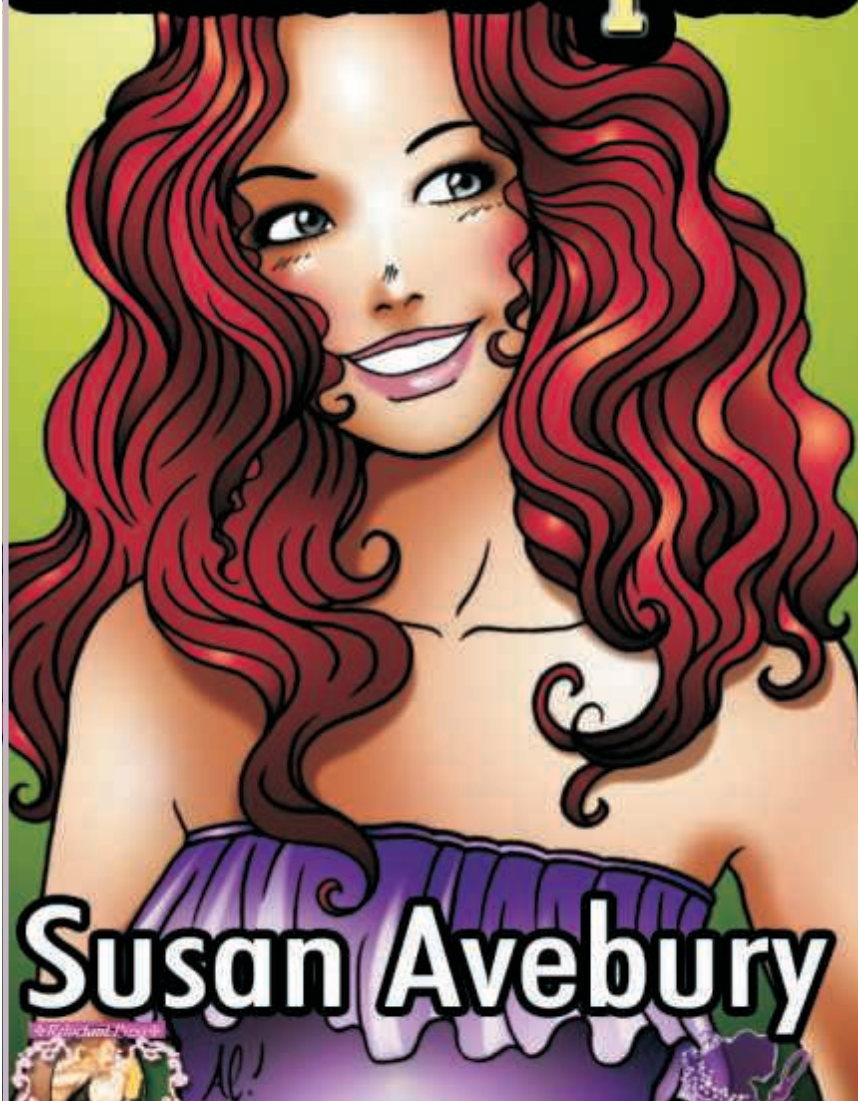


Hidden Depths



Susan Avebury



An "Adult Tv" Novel



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Hidden Depths

By Susan Avebury

CHAPTER ONE

“So do you fancy coming to a party at my place next Friday night?” asked Samantha, disturbing my concentration on the plans of a building I was working on.

I looked up. “What’s the occasion?” I asked.

“Anniversary of my divorce. Just fancied a few drinks with friends and some music. Let our hair down for a change. Should be fun.”

“Er, yeah, why not?” I replied. “Might be nice for a change.”

“Cool,” she replied. “About 7.30, bring a bottle,” and with that she flounced off.

It was later in the afternoon when Sam rang me.

“Just had a thought,” she said. “How about we do fancy dress? Everyone else is up for it.”

I shrugged, “Sure, why not. What’s the theme?”

“Heroes. The more risqué the better. Can be anything, superheroes, doctors, nurse. Big, sexy fireman if you’re up for it.” She giggled at that.

