

“Babe, these are my kids. You’re a druggie with a record. I just have to insist on custody for their sake, ya know?”

“Oh, bullshit!” Jane spat. “You barely paid any attention to these kids the whole time we were married! You’re just being an asshole!”

“Jane. Jane,” Kelly, Jane’s lawyer said, putting a hand on Jane’s arm.

“You see this?” Joe said. “See how mentally unstable she is?”

“Unstable!” Jane screamed, getting up, slamming her fist on the table.

“Both of you! Sit down and shut your mouths!” The arbitrator said, losing her temper. “This is a formal hearing to...”

Joe, smirking, raised his hands and sat down. Jane picked up her coffee cup, and it everyone in the room could tell she intended to throw the coffee in his face, but once again Kelly put a hand on Jane’s arm and whispered, “Please. Think of the kids.”

Jane thought of her daughters, 9 and 7, smiling and laughing, and then she thought of them filthy, unkempt, living in Joe’s filthy bachelor pad. Hand trembling, she sat, struggling to control herself.

The arbitrator sighed. “Based on what I have seen here today as well as on previous occasions, it is clear we will not be able to reach an amicable agreement on child custody. Therefore, I am remanding this case to Family Court for a binding judicial decision.”

“Good,” Jane said.

“You’re so crazy,” Joe said.

“You both need to start thinking about putting the interests of the children first,” the arbitrator said. Joe and Jane left, and the arbitrator opened her laptop and looked over the job listings, once again hoping to find a new career path. She’d gotten into the business hoping to help kids, but so

many of the parents only cared about inflicting harm on each other, it had become depressing.

Outside, Joe left with his lawyer, pleased at how easily he'd baited his dumb dumb of an ex-wife into melting down in front of everyone. It was going to be easy to steal the kids, the most important thing in her life, from her. That would teach her to throw him out of the house just because he cheated a little now and then. All guys did. It was biology. He'd seen an article about in Playboy and everything.

Jane, meanwhile, found herself digging her nails into her palms, shaking with anxiety. "I can't let him take my kids," she said. "I'd die without them! I would kill myself!"

"Jane," Kelly said. "I get it. I love my kids, too, and I understand your feelings, but—"

"But nothing! I'll.... I'll kidnap them!"

"Great. And end up in prison."

"I have to do something!"

"You're hurting your own case."

A tractor traitor roared by on Highway 79, which ran by the new suburban courthouse in Ocean County, New Jersey, blasting each of the women with a gust of diesel stench wind, blowing their hair.

"You're hurting your own case," Kelly said, patting down her hair.

"You've got to stop feeding him. He's baiting you."

"I can't help it," Jane said absently, her own hair now a cloud of crazy around her head. Her eyes took on a vacant, distant look. A thousand mile stare. "I hate him so much for this."

“I have an appointment I need to get to,” Kelly said. ‘Promise me you won’t have any contact with him— promise.”

“Okay. Okay,” Jane said, ‘Okay. But if he—-“

“Call the police. Let them handle it. You have a restraining order. Use it.”

Kelly left and Jane found herself standing there in the parking lot, wobbling from side to side without moving her feet, lost in a tangled mass of fear and anxiety that consumed her. She lost sense of time, standing there, staring into the black hole of misery and death she felt awaited her if she lost her children. The sun began to set. The air turned chill, and she began to shiver, her teeth began to chatter, but she wasn’t even aware of it, nor the fact that her hand had slowly dropped and the remainder of her coffee was now pouring onto the ground, splattering at her feet.

“Miss? Pardon me?”

The voice snapped Jane out of her trance, and all at once she became aware that she was freezing, hungry, that her feet ached. She looked into the big, green eyes of the tall, slender woman who’d addressed her. She wore a traffic cop’s uniform, and the brass nameplate on her breast read “Tatiana.”

“Tatiana,” Jane said, noticing the woman’s radiant and flawless cinnamon skin. Her mind remained locked on her one, overwhelming need and fear. “My children,” she said. “Are in danger. I have a court appointment in a week and—”

“I know,” Tatiana said, handing Jane a card. “I may have a solution.” Then, she leaned in and began to whisper in Jane’s ear. Her voice was soft and soothing, and as she whispered Jane began to smile. It was her

first smile in many months, but it was not a happy smile. It was the smile of a hungry predator getting ready to feed.

## Chapter Two

Two weeks later.

“Weird,” Joe thought when he slid into the cab of his Dodge Ram F-150, a big, heavy muscle truck that got 12 miles to the gallon. His feet didn’t quite reach the pedals, though he was the only one that drove “Sex Machine” as he’d named his baby. He reached down and used the automatic seat adjuster to move the seat forward, then punched the media system into action. As he pulled out, the truck began to thump with bass and Carly Rae Johnson sang:

Boy problems Who got ‘em  
I got ‘em, too  
Boy problems, we double,  
Don’t know what to do

*This song is so wonderful!* Joe thought, singing along in a falsetto, tipping his head from side to side with the beat, smiling, until he caught a glimpse of himself in his rearview mirror, and seemed to hear himself and the song for the first time, even as he saw Gabby Haus, the hot ass MILF next door,, jogging by, looking at him with a bemused smile on her face.

*What the hell?* He thought, cringing, stabbing at the display screen in his truck, trying to change the station. Ariana Grande came up, singing about a boy. He punched again, and Ariel was there, signing about spoons and forks— and a boy. Glancing at the screen, he saw all the stations had been changed form his classic rock lineup to stations for girls,

and his temper rose. He'd told his goddamned kids more than once not to mess with the setting on his truck and—

A horn blasted and looking up to see he'd been so busy focusing on his radio he'd drifted into the oncoming lane and was heading directly for a bus. He swerved back into his own lane as the bus driver flipped him off.

Heart racing, he resolved to just deal with it until he got to a red light. It wouldn't be so bad, and— Oh! Pocahontas came onto the system singing A Whole New World! He loved this song!

Joe pulled into the job site, tapping the steering wheel and singing along to Let It Go, lost in the music. The big, fat wheels of his truck crunched and popped against the gravel as he parked in the line of pickup trucks, the steel girder skeleton of the building they were putting up rising above him in the morning mist. *It actually looks kind of pretty*, Joe thought idly as he swung his door open, hopped out and stumbled, falling onto the hard gravel.

What the hell?" He thought, confused how he'd manage to misjudge the exit from his truck, which suddenly seemed higher.

"Nice face plant!" Kirk yelled, laughing along with all the other guys.

Joe shook his head. *Idiots*, he thought, knowing they had no choice but to bust his balls after a fall like that. Meanwhile, he pulled up the pants legs on his jeans, which were way too long and had bunched up around his feet. Pulling them up over the top of his boots, his eyes caught a glimpse of the bright, white tights he wore under his pants.

