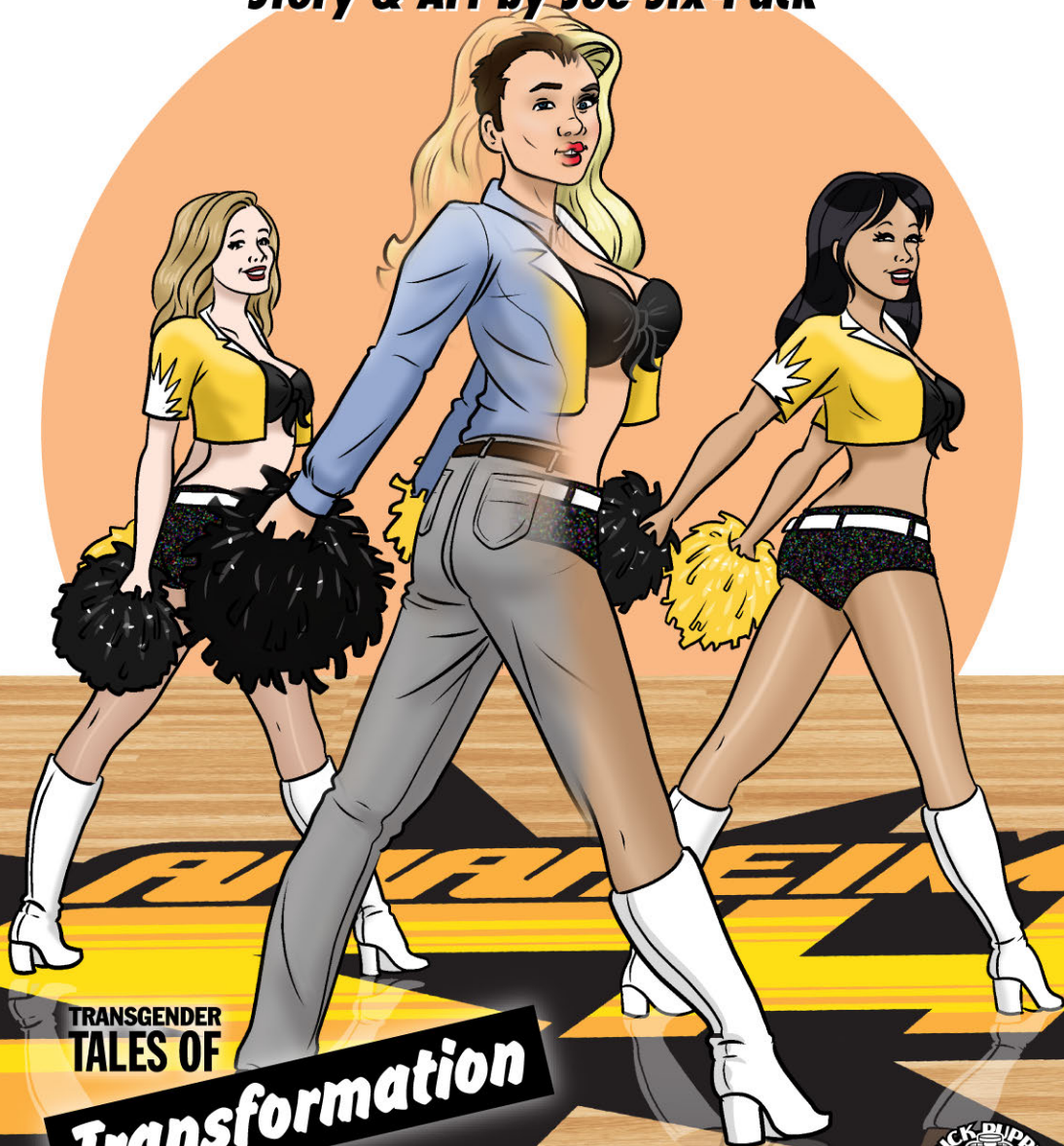


ADULTS ONLY

224 pages **38** illustrations

COSTUME DRAMA

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack



**TRANSGENDER
TALES OF**

Transformation



J O E S I X - P A C K

COSTUME DRAMA

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack
A Tales of Transformation story



2021 Digital Edition

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COSTUME DRAMA



THE FRIENDLY WAGER

The horn was like a cosmic disruption in reality. It's loud, piercing sound left ripples in the air. It shredded your thoughts and left your consciousness in tatters. Surely, it's mind-shattering noise was a declaration of urgency and a call to focus on the most important matters affecting the very fate of humanity.

It was a TV time out.

The players for the Anaheim Shock trudged off the court, weary from defending their 20-point deficit. But this was the NBA, and being twenty points down was nothing. These games were always decided in the last two minutes, and it wasn't even halftime yet.

That's why the full arena was less than attentive to the action. Many were already out of their seats and headed to buy a new beer or deposit and old one in the restrooms. A murmur rose from the fans as they shuffled in their seats.

But their attention, at least the attention of most of the men in the arena, was quickly seized as the famous Anaheim Shocker Girls dance team began their routine. A tune that punched you in the face and demanded to be danced to began playing, one every sports fan had heard roughly a billion times before. To the fans, it didn't matter what the music was, as the girls' perfect nubile bodies, spritely dance moves and the undisguised lustful look in their eyes made the rest of the world fade away.

Every synchronized move was followed intently by all pairs of male eyes. As the girls' long hair fluttered around their heads, their ever-present smile shone like a beacon. Some men may have noted their faces if it weren't impossible to divert their eyes from the girls' perfect peach-shaped asses or bouncing buoyant breasts.

The Anaheim Shocker Girls were like a little peek into a forbidden heaven for every man who saw them perform. A heaven made of young, unimaginably pretty girls performing for their amusement and pleasure.

In the front row, just ten feet away from this vision of a perfect nirvana, in seats that went for two thousand dollars a game or more, Seth and Jason looked at each other for a moment. Their silent momentary glance was to ask each other, 'how did we ever get so lucky?'

Court-side seats at a Shocker game were some of the most sought after seats in all of professional sports. Not only did they offer a point-blank view of the



Shocker Girls, but a close-up look at some of the biggest stars in Hollywood that came to the games. Oh, and the team had some of the best talent in the league, too.

However, the mystery of how two average guys had come to get these seats was easily solved. Both Seth and Jason knew exactly why they had these precious seats. They paid full price for them. The season tickets cost over a \$120,000 a seat, and they had bought four of them. In cash.

The horn sounded again, and the girls stopped their routines, quickly trotting off the court like giggling schoolgirls called back from recess. The time out was over, and now the game was set to resume.

Seth glanced around for a moment, looking for any sign of his wife. Amy had disappeared almost the moment the game begun, off like a shot at the first break in play. That wasn't unusual, as Amy and Jason's wife Karen, had made it a longstanding habit to leave their \$2000-a-game seats vacant for most the night.

Seth knew where they were, hobnobbing up in one of the sky suites with whomever it was they were trying to impress. Karen knew just about everyone up there, and towed Amy along for backup.

They'd reappear sometime in the last few minutes, non-plussed, as if they had just been gone for a second or two. The first thing Amy asked when she got back was always the same: "who's winning?"

They had been married for over ten years now, a number that seemed to mystify their wealthy friends. Three years of married life was usually the limit amongst the crowd they hung with now. Seth was never sure if the surprise he saw in his friends eyes was in respect or in ridicule.

They hadn't always hung out with these sort of folks, though. It was only two years ago that Seth and Jason had sold their internet startup for an irrational amount of money. A hundred million dollars can change a lot about a person, but both men swore they'd keep themselves from being changed by being



filthy rich.

That lasted about five minutes, and both men spent lavishly — not foolishly — but definitely without remorse. They bought expensive homes, fast cars, a private jet to share and even a vacation cabin or two.

Still, they could look at themselves in the mirror and say money hadn't corrupted them. Despite the expensive surroundings, Seth and Jason still spent their time working on new business projects. They liked to be kept busy, and they liked to stay focused on what they truly enjoyed: their work.

As for Amy and Karen, they wore their wealth with pride.

