

# Operation Reckless



# Charlotte Mayo



A "New Woman" Novel



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# OPERATION RECKLESS

**By Charlotte Mayo**

## PROLOGUE

How the *fuck* did I get into all this? I can't believe I'm sitting here, facing certain death, tied to a chair wearing a black leather miniskirt, a skimpy top and skyscraper heels. My ankles are bound to the chair legs, my hands are tied behind me, a thick rope binds me to the chair and there is a gag over my mouth so I can't scream or shout – not that anyone would hear me in this dark, dingy cellar. It's abundantly clear that I'm going precisely nowhere. I was stupid to involve myself in such an insane project and all because my superior wanted to look good – send a cop undercover, infiltrate the Eastern European gang, get the glory...

Slowly the door opens ajar and Natasja comes in.

"Do you want your dinner now?" she asks in her broken Euro-English.

I look up at the shabby door; behind her some seven foot, muscle-bound goon lurks menacingly, gun in hand. I nod my head. Well, it was all I could do with a gag around my mouth.

Natasja comes in with a tray and sits it on the floor. Then she rips off my gag, I wince with pain – it's like a plaster being pulled off a wound – in fact, it's a fucking plaster being pulled off. The goon is still lurking in the shadows.

"It's alright," she says. "You can leave us now. I can handle him from here. He won't cause me any bother." She says all this with a sense of self-assurance that tells me that a man in a mini-skirt is no match for her Russian brawn – not that she is muscular, far from it... but I do notice that she also carries a gun tucked into the waistband of her tight trousers.

As the door closes, Natasja picks up a spoon and starts to feed me thick vegetable soup. It spills down my silky blouse (the one with the volume sleeves that I had selected carefully from the police wardrobe department) and makes a stain. I strain at my bindings but Natasja just laughs. In a minute she'll ask me if I need the toilet; if I do, the goon will be brought back into the room. I'll be untied and marched to the small cubicle next door where I'll be told to perform (arms still bound together) with the door open and Natasja and the bodyguard looking on. Not exactly Geneva Convention, is it?

It's my own fault. Why the Hell did I tell my female boss that my mother used to dress me as a girl when I was young and, though I had given it up, I knew I could still pull off a damned convincing female and I would give it a go undercover? (I knew, of course, that I was good at female impersonation because I *did* still dress in female clothes. Since my marriage to Julia had ended in acrimony, I found myself dressing more and more). Sarah,

my superior, had been rather surprised at my confession of transvestism – well, it's not what you expect from a police officer – a detective at that – fire arms trained – part of the Flying Squad. I'm not totally sure she was convinced by my protestations that I had given up the dressing for Lent, if you follow my drift.

“You want to go undercover... dressed as a prostitute to infiltrate Vladimir's gang?” she said with an air of utter disbelief.

It *sounded* pretty crazy. I blushed deepest crimson.

“It's an idea. No one else has come forward,” I tried to explain.

And that was the truth of it. Most of the female staff had families and children and Sarah didn't want them to risk injury; it would not look good for the police if they sent a female officer under cover to infiltrate a notorious and ruthless Russian gang. Heads would roll, not just the head of the poor detective who got the job; so much for equality, ah? One female officer volunteered but she was too inexperienced for such a complex operation. A single male with no family ties? Well, he was expendable, right? That was what Sarah thought, and who could blame her? It's the same in Afghanistan – they send women to the front line but it's always the men who come back in the body bags.

To take you back, it was 2008 and an influx of eastern Europeans into the UK had led to a huge upsurge in organised crime: prostitution; drug smuggling; credit card fraud and God knows what. Anyway, the Metropolitan Police had received intelligence that a gang of Russians were going to flood London with prostitutes. The Squad wanted someone to go undercover as a hooker to befriend some of the Eastern European girls around Soho and get to Mr. Big, who was thought to be a certain Vladimir

Kontchelsky, a man on Interpol's most wanted list and a real nasty.

So, though Sarah was at first skeptical, a lack of volunteers led to me being called back to her office.

"You know this very bizarre request you have made to go undercover and infiltrate the Kontchelsky gang?" my boss said.

"Yes, Ma'am," I said

"I've discussed it with my superiors and we think it may be worth a crack. First though, we have to see how convincing you are as a woman. We want to test you out in women's clothes in the Opo Room and then, if we think it's a goer, we'll get you properly fitted out. You'll need a handler, of course. You do appreciate this is very, very risky?"

"I understand that but I only want to do my bit in keeping the country safe – particularly at this time," I said with an air of humble patriotism. Of course, the thought of being dressed as a woman in police time had nothing to do with it, did it?