I chuckled. “Okay. I’ll see what I can do.”

Heroes. That made it a bit easier, although I had really no idea at all what to wear, especially if it needed to be risqué. With my build, however, a hunky fireman was definitely out of the question. I put it to that back of my mind to think about later and ploughed on with my work.

It was later than I thought when I was interrupted again, by Rod this time.

“You still working? It’s gone five.”

I looked at my watch. He was right. I’d been so engrossed in work I’d completely forgotten the time.

“We’re going out for a beer. Coming?”

“Sure,” I said, that Friday feeling suddenly hitting me. “Let me finish off and I’ll see you there.”

“Nice one,” said Rod. “See you there.”

By the time I arrived at the pub, they were well into their first drink, Sam clearly enjoying a joke. I ordered a beer from the barman and joined them. They all looked up as I arrived and shuffled down the bench seat to make room for me.

“So what are you going to wear for the party then Jon?” Rod asked.

“Not sure yet,” I replied, taking a mouthful of beer.

“Sam had a wicked idea,” Rod went on. “You could come as a nurse.”

"You what?" I choked.

Sam let out a long, giggling laugh, clearly amused, as was everyone else.

"You are joking?" I queried.

"Oh come on Jon," squealed Sam. "You'll be great. You've even got the hair for it."

Great. My hair. It had let it grow to shoulder length and normally wore it in a ponytail, which I thought looked fashionable, in a Karl Lagerfeld way. Now it was betraying me.

"I've got some family and other friends coming as well. It'll be such a wind up for them. They think we're all a really straight bunch."

"I reckon you could carry it Jon," Rod chipped in quietly, nodding gently. "Sam's brother sounds like a right dork. It'd be good to wind him up."

I glanced over to Sam, who nodded eagerly.

"Oh you would not believe just how much of a dork he really is," she enthused. "I mean, as dorks go, he is the dorkiest. Oh God, it would be brilliant just to really wind him up."

I rubbed my eyes, wondering what I was being dragged into. A hand on my shoulder caught me unawares. It was Andy.

"Don't worry mate, we'll make sure nothing happens to you."

I looked at him, knowing that as geeky and 'unmacho' as I was, they were my friends and actually, yes, they would make sure I was okay. They always did.

"Do I have a choice?" I asked, accepting the inevitable.

Sam got up and came round the table, arms outstretched and wrapped herself round me from behind in a

big hug. I patted her on the arm and she kissed my cheek and thanked me, in that strange girly way that some women use when you've done something really exciting or nice for them.

"So where do I get a uniform from then?"

Sam downed her drink quickly and got up.

"Come on," she urged. "The shops are open for another hour. We can go and get it now."

I looked from Sam to my drink and back to Sam.

"Go on," said Rod. "At least it'll look right if Sam's with you."

I knocked the beer back and was almost dragged out of the pub by Sam as I tried to bid a good night to my colleagues. Outside, she put her arm through mine and led me at a fair pace down the road to a little shop just off the main road. She led me in, the bell jangling noisily as the door opened. Inside there was a wall full of plastic packets, all with fancy dress costumes inside, the picture on the header card showing what was contained inside. Sam went straight to the rack and started looking. I joined her and started looking, feeling slightly sordid and as if everyone in the world was watching me, knowing what we were planning.

"What size are you?" Sam whispered.

I told her my chest and waist and she reached up and picked one off the peg, checking the header card.

"This should fit nicely," she commented, showing me the packet.

'Naughty Nurse,' it read. 'Includes nylon dress, hat and garter. Stockings not included.'

There was a picture of an attractive model wearing the uniform, showing a huge expanse of leg and wearing

platform heels. Sam looked at me and I returned the look. I shrugged very slightly.

“I have no idea,” I whispered. “I mean, I don’t have the bust she’s got and I’m not sure where I’ll get shoes either.”

“It zips up a long way,” she replied, “so that’s not a problem. Plus it’s elasticated so it’ll fit better. What shoe size are you?”

I told her and a smile played on her lips. “Easy, you can get women’s shoes in your size.”

“Go on then,” I murmured quietly, slightly disturbed that I now had a semi-erection.