Tights? He pulled the jeans down to hide his tights, shaking his head in confusion. He didn't own tights. He didn't wear tights. They were— these were things his little girls wore to ballet. Why was he wearing tights? He prayed to God no one had seen them, even as he felt sick with shame as

he became aware of the way they hugged his legs, the feeling of the elastic band around his waist.

Putting the tights out of his mind, he re-laced his Wolverine work boots, which felt loose on his feet. It was clearly going to be one of those days when everything went wrong he decided. Finishing his lacing, he stood and walked, feeling his too loose shoes shifting on his feet. What the fudge? They'd always fit so well before. Looking down and eyeing how scuffed up they looked, he decided he needed a new pair anyway— not only ones that fit, but shiny, black. Pretty.

He walked over to where the other welders had gathered and stood at the edge of the circle while they shot the shoot and busted each other's unmentionables. Normally, he dove right in, but today he felt shy and, besides, why did they have to be so uncouth? Oh, well. Luckily, the whistle blew and it was time to go to work, as much as he didn't feel like it today. He grabbed his welding gear, his mask and gloves— they all seemed rough and uncomfortable! And then, reaching back to check his ponytail he—

Ponytail?

I am losing it so bad, he thought. Like Alice in Wonderland! He wouldn't be surprised at all if the Cheshire Cat showed up about now.

Joe got through the day. He kept to himself during lunch hour, and spent the afternoon welding, struggling against the fact that he constantly found himself singing Disney songs in his head. It was sooooo odd. He just couldn't understand it, and he found himself blushing, his cheeks burning red as he shrank with shame at the thought of what his buddies would think if they knew what was going on in his head. Why, they would think me a silly little goose, he decided, nodding emphatically. That was for sure!

Once more, the alien and frankly pussy ass nature of his thoughts shocked and scared him. I got to get ahold of myself, he thought. This was sick, fucked up behavior, and it needed to stop! I have a mind to stop by the local Inn for a glass of wine! Maybe even two glasses, he decided. Goodness knew it had been that kind of day!

Joe's torch sputtered and died as he slapped himself on the tinted mask covering his face.

What the hell did I just think? He shook his head. He definitely needed some wine— Kentucky Bourbon! Fuck.

*This is what having daughters does to a man*, he thought. *They are pussyfying me, goddamned it.* The thought of his snot nosed brats filled him with glee, though, as he thought about how fucked up Jane was going to be when he won custody. That evil witch will cry until she withers and dies! He thought, gleefully. And then?

He had no idea. He didn't want the kids or even really know what to do with them. Maybe he would just give them back to Jane, just to make her feel even smaller. She deserved it. She was— well, she was just a mean old hag like Ursula!

Fuck fuck fuck...

Booze. Lots of it, he decided, and then maybe he would watch some Mixed Martial Arts and try to get his... well, his unmentionables back! Goodness!

When the whistle blew, he gathered and stowed his gear. When he got to his truck it seemed even taller than before, and pulled the door open, he grabbed the frame and struggled to pull himself up and into the cab. Pushing the start button, he found his feet once more kicking at empty air and, looking down, he saw the pedals were once again too far. I must've put it



back when I got out, he decided, as it seemed like the only possible explanation. He adjusted the seat and then the steering wheel, which was tilted too high, and then he adjusted the rearview mirror, and the side mirrors, thinking after all that one of his co-workers must have gotten into his truck and messed it all up to tease him.

The boys certainly were full of mischief he thought, giggling as he carefully pulled out and made his way to the local pub, a place called The King's Tavern, which he liked because it sounded like the kind of place that would be in a Disney movie.

Walking into the bar, he stopped cold. It was dark and smokey, full of what looked like a bunch of ruffians. His heart raced and he thought maybe he should just go home, but then he saw another girl— a girl— sitting at the bar, and she looked nice and he thought it might be okay if he sat with her and maybe they could have a nice chat about their—

Oh, hell. Hell, he thought, walking into the bar, trying to put some swagger into his step. Man the heck up!

He sat down next to the girl— woman, smiled and said, "What are you drinking?"

She looked him over, shrugged. "Vodka and tonic."

"Another vodka and tonic for the lady," he called to the bartender, pulling out his wallet and slapping a hundred down on the bar. "And I'll have...". rose his mind called... a nice, sweet rose... or maybe a blush? But he marshaled his will and said, "Jack and Coke."

The woman eyed the hundred and warmed up to him. "You like spending money?" She said.

"On the people I love," Joe said, giving her the eye. "What's your name?"

“Belle,” she said, smiling.

Belle? Just like a Disney princess! Now that he knew her name, she actually looked kind of like Belle! Joe swooned. He totally had a thing for Disney princesses! “Belle? Why, that’s the bees knees!” He said, his voice cracking. He rubbed his throat and took a swig of the whiskey, which tasted terrible, but he swallowed it down, trying to look manly and feeling-silly.

“You’re funny,” Belle said.

Joe picked up his drink and took another drink, forcing the liquor down, swallowing hard. The room began to spin. He saw stars flashing in his eyes- or were hey fairies? And he started to reach out with his hands, trying to catch them, giggling as he did so, and then falling forward, right on his face.

Belle and the rest of the customers looked at him sprawled on the floor. Then, everyone started to laugh as the bartender came around to check on him. Joe couldn’t hear it. He was smiling, his face mashed against the sticky, dirty floor of the bar, as he imagined himself sitting on a toadstool, talking to a caterpillar.

Joe didn’t remember leaving the bar, getting home, but he woke tangled up in his sheets and quilt, sweating, his mouth dry, head aching. He remembered having one drink— had he even finished it? And then— nothing. What had happened? He couldn’t remember. But he must have had a lot of drinks as bad as he felt. Still, squatting at his Mini-Mouse alarm clock, he saw he’d overslept and would be lucky if he made it to work on

time. Throwing the covers off, he rolled out of bed and onto his feet, reaching back to tug at his panties, which had wadded up between his legs again and—

Panties? He'd reached the bathroom and looked at himself in disgust. He was wearing pink, polka dot panties, and a short little—he didn't even know what it was called, but it was like a shirt that just came down to his hips and had a picture of a mermaid on it. He stripped the clothes off and threw them onto the floor, skin crawling. Where had they come from? Why was he wearing them? Had he brought someone home?

No time. He needed to get ready, so he went to the sink and grabbed his toothbrush— where is my toothbrush? Where he usually kept it, he now found a pink, electric toothbrush with the picture of a princess on it. The kids. One of his daughters. They must have taken his by accident. Oh well, whatevs, he thought, grabbing the toothbrush and getting to work. Having a bright, pretty smile was ever so important, and once he brushed he did smile, admiring how even and white his teeth were, the cute little dimples on his cheeks. He did not admire the bags under bloodshot eyes, but there was no time for make-up, he had to get to work!