Sarah looked at me a tad skeptically and stood up from her desk. "Follow me," she said.

She led the way down a corridor and into the operations room; where I spied a bag of old clothes and some shoes.

"This is all we could muster. It's lost property. It's amazing what people lose. Have a rummage around and get dressed in something that fits. I'll be in the next room."

So, I went through the clothes – they were hardly very exciting but eventually I selected a black skirt and blouse. The shoes were a bit small and pinched my feet. There was also a selection of wigs on a table. I selected a blond one and made use of the mirror and makeup facilities to

make myself look semi-glam. When I looked at my reflection... well, I still looked like a man in drag. I wanted to say to Sarah, *Look, give me the afternoon off, I'll go home, get changed properly and come back to the station looking like a woman...* but, of course, that would have revealed my secret. The wardrobes of my bachelor's apartment contained more female clothing than male and I was still very much into "dressing".

Even so, Sarah was impressed, so were her superiors. They decided I should be made-up properly and put in clothes that fitted me. As they spoke about me, I could see they were gradually convincing themselves of the merits of what was an absolutely madcap plan. As someone might have once said, *No one is more deluded than an ambitious person.*

"Having a man undercover is less delicate," Inspector Sythe said.

*Yeah, I thought, and how many times have you been undercover, you silver braided arsehole?*

"Yes, and at least Toni is trained in combat and firearms: he may be able to fight his way out of any difficult situations," another brass-shouldered nonentity added with all the insight of a mole in a watering can.

"And he's divorced and doesn't see his kids, Sir," Sarah added for good effect.

"Yes, yes, yes," Sythe said, rubbing his chin. "Good work, Jones. I think this plan of yours to send this chap undercover might just work."

I stood around like a proverbial spare prick whilst the conversation went on around me. Eventually, the top brass walked out of the room and I was left with my immediate superior, Commander Sarah Jones.

"Get changed and I'll call you back tomorrow," she said.

So, new clothes were bought for me and the following day, I was given a full “screen test”; this time, a make-up artist from Charles Fox theatrical retailers, was invited in to work her magic on me. I was then paraded in front of the top brass in the Opo Room again. I must admit this time even *I* was impressed. Getting ready had taken most of the morning but by the time everyone had finished working on me I really did look convincing – in fact, there was no doubt about it, it was the best I had ever looked. The makeup was far better than I could have done myself and the clothes were of the best quality.

“Wow, if I didn’t know she was a man I would almost fancy her myself,” Inspector Sythe joked.

“She’s certainly convincing, Sir,” Sarah added. “I think, on this basis, Operation Restless is a goer.”

“Agreed,” one of the top brass said. “Carry on, Commander Jones.”

“Agreed,” Sythe repeated and then added, “but can I suggest that to see how convincing she is, we test her out around the office. Set something up, Sarah, and give it a week. If it’s good to go, we move forward with plan 4B.”

“Yes Sir,” Sarah said. She was beaming from ear to ear. I could see she already had visions of another pip on her epaulet and dreams of becoming the next Metropolitan Police Commissioner.

So a whole wardrobe of clothes was bought for me, and whilst the real Toni took some leave, Toni, the female impersonator, came back to the police station as a civilian temp. On my first day I was taken into the offices and shown around – I was a new girl come to do some temping. It was an experiment to see if I would function in public and, of course, I passed with flying colours. In truth, I wished Operation Reckless, as I called it, would end there and then. I just loved getting up in the morning and slipping into silky kickers (I discarded the horrid cot-



ton ones the police bought for me) and 10 denier stockings, silky camisole tops, skirt suits, heels, handbags and jewelry, thinking I was going to work and being accepted as a woman. It was perfect.



And, I was so relaxed and 'chilled' at the end of the day. It made me reflect how unhappy I had been during my marriage to Julia; the rows, the disagreements, the frustrations. Maybe it would have all been more relaxed if I had been able to pull on a pair of knickers and panty hose but after the children were born, that had become near impossible. Julia wasn't exactly supportive of my desire to wear the clothes of the opposite sex – in fact she hated it.

The week passed and no one read me let alone recognised me as D.I. Toni Lombardi and so it came to pass that Operation Restless (or Reckless) had its stooge. The combination of a transvestite with an urge to wear women's clothes on police time whilst going undercover to do a public duty and a megalomaniac boss who wanted promotion, promotion, promotion was a lethal cocktail and someone was going to get hurt.