When Seth had first met Amy, back in college, she was the cutest girl in his Java programming class, if only by the technicality of her being the only girl in his Java programming class.

After eight weeks of watching her, he worked up the nerve to silently stalk her for two more weeks. After following her to a party one night, and downing most of a bottle of vodka, he managed to override his crippling shyness and asked her out.

She took a week to gather up enough courage to answer him. They were practically made for each other.

They lived frugally for several years, as Seth and his partner Jason worked up idea after idea. There were several nights of ramen noodles or canned spaghetti. But Seth and Amy never complained. Neither of them ever really expected to succeed without some sacrifice.

Finally, an attempt to make a photo sharing site with facial recognition was the project that took off. It never made a dollar of profit, but the patents and trademarks were bought out by a social networking site for a cool \$275 million.

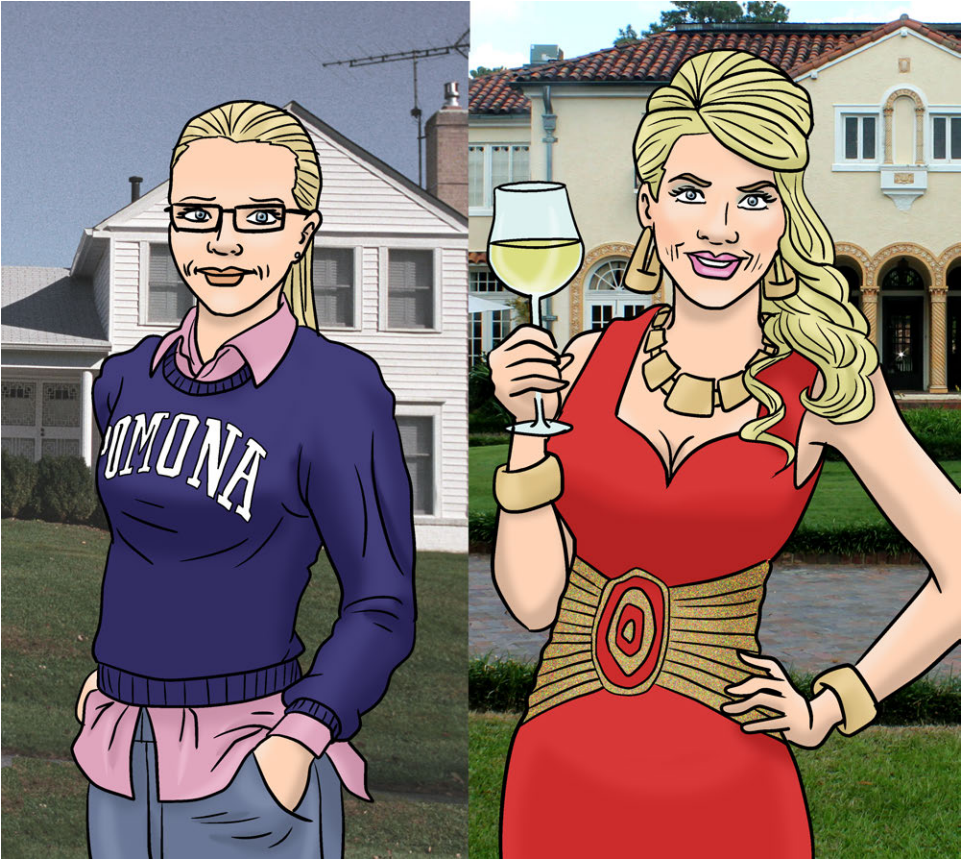
The avalanche of money had several effects on their life, most of all was how it seemed to flush Amy out of the high weeds of shyness. The emotional shell she had lived in for years was left behind like a molting cicada.

Before Seth knew it, he was married to an honest-to-goodness southern California 'real housewife.' Amy dressed in thousand-dollar outfits, wore enormous gold jewelry that was on the edge of gaudy and spent half her week in salons and spas to keep looking perfect.

She had lost twenty pounds, had laser eye surgery to get rid of her thick glasses, and a nose job nine months ago. Her whole personality and appearance had gone 180 from where she used to be. Ever so gradually, that cute nose of hers had begun to start pointing up.

One would never know that this intimidatingly well-kept and well-to-do lady was just a cute little geekette 20 months ago.

Seth was still trying to sort out his feelings regarding his newly refashioned wife. He didn't like who she was turning in to, and didn't like that she was also



trying to make him in to a stuck-up rich douchebag. She seemed to want the kind of glad-handing husband who would help her network with the rich and famous, and he had no desire for that. Seth wasn't about to give up, though. Like the programmer he was, he thought whatever issues he had with Amy could be diagnosed, analyzed and corrected.

At the same time, he kind of liked her assertive personality. Something turned him on when she bossed him around in bed. Not that he'd ever admit to it, though.

After what must have been at least thirty seconds of actual game play, another stoppage made the horn blare again. Much to their disappointment, it was not the Shocker Girls, but the team mascot who took to the court to entertain. It was some sort of anthropomorphic lightning bolt or something, and it usually just jumped around on a trampoline in a failed attempt to dunk a basketball.

Fortunately, two of the girls were assisting, feeding the mascot balls to dunk.

Seth sighed to himself, watching the girls enthusiastically and cheerfully play along with the tired routine. If he had a girl like that in his life, he'd treat her like a princess. He'd drown her with so much love she'd need scuba gear. They

were incredible. He couldn't understand how such beautiful, gorgeous young girls could be real.

"I don't see Gina," Jason said, looking around.

Gina was a shorter girl, who had crinkled black hair and a slightly Mediterranean nose. "Neither do I," Seth replied. He knew all the Shocker Girls by heart. Gina was 23, in her first year as a Shocker Girl. Her father was Greek and her mother was from Kentucky. She liked hip hop music and wanted to start her own dance studio.

At least, that was what her bio in the game program said.

"No, wait, there she is," Jason said. He pointed. "She's over by the Pepsi sign."

"Ah, my sweet, sweet Gina," Seth replied. He sighed again. All the girls were amazingly beautiful in every way, but he had grown to be a fan of her slight overbite. And she had cute knees.

Of course, Seth was so over-the-moon about the Shocker Girls that he could list every little thing he liked about each one. Kristin's nubby nose, those amazing dark eyes of Selina's, Portia's dimples, Tyeasha's trim waist, Zoe's gossamer neck...

"I'm gonna get me something to eat," Jason said. "Wanna come?"

Seth came back to reality, leaving his daydreaming behind. "Not hungry," he answered. He had just eaten a few minutes before they came, and he didn't much like the food here, anyway.

Jason motioned for him to get up. "You're coming. You need to eat."

Seth reconsidered. "Fine. We do it your way," he said, agreeing with his friend.

As they worked their way over to the tunnel, Seth gave a glance up into the suite level, hoping by chance to see if his wife was up there. It was a hopeless effort, as there was no chance he'd be able to spot her from this distance. But he looked just the same.

He did see any number of women who could have been his wife. Blonde highlights in medium-length wavy hair. Big earrings, a fake smile on their face, holding a glass of wine and dressed in casual but impressively expensive clothes. Maybe what Amy had become didn't bother him so much as the fact that there were thousands of women who looked and acted just like her. There was a kind of uniform look to the rich Los Angeles housewife, and Amy had bought right into it.

It wasn't like Seth hadn't taken a shot at reigning her in. When he first got a look at the bills she was racking up, he confronted her.

"You keep spending all money, and we are going to go broke," he said, his accent making him seem a little more angry than he was.

Amy just looked at him with a smirk. “I did the math. It’d be 239 years before we ran out of money at this pace,” she explained. “Adjusted for inflation.”

That was the problem being married to someone with a mind for numbers.

“But this is crazy. It is too much! Life is not all about money.”

Amy just turned her head away. “Don’t talk to me like a child, Seth.”

There was that new attitude of hers: confrontational and confident. Conceited was also another word Seth could have used.

“Not trying to start anything,” Seth said, to try and defuse the tension.

“Then don’t,” was Amy’s curt reply.