Grabbing a couple yogurt cups to eat on the way, he ran out to the truck, climbed in and raced to work, the whole time worrying about how he looked, whether he should have done more with his hair, cursing himself for oversleeping. Selena was always talking about how imprint it was to get quality sleep! Fiddlesticks!

At work, he felt nervous, insecure. The guys seemed— weirded out by him for some reason he couldn't quite put his finger on. He tried to compensate by giggling and laughing at all their jokes and smiling all the time, but it just seemed to make them more weird. Then, just after lunch, as he

was welding, it happened. He looked down and saw a brown mouse crawling between his feet, lifting its little nose, twitching it side to side. In movies he'd always found mice really cute— but now the sight of the creature caused him to scream in a high-pitched voice, leaping, grabbing a steel girder, climbing up on it in a panic. “Shoo! Shoo!” He yelled. “Go away you dirty little thing!”

The mouse casually sauntered off, and Joe looked around to see everyone at the job site staring at him. “I— it was—” but even as he started to explain, Joe realized how ridiculous it was that he'd screamed like that— it was just a mouse. Why had he acted so much like a— like a girl?

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” His boss, Harry yelled.

“Pussy,” he heard someone else murmur.

Joe climbed down off the girder, head dropped in shame. He couldn't even look anyone in the eye after that, and he began to seriously consider the possibility that he was going insane. When he got into his truck after the shift— once more adjusting the seat, and it was getting old having the boys pick on him like that— he put his hands on the steering wheel and stared at his fingernails. The round tips. The clear gloss. His cuticles needed some attention, and he wondered if he should stop by the salon and get a manicure. It would make him feel so better to pamper himself a bit and—

No. There it was again. Why did he have polished nails? He'd never polished them, gone to a manicure lady, never wanted to. And yet here he stared at these— abominations. He did not go to the salon. He did drop by the liquor store and buy a couple bottles of wine.

Joe woke to the braying sound of an alarm. He groaned. His head ached, and his mouth tasted like a dead mouse. He was laying face down, his head crushed into his pillow. Work. He had to get up and get to work.

But he was soooooo tired!

He rolled onto his back, his long blonde hair flopping across his eyes, getting into his mouth. He pulled it away, enjoying the feeling of the silky soft strands running between his fingers, smiling as he watched the rays of morning sunlight sneaking through his curtains shimmering on the pretty, golden— almost white— hair that flowed like water. His hair was so pretty, and he loved to—

Wait. He froze, the golden hair flowing between his fingers. I don't have blonde hair, he thought. He sat up and felt the hair flowing down over his shoulders, bangs flopping across his forehead. "What the hell?" Shaking his head, staring in horror at the long golden hair that seemed to wash down his head all the way to the mattress.

He remembered his strange thoughts from the day before, the weird feelings. What was happening wasn't possible. A guy couldn't just wake up with long blonde hair. Belle. He remembered the woman at the bar. Had she done this as a prank? It had to be a wig. He grabbed a hank of the hair and tugged.

"Ow!"

It sure felt like his hair. He ran his fingers along his skull, reaching under the hair, trying to find the edge of the wig, some opening or point of attachment, but he found-nothing. It seemed like the hair was real, and it was— his?

He glanced at the clock. Work. He had to get to work. Joe prided himself on never missing work. It was part of his man code. He'd gone in once even when he'd had a 101 temperature.

But he would not go into work with long blonde hair. Goodness, no. So, he threw back the covers and rolled out of bed. He felt one of the spaghetti straps of his nightie slide off his shoulder and absently hooked his thumb under it, pulling it back into place while he shook out the nightie itself, then headed to the bathroom, enjoying the feeling of the silk gown as it flowed over his legs. He was, truly, too old for the Missing Princess nightie, but he lived alone and no one ever saw it besides him and it made him happy so— whatevs. As he headed into the bathroom, he tossed his hair back, thinking to get his electric razor and shave off the ridiculous hair, and he looked in the mirror and froze, his soft, pink mouth dropping open to reveal a row of bright, white teeth.

He was nowhere to be seen in the mirror. He looked like young— crazy young— like a teenager, and more. He looked like— a girl? No. There was no way. He looked like— Boy, he thought as he stepped toward the mirror, his fingertips placed gingerly on his pink cheek. I am a boy. A man.

His golden hair glimmered prettily in the bathroom light. His eyes looked SOOOO big, wide and kind of startled, like a doe caught in the headlights. His skin was— well, he couldn't complain about having such bright, pretty skin. But, more, he realized for the first time he was wearing a nighty, and his body— the bulging, muscle-ripped shoulders he'd built working his ass off on the jobsite and at the gym— gone. Replaced by soft, round little shoulders— white as snow— and his arms.

No. No. No.,.

Twigs. Skinny little white twigs. Seeing the little straps across his tiny shoulders, his mind saw the image of a woman— a girl, really. Nothing like a man, not like the man he'd been. He shook his head, his hair swishing prettily, his eyes sparkling.

His skin crawled at the sight of himself standing there in a nightie, with those little arms, the white skin. This isn't real, he decided. It can't be real. He looked at his small, soft white palms, looked back at the pretty girl's face in the mirror. I must be sleeping. He pinched himself. Filled his little hands with cold water and splashed it in his face.

Noting. That girl stared back at him, her face a mask of shame and terror, her eyes looking scared and like she was about to cry. I am about to cry, Joe realized, his chest heaving as he felt himself overcome with emotions. I am her, he thought. She is me.

No. No. He turned away from the mirror, his hair swirling around him.

I can't go to work like this, he decided. I can't! He would have to call in, as much as he hated it. Call in and then— do something. Find someone who could help him. Maybe he should call Mommy. She always helped him, and she would know what to say—

Call Mommy. Fudge! He was a grown woman— girl— man! Besides, his mother had passed away some years hence, so it was just pure silliness on his part to think of calling her!

Don't think about it, he decided. Just call work. Call and then just— whatever. Do something before this goes any further. He found his cell-phone, now with a Cinderella skin— of course, and called work.

"Don't even think about it," Harry, the job site manager said. "Three people have already called out today."

“But I really need a day off,” Joe said, not surprised that he sounded so youthful and so girl.

Harry didn't seem to notice. “Unless you are sick to the point of death, you need to come in. Are you sick?”

Joe bit his lip. He knew it was wrong to fib, and so he sighed, feeling himself flush with shame and humiliation at the thought of going in, being seen like— this. “I'm— no. I'm not sick!”

“Then get your ass in here!” Harry said, ending the cal.

“Ugh!” Joe said, stomping one little foot. “It's not easy being good!”

