

Role Model



Audrey Taylor

A "New Woman" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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Role Model

By Audrey Taylor

I felt good preparing the recommended shoe buy for Mrs. Grippe, carefully evaluating sales and existing inventory for each style. After sweating through senior year and graduating from Walden High last June, I was enjoying my first full time job at 'Fashion Heels & Soles', diligently working on this important purchasing project.

It had to be completed by Monday morning as Mrs. Grippe had several appointments with salesmen later in the week. I'd already stayed late on Thursday and Friday and it still looked like Sunday would be needed to get it done.

There goes my apartment hunting, delayed again.

Not that living with Mom wasn't okay, she was super. It's just that I was a normal eighteen-year-old guy, crazy about my girlfriend Ellen and wanted my own pad really badly, you know what I mean.

I walked to the rear of the store listening to the click of my heels (Mrs. Grippe insisted I wear them at work. ‘You must get the feel of the products we sell.’). The nylons felt slinky on my legs as I carefully checked our stock in one of the more popular styles. I was thankful for my own pants and shirt, which hid the garter belt I wore to keep my stockings taut (‘heels need stockings,’ she’d dismissed my inquiry). I was past my initial difficulties with the 3" heels, not realizing how much my posture and stride had changed to accommodate the unusual balance they required.

Mom came in looking for me for lunch and talked idly with Mrs. Grippe while I got ready.

“I’m starved,” I said, switching to flats (no way I wore heels to lunch) and told Mrs. Grippe I’d be back in an hour.

Mom held my arm possessively, as we walked the three blocks to the Crescent Diner discussing our plans for the balance of the weekend. As we strolled together, we looked so much like sisters, my resemblance to her came through for all to see. People were always saying, “You’re certainly your mother’s child,” ever since I could remember.

Growing up under Mom’s influence, with no males around, my masculinity had suffered considerably. At school most of the kids just avoided me, thinking me eccentric. Except for my friend Ellen, thank God for her, because without Ellen I probably wouldn’t have survived. Now she was going off to college, leaving early next week. I was going to miss her big time.

At school she was always sticking up for me, explaining how my father had died in a car accident when I was only three and how there hadn’t been another man to identify with.

Strange, how my mother had never remarried, in fact I couldn't remember her ever being out with a man. She'd always shrug off my question with a smile, "What do I need a man for? I've got you."

She certainly enjoyed and seemed to prefer the company of her lady friends, especially Alice. It wasn't until later that I learned of the woman who'd almost died alongside my father and how they'd been out drinking and carousing around together earlier that evening. And that hadn't been the first time either.

Mom ordered salads for us cautioning me, "You know Evelyn (my middle name from my grandmother, which Mom used exclusively), you've been putting on some weight lately (constantly on my back). Your waistline will disappear if you're not careful."

So what, I thought, I'm a guy and guys don't worry about their waistlines. I'm concerned about developing my pectorals.

"It's only a couple of pounds and I'm still growing you know." Unfortunately my height hadn't changed in two years (only 5'4"). I was long overdue for a growth spurt, only I didn't realize at the time the direction my next growth spurt would be taking.

Mom looked at me smiling, "Darling, it's a few pounds here and a few pounds there and suddenly your clothes don't fit. Trust me, watch what you eat next week and the excess weight will disappear."

"But Mom, I only weigh 135. How can you call that excessive and besides I'm joining a gym next week so I can get into shape like you." I admired her trim figure. She did regular exercising every morning to keep in top shape.

“Why don’t you try aerobics with me in the morning,” she suggested for the umpteenth time. “It works. You can join me tomorrow and we’ll see whether you can keep up with me,” she challenged.

“Tomorrow’s Sunday Mom, my only day off, and you want me to get up at seven and jump around to your weird aerobic music.” I looked at her incredulously, “Do I look nuts?”

Her immediate embarrassment brought a deep flush to her cheeks. “Hey, you can’t hide your inadequacies behind silly words. I can see you’d prefer to remain a blob, so I won’t mention it ever again.”

“I’m sorry Mom.” That’s great, now I’m insulting her. I could do her stupid exercises no sweat, I thought to myself, it’s the getting up so early that’s the problem. My mind rambled on as we strolled back to ‘Fashion Heels & Soles’.

“Don’t forget I’m going to the ballet tonight, so plan an early dinner, okay? See you later darling,” she said, continuing on to her doctor’s appointment for a checkup.

I returned to my shoe project with intensity, hoping to disturb my Sunday as little as possible.