Still, he knew that girl he had fallen in love with was in there somewhere. Maybe this would just be a phase and she just needed to live out some sort of rich-lady fantasy before coming back down to Earth. He was beginning to regret ever having sold his company in the first place.

The day he came home from the lawyer’s office where they negotiated the deal should have been one of the great accomplishments in Seth’s life. Now, in retrospect, it was the end of his life. His *old* way of living, at least.

“Well?” Amy asked him when he came in the door. “I texted you, but you didn’t answer! How much?”

“275,” Seth replied. He didn’t need to add ‘million’ to the figure. They both knew.

“And we still get half?”

Seth should have recognized that was the moment when he lost Amy. The look of wild greed in her eyes was plain to see, but Seth’s love for her had kept him from recognizing it.

“Minus some for lawyers,” he replied.

She hugged Seth so hard he was afraid he might explode. The sex that night was mind-blowing.

For a man who wasn’t particularly hungry, Seth found himself loaded with food when they got back to their seats. Jason had talked him into two hot dogs, nachos and a beer — exactly what Jason had ordered for himself.

Jason was a smooth talker. He always had been. That’s why he was such a good business partner — even if he got a little pushy at times.

Once they were settled back in the court-side seats, Seth largely ignored his food and only sipped a little bit from his beer. The game finally got close, and with 17.9 seconds to go, the Shock were tied.

It was always better in the last few minutes of the game. The crowd was into it, the noise was pounding your chest and the energy was electric.

The best part was the Shocker Girls, who always kicked it up a notch in the close games. Every turn was quick, every kick was straight, and every move was crisp. Watching the girls perform in the last few minutes was a joy to behold.

Seth didn't even notice he had swallowed the rest of his beer in ten seconds flat, as distracted as he was watching the performance.

Jason was just as focused. This was why he was here. He was focused on the legs in the air, frills flying, hair fluttering and pom-poms sparkling. Neither of them could really admit that they had become fans of the team and of basketball only because of the cheerleaders, but that was the honest truth of the matter.

When the horn sounded to start play again, both men slumped their shoulders and sat back in their seats.

Since there were just seconds to go, and the game was just about over, it was probably the last dance of the night. The next game was six days from now, so it would be a while until the boys could see the Shocker Girls again.

"Who's winning?" Amy said, as she and Karen took their seats beside their husbands, still toting glasses of wine.

"Winning?" Despite his contempt for his wife not even knowing who was ahead, he answered — after he checked the scoreboard himself. He had been focused on other things. "The, er, Shock. By two."

"Is that a lot? Can we go yet?" Amy asked.

Seth replied without looking at her. "It is still close. Is not much time left."

"Fine," Amy replied, frowning. "But traffic will be a living hell." She crossed her arms in a show of displeasure. "And if it takes more than an hour to get home, so will I."



Seth had come to the United States when he was 15. He had been born in Uzbekistan, to his native parents. His father was a soldier and killed in combat. He still didn't know what had happened to his mother, but the rumor was that she had committed suicide when she heard the news of her husband's death. So his Uncle, who lived in La Jolla, agreed to take him in.

In fact, "Seth" was just an Americanized nickname. His real name was Sanzhar, but he never used it, except on his taxes and at the DMV. His accent was thicker than he wanted it to be, though he hadn't spoken Uzbek for years. He still had a tendency to speak in sentences that dropped some words here and there, and were often a little clumsy. "I speak good American, yes?" He'd tease, playing it up.

Though he did have a darker than average complexion, dark hair and slightly Eurasian features, he considered himself “essentially” American. Despite that, it was still common for him to get detained at airports, when they saw his foreign heritage.

Working in programming just came naturally to Seth. It was a solitary pursuit, and Seth tended to keep to himself anyway.

He met Jason when he was in his Freshman year at college, assigned to a dorm room across the hall from him. While Seth was a coder and a tinkerer at heart, Jason had a drive to him that Seth lacked. When Seth was perfectly happy to keep exploring whatever ideas would pop into his head, Jason would crack the whip and keep him focused and on topic. Seth, in turn, would keep Jason from getting too ambitious with plans to take the world by storm with whatever project or technology they were working on.

They made a great team throughout college, completing several assignments and projects together, and it just seemed natural to continue on after they graduated.

Over the years, Jason must have torpedoed at least a half a dozen good ideas that would have made decent money, always favoring business ideas that were capable of going “big time.” Jason only got excited when he thought an idea was going to go global. They’d inevitably fail — hard — and the two would have to move on to the next big idea. Sometimes Jason’s type-A personality drove Seth nuts, but he was usually right, in the end. Sure enough, the photo sharing site had now proven that big ideas could pay off.

Jason met Karen sometime in the past year, at a networking conference. She was doing promotional work for one of the vendors and the two “hit it off” as Jason later told Seth. Seth assumed that meant wild, drunk sex in the hotel room.

Even though they sniped at each other and would go through week-long periods where they weren’t talking, they always made up and never talked about a separation. They were an odd, sometimes unstable mix, but the marriage was solid.

Jason’s natural ambition made it easier for him to mix with the social set Karen and Amy were in with, though he disliked them just as much as Seth did. Jason would remark that they were “just a bunch of no-talent frauds” who “only valued money, not ideas.”

As Seth and Amy returned home from the game, to their dark, huge home, Amy walked ahead of him and straight into the kitchen, giving her husband a cold shoulder from the long drive home.

Checking the time, Seth decided the best course of action was to just call it a day. Amy was already pouring herself a drink, and he assumed she would be in

a worse mood once she was done drinking it. He needed to cede the ground floor to her and let her stew alone, so he went upstairs to get undressed.

Flipping on the bedroom lights, Seth removed the tailored dress shirt his wife made him wear to the games. “You’ll be on TV!” She always told him. The close seats virtually guaranteed they’d be in a few shots of the game every night.

He untied the laces of his brown leather dress shoes and plucked them off his feet. He carefully put them back in the shoe tree in his closet, or else he’d hear about it from his wife. Seth peeled the brown socks off his feet and tossed them aside. He undid his belt buckle and unzipped his dress slacks, letting them fall around his ankles.

He felt so good to be out of those damn clothes. If there was one thing Seth hated, it was dressing up. Just give him some shorts and a t-shirt and he was gold.

He kept the dress shirt on, but unbuttoned, as he went to go brush his teeth. He checked the hairline on his peach-fuzz head in the process. Seth was only 33, but he had the sneaking suspicion his hair was starting to leave him. It was too soon to tell, but he could see the day where his shaved head would be bald from nature rather than by choice.

It wasn’t long before he was under the covers, dressed in only his boxers, flipping the channels on TV. Maybe tomorrow, he promised himself, he’d get back to work on the new web service he was working on. He really needed to be working to be happy. Still, he hadn’t been able to really focus on programming for nearly a week now.

There was always tomorrow, he told himself, but he had been telling himself that for too long. Sometimes he wondered if he would ever really finish what he was working on.

Once and a while he’d ask himself if it really mattered anymore.

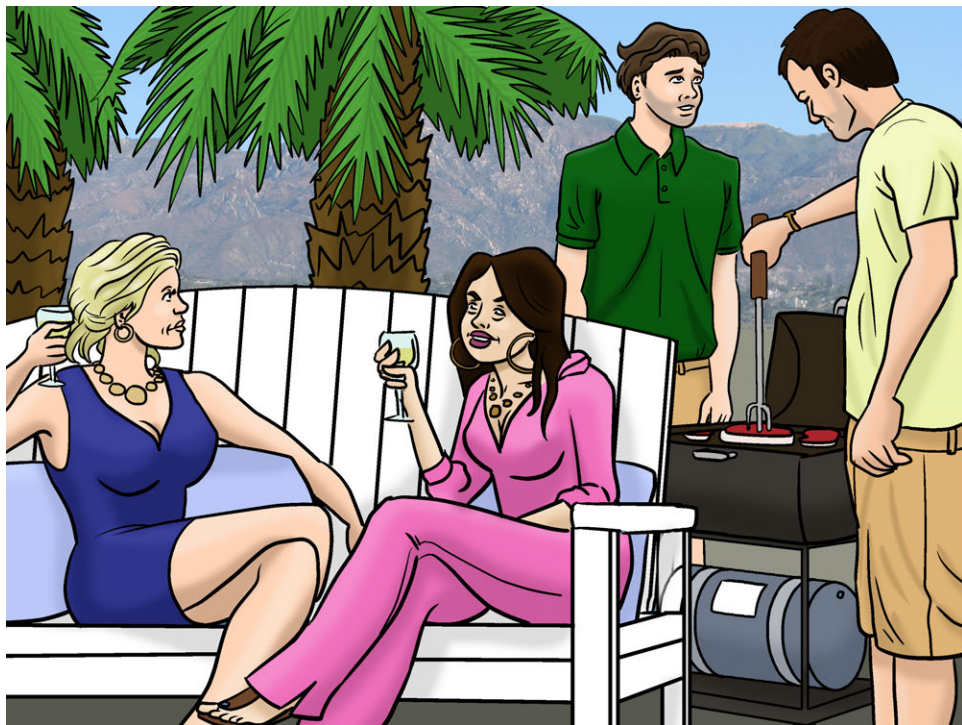


It was at the trail end of the summer, in August, that the four of them got together for a little cookout on the back porch at Seth and Amy’s place.