Whilst I was temping I was taken away from my mundane chores from time to time and given some training and instruction on how to be a lady of the night from a real-life hooker. She taught me how to walk and talk as if I was a woman (as if I didn't know already!) and the lingo that went with the job whilst a coach helped me with my voice. I was also briefed on the Kontchelsky gang and shown photographs of some of the key gang members. I also watched DVDs of confessions from prostitutes that had got on the wrong side of the gang and taken a beating. It was all designed to give me motivation.

Sarah was absolutely amazed by my transformation. I could see her glowing (and crowing) at the prospect of me going undercover and nabbing Vladimir Kontchelsky. When I had finished my stint as a temp, D.I. Toni Lombardi re-appeared from leave and came back on duty. On the first day, Sarah asked me to show her my hairless chest.

“Umm, I like a hairless man,” she said rubbing her hand over my pecs. “There’s something so erotic about a man who is clean, smooth-shaved.”

I must admit I was amazed that Sarah was so aroused. All my fellow officers saw her as a frigid, ambitious matron with no interest in children, men or husbands or any of the finer things in life. Work was her life.

A few days later, Operation Restless was due to commence. One night, when I came on shift, I was taken to the Opo Room and dressed and made-up professionally. When I was ready, an unmarked police car took me to Soho and I was introduced to a Russian girl, Xenia, who was in on the plan. She had been arrested for prostitution and had no valid ID but had been told if she helped me then she would be let off and allowed to remain in the UK – she knew Kontchelsky but hadn’t worked for him. She knew I was an undercover cop but little else.

Of course, unlike her, I wasn’t available for hire! Even so, a number of cars stopped and asked about me as I stood around on the pavement. Xenia gave them the brush-off until one of the Kontchelsky mob approached us and warned us off the Russian’s London pitch; it was the part of Soho we knew the gang operated in.

“We run the street round here,” the big Russian goon said as he got out of his large car. “So you go fuck yourselves. This is our territory.”

We acted frightened and walked a few hesitant steps away, then Xenia, who I have to say, was a mighty fine actress, stumbled back on high heels.

“But please Mister, we are poor, we have no work, please let us work the street. We could work for you.’

The Russian thug relented slightly. “Ah, you say you have no pimp?”

"No pimp," Xenia repeated. "Toni here is new to the game and she has no pimp either. Me? I have friend in Manchester and can work there but she, well, she has no one and just wants to work and would work well for you. She does much good fucky," Xenia explained. "Many clients come back to her again and again as such good is her fucky. She earn you much, much money and don't do no fuck around either with the money so you make well out of her. And she's English so speaks good the language. And she's not like most English girls who jack the smack. She's clean."

The goon's eyes lit up. "English, ahh? English women are dogs and slags and like to fuck."

His dark eyes peered into me. As we hoped, he saw me as another potential whore on a string. I stood against a brick wall in my skyscraper heels and short skirt, trying to look seductive. In truth, I was as nervous as hell. The piercing black eyes never left me.

"Come," he said at last. "I take the pretty one with me and maybe give her work. But you? You're just an old whore who needs to fuck off to Manchester and work there. There is no business here for you. We see you here again and you get such a beating you never work again. Now go fuck yourself."

Xenia gave me a hug and whispered 'good luck', then she was gone. I was bundled into the back of a car... and that was the start of it. It wasn't long before I had delved into Vladimir's world and that in turn led me to being tied to a chair and gagged in the basement of a terraced house in the East of London. I figured there must be a spy in the police camp and Vladimir had been sent for. When he arrived, my fate would be sealed.

The men who captured me made some pretty complimentary comments about my "big butt" and "mannish face" but despite a bit of slapping, they had not been too

hard on me. I expected worse and knew I was likely to get it once my little secret was discovered. It was Natasja, with her full breasts and long legs, who exposed me. As soon as she walked into the room and saw me, she pointed and shrieked.

"She's a man!" Just like that. One look and she had clocked me. Maybe it was the stubble showing through my thick pan makeup. I don't know for sure but I knew the stubble could give me away eventually. I hung my head.

One of the goons shot a hand up the inside of my black leather miniskirt and grabbed my wedding tackle. He stumbled back, laughing like a hyena.

"Natasja is right. We are, how do you say? Dealing with a geezer."

The two goons in the room cried with laughter. They actually leant against the cellar wall and guffawed hysterically. They were literally crying with laughter at my predicament. Finally, one of my captors, who was seven foot if an inch and built like a proverbial outhouse, said. "You English, you so crazy. You send a man to do a woman's job..." The goon pointed to his head and repeated "crazy" many times amongst a deluge of Russian which, though I could not speak a word of the damned language, I took to be of a far from complimentary nature.