Joe went to his closet and threw open the door, feeling only slightly surprised to see a row of dresses and crisp, white blouses. Of course he would have a closet full of dresses now. What did shock and appall him was how excited he got looking at them shimmering there with their bows and pleats, how badly he wanted to slip one on along with a pair of white tights, some pretty black patent leather shoes! But no. He would not do that. I am not a girl and I do not like pretty dresses, he thought to himself, though the words felt like a lie. I simply do not!

Instead, he turned to the other side of the closet and grabbed a pair of jeans, a red and black checked flannel shirt. Back in his bedroom, he offered little resistance to the idea of pulling on a chamois and a pair of white tights before slipping into the flannel shirt. It seemed the clothes had altered to fit his new form, as the shirt had a snug fit, as did the Brandy Melville jeans, which were made of a stretchy material and hugged his legs and hips.

Gathering up his long blonde hair, he shoved it under a trucker hat and then took a look at himself in the mirror, seeing what looked like a teen girl



looking back at him. With the tight shirt and pants, he saw he had a shape like a girl now, with slightly rounded hips, narrow waist. Oh well. Whatever. He had to get going, so he laced up his black and white Chuck Taylors and grabbed his leather bag, throwing it over his shoulder. He headed out to his—

Joe froze. His truck was gone. In its place stood a sparkling black and white Mini-Cooper. A girl's car. He sighed, stomped his little foot once more and rolled his eyes with a dramatic sigh. The guys were going to tease him so mercilessly! But, what was he to do but face the music? Be brave, he murmured. If Ariel can stand up to Ursula, you can do this!

He climbed into the car, got rolling. Once more the sounds of Disney filled the car, and once more Joe sang along prettily, glancing in the rear-view at every light and fidgeting with his hat and hair, wishing just a little he were a real girl so he could wear some lipstick, some blush. But, well, he just couldn't! Boys don't get to wear lipstick, and it was so unfair!

His phone rang, and the display on this smart screen said the call was from "Mommy." Joe slit his eyes. Now whoever could this be? He pushed the phone button on his steering wheel. "Hello?" He said in the most proper tones he knew. "To whom am I speaking?"

He heard a harsh, booze and cigarettes chuckle from the other end of the line. "Joe?"

"Jane," he said, his mood darkening. "To what do I owe this *pleasure*?" He put all the sarcasm he could muster into the last word, feeling a little thrill at how mean he'd been.

"To what do I owe this pleasure?" Jane mocked. "You sound adorable!" She said. "Your voice is so pretty!"

Joe felt something tie up inside him. It was— he felt part of himself swell with pride at the notion that he had a pretty voice, that he sounded adorable. But, yet, he knew he shouldn't. He knew she was mocking him, that he was a man and he should be— cross at her or something other than pleased. He tried to think of a retort, but found himself sitting there, biting his lip while all the household items from *Beauty and the Beast* sang, "Be Our Guest" in the background.

"How is everything?" Jane went on. "Is everything good? Have you experienced any... changes or anything?"

Changes? Did she know? Joe glanced at himself in the mirror, his bright, pretty eyes, slender eyebrows. Could Jane somehow be the cause of this? "What sort of changes do you mean?" He asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Just... changes. I mean— like the way your voice has changed?"

Joe shook his head. Fiddle de doo. He wasn't going to play these games. "I do not have time for this shenanigans, Mother! I am off to work, and I would appreciate it if you would leave me alone!"

Laughter came crackling over the line. "Did you just call me Mother?"

"Of course not!" Joe said, his voice rising to a shriek even as he realized he had, indeed, called his mean old ex-wife Mother.

"Josephine," Jane said. "The hearing is tomorrow. Are you sure you don't want to just stop this silliness and give me custody of the girls?"

"My name isn't Josephine," Joe answered, feeling himself on the verge of throwing a hissy. "And, no, I am not giving up anything! I am going to win, and you will be sorry you ever made me cross!"

Laughter. "Well, in that case, the girls would like to spend the night at your place tonight. Are you good with that?"

“Tonight?” Joe glanced in the mirror at the girl’s face he now possessed. “Um, maybe tonight wouldn’t be a perfect night. I am afraid I have some household chores I simply must perform!”

“I bet you do. The thing is— well— they were hoping you would have a tea party.”

Tea party? The words sent a thrill through Joe’s whole body. He loved hosting tea parties! Oh, it would be such fun! But, what about when the girls saw how he’d— changed? What about when Jane saw? He looked at his tiny hands gripping the steering wheel, his delicate wrists. She would tease him, he was sure. It would be quite the scene. “Tea party?” He muttered, his voice creaking with emotion.

“Yes,” Jane said through bitter laughter. “I know how much you adore your tea parties.”

He did. It was true, but how did she know? And since when did he adore— anything? She’s doing this, he realized. He knew. And yet, “Um, well, for heaven’s sake of course I would love for my daughters to come over. Goodness me. What time?”

“I’ll drop them off at 6,” Jane said.

“Thank you,” Joe said.

“Oh, and Josie? Wear something pretty for me?”

“Oh! You are too rude!” Joe said, annoyed at her tone and suggestion, cutting off the call, which immediately made him feel guilty because It really wasn’t polite and he did strive at all times to be as polite and considerate as possible. He thought about calling her back and apologizing, but fought off the urge as she was quite a mean old witch and, besides, he was just pulling into the driveway at the ugly and dirty place where he worked and why had he taken such a terrible job? He looked at the rocky grounds, the

beams of the building rising into the morning sky. There was no mist today, and the whole thing just looked ugly. He felt like Belle, trapped in the ugly castle, and there was his Beast— Harry, his mean boss, glaring at him as he parked his car.

The angry glare in his boss' eyes gave Joe the shivers, and he climbed nervously out of his car, his tummy rumbling with anxiety, full go butterflies even as he pulled his hat down harder, terrified his long blonde hair would come spilling out.

“What the fuck are you driving?” Harry said, sitting a wad of chewing tobacco on the ground.

“That’s my— um, I borrowed it from— you know, truck broke and all that stuff?” Joe was standing in front of Harry now, one foot on top of the other, shrugging his little shoulders, looking up at a man he had been taller than just a couple days before, feeling skinny and small and... vulnerable? In a way he never had before.

“It’s a fucking girl’s car,” Harry said.

“It’s not mine,” Joe lied, adjusting the strap of his leather bag.

“Hey, Joe, you gonna be giving blow jobs in the back of that thing during lunch?” One of the guys called out.

Joe’s mouth fell open in shock. How rude! But he shook his head and went to his locker, figuring it was best just to get to work.

Harry watched Joe walk away, dumbfounded as he looked at the way Joe’s jeans hugged his round little ass, the way his flannel shirt cut in at his narrow waist. He looked like a teen-age girl all of a sudden, and Harry found himself feeling— things, which made him feel disturbed and angry.