Of course, summer in L.A. is more a state of mind than an actual changing of the seasons.

Seth and Jason were taking turns working the grill while Amy and Karen were chatting away, checking their phones for messages, completely ignoring their husbands.

They had long been trading pledges amongst themselves to get together before the summer was over for a “good old-fashioned summer barbecue.” Now, with just a couple of weeks to go, they had finally come through and done it.



“What you want to do is wrap it in foil first. It seals in the juices,” Jason said.

Seth shook his head. “I always cook it like this, on the flame. You just have to be careful about the time and use a meat thermometer.”

“I’m telling you, foil will do it right every time. It also keeps the outsides from getting charred.”

“I like it charred,” Seth said. “Burnt to a crisp.”

“Do what you want, dude,” Jason said, slapping him on the back. “I trust you.” He went to go check on the girls.

Seth waited a full minute before he had to turn to his wife. “Amy, where do we keep foil?”

Jason smiled back.

“Honey,” Amy replied, idly waving her wine glass as she talked, “I haven’t the foggiest. You should ask the cook when he gets here.”

After quickly hunting down some foil and finishing the grilling, Seth served up dinner. Ribeye steak. The disdain on his wife’s face was barely disguised. The sneer on Karen’s face was not.

“Doesn’t that look good,” Amy said, without a hint of sincerity.

“I don’t think mine’s charred enough,” Jason quipped, peeling the foil off his meat. He waited a moment. “I’m kidding.”

Seth put aside his tools and sat down to join them. Predictably, Karen and Amy both ate slowly, chewing the meat as if it were going to explode in their mouths.

The men ripped into their steaks like hungry prisoners. It was almost a full five minutes before anyone even spoke.

“Tender enough?” Seth asked.

“It’s very nice,” Karen replied. Seth wasn’t sure if that was just a platitude, because he was certain Karen wouldn’t have any idea what a ribeye steak was supposed to taste like. He doubted that in the last several years she had eaten anything less expensive than filet mignon.

“Don’t eat any more potatoes,” Amy said to her husband.

“Pardon?” Seth replied.

Without any prompting, Amy began scooping the potatoes off of Seth’s plate and tossed them onto an empty plate. “They’re just starch and that’ll spike your blood sugar.”

“Honey...”

Amy took the plate and put it out of her husband’s reach. Seth was used to his wife’s imperious behavior, but not in front of friends. “And only one more glass of beer. You get gas.”

“Amy! You can not tell me what to...”

“You know what I saw at the drug store today?” Jason said, trying to defuse the tension. “Halloween candy.”

Nobody else answered, so Seth took a stab at it. “Yes? It is not September, even.”

“I guess it’s like Christmas. It just comes earlier and earlier every year.”

“The end of summer. It is always depressing.”

“True, but that also means we’re only ten weeks away from discount candy.”

“What were you doing at a drug store?” Karen asked, aghast, apparently unable to grasp the idea of her husband dirtying himself by visiting such a common establishment.

“Buying some condoms so I don’t get syphilis from that crack whore I fuck every Tuesday,” Jason said.

Seth practically spit his drink out, he wanted to laugh so hard.

“Fine, then,” Karen replied.

“Anyway,” Jason continued, “that reminded me that Halloween costume parties must be coming up, and I wanted to inform you two that I’m not going to any such thing.”

Seth was chewing, but he felt the need to chime in. “Same here.”

Both Amy and Karen exchanged a glance. "I wish you had told us that earlier," Karen said. "We're already committed to the Stevensons for their annual Halloween Gala."

"So un-commit me," Jason said.

Seth finished swallowing before he spoke. "Halloween is 75 days away. You plan parties out that far?"

"We've already planned Christmas and New Years as well," Karen answered, "haven't we?" She looked at Amy for support.

"We've already R.S.V.P'd, honey," Amy said.

"Unbelievable," Seth replied.

"Seriously, I'm not going to wear a costume. I'm a grown man," Jason said.

"I am not canceling with the Stevensons. They hosted our wedding reception, don't you remember?"

Jason steeled his jaw for a moment, as he swallowed a bite of steak and his pride with it. "Fine. I'll just go as I am. No costume."

"I already got you the costume," Karen said with a hint of mischief in her voice. "Amy and I found the perfect ones for both of you when we were shopping last weekend."

"I do not wear costume, either," Seth told his wife.

Amy put down her fork. "It's just Halloween. One day out of the year. Everyone makes the effort to have a good time. What makes you think you're so special? Do you think you're better than everyone else?"

"No! I..." Seth wasn't sure how that got turned back on him. "I am not saying I am better, I..."

"What costumes did you get?"

"Well, I'm going as Queen Elizabeth," Amy said with a regal flair. Even though she must have meant it as a joke, Seth could easily see her as a stuck-up queen. That wasn't hard to imagine at all.

"And I'm going as Marie Antoinette," Karen added.

Seth wondered if either or both of them realized how close their costumes were to representing their worst qualities. Aristocrats who were out of touch with reality. Sadly, they both seemed oblivious to it.

Jason wiped his mouth and folded his hands in front of his face. "You said you got some for us? The perfect costumes? Out of curiosity..."

Seth could already imagine what they had thought were "perfect" costumes. Maybe bellhops that serve their every need? Jesters to entertain their royal spouses? Perhaps butlers to cater to their whims.

“It’s something you’re both fascinated by,” Karen teased. “Preoccupied by, really.”

“Oh yes, we thought if you’re going to spend all this time dreaming of them, you’d want to be them.”

Jason had enough. “Will you please just...”

“You’re both going as Shocker Girls,” Karen said, interrupting her husband because she was so eager to say it.

“Yes,” Amy spoke, “those are the cheerleaders you drool over at every game, are they not?”

Karen snickered. “You’re both so fascinated, it just seems appropriate.”

“Not on your life, no,” Seth quickly replied. He looked at Jason for backup, but was surprised to see a look of intrigue on his partner’s face.

Jason would do this from time to time. He would stop everything and just think. He didn’t seem to care if it was socially awkward or strange to just not talk for a little while. Eventually, Jason started to drum his fingers on the table. “What’s it worth to you?” He asked his wife. “And I’m not conceding anything.”

Seth had seen this before, several times. Jason was negotiating. This was definitely his negotiating face. That made him feel better, because this was the same Jason who took a 50 million dollar offer for their company and got it to over 200 million by the time he was done.

He gave Amy and Karen a confident smile. They had no idea what they were in for when Jason got like this.

“If you’re proposing that both Seth and myself would dress up as women, and cheerleaders at that, there are some serious concessions that need to be made. My dignity is quite valuable to me, and I’m not going to risk it for the sake of a one-night party.”

“You think you can bribe us?” Karen said to her husband.

“That’s not what I’m saying. I think we can agree that a person’s dignity has a value to it. Unless we can match the value, I don’t see how what you propose can be viable. Let’s quantify this.”

Seth shot Amy a smug look. She was about to see the master in action.