And not for the first time I thought my seven foot Russian minder was correct. We *were* crazy. It was a stupid plan that Sarah should have dismissed as soon as it had left my lips. For my part, I had only suggested it because I had wanted to legitimise my dressing; show the police service that I was a transvestite with a purpose, that I could pull off a daring undercover raid that would get Sarah promoted and me a mention in some report or other. But all it had led to was me being tied up to a chair and force-fed like a baby. When Natasja had finished spoon-

ing the soup into my mouth, she sat on the floor at my knee.

“Tell me, Toni, how did you, how do you say? Get involved in this caper?” She curled her legs under her as if she was about to listen to her grandmother telling a tale of yore. “We’ve got much time and I’m interested,” she added.

“Let me take you back...” I paused and took a deep breath. “Let me take you back to where it all began...”

## CHAPTER ONE

“It all goes back to my childhood. Most things do. My mum got pregnant with me when she was eighteen and my dad did a runner - I’ve never, ever, met him. Mum was thrown out of her house by my granddad. He was very strict and didn’t believe in sex before marriage. Mum ended up feeling pretty bitter about the whole experience. Anyway, she was convinced I’d be a girl - I think the midwife told her that and she wanted a girl because men had been so bad to her. My rat of a dad had deserted her and her dad had beaten her with a belt when he found out she was pregnant and disowned her so she felt utterly rejected. She came from a strict Italian Catholic background, you see. When the baby was born, she got me! She christened me Toni with an ‘T’ and she dressed me as a girl when I was small. She had to struggle financially as she didn’t want to take benefits and she has always worked. We lived in apartments and things and eventually she bought her own house.

“I don’t have much memory before the age of about five or six but I’ve seen photos of myself when I was two, three, four years of age and in quite a few of them I’m wearing dresses and have pretty pink bows in my hair. Because her family disowned her, she didn’t have anyone who could tell her not to do it. In any case, Mum was

pretty stubborn and just wanted me to be a girl. To add insult to injury, the woman opposite, Mrs. Patterson, Denise, had a daughter called Susan who was the same age as me. In fact, we went to school together. "Denise was a stay-at-home mum so around the holidays, my mum would pay her to look after me and I would play with Susan. We were best friends and did everything together. Of course, our games included dressing-up and I was dressed as a girl - a lot. Because Mrs. Patterson lived opposite she knew that mum dressed me as a girl. I'm sure Mum told her I wanted to be a girl because Denise would often encourage me to dress in Susan's clothes and even brought some girls clothes for me.

"Mum would love it when Denise brought me back home at the end of the day and I was wearing a dress. I used to go around there after school if Mum was late home from work and sometimes I'd be given a dress to wear. I think Susan, Denise, and my mum enjoyed it though I'm not so sure about Mr. Paterson; I think he had reservations about me dressing as a girl and would sometimes say to me that I should be out playing with the boys. Mrs. Patterson would just say, "'Look John, you know he has problems, he's transgendered, let him play with the girls, it's the least we can do.'

"I didn't know any different. When I went to the shrink after my marriage failed, he said it was conditioning and imprinting, that, as I was so young, I would have seen whatever my mother wanted as being 'right' and would have gone along with it. As I got older, I loved the fact that mum liked me being feminine; when I wore a pretty dress and pirouetted or curtsied, she would clap her hands and encourage me and give me a hug and kiss me. I loved that - my dressing made Mum happy.

"At primary school it wasn't a big deal at all; the school wasn't too rough and back then, in the Eighties and early Nineties, kids were more innocent and there

wasn't so much bullying. It wasn't not like now with my kids and Facebook and mobile phones and what have you. Back then you just turned up for school and no one cared that I didn't like football or sports or that I liked to play with the girls. That was just how it was. Maybe I'm seeing it through rose-tinted spectacles but I really don't remember a lot of hassle at primary school – certainly nothing like secondary which I will come onto later."

"Why? Were you bullied?" Natasjaaja asked.

I enjoyed talking about my past; apart from the discussions with the shrink I had never really talked to anyone about dressing but my mouth felt so tight and sore, a consequence of being gagged. "Wait, I'll come to that," I said. "I just need some water."

Natasja obliged with a glass of water. I closed my eyes and continued.

"At primary school, every year you had to bring some money for a school charity and then you could dress as anything you wanted. So I got dressed as a girl. Every year. Sometimes a princess, sometimes a fairy, but always a girl. Mum loved it and would go into work late those days so she could take me to school and see me walk into the playground in my skirts.

