was.

"Use that lipstick that you did before," my mother told me. "It would take too long to have you change completely." So, I stood before her and put lipstick on my mouth. She curled my hair some more so that it bounced even more femininely against my cheek and neck.

"He's Karen's boy friend and he's rich," my mother whispered as she did my hair. "So, you be nice to him as you were on the front porch." I had to shudder when she said that. Was she really telling me, her son, to start kissing another boy? "I'll talk it all over with your Dad and we'll send Karen a letter. I'll try and get her to phone me if she can. So you be really nice to Neil and don't do anything to jeopardize Karen getting married to him."

Mom took me by the hand then and assisted me in going down the stairs, my skirts swishing again. I felt as if I was descending through layers of silk as I bounced on each step and my dress swirled against me. I know that I was red-faced when my mother handed me off to Neil, who immediately put his arm about me again, and hurried me out of the house.

Mom came to the front door and watched Neil open the front door of his sports car for me. He put the top up then as he hadn't warned me to bring a head scarf. "Don't go back," Neil said to me, stroking my hand as I tried frantically to buckle up and not have the seatbelt

disturb the padding at my chest. "I don't want to have to try and talk to your parents again."

"You, you shouldn't want to marry me," I said to him in Karen's lilting voice. She always spoke as if she was teasing you all of the time so her intonations were easy to parody. "We all end up looking and sounding like our parents, you know."

Neil turned and grinned at me, looking somewhat like his brother, Steve, when he smiled. "Now, now, Karen," he said to me. "I know that you and your brother were adopted, don't I? You've told me so more than once."

The car did a sudden turn and we weren't headed down Main Street any more. "Hey! Where are we going?" I gasped as the car turned onto a hill road that everyone in Darlington knew as Makeout Mountain.

"If we went down to the Lodge," said Neil, "everybody would want to dance with you as they always do. Bill is there as well. I saw him going in with Carlie Mason. But we're early to be up here. We can be all alone, Karen darling, and have a private, little party until I have to take you back home to your Mom."

There was no-one at the lookout point as Neil drew up and parked. "Neil," I shuddered, "this isn't such a good idea."

It was possible that we could get arrested, especially when a smiling Neil Martinson went to the back of the car and came back with a bottle of vodka, cans of coke and paper cups. He turned the key in the ignition and turned up the radio. "When I said a party," Neil grinned at me as I shook in the seat belt I still had on, "I meant that we party."