“My reputation is definitely at risk if I were to dress like a woman and attend this party. There’s no doubt I would hear about it for years on end, comments that would ridicule me endlessly.” Jason leaned over on an elbow. “Now, this kind of reputation would do material damage to me. I could lose my next opportunity to sell what new startup we create. At the very least, the offers we would receive might be less than what they would be today.”

“That’s several million dollars,” Seth interjected.

"Maybe as much as fifty or a hundred," Jason followed up. "Now this is admittedly a subjective amount, but there seems little doubt that I would suffer a significant monetary loss."

"You're making this up," Karen said.

"I can work up some figures, I'm sure." Jason leaned over on the other elbow. "But what you certainly *can't* say is that any damage to my reputation would not cause me — and by proxy, you — to lose potentially huge sums of money in the future."

That seemed to hit Karen where it hurt. You could tell she was recalculating the consequences. She looked over to Amy for any help she might be able to give her. Amy was silent.

Seth enjoyed knowing the wives were at a loss for words. They thought they could just get their way with whatever they wanted. *Not so fast*, Seth thought to himself.

"So, do you see my point?" Jason asked, wanting to hear the wives concede. "Do we agree? We'd stand to lose millions of future income."

Seth reached for his drink, his smile giving away his feeling of supreme satisfaction. Jason was brilliant at this.

"What if you *were* compensated?" Amy said.

"How do you mean?" Jason replied.

"Well, if you stand to lose, say, a hundred million dollars, what if you were compensated a hundred million dollars?"

Seth quickly swallowed his drink and put his glass back. He wasn't at all sure where Amy was going with this.

"It's a fair trade then. The value would match the damage. But, of course, without that kind of money in play..."

"Oh, I have a hundred million dollars," Amy said.

"What? What are you saying?" Seth asked his wife. He had a sneaking suspicion she was going way, way out on a limb and about to say something they'd both regret.

"I have a proposal. A contest. You both go to the costume ball as these Shock-er Girls." Amy was running her finger around the rim of her drink as she thought. "First one to get spotted as a guy loses."

"We'd both be laughed out of there," Seth said. "Our lives would be ruined."

"Not if you actually carry it off," Amy countered. "Once one of you gets found out as a man in a skirt, the bet is over and the other man leaves and saves face. So the bet is that the first one to be read as a man loses."

Jason tapped his lips with his finger in deep consideration of this proposal. "Loses what?" He asked.

With what looked like a glint in her eye, Amy leaned forward and spoke slowly. “Everything,” she said with all due dramatics. “The houses. The cars. The jet. The stocks. Everything.”

“Ha!” Seth laughed out loud. It was a slightly nervous laugh that was intended to be a question more than a reaction. He was waiting for anyone else to answer his laugh by joining him and dismissing this crazy idea as a joke.

No one joined him.

“You’re serious?” Jason asked.

“No,” Seth said to his friend and partner. “Don’t be foolish.”

“This is a great idea,” Karen said. “I’m behind this one hundred percent.”

“You stay out of this,” Seth snapped. He turned back to Jason. “I don’t want to even think you’re considering this.”

Jason didn’t reply immediately. He folded his hands again, indicating deep thought. Every second that ticked by generated another bead of sweat on Seth’s furrowed brow.

Finally, after a minute of contemplation, Jason spoke. “Hear me out, Seth. Think of it this way: If I win, my reputation is in tact and I can still sell our next startup. You sign over everything to me, and you get to go back to life like it was two years ago. You can’t tell me that doesn’t appeal to you.”

It did, actually. It really, really did. Seth’s life was so much better when he was middle class. His wife wasn’t such a bitch, his life was just coding and sleeping. No parties, no obligations, no lawyers.

Jason continued. “And if you win, I sign over everything to you. I’ll sell our next startup for insane amounts of money and make it all back. So I spend a few months down on my luck. It’ll make me hungrier.”

Seth was offended. “You would do this to me? Take everything I own?”

“I know you. You’re probably this close away to giving it all away.” Jason said.

Seth had to admit, he had thought about that. “True. So, what incentive do I have to win, then?”

“Maybe none. That’s why I think I’ll win. I can double my net worth in one evening.”

As much as he admired Jason, Seth would also see this side of him from time to time, and it scared him. This was him disposing of all emotion and viewing the world in terms of kill or be killed. A jungle mentality.

“We have a deal, then?” Amy asked.

“Absolutely,” Jason answered.

“There’s no deal!” Seth objected.

“Legally, we just created a verbal contract between my family and yours,” Amy said.

“And I witnessed!” Karen added.

“It’ll be good for the both of us,” Jason said. “It’s win-win. More money or less money, you’ll be in great shape.”

Seth pushed his chair back and got up from the table. “This is certifiably crazy.” He walked away and into the house.

The three remaining people seated at the table looked at each other.

“He didn’t say ‘no,’ did he?” Amy asked.

Back by himself in the house, Seth took a deep breath. Maybe Jason was right. He usually was. Fact was, he was as bored as he’d ever been with life, and at the very least this was going to shake things up. Maybe this was even a good thing. Maybe losing everything was nothing be scared of. Starting back at zero was something he wanted, after all.

In truth, maybe he had nothing to lose at all, except for being slightly humiliated. Humiliated by people who’s opinions he didn’t respect, anyway. That was no loss to him. Seth took a deep breath and pulled up his shorts.

Coming back to the table, he took his seat and cut his steak. “So what do we do next?” He asked.

THE BOOT CAMP



Two days later, it was a legal contract. Whoever was exposed first at the Stevenson's Halloween party would forfeit their material possessions, minus some modest living expenses and lawyers fees — and of course both men insisted on keeping their court-side seats at Anaheim Shock games.

Seth wasn't sure if he was excited at the proposition of losing everything or terrified of it. He was a bundle of nerves, that was for sure. Every couple of hours he would try and sit down at his desktop to work on his coding, but every time he'd have to just give up and walk away, unable to keep himself focused. He couldn't concentrate on anything. He just spent his time sitting in the living room, looking extremely stressed out.

"You should take these," he wife said, handing Seth two pills.

"What are they?" He asked.

"Hell if I know. Dr. Hiller gave them to me to deal with my nervous condition."

"You have a nervous condition?" Seth asked.

"Sure, why not? If I can get pills like these little babies, I'll claim to have whatever disease I need to have."

"You know how I hate pills."

"How can I forget? You mention it every time I take an aspirin. What do you have against modern medicine?"

"They're just scam artists."

"Yes, billions of people are taking fake pills and it fools them into feeling better."

"You mark my words! It's all trickery! Black magic!"

"Just take the pill, Seth."

"What's in it?"

"Black magic."

Seth angrily slammed the pills down and waited for them to take effect. He normally would have rather jumped out of an airplane without a chute that rely on a drug, but he had bigger fights to fight today. He had decided this would be the day he gave himself over to his fate.

It was a lazy Tuesday afternoon at Seth and Amy's. With nothing on Amy's social calendar and Seth unable to work, he knew that, unfortunately, this was as good a time as any to get things rolling.

"So about this Halloween costume..."

That was all the opening Amy needed. "Okay, first things first. I want to see you dressed up so I know what we're up against. To start, I think we need you shaved."

"You are really going to make me do this?" Seth asked.

"Don't be difficult, Seth. This is just a Halloween costume. Not a change of life."

He took a deep breath and trudged upstairs with all the enthusiasm of a prisoner walking to the gallows. It took almost an hour, but he did manage to complete shaving himself with little blood loss.

Fortunately for Seth, his Uzbeki Eurasian genetics kept him from being as hirsute as most men his age, and was one of the few times he felt thankful about his country of origin. He shaved the light hair on his legs, his chest and even got his armpits.

By the time he told Amy he was ready, the pills had more than kicked in. His head was floating in the clouds while his feet were tripping up on the carpeting.



“How do you feel?” Amy asked her husband.

“Weird,” Seth replied, as rubbed his clean chest.

“So let’s get you dressed.”

Amy had picked out an outfit for her husband made up of things she had meant to give to Goodwill. She referred to them as “old stuff,” but Seth recognized them as the clothes she used to wear before they became rich.