At the counter Sam asked for white stockings and the assistant fetched a pair for her. I paid and with bag in hand, Sam led me out of the shop and up the road again.

“We’ll get you some white knickers,” she said, “and shoes we can find easily.”

“Bra?” I asked, almost guiltily. “I mean I don’t have real breasts or anything.”

“We can get that as well,” she replied, not missing a beat.

“I can pad them out with socks I suppose,” I mused out loud.

I let Sam lead me up the road, feeling helpless, yet, oddly excited by the whole affair. She took me into a small shoe shop that sold cheap shoes. Sam scanned the racks and found a pair of black court shoes with a high heel in my size. She led me to a fitting area at the back of the shop where we sat out of direct view of the assistant. I took my shoes and socks off and pulled on the little nylon sock provided before pulling on the courts. They were tight but not uncomfortable and I stood up and walked a couple of steps.

“Okay?” asked Sam.

“I think so,” I replied. “A bit tight, but okay.”

She nodded. “They’ll loosen up a bit as you wear them. I would get white to go with the dress, but they’ve only got black in stock in this size.”

I sat down and put my own shoes back on before we paid for the shoes and went out into the main road again.

“Underwear,” she said, a tone of determination in her voice.

Again I found myself with a semi erection as I thought about what we were buying. I couldn’t fathom why I found it so exciting. Sam finally led me into a large department store and we made our way to the lingerie department.

“What chest size are you?” she asked quietly.

I told her and she selected a full cup bra from the racks.

“B cup,” she said. “What do you think?”

I shrugged.

“Okay I guess.”

She nodded. “It’s big enough to hold some padding easily so you can look decent enough on top.”

She led me over to another section with a sign saying ‘shapewear’.

Sam found a large pair of knickers she liked and pulled them out. They were apparently designed to shape and control the abdomen and buttocks.

“These should hold you in,” she said holding them out to me.

‘Firm Control’ read the tag, ‘with power control panels to flatten your tummy and lift your bottom.’

The heavy material was quite smooth and sleek and I nodded my approval, not really knowing whether it was good or bad and asked quietly about a suspender belt for the stockings she had bought at the fancy dress shop.

“They’re holdups,” she replied. “You won’t need a suspender belt.”

“Oh. Okay,” I answered, suddenly feeling slightly let down for some obscure reason.

Sam led me next to the cosmetics department where she scanned the racks for a foundation, testing a couple covertly on the side of my jaw. Then, a pressed powder, eyeshadow, mascara, blusher and lipstick joined everything else in the basket along with a small pack of cheap brushes. I watched with a nervous excitement knowing I would be learning how to apply these soon.

It was late by now and outside, Sam gave me the bags before telling me to call her in the morning.

“I’ll show you how to do you makeup,” she said. “You could try the clothes on in the meantime, make sure they fit okay. Don’t ladder the stockings though.”

She turned to walk off and then turned back briefly.

“You’ll need to shave your legs as well.”

With that she tapped off again into the night, leaving me feeling slightly lost and very conspicuous. Arriving home, I dropped the bags in the bedroom and went to prepare a simple dinner. After dinner, with a nervous feeling, I dragged myself to the bathroom where I ran a nice hot bath. I soaked for a few minutes before taking a razor and shaving my legs. Although not the hairiest of people, the razor clogged up really quickly. Still, I persevered and once my legs were done, I paused and figured that I would do my bum as well. That was an interesting challenge, not being able to see what I was shaving. I

looked at my arms and realised there was more hair than most women would have. Another bout of shaving and rinsing saw my arms smooth as well. I was about to stop when I realised that I ought to shave one last part, just to make sure there were no straggly hairs poking out of this nice underwear Sam had bought me.

Emptying the bath and drying off, I made my way to the bedroom and I emptied all the bags onto the bed, a strange excited feeling coursing through me. Pulling the bodyshaping knickers on, I hardened almost instantly, which surprised me. Then I slipped my arms into the bra and reached round to fasten it, fumbling for a few minutes before I managed to get it right. It sat against my chest, the cups empty and floppy until I padded it out with some socks. I unzipped the nurse's uniform, stepped in and pulled it up, surprised that it fitted so well.