When Joe got to his locker, Pete was standing at his, two doors down. Pete looked down at the pale, skinny looking girl at Joe's locker and sneered. "What the fuck happened to you, Josie?" He said.

"I don't know," Joe said, aware of how small and feminine his voice sounded, and once more how small and skinny he was now standing around these *men*. He felt— weird, scared, nervous. Opening his locker, he put his bag in, looked into the mirror and adjusted his hat, his shirt, once more wishing he had the courage and freedom to put on a little makeup.

Pete took a couple steps over to look at Joe, and then, looking inside Joe's locker he saw that instead of being decorated with nudie pictures like it had been, it now featured sparkly stars, pictures of Disney characters, unicorns and tinker bells. "Jesus Christ," he said. "Are you some kind of pervert?"

"What?" Joe said. Pete was now standing close, and Joe felt himself trembling.

"Your locker. It looks like my little girl's room."

Joe looked and as if for the first time saw the unicorns, the pixies, the Disney Princesses. "Omigod!" He shrieked. "I don't know— who put those in there?"

"You," Pete said, stepping closer to Joe, who moved to step away but Pete slammed one arm against the locker blocking him, invading Joe's space, getting so close Joe could feel the heat coming off Pete's body. "We don't like little perverts around here," Pete said. Joe looked scared, pretty, Pete actually felt himself getting attracted to the little pervert, and that feeling scared him and made him angry.

"Please," Joe said in a small voice, his back against the locker, his knees together.

“Pete,” Harry called. “A word.”

“In a minute—“

“Now!”

“Freak,” Pete said, punching the locker, making Joe flinch.

Joe’s heart was racing and he was breathing hard. He looked longingly at his Mini-Cooper, thinking he might just run to it, jump in and drive home, pull the covers over his head and hide from what was happening to him, the world.

“Josie,” Harry shouted, making Joe jump. “Get to work!”

“Yes, sir!” Josie called back in his soft little voice. Fudge. He had no choice now but to— ugh! Weld. As he got his big, heavy gloves and welding mask, he heard Harry talking about lawsuits, diversity, modern world to Pete. He’s protecting me, Joe realized, flushing with gratitude. There were nice boys out there! He struggled to move his propane tank to the work site, dragging it along with both little arms using his whole body, whereas he used to be able to easily lift it. It annoyed him, but he also felt kind of cute and wondered if the boys were watching. The gloves were coarse, and he worried they would damage his soft skin, but he didn’t have much choice but to just endure. Maybe he would wear some nice, soft lace gloves underneath tomorrow?

Once he got working, some old part of Joe emerged and merged with the new Joe. He lost himself in his work, singing his favorite Disney songs in his head and then, losing himself, signing them softly under his breath as he worked. Finally, the lunch whistle blew and he pulled off his welding mask and tossed down his gloves. He’d been kneeling as he welded all morning, and when he stood his long, coltish legs felt stiff, so he started to work through the warm up he remembered from ballet- Grand Plie, Revele.

Using one of the steel girders as a barre, he did some raises, then pulled his hat off, shaking out his long, golden hair, feeling it flow all around him as he did a twirl.

Applause.

He looked and saw all the boys watching him, clapping and laughing. His mouth dropped open and he felt his cheeks burning with shame. He turned away, putting his face in his hands, stunned that he'd been doing all these ballet moves in front of the boys, that they'd seen his hair, which he now hid under, feeling safe inside the soft, curtain like tresses.

“Josie!” Harry called. “No! We’re not laughing at you! Come on.”

Joe looked back over his shoulder, blonde bangs dragging across his eyes. “You were so laughing at me!” He shouted.

“No! Guys, she looked great, right? Really— like what’s the word, anyway”

“Graceful,” Pete said. “Like a deer or something.”

“Yeah! Like a deer!”

She? Joe thought. Did they think he was a girl? But then, that thought was supplanted by a swelling of pride. Graceful? Like a fawn? He rose on his toes, turned to face them and toss this hair back, smiling. “Really? Like a fawn?”

“Oh, yeah. Just like that,” Pete said.

“You gonna eat lunch or what?”

“Oh, yeah,” Joe said realizing he was famished.

“Come on over and eat with us.”

Joe felt himself flush with pleasure. The boys weren’t making fun of him, scaring him. What? He skipped over to his locker, his long blonde hair trailing behind him, flashing in the sun, then grabbed his rice cakes and

green tea, going over to where the boys were eating and sitting on the ground, cross-legged.

“It’s good having a girl around,” Harry said. “It kinda civilizes things, ya know?”

“Yeah. I thought it would suck and everything, but you are all right for a chick.”

Joe giggled and hooked his hair behind his ear. “Thanks!”

“And your not a bad little welder, either!” Harry said.

Joe just giggled and munched on his rice cake, feeling giddy. It seemed that as long as people thought he was a girl they liked him, so he supposed it wouldn’t be so bad to be a girl, or pretend to be one at least. He stretched out his legs into a split, feeling like he maybe could get through the day after all.

And then— tea party!

When the whistle blew, Joe skipped all the way to his car, his long hair bobbing behind him. Hopping in his cute little Mini Cooper, he clapped his hands as he started the engine, then pulled out giggling as he thought about all the things he needed to buy for the tea party. He loved shopping almost as much as he loved tea parties!

At the store, Joe grabbed a shopping cart and proceeded to dance and sing his way up and down the isles, grabbing decorations, tea cakes, strawberries and muffins. Remembering he didn’t have any napkins, tea cups or even a tea kettle, he skipped to the isle where they had all the plates and napkins and forks and— Oh dear. Joe stood, biting his lip, shaking his head. Paper napkins? Plastic cups? No. No. No. It simply wouldn’t do!



Looking at his pink, princess phone, he saw he had another hour. Was it enough time?

“I will simply have to make it enough time!” He said, stomping his little booted foot, then grabbing his cart and scampering to the front counter, where an elderly woman stood at the register. At the sight of Joe rushing up, his cheeks pink, eyes sparkling with delight, she couldn’t help but smile.

“Well, young miss, did you find everything you were looking for today?”

Young lady. Joe almost corrected her, but then he remembered how much nicer the boys were once they started to think of him as a girl, and besides, it would be rude to correct his elders. So, instead, he smiled his brightest, prettiest smile, tossed his hair back over his shoulder and said, “Of course! Your store is simply wonderful!”

“Oh, aren’t you adorable!” The woman said as she scanned Joe’s items.

Adorable! Joe’s heart skipped a beat and he batted his eyelashes, then looked away wanting to seem properly modest. He couldn’t remember anyone calling him adorable before, and he really liked it. “Thank you!” He chirped.

“What’s all this for?”

Joe’s eyes lit up and he giggled. “I am throwing a tea party!”

“Oh! What fun!”

“I just hope it’s the bestest most funnest party ever!”

“I am sure it will be.”