She gave Seth a beige half slip and an old pair of panties. He gave his wife one final look of skepticism, but she didn’t give Seth a way out. He put on the silky undergarments.

Next, Amy picked out an old linen dress of hers, knee-length and sky blue with short sleeves and a little drawstring at the waist.

Once he had that on, she gave Seth a pair of mid-calf black suede flat-heeled boots. He loved the boots. Not on him, of course, but on his wife. He always liked these boots and had fond memories of seeing her in them — but that was years ago. Now, he felt like he was desecrating his own memories by putting them on.

“Shouldn’t I be wearing the costume?” Seth asked.

“Baby steps, honey.” She fluffed out a wig she had pulled from a plastic bag. “Here’s the wig from the costume, if you want to put that on, at least.”

Seth picked up the wig like it was a dead animal and took his time figuring out what to do with it. Eventually, he pulled it over his head.

To this point, Seth was avoiding the mirror, scared of what he’d see there. He had his back turned and didn’t want to accidentally glance at it.

“How’s it coming together?” He asked his wife. He much preferred an opinion over seeing the actual thing.

“It’s not a disaster,” she said.

“Don’t try to sugar-coat it.”

“I mean it, it’s not a disaster. This might just work out.”

Seth was tempted to peek at his reflection, but resisted.

“Take it all off,” Amy suddenly said.

“What? Why?”

“We need boobs. Without that, it doesn’t look right at all.” She went to her box of old clothes and plucked a beige bra from the pile and then some old pantyhose, which she balled up. “Do I need to show you how to put this on or can you figure it out for yourself?”

“I’ve taken these off you enough times.” Seth fed his arms through the loops and then adjusted it to be centered. “Back?”

Amy clipped the back of the bra in place, and then patted one of the stuffed cups a little to balance out the other.

“That’s tight.”

“I’ll size you and we can get some that will fit better.”

“Great,” Seth said, sarcastically.

“Okay, now put everything back on again.”

“How much time is this going to take?”

“However much time it takes is how much time it’s going to take.”

Amy pointed him to the chair she had set up beside the bed. “Have a seat, I need to do your face.”

Seth snickered. “I’ve been trying to get you to do my face...”

“Knock it off,” Amy said, testily.

“What do you need from me?”

“Just stay still.”

Amy gave her husband a super-quick coating of foundation, blush, and powder. She spent a little more time on his eyes, with shadow and eye-liner, and gave him the fullest, glossiest lips she could manage.

“A little jewelry and this should be done,” she said. Amy then attached some clip-on earrings, a thick gold necklace and then gave Seth some miscellaneous bracelets to put on.

“Done?” Seth asked.

“Done,” she pronounced.

Seth then had no excuse not to get up and turn around, ready to see what that full-length mirror had in store for him

“Legs together, and stand straight as you can,” Amy coached. “Chest out. And smile.”

He followed her instructions. Seth turned around with his eyes closed, brought his legs together, puffed his chest out and straightened his back. With a smile on his face, he opened his eyes.

“Oh,” Seth said. “I... Uh...” He had to find exactly the right words. “It is not a disaster.”

“With beer goggles, someone might actually hit on you,” Amy commented.

Seth was feeling a maelstrom of emotions all at once. There was a sense of disgust in there, that he had let himself get dressed in women’s clothing. There was also some confusion, as he wasn’t sure what this meant. He wasn’t attractive in the obvious sense, but he wasn’t a ‘man in a dress.’

Fright was also a big part of what he was feeling. That was to be expected of any man who was seeing himself in a dress for the first time. He didn't know what this meant, existentially, to be a passable woman. Was this inside him all along? Was this something anyone had seen in him before? Was it something everyone had seen in him before?

He wasn't just taking a hit to his masculine pride, as modest as it was. His masculine pride was being fed into a threshing machine.

Worst of all, even if he were to put a stop to this right now, and not take a single step further, he knew his wife would always see this effeminate person in the mirror every time she looked at him.

"You look great," Amy told her husband, "as a woman."

Seth looked at the floor as he spoke. "Yeah, thanks, honey."

"Okay, you know what I think?" Amy said. "I think we have a six days before we see how nasty Jason looks in a dress, and I want you to just blow him out of the water."

"Now what are you going to do to me?"

"Stop whining. Here's what we need to do. I want you dressed in women's clothes day in and day out until we meet up with Karen and Jason."

"Absolutely not. Why would I do that?"

"Look at yourself. You may fit into the clothes, but all your body language says you're totally uncomfortable."

Taking another look at himself, Seth had to admit that he did look awkward. He was hunching over, as if the clothes were attacking him.

"I really do not want to."

"And I really don't want to lose everything we own. No one's going to see you, so what does it matter? You need practice to get familiar with everything. If you walk into our meeting with Jason as a confident and complete woman, like you were born in dresses, they'll be begging us to rip up that contract. It could all be over before it even begins."

"You do not want to win the bet?"

"I want to win the bet. I don't think we need the money, do you? If they give up, it's just as good."

That did appeal to Seth. "Do I have to wear the wig?"

"Not that one. It's cheap. I'll get you one that doesn't look like it's made of plastic."

"No one gets in the house. No one is allowed inside. And I'm not going anywhere."

"My interior designer is coming tomorrow..."

"Cancel or reschedule."

Amy would have objected, but she understood how far she was pushing her husband. "I'll reschedule."

Seth knew she was making a sacrifice. He leaned over and kissed his wife on the cheek. "Thanks."

"Just keep focused and try to get comfortable in these clothes."

Seth licked his finger and rubbed his wife's cheek.

"Pardon?" She asked.

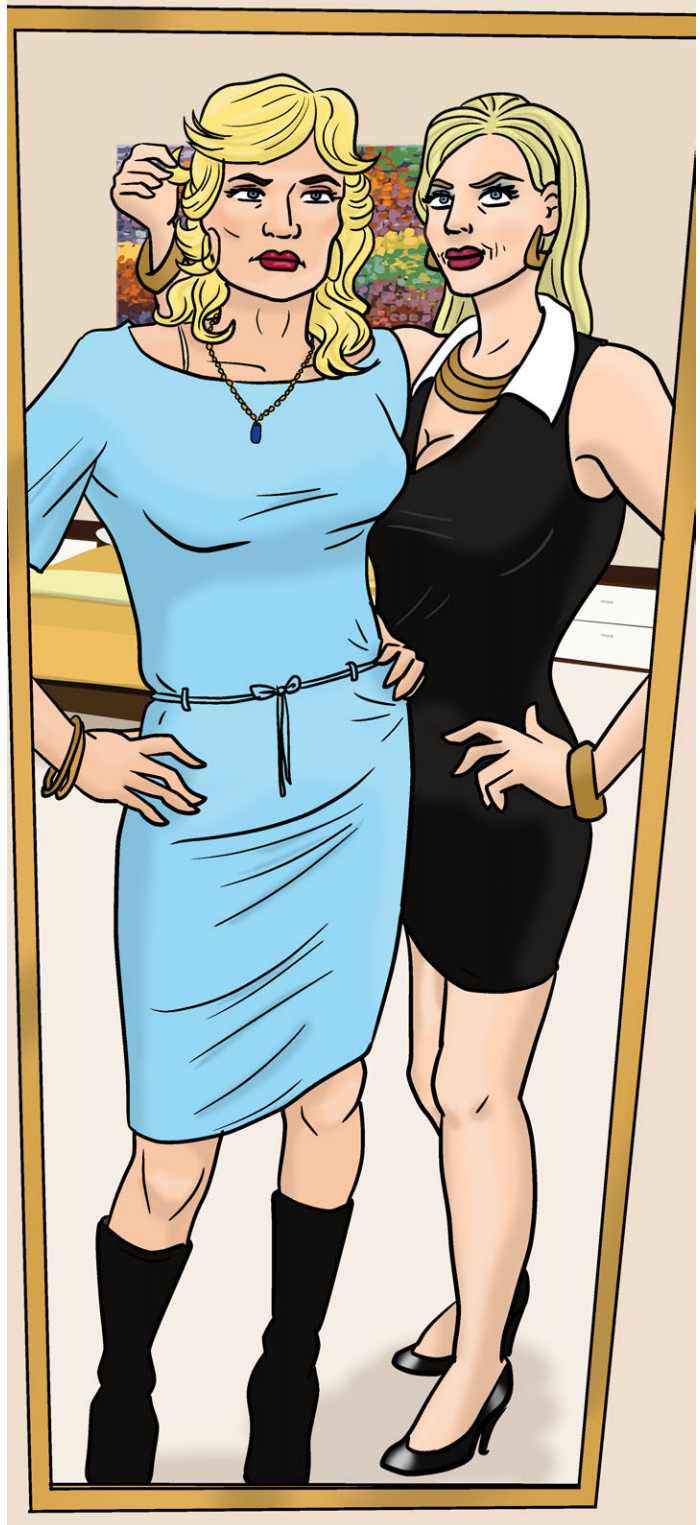
"I got some lipstick on you."