I toyed with the idea of trying the stockings. Sam had warned me, but I wondered how hard it could be. I took them out carefully and realising how delicate they were, carefully rolled one up and inserted my foot into it, before pulling it gently up my leg, the rubber grip clinging tightly to my thigh. I repeated this for the other foot and then squeezed my feet into the shoes. It was a most peculiar feeling, a mix of breathless excitement and almost a self loathing for enjoying this deviancy. I stood up and tottered to a mirror. I stood, posing and admiring myself in the mirror for several minutes, practising coy little moves like bending down and showing my knickers off. All the while, I grew more and more excited until eventually I gave in and had to lift up the dress, pull down the knickers and relieve myself. It lasted a matter of seconds, so excited had I become.

Afterwards, as I cleaned up, I felt dirty, embarrassed and ashamed of myself. I changed out of the clothes quickly, but carefully to avoid ripping the stockings.

Tucking everything back in their packets, I put the whole bag full in the bottom of my wardrobe and went to bed.

CHAPTER TWO

The next day I called Sam and told her everything fitted well and we arranged for her to come round on Sunday morning to show me how to do makeup. I spent the day resisting trying on the clothes again, slightly ashamed that I wanted to. I wore the shoes, however, so I could learn to walk in them without falling over. Matched with my T shirt and jeans, they looked disturbingly normal and as I posed in front of the mirror, I thought I could almost pass as a somewhat flat chested woman. My face would need a shave and my hair would probably need something doing with it to make a little more feminine. I examined my face a little more closely. With no really strong masculine lines, I figured with a close shave, I could pass for a reasonably attractive female.

I spent pretty much the entire day in my heels until I felt I could walk with some degree of capability in them. I had been tempted to hang out my washing in them, but the idea that the neighbours might see was enough to stop me. I also managed to get sufficiently used to them so that the bulge in my underwear declined significantly, although it didn't take a lot for it to return.

The next day I decided to carry on wearing the shoes and greeted Sam at the door in them when she turned up for my makeup lesson. She took in the image and nodded in understanding as I explained my reasoning for wearing them. If she suspected I actually got some pleasure from it, she didn't say anything. She was quite impressed that I had actually got a good idea of how to walk in them as well and told me I was a natural, which was as pleasing as it was unsettling.

I made coffee for us both and we sat down in front of a mirror propped up on the dining room table as she set about instructing me in the fine art of applying makeup. I struggled at first to understand the finer techniques of applying eyeshadow, although the other aspects, foundation, blusher, mascara and lipstick seemed fine. Eventually though with her expert guiding hand, we arrived at a basic set which would do for the party and which, more importantly, I could do myself.

It was then, with face made up, that she told me to get dressed in the outfit so she could see how it looked. As I was changing, Sam knocked at the door.

“You okay with everything?”

“Fine thanks,” I called back, zipping up the dress and putting on the shoes again. The bulge in my knickers was painfully obvious to me, although the cut of the lower part of the dress was sufficiently loose to hide it, provided of course that Sam wasn’t looking up at me from the bottom of the stairs. I opened the door and stepped out. She stood back and looked me up and down, nodding appreciatively.

“Very good,” she praised, “you look really good!”

I went to the large mirror and looked myself up and down. She was right, it did look quite impressive. Of course to my eyes, I still looked like Jon in fancy dress, but perhaps I could pass in front of someone who didn’t know me.

“We’ll have to do something with your hair though,” Sam went on, running her fingers through my hair. “Come downstairs again and we’ll see what we can do.”

She led the way downstairs and sat me at the table where she arranged curling tongs and other tools around me.

"Hmm, curls?" she mused out loud, scrunching my hair up in her hands. "Or ponytail?" she drew my hair back into a ponytail.

"I think the ponytail shows too much face," I volunteered. "People will realise who I am."

Sam pursed her lips.

"Possibly."