"Then there were Susan's parties – all-girl affairs because girls didn't have boyfriends at that age. Mum sent me across the road dressed as a girl. No one seemed to care; the other girls seemed to accept me as a girl. But as I got older, one or two girls did ask me if I wanted to be a girl or why I dressed as a girl but I just think they thought I was eccentric or wanted to be a girl and left it like that. Everyone at school knew, of course, and sometimes kids would look at me funny or tease me or call me a freak but on the whole things were OK.

"Every night when I came home from school, I was given a dress or skirt to wear – all my pants were silky



girl's knickers, I even slept in a nightdress so I was far more feminine than most girls."

"That's really weird," Natasja said. She stroked my knee.

I sighed. "That's what others thought and it got really difficult when I was eleven and went to secondary school. That was when it was really hard. I started to look at myself in the mirror and think, 'Do you know what, I'm a boy!' I couldn't understand why Mum wanted to dress me as a girl. When I asked her, she said it was what *I* wanted but how could I have known what I wanted when I was a baby or a two- or three-year-old? I had no notion of different genders then.

"When I got to secondary school, I really fell out with her over it. As I say, I started to question why she dressed me as a girl. One time, I got caught in women's knickers when changing for P.E. The other kids really started to take the piss out of me and some of the kids, who had gone to primary school with me, said I dressed as a girl at home. That led to years of bullying. Not by one group of lads either but by all sorts of kids, girls as well. Every fucker seemed to know about me. Every fucker seemed to want to have a go at me." I could feel tears in my eyes. "I hated secondary school and was always bunking off – my mum even got taken to court for it. It was just a total nightmare. I argued constantly with my mum and blamed her for dressing me. For two or three years, I didn't dress at all and threw out all the female things she had bought me. I even went to charity shops and bought myself some boy's clothes. Mum was quite strict and quite stubborn so I used to get punished a lot – smacked, that sort of thing. Because she worked full-time, she always expected me to do a lot of the chores when I got home from school but I got in with a group of boys who played up. I wanted to be hard, to be macho. I was getting into girls..."

“Before that, though, when I was about fourteen, I just caved in. I really missed the dressing. Susan was less friendly to me as she had her own friends and had started dating boys. I was kind of jealous. It was tough. I was lonely. Really lonely. I had no friends to speak of. Then one day during the summer holidays, I went over to see Mrs. Patterson.

“‘Susan’s out,’ she said. ‘But come in, Toni.’”

“I followed Denise down the hall and into the kitchen. I knew Susan was out with her boyfriend. Denise poured me some orange squash and I sat down in the kitchen and talked to her about this and that – how I hated school and that sort of thing. Then I told her about Mum and the problems I had been having. I really opened my heart up to her and told her that I was rebelling but that really, deep down, I wanted to dress as a girl and I missed the closeness to Mum. Denise really understood. She told me to come over the following day and she would sort things out. She would make things better between me and Mum.

“Well, the following day, Susan, Denise, and I went shopping. Susan advised what to buy and Denise bought it – clothes, makeup, jewelry, lingerie. Susan was pretty disinterested by that time and she wasn’t the Susan of old but she went along with it - I think she liked the fact that she could show her mum she was fashionable and that she was good at matching clothes.

“When we got back, she went off to see her boyfriend and Mrs. Patterson dressed me up. It felt so good, it felt *great*. Later, Mrs Patterson... Denise... took me to see Mum and she made quite a fuss of me. She couldn’t believe I was dressed again and she cried. I told her I was sorry for the way I had behaved and would do as I was told in future. After that, I went back to dressing but it didn’t last long. One time I got read by a woman – my voice was breaking and I was starting to shave, so I gave

up. Also I was really confused; I wanted to be a boy and I started acting tough.

"I went to college and I had a few jobs. Mum met a guy called Mark and married . They bought me a flat. I started dressing again and went out and met other transvestites. Eventually I joined the police as I wanted to prove I was a man. I had no problem finding women. In due course I married Julia and put the dressing to one side. I tried to repress it but it came back; it always does.

"Eventually, I started dressing again. Julia found out and we got divorced. It wasn't just that, it was the late nights, the shifts; police work is not good for a stable marriage. When we divorced, I saw a psychiatrist; he told me I would always be a transvestite and I needed to come to terms with it. So I bought a flat and started dressing again. Then this undercover job came up and I volunteered."

I left the sentence hanging to see Natasja's reaction. She was sitting on the floor, her shoes were off, he had taken her hand off my knee and was stroking her feet.

"It's surprising your mum wanted a girl," she said as last. "Most family they want boy."