Joe pulled his wallet out of his bag and handed the woman his debit card. While the woman scanned it, Joe pulled out his compact and looked at his face, pleased with how cute he looked with a natural pink flush to his white cheeks. Maybe he didn’t need make-up, he thought, though he

ached with the desire to wear it. He could use a little eyeliner, some mascara.

“Thank you, Josephine,” the elderly lady said, her own spirits having risen after her interaction with the perky girl. “You are a delightful young lady.”

“You are too kind, but why did you call me—“ Joe stopped himself, remembering once more that it was impolite to contradict his elders. “How did you know my name was, um, Josephine?”

“It’s on your card, dear. Have a lovely party!”

Joe looked at his debit card. It clearly read Josephine A. Wilson. But, that wasn’t his name? Well, he didn’t have time to worry about it now. He needed to get to Williams-Sonoma! He thanked the nice lady and raced out to his car, throwing all the supplies in the back then jumping behind the wheel, hurrying off, zipping in and out of traffic. He knew his driving was not as ladylike as it should be, but there was a tea party at stake! The next hour passed in a blur and he came screeching into the Williams-Sonoma parking lot, rushed in and bought himself the prettiest MacKenzie-Childs enamel tea kettle with lovely flowers, gorgeous china tea cups and pretty cloth napkins plus, remembering it at the last minute, a lace table cloth! He didn’t know how much he needed them to be happy until he saw them, and hugging the tea kettle to his chest, he kissed it and whispered, “You complete me...”

Back in the car, home, he slipped on his apron, cleaned and dried all his new treasures, set the table, dusted, put his hands on his hips and shook his head— dusted some more and was about to see if he could mop and wax the kitchen floor when the bell rang. “Oh!” He looked at the clock. It

was time! And here he was still wearing his ugly work clothes, and he hadn't fixed his hair, and the apartment looked so drab!

"Josephine," he heard his meanie of an ex-wife call. "The girls are here!"

"Darn my socks!" Joe said. Well, he would just have to make due. At least he'd gotten pretty cups and plates. Tucking in his shirt, tossing his hair back, he went to the door and pulled it open.

Jane's mouth dropped open as she stared at the slender little — was he already a girl? Their daughters, Jackie and Sienna, likewise stared at him, stunned. They knew this was their father due to the magic, but they were still stunned to see how he looked now standing there in his skinny jeans and flannel shirt as slender and petite as a 10 year old girl, though still slightly taller.

"What?" Joe said in his squeaky new voice.

"You're— so— cute!" Jackie, the oldest said.

"Oh," Joe said, tossing his long blonde hair. "Don't be silly."

"She's right, Josephine," Sienna said. "You're pretty!"

Joe felt himself blushing even as something in him rebelled at what he was hearing, the way the girls were talking to him. He was still their father, after all, and it wasn't appropriate for them to talk to him like he was just another girl, was it?

His thought were interrupted by the harsh laughter of his wife. "Oh, Josephine, the girls are right. You're just a pretty little thing now, aren't you?"

The harsh, mocking talk woke Joe up and he threw his shoulder back, looking up to meet his wife's eyes even as he realized she was now taller than him. "What have you done to me? I know you did this!"

“What if I did, Josephine? What are you going to do about it?” Jane stepped forward, towering over Joe, looking down at him, amused.

Joe felt his confidence and defiance melt away. His wife was not only taller, but full grown— bigger everywhere. He was small, skinny. Despite himself, he stepped back and dropped his eyes, unable to maintain eye contact with his former wife.

“Come on, Josephine,” Jackie said, taking his hand. “Let’s go have our party.”

“Yes, Josephine, go have your tea party!” Jane taunted.

“My name is Joe!” He shrieked, losing his temper and taking a step back toward Jane, raising a little fist.

Whack.

Jane slapped him in the face, then pushed him on the chest and he fell backwards, landing on his butt, his blonde hair falling in his face. Joe blinked, stunned, the sting of tears in his eyes. “Why, you fiend!” He said, starting to get up.

“Stay down,” Jane said. “Stay down or so help me I will put you over my knee and spank you— *young lady*.”

“Young lady? Spank me?” Joe said softly, shocked and scared because he knew she meant it. And yet, his daughters were watching. He couldn’t let his daughters see his wife humiliate him like this. He put his palms on the ground, struggling against all his newly developing feminine impulses, but then his daughters rushed between he and his wife, and they put their hands on him and pushed him back down.

“Stay down, daddy,” Jackie said.

“It’s better,” Sienna said.

“Oh, how sweet, protected by two little girls.”

“Mother,” Jackie said. “Enough.”

Jane snickered. “Have fun, girls,” she said. “I’ll see you in the morning at court. And Josephine— wear something pretty.”

With that, Jane pulled the door shut and Joe huffed. “She is so mean!” He said, breathing hard, then looking at his girls through the strands of hair that had fallen in his face.

“Forget about,” Jackie said, gently pushing the hair from her father’s pretty face.

Sienna ran her hands through some of the long, silky strands. “Your hair is so pretty!” She said.

“It’s not really my hair,” Joe said, feeling odd at the way his daughters were talking to him, treating him— like he was just another girl. Getting to his feet, he took a deep breath and decided he needed to be the daddy. “Girls, go put your things in your room and clean up. Then, I have a surprise for you.”

“Surprise? What’s the surprise?” Sienna said.

“Tell us!” Jackie said, still playing with Joe’s hair. She was almost as tall as Joe now.

“Girls, I said to put your things in your room.”

“What’s the surprise?”

“Put your things in your room,” Joe repeated, trying to use his “stern” Dad voice, but with his girl’s voice it just sounded silly to his own ears, and in fact, the girls laughed. “Girls!” Joe said, his voice rising to sound like a furious pixie.

“Josephine,” Jackie said. “Show us the surprise.”

“Call me Daddy,” Joe said, trying to sound less shrill.

Both girls giggled. “You’re silly,” Sienna said, taking his hand. “What’s the surprise?”

Joe shrugged and rolled his eyes, deciding he couldn’t win. “Okay. I will show you. Come on!”

The girls followed as Joe skipped to his room and to his closet, throwing it open to reveal the line of pretty party dresses. The girls gasped and shrieked, rushing in and looking at the pretty, old-fashioned dresses. Joe watched, delighted, clapping his hands. It pleased him to see the girls so excited. “I thought you might want to wear one for our tea party!” Joe said.

Jackie turned and eyed her father, her eyes dancing with mischief. “You thought we would wear one of these dresses?”

“Yeah, I thought...”

Sienna caught her sister’s look and her face broke into a grin even as her eyes also danced with mischief.

Joe looked at them, confused, and then he realized what they were thinking. “Oh, no. No. Girls, I am your Daddy!”

“You,” Jackie said, putting his hand to her chin and surveying the slender little creature her father had become. “Are going to look **adorable**.”