She tried some other ideas and I found it strangely exciting to have someone playing with my hair, making it into various styles. In the end we settled on curls as being ideal. She plugged the curling tongs in and while they were heating up, I made some more coffee. Then she applied some lotion and curled my hair into long flowing curls which dangled either side of my face. I was quite taken by the effect.

Sam seemed quite pleased as well and told me to stand and walk around a bit to see how everything worked together. Like this, with Sam, I felt amazing, although as I explained to her, it still felt slightly odd. She assured me it would be fine on the night, although she had to agree with me when I pointed out my voice didn't quite match my appearance. I tried putting on a female voice but ended up with a squeaky parody instead that made us both laugh. At her insistence, I tried different techniques of modifying my voice and we ended up with a way of softening my voice so that it sounded more feminine. Sam recorded a clip on her mobile of me speaking and played it back to show how effective it was.

"Well, I suppose I'd better go and get changed again," I remarked, "and then we can have some lunch."

"Leave your makeup on," said Sam "and your knickers and bra. I've got an idea."



She reached into her bag and pulled out a pullover, a loose black skirt and a pair of dark tights. Handing them to me, she told me try them on.

"Be careful with the tights won't you? They're mine."

I stopped and looked at her. "You want me to wear your clothes?"

"Just try them," she said. "I want to see if you'll look as good as I think you will."

Somewhat apprehensively, I went back upstairs to my bedroom where I took off the dress and stockings. I was fiddling with the bra, trying to improve the sock padding. Sam opened the door and poked her head through the gap.

"Just wanted to make sure you....oh!" She stopped mid sentence, staring at my still bulging knickers. I became very self conscious and felt a huge blush spread across my face. There was a long pause.

"Erm, just wanted to make sure you were okay with the tights and everything," Sam went on, speaking slowly, her eyes returning to meet mine. She stepped back out of the door.

"Sorry," she called through the door. "Didn't mean to embarrass you."

To some extent it had worked as the shock and embarrassment caused my excitement to wane sufficiently for me to soften almost completely. I took the opportunity to reach in and tuck it all out of the way whilst I could.

"It's okay," I called back. "You can come in if you want. I'm a bit more decent now."

The door opened cautiously and Sam poked her head round again.

"Sure?"

Her eyes flicked quickly up and down and seemingly relieved that I was indeed a bit more decent, she stepped inside.

"I didn't realise you enjoyed it so much," she commented, after a short pause.

"Neither did I," I replied. "Not sure whether I should or not or what it means about me."

She shrugged her shoulders in return.

"No problem, each to their own. Perhaps you should dress up a bit more often if you enjoy it."

I wasn't sure how to take that and then she gestured at the clothes she had given me.

"Are you going to try them on then?"

There was a distinct battle in my head between the urge to try the clothes on to see what they were like and to say no and hand them back because of what it might say about me.

"You might as well," persuaded Sam. "What have you got to lose? Just don't rip my tights."

I carefully pulled the tights on, working them gently up to my waist, loving the snug feeling. Sam picked up the pullover and pulled the neck wide, reaching to pass it over my head.

"That's better," she went on. "Don't want to smudge your makeup."

I twisted my arms into the sleeves and smoothed the pullover down. It was a slightly loose fit, which disguised the slightly lumpy bra. Unzipping the skirt, I stepped into it and pulled it up around my waist, before stepping into my shoes again. Sam led me out to the mirror again where I was stunned by the transformation into an everyday kind of woman.

"Looking good girlfriend," remarked Sam happily, a big smile across her face. "Come on, let's go out. I need to

get some shopping and we can have some lunch afterwards."

My mouth went instantly dry.

"You mean out for lunch?" I asked. "Seriously, go out, dressed like this?"

"You look fine to me," she replied. "Anyway, who'll recognise you dressed like that with makeup and curly hair? Let me do the talking if you're worried."

She took my hand and despite my protestations and worries, led me downstairs. She handed me a fleece jacket off the peg along with my keys and led me to the front door. I paused there peering out through the part open door. It seemed quiet enough. No, I couldn't.

"What about the neighbours?" I hissed at her. "What will they say?"

"Nothing if they don't know it's you," replied Sam. "Trust me, they won't."