"I think Mum really liked me dressed as it gave her control over me and she hated men. I can never really remember her having a relationship when I was young, though she's now married to this chap, Mark. He's a nice guy. But back then, she felt bitter and she wanted me to be a girl. Obviously, I dressed as a boy most of the time; when I was a teenager, I had male friends, went out, partied and met girls. She was cool with all that but by then she had met Mark and was less interested in what I was doing."

Natasja stood up and stretched. "Your life," she said. "It's how you say? Very weird. I think in my country, no man would admit to enjoying the dressing in the woman

clothes. Russian men are very macho. In your country the men are very weak and puny and do not have much, how do you say? Balls? Their wives tell them what to do and they are not real men at all. For my part, I like the Russian man the better." She stood up. "Do you need the toilet?"

I told her I didn't. "Then it's good night, Toni with an 'T'."

She unwrapped some heavy-duty tape from a roll, pulled some out, cut it and slapped it over my mouth. She walked to the door

"Sorry, Toni, we cannot have you make a noise. You stay nice and quiet and think about all the lovely dresses you once wore. If you want to wear again, you must do as we say. We Russians are not afraid of your soft courts and so-called justice." She laughed. "Why your crazy coppers carry no guns? How can you catch a villain with no gun? I do not understand. You English are mad. You have no balls."

She closed the door: Her light laughter drifted along the stairwell as she walked up the stone steps and away from the cellar.

## CHAPTER TWO

The rope dug into my hands and the one around my middle cut into my waist. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. 1987. I was seven years old. Susan's party was on a Saturday which meant Mum had all morning to get me ready. The dress had been hanging up on her wardrobe door all week, wrapped in plastic.

"Don't you go in there sneaking a look," Mum said. "I want it to be a nice surprise. You will be the belle of the ball. You really will be."

It wasn't hard to resist. By then I already knew the difference between 'boys' and 'girls' and I was beginning to

question why mum had this strange desire to dress me up in girl's clothes. Sometimes when I lay awake at night, I would cry and pray to God that He would make me normal, just like everyone else. But who was 'normal'? The invitations had been given around at school and, as always, I was the only boy invited.

"Susan wants to be your girlfriend," one boy had said. It was nice to think some of the boys still didn't know I went to the parties dressed as a girl. Most did though and even my teacher had asked one day:

"Toni, does your mum send to you to Susan's parties in a dress?"

I nodded my head.

"Do you like it?"

I shrugged and nodded again. Well, what else could I do? I knew Mum would be furious if I let her down and told the teacher she dressed me against my will. Mum often made it clear to me that she didn't want anyone official knocking on her door; I risked being taken away if I told the teachers too much. But did I like it? I didn't know. It was just what I did, how things were, it was kind of 'normal'.

Even though I never breathed a word to the teachers or said I didn't like it, I know they spoke to Mum about it at a parents evening. Mum said it was what I wanted and that she was trying to bring me up to be gender neutral as she thought I might be transgendered. I think the teachers liked that. Mum was very plausible and persuasive. She was good at telling stories. She convinced Denise I was transgendered and I'm sure she convinced the teachers as well. It was all for my own good. It was what I wanted.

So it was the Saturday of Susan's party. Mr. Patterson had gone off to football – he was a keen Arsenal fan – which meant the house would be Girls Only. The party

started at 2 PM. At about 10 AM, I was told by mum to have a bath. When I got out, Mum dried me and I put on a silky wrap. My feminisation had started. I was told to sit on my bed and she came through with nail varnish and painted my nails, toes and fingers. Then she combed and straightened my blond hair which had not seen a barber's scissors for years. Did I like it? Of course! I loved the attention. Having Mum all to myself. She spoke so softly and kindly to me and she told me how pretty I would look, it sent a shiver down my spine.

Then she left the room and returned with a pair of purple knickers and a slip which I was told to put on. They were silky and good quality. Mum never scrimped when it came to dressing her Toni.' I was then told to pull on little white socks with a bear motif on them. I stood in the room looking at my reflection in the mirror. Mum went back to her bedroom and returned with the dress, covered in polythene. She pulled off the wrappings and showed it to me. It was purple chiffon with a nylon underlay. The dress was straight with no skirts. A shift dress.

"This is a more mature dress than the dress you wore last year," Mum said. "You're getting too old for pretty little party frocks. You need something more in keeping with the times."

She took off the wrappings and unzipped it and I pulled it over my head. Mum ran up the zip. I looked in the mirror. I was a pretty girl; my blond hair smoothed, my dress tight to my body, my legs bare and pale.

"Sit down," Mum said.