Chapter 2

“How’d it go?” I asked as Mom came in the front door. She was disheveled and sat down heavily into a kitchen chair watching me prepare dinner. I was frying flounder.

“Evelyn, stop for a minute and sit down. I have something important to tell you.” She was deadpan serious.

“Just a minute Mom,” the fish was ready so I removed it from the pan and sat down opposite her at the table.

“I got bad news today from Doctor Farrell. She’s not certain but she thinks I may have leukemia. She took a series of tests and should have the results back by Tuesday. I knew the pains I’ve been having could be trouble.”

I stood up and looked in her eyes trying to fully comprehend. “How serious is leukemia?” I managed from my dry mouth.

“It could be real trouble. I’m still in shock. Here I am, supposedly in excellent shape, and suddenly this doctor’s telling me I have a serious blood disorder. The pains I’ve been having in my back and thighs are certainly real enough. When the test results are in on Tuesday we can decide what has to be done.” Color was returning to her face. Talking with me had been a calming influence.

It was sinking in, “How do they treat this disorder?”

“I’m not sure darling,” she came over to me putting her arm around my shoulder. “We hardly discussed it, preferring to wait until it’s confirmed or not. Come on, let’s have dinner. If you don’t mind I’d rather skip the ballet tonight and tag along with you and Ellen to the movies.”

“Of course Mom,” I smiled wondering at her change in plans. “We always love your company.”

“I’ll call Alice to let her know. Evelyn, let’s keep this between us girls (she was always referring to me as one of the girls), until I’m certain. No need upsetting the others unnecessarily.”

“No problem Mom,” I assured her watching her call Alice. Dinner was on the table when she hung up and we both ate in peace and quiet, lost in our own thoughts. I couldn’t help but wonder how debilitating it would be, concerned about her business. She was the owner and only worker of a small, yet highly successful women’s active wear store ‘The Active Woman’, located directly under our apartment.

She also owned our building, actually a portion of the building which was part of a small shopping center. The center called ‘Women’s Corner’, was appropriately named, exclusively catering to the needs of the female sex. The other three store owners were in partnership with Mom.

They were all professional business women, Mrs. Sandra Grippe being one of them, whose shoe store I was currently employed at. There was also Ms. Alice Stevens, a wispy blonde in her mid thirties whom I’ve had a secret crush on since I was eight. Her dress shop, ‘Dress Your Best’, offered quite a variety of ladies casual wear and even had a small formal gowns area. And then there was Ms. Marilyn Black the oldest in the group, whose hair was always pulled severely back into a bun. She was a stickler for appearances, constantly reminding me to comb my hair or straighten out my shirt or something, whenever she saw me. She ran ‘Corsets For All’, specializing in foundation garments, ladies underwear and sleepwear.

Is it any wonder, growing up in this environment had played a significant role in my appreciation of things feminine? My mother’s close relationship with these woman had helped her overcome the tragic loss of my father. They’d also assisted with my upbringing providing the close family unit, including Alice who I daydreamed about all the time. She usually wore corsets outlining her magnificent figure (a real knock-out) and I stopped quite often by her shop on any pre-

tense I could dream up just to catch a glimpse of her. My girlfriend Ellen knew nothing of my obsession. No one did.

During my teenage years I often helped out at the stores, earning extra pocket money either taking inventories, doing window trimming or running errands. Over the years I'd gotten pretty friendly with many of the customers.

My mother loved to explore any interest I had in ladies wear and at times I'd probably tried on just about every type of garment known to womankind. Maybe now you can understand why I wasn't objecting to the garter belt, stockings and heels required for the new job. It was just no big deal.

In fact I left the stockings on, only changing to a fresh pair of panties (worn them ever since Ms. Black gave me a dozen in multicolors for my eleventh birthday) and shirt and pants for the movies. My new slacks, a gift from Mom had the zipper on the side and the soft gray cashmere sweater was a hand-me-down Mom didn't want anymore. "There's still plenty of wear left in it," she said putting it in my drawer. This happened pretty regularly. My drawers were filled with her castoffs, her insisting they were unisex enough for me to wear. I felt Mom's presence when I wore them and Ellen never seemed to mind. She'd also gotten some of the hand-me-downs over the years and frequently borrowed things of mine she liked, balking only when I occasionally tried borrowing her things.

Ellen thought I looked great when she saw me, greeting me with a solid kiss before we left for the movies.