She pulled the door open further and almost pushed me out. I went reluctantly, conscious of the noise of my shoes on the driveway, feeling extremely conspicuous and very scared. Nothing happened, however, and Sam led me to her car where I climbed into the passenger seat, trying to be lady like. We drove to a small supermarket where she despite her efforts, I resolutely refused to get out of the car.

"What are you worried about?" she asked. "You look great."

"Maybe," I replied, struggling to find the words. "But I'm not ready for that. I don't think I'm good enough to get away with it."

She sighed, shut the door and walked off. I tried to calm down by listening to the radio, but I was forever checking the car park to see who else arrived. After about

ten minutes, when no one had even so much as glanced in my direction, I decided that perhaps I could relax. Curious as to what it would actually be like, I waited until I could see no one around and then opened the door. Another quick check and I slid out and stood up, heart pounding. Keeping a watch all the time, I walked around the car, enjoying the strange sensation of the fresh air on my legs, through the tights.

I stayed out until Sam came back with her shopping, which I helped load into the car.

“Feeling brave now?” she asked.

“Only when there’s no-one to see me,” I replied quietly, not wanting my voice to carry.

We got back in the car. She was clearly amused by my fear.

“I reckon you love it really,” she went on. “After all, you seemed to be enjoying it earlier on.”

She cast a quick glance at me and then patted my leg.

“No harm in that,” she said. “Must admit, I was a little unsure as to how well you’d take it. Dressing up I mean. Most men would have a fit about doing that, but you’ve really just gone for it. How do you feel?”

I shook my head slowly.

“I have absolutely no idea,” I replied. I babbled on, “How am I supposed to feel? I mean, I feel relieved that no one said anything, I’m amazed that no one said anything, I feel twitchy because of what happened, I mean actually doing it. I can’t believe I did it and I can’t understand why I don’t feel bad about it. Well, I do feel a little bad. No, not bad, just, well, you know...”

“Confused?” suggested Sam, as I simultaneously ran out of breath and things to say.

"That as well," I replied. "Definitely that."

"Well don't worry, it doesn't make you a bad person. You are who you are."

I persuaded her that I didn't want to have lunch out and we went back to my house instead. A thought struck me as we went through the door.

"Sam, you know earlier, when you came into the bedroom and saw me and you were a bit surprised?"

She smiled. "I do."

"You won't say anything will you? To the others I mean. And about this as well, going out dressed in your clothes."

"Not if you don't want me to," she replied. "Although to be honest, I don't think you'd have any problems. We all know you're a little strange anyway, but we love you."

"Strange?"

She wrinkled her nose.

"Strange as in unique. How you like everything tidied away. How you like your science fiction and fantasy stuff. All those other little things you do that make you who you are."

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that being strange," I replied, slightly perturbed at being thought of as strange, but secretly pleased at being unique.

After lunch and with Sam's encouragement, I went into the back garden to hang out some more washing, after first making sure the neighbours weren't watching. I was still scared in case they saw me and realised it was me. Otherwise, I was feeling quite comfortable, dressed in Sam's clothes, especially as she treated it as being quite normal. I did ask her why she didn't find it strange that I

was okay with it, but she couldn't find a real answer other than to say it just didn't bother her.

I was a little sad when later in the afternoon she said she had to go home meaning I would need to return her clothes at some point. Somewhat reluctantly I went upstairs and changed completely into my male clothes. Downstairs I handed the clothes back to Sam, feeling odd now I was back in my normal clothes.

"Don't forget to take the makeup off," Sam reminded me, sitting me down.

After a few minutes attention with a cleansing cream and some cotton wool pads, I went and gave my face a final wash. My hair remained curly but Sam told me not to worry. It would straighten again in the shower. She packed her everything away and I gave a last wistful look at the clothes. I had enjoyed wearing them, it was true and with her, it didn't feel wrong, just different. She must have caught me looking as she suggested we could try buying some clothes just for me if I wanted. Much as I wanted to, I struggled to admit that I did. She gave me a knowing smile and left saying that if I wanted to do some shopping, she would be happy to help.