I sat back on the bed. She dabbed makeup on my face using her hands and a brush. It wasn't much but enough to give my face a little colour, adding to the girliness. Then she added jewelry

I always got nervous before I was due to go outside dressed – I wondered what the other girls would think of me, whether they would call me a freak as some boys at school had done on the ‘dress up’ charity days. I wanted to tell Mum I didn’t want to go but I knew that was impossible. I felt nervous. Mum took my hand.

“There, what do you think?” she asked.

I looked at myself in the mirror. My heart was beating like a drum. A boy called Toni, a girl called Toni. The boy who liked to play with the girls, to dress as a girl. I knew there were some boys who were jealous of me – one older boy at school sorted me out and asked me about my mum dressing me as a girl. At first I thought he was just taking the rise out of me but quickly realised he was genuinely interested and wanted to know every last detail. He was the exception – on the whole the boys shunned me. It wasn’t cool to have me as a friend. The boy who dressed as a girl. They left me alone, though, let me get on with it; the bullying would come later.

“Shall we go?” my mum asked.

I nodded and she took my hand. I followed her downstairs. My mouth was dry and the butterflies swooped and dived around my stomach. In the past, I had enjoyed it because it was a dressing-up game. But I was seven now. I knew I was doing something other boys didn’t do and I felt nervous. Nervous to the pit of my stomach. I reached the hall and picked up the carrier bag that contained Susan’s present (Mum would make out I chose it myself but I hadn’t. It was a Barbie doll). Then the front door opened and the sunlight burst in. I always hated that bit. We lived on a busy road with a bus stop near us and pedestrians would come by. My hand felt sweaty on the carrier bag handle. Mum sensed my unease and led me across the street. On the stroke of 2 PM, Mum rang the doorbell. Denise answered, bent down, and told me how

pretty I looked. I was ushered in. Mum released my hand and turned to go.

“But Mum...” I said, at last feeling the urge to resist. Mum bent down and kissed me on the cheek.

“Don’t worry, Denise will look after you. Now have a good time, won’t you?” With that, she left me – as she had done every year. But that year I realised it was no longer a game. I was seven and knew it was ‘wrong.’

Susan appeared in front of me wearing a pretty pink dress and the thick glasses she wore until she was a teen and discovered contact lenses. Her hair bounced up and down her back like a horse’s mane.

“Hello Toni,” she said. “Is that for me?” she asked as she looked at the carrier bag. She completely ignored my attire; she had seen me so many times in a dress she was blasé about it. I nodded and handed over the gift and card. I followed her into the front room; it smelt bright and fresh. A table been set up for tea. Three other girls were already there, sitting on the floor and looking at the presents Susan had already unwrapped.

“This is Toni, Toni from school.”

I remember the smiles, the laughter, the smirks. Like me, they realised it was no longer a dressing game.

“Toni, but he’s wearing a *dress*,” one of the girls said.

I blushed: I wished the ground beneath my feet would open up.

“Now girls, remember what I told you!” Mrs. Patterson said sharply.

“Yes, Mrs Patterson!” they sang in unison.

And that stopped any further comments. But what had Mrs. Paterson told them? What had she said? When I went to see the psychiatrist, all those memories were dredged up. There was so much going on when I was a



child which I knew nothing about. So many secrets. And a lot of them were about me.

When the other girls arrived, we had our tea – jelly and ice-cream and crisps and things. Some of the girls looked at me. I remember the looks. As I was growing up, I got a lot of looks when I was out with Mum; when she took me shopping; when she took me to the pictures. Was I a boy or was I a girl? But at the parties there were always girls who stared at me. As children do. After Denise brought in the cake and we sang “Happy Birthday,” we played some games and listened to some music. We got bored as children do so we went out into the garden. As always I was quiet. I just joined in with the others. Then Mandy, one of the girls who was also in my class, took my hand.

“I like you dressed as a girl,” she said softly. “I like you better as a girl than a boy. I wish all boys were like you.”

Then she skipped off. I never forgot that moment. Never.

## CHAPTER THREE

I slipped in and out of sleep. I daydreamed, mulled over my predicament. It was hard to sleep with my head lolling forward. It was so damned uncomfortable being tied to a chair for hour after hour, day after day. The rope around my middle cut me in two. My wrists felt sore. I just wished Vladimir would arrive and put me out of my misery. I lost the will to live. How long had it been? How long had I sat in that dingy cellar with a bare electric light bulb dangling above my head? The cellar smelt musty and damp. Well, I suppose I could not have expected five-star treatment. I just wished they would get on with it and shoot me. I had found out that they were the Syndicate: Vladimir’s Mob, that’s what they call themselves, the

Syndicate or *Ñèíäèèàò* as it's known in Russian, not that I knew any Russian. Natasja translated that one for me. My head lolled forward. It was hard not to think of the past... of sunny days... of open fields... of dresses....