Ellen asked why I was feeling down. I just squeezed her hand telling her it was nothing. She was so tuned in to me.

The three of us were frightened silly by the horror movie we saw and their screams almost deafened me. They squeezed my arms black and blue and sometimes hid in my shoulder. Afterwards we stopped for ice cream and then slowly walked home. When we parted I told Ellen I'd call her tomorrow. Hopefully I'd have the project completed early so we could spend some time together. It was okay with her, she was fully absorbed with getting last minute things needed for school.

Mom came to my room to say good night and gave me a crushing hug, expressing her deep love for me. We were so close. I felt her soft breasts squash against me filling me chest with adoration for her. I lay awake quite a while remembering all our good times together and how wonderful she was. This threat had better be nothing I almost yelled out. She was too important to me.

Chapter 3

Sunday went by all too quickly and the project wasn't completed until five o'clock. Mom had actually gotten me up before 7:00 A.M. determined to get me involved in her workout routine. Boy was I sweating and sore in the shower afterwards.

Mom had gone away all day on a trip with the girls to an art museum. I called Ellen and we arranged to meet at Frank's Pub for dinner, one of our favorite hangouts.

Putting a tight pair of jeans over my garter belt and stockings left my feet vulnerable to Ellen, who loved playing with my nylon clad toes. My beige blouse was a castoff of Mom's which Ellen and I both liked, and matched the beige flats I had picked up just last week at the Fashion Heels sale. They were kind of unisex I

told myself, liking how they came off easily under the table or in the movies and then slid back on with no trouble.

I'd put in my fanciest earring, a dangling silver crescent Ellen had gotten me for my last birthday. She teased me about wearing the matching one in my other ear, thinking it such a waste. I told her she was crazy and I'd rotate them so they'd both get some wear.

She had on her yummy yellow dress which barely reached mid thigh and showed off her figure to perfection. We greeted each other with a warm hug, then found our usual table in the back where we enjoyed the music, and each other in relative privacy.

Over soup we played footsie and she told me about the new clothes she'd gotten that afternoon. While we got messy with the spare rib dinners, I almost told her about my mother, but hesitated remembering Mom's wish, 'keep it between us girls'. All too soon we were slowly walking toward Ellen's house enjoying the evening air.

"Ted, I'm going to miss you so much," Ellen groaned. By the way that's my first name, which I've had trouble responding to ever since school ended. I was Evelyn all day long to everyone in the store and around the house. No one else used Ted. "These past four years have been so wonderful and I hope you won't forget me when I'm gone."

"How could you think that?" I exclaimed.

"Well you happen to be my best friend and lover and I'm afraid other people will discover how really wonderful you are and steal you away from me, while I'm gone. I keep having these nightmares that you're wearing an enticing evening gown and are pulled away from me by a handsome man when I turn away

for a moment. The nightmares are really strange. They leaves me sitting up in a cold sweat, wondering how I'm going to handle not being able to see you." She stopped and kissed me holding my head so I couldn't pull away, like I wanted to. She was so aggressive sometimes.

I looked in her eyes, "Stop worrying El, I'll write you all the time. I've been dreading this too, all summer. I know it's going to be tough, but we'll make it. I love you too much."

We kissed again deeply, separating only after noticing several people walk by with broad smiles on their faces. We reached her house and reluctantly parted, both dreading next Wednesday when she was leaving for school. My legs were aching as I walked home thinking that Mom expected me to join her at aerobics again tomorrow morning.

I was already missing Ellen. Maybe Alice could somehow jump out of my fantasies into real life to take her place.

Chapter 4

Mrs. Grippe was impressed with my proposal. I had recommended purchasing quantities by color and size for all the styles she currently carried. "I can see I'll have to bring you to the buying show in November, to help me select the styles for next season. I'd also like you to sit in on the salesmen's presentations this week and offer your opinions when I ask for them. Okay?"

I felt good, "Sure Mrs. Grippe."

"That's another thing Evelyn," she placed her hand on my arm. "I'd appreciate it if you'd call me Sandy

from now on. You're no longer a child. You've matured so nicely and have certainly proven yourself capable of handling our relationship on more familiar grounds." She was squeezing my arm affectionately.

"Thanks Mrs. Grippe, eh, I mean Sandy. It's going to take some getting used to." I smiled trying to excuse myself, "I wanted to put the Posner shoes into stock before lunch."

She nodded and released my arm. She moved toward a customer in need of assistance while I went to unpack the recently arrived shipment.