After she had gone, I sat quietly on the sofa, toying with my new hairstyle and mulling over the day's events. Going out dressed up had been utterly incredible and uplifting. So why then, if it felt so good, did it leave me feeling slightly sordid? I spent some time online reading up about cross dressing, transgender, trans-sexual and fetishes as well. It was a huge subject, bigger than I had ever imagined. I even found one website which specialised in transgender stories, which I found fascinating. I was intrigued by the contact sites. The idea of men wanting to have sex with transvestites was unusual and left me with a slight worry. How would I cope if I ended up wanting to do that? Almost guiltily, I searched a picture

sharing website, finding pictures of transvestites, some of them engaged in various activities with men which despite myself, I found strangely erotic.

CHAPTER THREE

The following week at work, I was relieved to find that Sam had indeed kept the weekend's events to herself. I found myself wondering more than once whether the tights she was wearing were the ones I had worn. It was almost obsessive and I wanted to know but couldn't bring myself to ask such a strange question. It left me excited a couple of times and I longed to see her wearing the same pullover and skirt as she had lent me.

On Friday, Sam arranged to meet me at my house immediately after work so she could curl my hair again. She had taken the afternoon off to get everything ready and she was waiting outside my house when I arrived. Inside she wasted no time in curling my hair. I asked her about driving in high heels and whether I should get a taxi instead.

"Wear trainers and drive over," she said. "No one else is staying over and I have a spare bed."

I still had a slight dread about driving over dressed in a nurse's fancy dress outfit. What if I had an accident, or the car broke down? Despite neither of those having happened before the fear of them happening while I was dressed was sufficient to make me feel quite sick with nerves. I mentioned my fears to Sam who suggested putting a bag of male clothes in the boot, just in case. As she pointed out, I would need something to wear the next day anyway.

After she finished my hair and left, I had about an hour left and spent the time worrying myself sick about

the evening and it was all I could do to apply my makeup without messing it up. Once it was done, I got dressed, shaking with the excitement, putting trainers on rather than my heels. I packed a bag, grabbed a bottle of wine and went out to the car, looking to make sure I wasn't being watched. It felt like every house in the street was watching me.

The drive over was easy enough and I arrived a few minutes ahead of schedule. Sam let me in with a broad smile and pointed me to the spare room to drop my bag and change my shoes. As I came down again, I saw Rod and Andy were there already and their expressions spoke volumes.

"Blow me Jon," exclaimed Andy. "You look stunning!"

Rod nodded in agreement, running his eyes up and down me.

"Well thanks boys," I gushed in my best girly voice
Andy closed his eyes and laughed.

"Oh yes, oh yes, even got the voice."

"I was hoping you wouldn't recognise me," I said, a little unhappy they had.

"It was the dress that gave you away," said Rod. "Sam told us you'd be in a skimpy nurse's outfit, but otherwise I'd have struggled."

That cheered me up.

"You two look pretty good as well," I complimented them.

Rod had come as a policeman, and Andy had come as a fireman, just to please Sam. His jacket hung open displaying a respectable chest. Rod's physique was less obvi-

ous through his shirt, but it was clear they both worked out.

“What should we call you?” asked Sam, handing me a drink.

That was a good question that I hadn’t considered.

“Joanna?” I suggested, getting a moue from Sam.

“Nurse Shark,” suggested Andy, which made me giggle. Odd, I giggled rather than laughed.

“Naughty nurse Nellie?” suggested Rod.

“Nellie?” I queried. “I’m dressed like this and you really want to call me Nellie?”

Both of them smirked.

“How about foxy Roxy the naughty night nurse?” prompted Rod making us all laugh.

It seemed appropriate and so I was christened, at least for that night. I chatted with Rod and Andy as more guests arrived and I was careful to keep the voice up once more people started arriving. Then around 8 o’clock, Rod and Andy pointed out a new guest. He was dressed as some kind of soldier, combat trousers tucked into combat boots with a sleeveless combat jacket on top, open to display a somewhat rotund body with a clearly developing beer belly. He carried two toy pistols on his waist and a plastic assault rifle in one hand. Two plastic bullet belts criss-crossed his chest and a red bandana was wrapped round his head. As a costume it was fine, but the man inside was the real issue, as became obvious after just a few minutes when he attempted to kiss one of the women he was introduced to. He was one of those people you could take an instant dislike to.