It was March 1991 and I was eleven years of age.... year six at school and just about to go to secondary school. As I had told Natasja, every year the school allowed all the kids to come to school in anything they wished for a small donation to charity and every year I came in a dress.

"What are you going to come as this year, Toni?" Mandy asked me.

"He loves looking like a girl; he always dresses as one," one of the other lads said.

I just shrugged my shoulders and pretended the jibes didn't worry me. Everyone knew. The staff, all the other kids. I was transgendered, that was the word they used. Not that my fellow eleven-year-olds knew such words' to them, I was "sissy" and "queer boy" and "freak".

"So what's it to be?" Mandy asked again.

I shrugged. "Not sure. I may surprise you all and come as something complete different. Superman, Spiderman... ."

"Batman! *Batgirl* more like. Your mum won't let you dress as a boy, Susan told us," another boy sniped.

I started to cry then. Big wet tears that rolled down my cheek. That was the truth of it and Susan had obviously spread the word around; maybe, just to a friend but things get repeated. Tell one person and you may as well tell the world. I covered my face, dug the heels of my hand into my eyes. Sometimes I wished I was normal... or dead.

But when I saw the dress Mum bought for me, I just couldn't wait to put it on. It was long and pink and the

skirts were buoyed by net. I couldn't wait to wear it. I loved how Mum took so much time doing me up – working on my hair, applying a smidgen of makeup with her fingers to my face just to give me “some colour”; how she set out my underwear on the bed, how she helped me into that glorious dress. All week I thought about how I would walk around the school in the long skirts. I would get teased, I would get stares; I knew that but I would be immune from all the hostility; protected from the jibes and snide remarks by the silky covering of the dress.

It was a Friday, the mufti day. I remember getting up, having a shower, then going back to my room to pull on silky underwear and a slip; there was no time for breakfast. Then Mum did my face and added the makeup. She got the dress out of its protective polythene wrapper and laid it on the floor like a sack. She held the bodice whilst I put my tiny feet inside the circle of cloth. Then she drew it up; I slipped my arms into the sleeves and she zipped me up. I looked at myself in the mirror. Toni the boy. Toni the girl. I knew I would be the most feminine at school; none of the other eleven-year-old girls would be quite so girly, so feminine, so beautiful.

It was raining, I remember that. I remember slipping into low-heeled shoes; Mum gave me a Mac to hold over my head as I hurried to the car in my long skirts. I suppose I should have known the omens were bad. That rain. The crack of thunder. Mum drove me to school. I was late and despite my excuse about how I had had to get ready, I still got a detention. I think the teacher liked punishing me. He taught P.E., thought I was a Nancy boy and had no truck for the idea that I might be transgendered. That was the first thing that went wrong. Things seemed better when I entered the hall for assembly and there were cheers, even some wolf whistles as I was paraded in front of the school as someone who had made the best effort. I felt accepted. I didn't learn much at all that day; all I

could think about was the dress, how nice it felt, and how I liked wearing it. It was a wonderful day at school but it turned nasty.

It was the end of the school day and Mum was late picking me up. I was standing at the school gate on my own as the other kids had all gone. Waiting. It was a pity I hadn't done my detention that night for lateness as it would have saved me from what happened. Four boys from the secondary school up the road walked passed. At first they didn't seem too concerned, then one of the boys turned back, bag over his shoulder.

"You a boy, mate?" he asked.

I nodded, suddenly feeling really exposed. Frightened.

"Well, why are you dressed as a fairy?"

"For charity," I said.

"What? A poofers charity?"

"AIDS!" Another lad joked and they all laughed.

One of the lads came close and put his head near me. "You gay, mate?"

I shook my head.

"I think you are. I think you're a poofter." He punched me in the stomach. Then again. The others joined in. They all pounced on me, kicking and punching and kneeling me. Red splattered onto the pink of the dress. Fists rained down on me. I was caught in a blizzard of punches and kicks. The pain was excruciating. I tried not to fall to the floor but in the end, I could not stand up and fell onto my knees. I was an easy target then. Boots and shoes crashed into my body. Time and time again. Then I heard the car. The screech of brakes.

Mum shouting. She was mad. Furious. "Get off him! Get off him! LEAVE HIM ALONE YOU FUCKING BULLIES! LEAVE HIM ALONE!"