"Oh."

Seth turned to look at himself in the mirror again. "A lot of fuss for a goddamn Halloween party."



The six days passed slowly for Seth. He couldn't make a move without comment from



Amy.

Shoulders back. Stand up straight. Don't slouch. Smile! Head up. Don't rub your face. Enunciate. Look attentive. Use your hands to express yourself. Smile! Licking your lips is not a good idea. No slouching. Stop scratching yourself. Why aren't you smiling?

Seth wondered if real cheerleaders had to do this when they were learning their craft. He had often tried to picture what cheerleaders do on their down time, thinking that they went out to parties, flirted with the players and led a life of excess. He suspected the truth was more like they went home to a half-awake boyfriend moaning that they were out of beer and then heated a dinner in the microwave before falling asleep watching infomercials. He liked his make-believe version better.

Day by day, he was getting used to the clothing. There was much more to wearing dresses and skirts than he first assumed. You had to manage the skirt when sitting, you had to be careful with your legs not to flash your undies, and worst of all, he couldn't use his clothes as a napkin when eating.

It slowly dawned on Seth that he had to be constantly mindful of how he looked. He could no longer tune out and just focus on whatever he was doing, he had to make sure he was poised well, his clothes were in good shape, his wig hair was in place and he hadn't wiped his mouth with the back of his hand lately. Being a woman was a pain in the ass, in Seth's opinion.

But on the positive side, he was, after six days, far more comfortable in the clothes. Yes, he was even confident. He didn't make silly mistakes anymore like tucking his skirt into his pantyhose after going to the bathroom, and he rarely tried to pick his nose with his press-on nails anymore.

Besides that, he could walk confidently in modest heels, and look as though he had been wearing skirts and heels for years. When it came time to go meet with Jason and Karen, he was feeling pretty good about himself.



Seth planned a crisp military operation to get him out of the house without being seen. He had Amy rent a U-Haul truck and block the driveway so people couldn't see the front door except at certain angles. To cover those gaps, he had the lawn sprinklers on so the mist would obscure his quick dash to the car where Amy was waiting, with the engine running.

"You're ridiculous," Amy said as Seth jumped in the passenger side, careful to keep his skirt from wrinkling.

"So be it," he replied. "Better this than the alternative."

Jason and Karen only lived about five minutes away, but it was the most nerve-racking five minutes of Seth's life. He adjusted the seat as low as it would go and slumped down even further so only the top of his head could be seen. He was scanning for any police cars anywhere, terrified that they'd get pulled over.

"Watch your speed!" He told Amy. "Use your turn signals!"

"Relax!" Amy barked. "For Christ sakes!"

Amy pulled the car in to Jason & Karen's place and drove around to the back, where the large pine trees would cover them. Seth had it all worked out.

"Well hello!" Karen said, welcoming them through the back door. "Aren't you all dressed up!" she said to Seth.

"Of course," Seth answered. "That's the point, isn't it?" He concentrated hard, as he walked into the house, gliding as gracefully as he could.

His wife had chosen for him a flattering black dress, made of matte material to best conceal his male proportions. It was light and fluttered around his shaved, smooth knees when he walked. It tapered slightly from the bodice, effectively disguising his waist and lack of hips.

His velvet black one-inch pumps were steady and sure as he carefully walked with one foot in front of the other, heel to toe, just like he had practiced.

"Impressive!" Karen said. Seth turned to respond, but saw she was talking to Amy, not him. "You must have had quite a time training him."

"He was a doll," Amy replied. "I never thought he'd look as good as he does. He's good enough to pass — in the right company."

"I have to agree," said Karen. "Why don't you have a seat and I'll go find Jason. He's probably upstairs."

"Probably trying to make some sort of dramatic entrance," Seth said. "It is not going to help him."

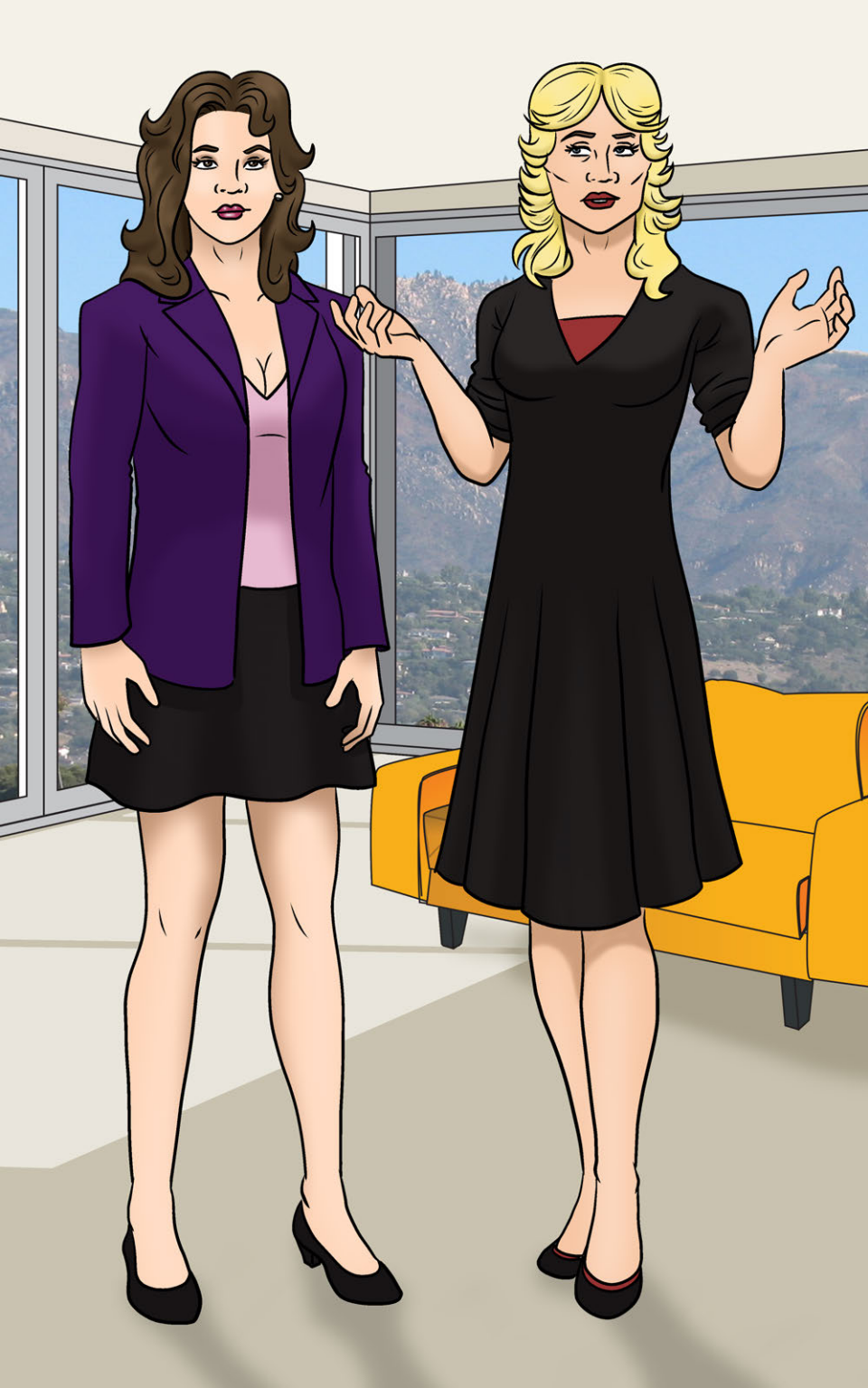
Karen gave Amy a glass of chilled white wine, her usual drink when visiting.