Sandy, that's a new step. She'd been Mrs. Grippe my entire life. I wonder what ever happened to Mr. Grippe.

I filled in the back room stock carefully sitting down several times to rest my weary feet from the new 3 1/2" heels Sandy had me wearing. She constantly got me into new styles, wanting to give me the experience so I could make recommendations to the customers. My legs felt weary having gone through morning exercises with my slave driver Mom. Between the heels and the aerobics I wasn't sure I'd survive.

The customers were accustomed to me in heels, no one ever seemed to mention it. It made me taller, nothing wrong with that. I often wore them home since it was only a few doors down.

Mom commented on my height, meeting me at the front door.

"My legs are killing me," I complained.

"My day was pretty bad too, my backache and cramps didn't let up," she countered. "Can you fill in for me tomorrow afternoon when I go to the doctor at

2:00 o'clock. Check with Sandy in the morning, okay sweetheart?"

"Sure Mom. Why don't you go lie down awhile and I'll make dinner," I offered.

"Thanks hon, that's a great idea. Maybe I'll take a short nap. How about 7:00 P.M. for dinner," she watched me nod my approval and wearily trudged off to her bedroom.

Feelings of apprehension overwhelmed me watching her in pain, knowing she'd never needed naps before. Hopefully rest would help and I kicked off my heels stretching out my weary feet in front of the evening news.

Later we both enjoyed the chicken fricassee and Caesar's salad and she informed me she was thinking of hiring an assistant. Business had improved and she was having difficulty keeping up with it.

"Maybe I can help when it's not busy at the shoe store," I suggested.

"That's an interesting idea. I'll talk to Sandy about it and see if we can work something out. It would certainly save me a lot of training time." She beamed at me, "You're such a marvelous son. I'm so proud of you."

Later in bed I prayed that tomorrow would bring good news, finally falling into another restless sleep.

Chapter 5

Mom walked into 'The Active Woman' about 4:00 o'clock looking like disaster. I locked up early and followed her upstairs.

I sat down at the kitchen table while she made tea for us.

Her hands were shaking. She came over and hugged me and started crying on my shoulder. "It's worse than I expected," she said as I felt her tears wetting my neck. I cried too. "Come let's sit in the couch and I'll try to explain it."

When we settled down with her arm around my shoulder she blurted out, "I'm dying Evelyn. I've got this damn disease and I've only got maybe three months to live."

I felt a shudder run through my whole body.

"It can't be Mama," I cried.

"It's true. The tests confirmed this stupid disease is eating away at my bone marrow and can't be stopped. It's definitely the cause of my pain and the doctor's given me strong medication to relieve it. She wants you to come with me tomorrow morning, so she can talk to us together and answer all our questions. I'm going to ask Alice to come too so she can fully understand the situation."

I sat there numb. She was talking but I couldn't understand anything she was saying. There had to be a mistake. We'd all go to sleep tonight, and everything would be fine in the morning. I felt her helping me undress (how did we get in my bedroom), helping me into one of her nightgowns (I loved their feeling of security) and tucking me in with a kiss as a gentle smile crossed her pale face. I lay there in shock until sleep gratefully claimed me.

Chapter 6

Mom's gentle touch on my shoulder told me aerobics was beginning in ten minutes. She loaned me a warm-up outfit I'd always liked and we jumped together to the routine for over forty minutes, leaving me sweating profusely at the end. We showered together, something we hadn't done in a long time, but it seemed so natural when she came in the shower with me to wash my back.

She still had a beautiful shape in spite of this disease eating away at her. Her full breasts hardly sagged and her narrow waist curved out to her firm hips and her bottom cheeks, still attractively round and full. Her breast brushed my arm while she gently lifted my hair from my eyes and asked me to soap her back thoroughly. I did a good job.

I enjoyed emulating how she dressed, putting on my panties and garter belt and smoothing my nylons over my legs so the seams were straight and wrinkle free. Aside from her bra, we were dressed alike in black slacks and cashmere sweaters and when we looked at ourselves in the mirror we smiled. She put my gold earring in for me, which matched hers. She added a slight hint of eye liner and mascara to my eyes. We wore matching three inch heels heading out to the kitchen for breakfast.

I loved looking like Mom, losing myself in admiration for her. We'd dressed alike several times in the past, but not recently, my involvement with Ellen had taken higher priority. This morning I needed to feel close to Mom.

Alice knocked on the door and walked in. "Evelyn, you look scrumptious. Where's Mom?" she asked.