“I wonder who he is,” muttered Rod. “Right moron by the looks of it. Thinks he’s something special.”

“Not like he’s got a lot to show off,” I replied. “Unlike you two.”

I was conscious that Rod and Andy had both stood a little straighter, pushing their chests out a little when I said that.

“Isn’t that Sam’s brother then?” I asked.

They both shook their heads and pointed out a figure in a distinctive sci-fi uniform with plastic pointed ears over his own.

“That’s her brother.”

In retrospect, dork was probably fair. As much as I love science fiction, it was hardly a hero’s outfit. I noticed the ‘soldier’ cast a glance in my direction. It was more than just a passing glance and it made me feel rather uncomfortable.

“Soldier boy’s got an eye for you,” warned Rod. “Could be interesting.”

I swallowed nervously and looked away from ‘soldier boy’. Suddenly the idea of winding up Sam’s brother didn’t seem such a good one. I sidled a little closer to Rod and Andy, feeling extremely vulnerable. Rod’s hand extended over my shoulder in a gentle squeeze.

“Don’t worry Roxy, we’ll look out for you.”

I looked up and he gave me a slow wink and a gentle smile. I took his hand in mine and gave it a quick squeeze.

“Thanks Rod. I’m beginning to wonder just how bright an idea this was.”

“You’ll be fine,” replied Andy. “Anyway look at him. All mouth and no trousers. I reckon even you could put him down.”

I had to laugh. They were genuinely supportive and I felt a lot safer with them by my side. Sam wandered over and joined our little group.

“You’ve seen my brother?” she asked.

We all nodded.

“Who’s the idiot in the combats?” asked Andy

Sam glanced over and shook her head.

“Don’t know. Turned up with, with...” she tailed off, waving her hand vaguely, trying to remember.

“Looks like a right character,” I ventured.

“Hmm,” she agreed. “A bit too forward for my liking, but he’s not causing any problems. Not sure his costume really suits him though. Unlike the three of you.”

She made a purring sound, ran her fingers down Andy’s chest, giggled and walked off to another group. Andy looked slightly embarrassed yet rather smug at this attention. Rod gave him a playful thump on the arm.

“Easy tiger, she’s more than you can handle.”

“Yeah well I can look after her, you look after Roxy,” he replied, making me raise my eyebrows.

Rod just grinned and flicked his eyebrows and I slapped him playfully.

“Behave!”

We mingled a little more with some of the other guests and I generally did very little talking, not totally certain I could keep up the voice all the time. Some of our other work colleagues were there as well and I spent more time with them. I received several compliments on my appearance, which was very pleasing and boosted my ego hugely. I kept a close eye on where ‘soldier boy’ was at all times. After his initial lecherous look I had no desire to

meet him. Inevitably, however, he caught me in a well executed pincer movement, trapping me in a corner.

“So then,” he drawled, clearly having had more than a few drinks. “What’s your name gorgeous?”

“Roxy,” I replied, struggling to keep the voice right, with my mouth suddenly dry. I became painfully aware that my protectors had suddenly disappeared and that I was on my own, hidden from general view by his somewhat larger frame.

“Roxy? Nice name for a pretty girl. Are you one of Sam’s friends then?”

I nodded.

“Yes, we work together.”

“I’m Josh. Remember that, you’ll be screaming it by at the end of the night.”

Somehow I doubted that.

He held out his hand and I went to shake hands with him. A somewhat strong grip nearly crushed my deliberately girly handshake. He smiled, clearly pleased with his show of strength. However, he kept hold of my hand and pulled me closer.

“How about a kiss then?”

I forcibly extracted my hand from his and smiled weakly, leaning back away from him as far as the wall would let me.

“No thanks,” I replied, really not happy to be so close to this simply obnoxious man.

He raised his eyebrows in mock surprise.

“Ooh, playing hard to get are we?”

“No, you’re really just not my type,” I replied.