“Adorable?” Joe said, his voice cracking. “Me? No.”

“Yes,” Sienna said. “Oh, so yes.”

Joe shook his head side to side, backing away. “Girls, please..” He very badly wanted to wear one of the dresses, in fact his whole body ached with desire, but that need and desire terrified him. He felt like it would extinguish forever whatever was left in him of a man. And what would his daughters think of him if they saw him put on a dress? He would lose all of his... POWER.

That was it. He couldn't let it happen no matter what because if he did he would no longer be a man or a Daddy, he would just be another girl, and the thought of being a powerless little girl terrified him. He stepped back and back as Jackie and Sienna advanced, finally ending up with his back to the wall.

"Come along, Josephine. Stop being so difficult," Jackie said.

Joe summoned all his will and crossing his arms over his chest and tossed his long blonde hair defiantly. "Girls!" He shrieked. "I am your Daddy, and I am afraid I must insist that you stop... um... bullying me and trying to make me put on a dress. It would be most inappropriate as I am your male authority figure!"

"Male authority?" Jackie snickered, looking him up and down, making Joe hyper aware of how skinny and small he'd become. "Hardly."

Sienna covered her mouth and giggled.

"I am I am I am," Joe insisted.

Jackie reached out and pinched his ear. Joe shrieked. "Come along, Josephine," she said, pulling him toward the closet. "Time to make yourself pretty."

Joe let himself be dragged along, mewling in pain.

"Sienna," Jackie said. "Please pick out a cute dress for our *male authority figure* to wear while she hosts her tea party."

"Would you please let go—"

"Shut. Up." Jackie said. "You are being so annoying."

Joe shut up, and then found himself smiling. He felt bad that he'd annoyed Jackie, and now he just felt it would be better to go along and try to please her even if that did mean—

Goodness gracious! He thought as he saw Sienna walk out of the closet with a white and pink dress destined with ribbons and bows and hearts, with a wide, A line skirt and the most fetching lace collar. He felt butterflies, felt himself shaking, his cheeks blushing. It was so sweet and pretty, all sugar and spice and everything nice.

“Do you like it?” Sienna said holding the dress toward Joe.

Joe shook his head and lied, “No. It’s... terrible. It’s too... um... girly?”

Both Sienna and Jackie burst out laughing. “You’re the one whose too girly,” Jackie said.

“Compared to you,” Sienna added, “this dress is like a caveman or something.”

Joe felt himself experiencing a full body blush, and he crossed his legs and arms, wanting to make himself smaller, to disappear. He couldn’t believe this was happening, that he’d lost his manhood and everything so soon, that his little girls were mocking him now and teasing him for how feminine he’d become. He stared at the dress in horror and delight. It was his beautiful nightmare, his terrible dream. It was... him. Now. What his wife had turned him into.

“Come, come,” Jackie said. “Let’s get you into this dress.”

Joe nodded and started to unbutton his flannel shirt. He stepped out of his jeans. The girls brought him a slip to wear under his dress, and he raised his little arms and let them drape it over him, feeling the cool silk slide down his soft, hairless body, his shivered and smiled and then— giggled.

Blur. The next minutes were a blur as his girls got him into his dress, cooing and clapping, telling him how pretty he looked, how adorable. The word never failed to send a shiver of pleasure through his whole little body,



and he desperately wanted to run to the mirror, to see himself in his pretty party dress, but the girls insisted they get him all prim and proper before he saw himself. They had him slip on a pair of fresh white tights. They fixed his hair, strapped him into a pair of pink and white saddle shoes that matched his dress. While he sat, knees together, hands in his lap, waiting for Sienna to finish with his hair, he heard Jackie shout with joy from the bathroom. “Omigod!” She said, and then she walked out of the bathroom holding mascara, lipstick, foundation. “Daddy has makeup!”

The girls looked at each other and shouted in unison, “Makeover Party!”

Joe sighed. He knew better than to argue. Jackie went to work, painting his face. He sat passively, feeling the cool cosmetics being spread across his features. The girls giggled and chatted, talking about what kind of lashes to give him, how to draw out his features while keeping him looking “sweet and innocent.”

Sweet and innocent. Joe was a 29 year old man. He’d been a father, a husband, slept with his fair share of women. And yet here he was in a dress while his daughters did his makeup, and they were making him look sweet and innocent, and just as with his dress and hated it as much as he loved it.

As Jackie was putting his lipstick on, there was a sudden flash, and he glanced to the side to see Sienna had just taken a picture of him with her phone. He didn’t dare speak. Jackie was doing his lips, and she would quite the angry girl if he messed it up, but he shot Sienna an angry, warning look.

Sienna giggled. “You’re cute when you’re scared,” she said. “I’m just sending it to Mom.”

Mom? No. No. Joe couldn't let her see him like this, couldn't let her see his daughters forcing him to dress as a. Girl. He wanted to say something, needed to say something, so he glanced at Jackie, eyes full of pleading.

"Don't even think about it," Jackie said as she worked on his upper lip.

Sienna's phone buzzed. She glanced down. "Mom says you look adorable," she said.

Joe sighed. Adorable. There was that word again. The word he loved. But coming from that mean old ogre, it was like a kick in the gut. He felt it all now, the dress, the makeup. He was over. Joe was done. He'd been murdered by that mean old hag.

Well, he would win custody and then she would be the one feeling bad. That was for sure. His lawyer had a whole bunch of evidence and stuff that the court would be so interested to hear about. Maybe he could use the girls as bargaining chips after all? Turn me back to normal, and I give you the girls?

"Come take a look!" Jackie said.

All the thoughts of revenge and his wife and legal bargains fled from Joe's pretty little head and he hurried over to the mirror and stood there, staring in wonder at what he'd become— his little, round legs look so good in those white tights, and the buckles on his shoes sparkled. His dress was just a glorious confection of pink and white, iced with bows and in fact he giggled with delight to see how much he reminding himself of a delicious pastry. Oh! And his face. He'd felt like Jackie was putting on a ton of makeup, but it was actually not too much at all, just enough to make him look even prettier, but at the same time younger, more naive and sweet.

"You're sooooo cute!" Sienna said.

“Pretty,” Jackie added. “So pretty!”

Joe’s eyes danced with pleasure and he did a twirl then threw his arms around his girls, hugging him tight. “Thank you thank you thank you!” He chirped. “You’re the best girls in the whole entire world!”

Sienna and Jackie hugged their pretty little father back, but their eyes met behind his head, and they each had a look that combined mystification and glee.

“Time for the tea party,” Joe suddenly said. “Let me put the kettle on.” He rushed from the room, leaving the two girls to watch in amazement.

“I really think tea parties are totally stupid,” Sienna said. “Can’t we just watch Riverdale?”

“I wish,” Jackie said. “But we better humor her. She really has her heart set on this whole girl bonding thing.”

“It was mean of mommy to do this to Josephine,” Sienna said. “She’s supposed to be a boy.”

“Yeah, but I kinda like it?” Jackie said. “Besides, this way we get to stay with mom.”

Joe got the tea going, then went around the table pouring the hot water into each of his pretty new china cups. The girls sat while he served them, and then they all sipped their tea, nibbled on the food and chatted. Joe found himself fascinated with his daughter’s lives and peppered them with questions about their school and their friends, the boys they liked, the shows they watched. He’d always felt distant from the girls before, not feeling like as a guy he could ever really relate to them, but now he couldn’t get enough of their stories.

Jackie and Sienna ended up feeling like the tea party didn't totally suck after all. They enjoyed talking about school and their friends, and Josephine was such an excited and active listener she was quite the pleasure to talk to. Finally, though, Jackie and Sienna went into the living room to watch Riverdale while Joe scurried about in the kitchen, cleaning, putting away the leftovers, all the while being careful not to get anything on his dress, or to mess up his makeup.

When he finally finished, he went into the living room to find the girls asleep on the couch. Oh! So sweet! He thought. Once, he would have picked them up and carried them to their beds, but now he was too small and weak, so he just gently woke them and got them to their beds.

Finally, the house quiet, he yawned. He needed to get to bed so he would be bright and pretty for court, but he couldn't resist! Grabbing his phone, he started taking selfies of himself in his dress, striking different dainty and demure poses, smiling with delight when he looked at them and thinking, "I am her! I am so pretty!"

The next morning, Jane sat in court with her lawyer, grinning. Her girls had sent some pictures of their father, all dolled up for his big court appearance. They had draped him in a red white and blue dress, convinced him to wear lace gloves, made him all pretty with shades of pink on his pale face. She could see now that he had small, budding breasts, and she covered her mouth trying not to laugh as she thought about how he must have felt when he woke up and found those soft little cones on his chest. He'd always been obsessed with boobs, and she loved that he now had a pair of his own.

Finally, the courtroom doors opened and Sienna and Jackie entered, Joe trailing behind looking nervous in his pretty dress, but smiling brightly

as a young lady should. When they reached the front of the court room, Joe started to go and sit next to his lawyer, but the girls grabbed his hands and whispered, "Come sit with us."

"But, I...". Joe started.

"Josephine," Jackie said in her stern, maternal tone.

"As you wish," Joe said, going and sitting with the girls behind Jane.

The judge came in— a youngish looking Asian woman. Joe thought she had very pretty eyes. "Counsel. Is your client planning on showing up today?"

Pete Engel, Joe's lawyer shook his head. "Your honor, I am sorry to say that my client is not here and has not answered any of my calls or texts. I can not say that he will be appearing today."

"Does your client know that if he doesn't appear, then the children go to the mother?"

"Yes. I made him aware of that."

What are they talking about? Joe thought. I'm sitting right here. He raised his hand, like a good girl does, and waited to be recognized.

"Is Joseph Wilson present?" The judge asked. She saw Joe raising his hand, but as he was just a girl and sitting behind the lawyers in the observer's section, she ignored him.

"Um... um.. um..". Joe said, bouncing in his seat, having his hand.

"Young lady?" The Judge finally said, annoyed. "It is not appropriate to interrupt the proceedings."

Not appropriate? Joe tensed up at the thought that he was being a bad girl, but this was too important. "Um, please, I have something..."

"Josephine!" Jane snapped. "Stop embarrassing me!"

“Let the record show that Joseph Wilson did not appear in court today, and therefore—“

“Wait!” Joe shrieked, fighting against every feminine impulse. He stood. Jane covered her mouth, amused.

“What is it?” The judge asked, looking over this young woman dressed like she was on her way to a tea party— in the 19th Century.

“It’s not true,” Joe said. “It’s not true that Joe Wilson didn’t show. The thing is, I am Josephine Bisset!” He had meant to say, Joe Wilson, and his eyes went wide with shock as he heard himself call out Josephine in his pretty little voice. “I mean, I am Josephine Bisset! No, that’s not right. I am Josephine.” He shook his head, frustrated, confused. “These girls are my sisters!” He shouted. “No. I mean, I am these girl’s sister!” Joe put a soft little hand to his throat. “I don’t understand what’s happening. Why can’t I tell me that my — she!” He pointed one of his dainty, lace gloved hands at Jane. “Mommy did this to me!”

“Young lady,” The Judge snapped. “If you speak again, I will be forced to have you removed from this court room. Now, sit down and be a good little girl.”

Joe started to speak, but something inside him tied itself up in knots. He was a good girl, he needed to be a good girl, and so he sat, knees together, hands in his lap. Jackie and Sienna immediately put their arms around him. Joe looked over to his lawyer, eyes wide with pleading, but his lawyer just stared at him like he had three heads.

“Let the record show that Joe Wilson did not appear at this hearing. Therefore in keeping with the laws of this great state, I award custody of Jackie, Sienna and Josephine Bisset to their mother, Jane Bisset. This hearing is adjourned.”

“Yeah!” Jackie and Sienna cheered, jumping up to hug their mother. Joe just sat there, feeling small and ashamed, completely and totally defeated. “Girls, give us a moment,” Jane said, and the girls walked over, smiling and happy they got to stay with their mother.

“Well, Josephine, looks like you’re my little girl now.”

Joe looked up at her, his eyes filled with impotent rage. “Give me back my life,” he hissed. “Give me back my body.”

“No,” Jane said. “You just had to try and use the girls to try and get to me. You just couldn’t do the right thing, could you? Well, now look at you. I’ve taken everything, even your name. After our divorce, I went back to maiden name, Bisset, and now it’s your maiden name as well. Isn’t that delightful irony? And now, darling Josephine, you will spend the rest of your life a lovely Lolita.”

“Lolita?” Joe thought about the dresses in his closet, the one he was wearing, the ribbons and lace, the pretty shoes. Yes. He’d enjoyed looking at pictures of women dressed like this, women who acted like naive and demure— “Oh, goodness no.”

“Yes.” Jane said. “Oh, yes.”

“Forever?” Joe whispered, feeling himself being forever trapped in dresses, ribbons and lace, feeling like he was drowning in it, would drown, would never be able to breath again. He dropped his eyes, burning with shame.

“Forever,” Jane said, reaching down and cupping his chin, tilting his head back. “Forever.”

“Forever,” Joe whispered backs the tears filled his eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

“Say, thank you, Mommy,” Jane said, grinning down into her husband’s pretty face.

Joe’s world blurred as the years filled his eyes, and he choked and sobbed, and said, “Thank you. Mommy, dearest.”

Jane laughed, and kissed him on his soft, white cheek.