She took a sip. "I was thinking that maybe we should just reduce the terms of the bet, Karen."

"Oh, did you?" Karen replied. She then handed another glass of white wine to Seth. He usually had a beer, and figured Karen was trying to make a catty little dig at his appearance.

"Nothing drastic," Amy said. "I just don't think that Seth is going to be spotted at the party as a man. And in only six days of work! We have several more weeks to go even farther than what you see. He'll be a heartbreaker by Halloween."

"I can see that," Karen responded. "But before we go changing the bet, why don't you see my little Jason? Say hello to everyone, Jason."



Seth and Amy turned in unison to see Jason, who had snuck up behind them. Both of them were outright devastated at what they saw.

What was immediately apparent was that Karen and Jason hadn't wasted a second practicing or a spared a dollar in making him over.

"We've been working very hard on his new look," Karen explained.

That was a grand understatement, in Seth's opinion. Jason wore a tight, long, purple women's blazer over a salmon-colored silk blouse with a low-cut neckline. He sported a flared short black skirt that only ended at the middle of his thighs. His legs were in smoky black pantyhose and he wore black pumps with a three inch heel.

"Come around here and let them get a good look at you," Karen said to her husband.

Jason strode forward, walking in the high heels like a dancer, his hips swaying gently and his long hair was wafting behind him. When he came to a stop, a stray strand covered his lips. It was just for a moment, as he femininely used his pinky finger, topped with long coral pink nails, to sweep it away.

"Jason and I are quite satisfied he'd be able to pull this impersonation off," Karen said. "Aren't we?"

Jason nodded.

"His body is nice, but... His face!" Amy said. "How?"

His face was radiant, his lips as full as any woman's. His brows had been whitened down to gentle arches and his beard was undetectable. His makeup was immaculate, with just the right colors to hide his masculine edges and create high cheekbones and smooth skin.

The lips shined with glossy lipstick and were perfectly shaped, but it was his eyes were the real show stealers. His lashes were long and black, and lined in such a way that turned his eyes seductive and mysterious.

"You almost look..." Amy started to say.

"Asian?" Seth finished for her.

"You know, I was thinking that, too," Karen said, looking at her gussied-up husband. "I thought it just might be me, but... He really does have a kind of oriental look to his eyes. He's also been tanning a little bit. That certainly does make it look more so, doesn't it?"

"Karen," Amy said, "Seriously, how did you do it?"

"Just a little bit of makeup and hair," Karen replied, "a decent stylist can do wonders..."

Amy cut her off. "Bull."

"I suppose you're right. No sense in keeping any secrets." Karen sat down again, leaving Jason as the only one standing, on display as he was. "We were

having a terrible time with his face. Jason's features don't lend themselves to a feminine appearance. So, we went to one of those salons the celebrities use."

"I've always wanted to try one of them, but it always seemed so extreme," Amy commented.

"Maybe we'll need them ourselves in a few years, dear, but so far *we* don't need that kind of intense maintenance." Karen pointed to her husband's face. "Collagen injections in the lips and the cheeks, a chemical peel, eyebrows tweezed, the beard epilated, and the circles under his eyes zapped away with a laser."

"Jesus," Seth said.

"Oh, it was nothing serious. It was all done in two visits to the salon. It all wears off in a few weeks, anyway."

"It's really incredible," Amy remarked. "It really made a difference."

"The face is only half the job. Then there's the hair and his body, of course."

Amy moved to the edge of her seat and placed her wine aside. "You have to tell me what you did. Tell me everything."

"The most important thing was the therapist."

"A therapist? Like a psychologist?"

"Sort of like that. Jason just had a natural tendency to fight everything. He didn't want to wear panties or a skirt, he wouldn't try to walk in the pumps, he was just uneasy with the whole thing. A little bit of time with a professional has done wonders with his frame of mind."

"What did this guy do?" Amy was eager to know more. "Did he..."

Karen held up her hand to stop any further conversation. "Jason, why don't you show go Seth the shoes you bought yesterday? They're in the upstairs closet."

Jason immediately scooted off, apparently grateful to be out of the spotlight. Seth got up and hesitatingly decided to follow, unsure of why he would be interested in shoes, but he was dying to ask Jason some questions. He stumbled in his heels, but righted himself quickly.

Karen couldn't resist a comment. "You might want to take some lessons from Jason if you want to keep up, Seth."

In what had to be one of the most humiliating moments of his life, he listened to his wife and Karen laugh at his expense as he followed Jason upstairs.

Seth watched from behind as Jason climbed the stairs and headed for the bedroom. He was amazed at how thoroughly Jason was imitating a woman. With his short steps, his swinging hips and his hands raised to his sides, Jason was the image of a young lady.

"She's not watching, you can stop acting like that," Seth said.

“Acting like what?” Jason said. His voice was quiet, like a whisper. “Oh you mean the walk. It’s tough to stop. I’ve given up trying.”

“What?” Seth said, in confusion. “What is that supposed to mean?”

Jason looked behind them to make sure they were out of sight from downstairs. “Listen, Seth, that therapist Karen said we went to? He wasn’t a normal therapist. He’s a hypnotist or something.”

“A hypnotist?”

“Well, not really a hypnotist, but he did mess with my mind a little. Don’t tell Karen I told you. I’m supposed to keep it a secret. But I’m really worried about what they did to me!”

“How do you mean?” Seth asked.

“I can’t stop acting like a woman! I walk like a woman, I can’t talk back to Karen, I’m not hungry anymore... It’s so... Weird...”

Seth watched as Jason’s eye seemed to drift away from reality for a moment. “You don’t sound like yourself, Jase.”

“I can’t explain it. I just seem to be thinking differently all of the sudden.” They finally got to the master bedroom, where Jason bent over at the hips and picked up a pair of three-strapped tall red pumps. “These are what Karen was talking about. She actually took me shopping yesterday. I saw these in a window and had to buy them.” Jason’s face turned serious as he placed his hand on his hip. “I mean it, Seth. I *literally* had to buy them. I couldn’t stop myself. What’s wrong with me?”

“You’re probably just stuck in character,” Seth said, slapping Jason on the back. “Don’t freak out about it.” Seth backed up for a minute. “Did you say she took you out shopping? In public?”

“Yeah, she did. I was scared shitless, let me tell you.”

“I bet. I don’t think Amy would try it, but you never know.”

“We should go downstairs. I have a feeling they’re talking about us behind our backs.”

“I can guarantee that.”

As they headed back, Seth took a sniff. “Are you wearing perfume?”

“You aren’t? It’s kind of an essential part of passing as a woman. Like painting your nails, piercing your ears, whitening your teeth...”

“You pierced your ears? Do you really want to win the bet that badly?”

“I guess I’m just kinda competitive,” Jason said, fluffing his long hair with his hands.

“Do you really want to keep going with this stupid bet?” Seth asked.

"To be honest, I hoped you were going to give up," Jason replied, quietly. They were getting closer to where they could be heard. "Now, I don't know what Karen will make me do next."

"Since when has she told you what to do? You should just..."

"The gossip girls are back, I see," Karen interrupted. She spoke loud enough to indicate she could hear them talking.

"So how did you get him down that slim?" Amy asked Karen, as she crossed her legs.

"He's on a strict diet, and, well... I did put him in a corset."

"Wow," Amy replied. "It really does the job, doesn't it?"

Karen got up and took Jason's coat off for him, and then raised his blouse. "The coat kind of hides it. A tight corset gives him the curves a woman naturally has, maybe even better. My husband may have a slimmer waist than I do by Halloween! I highly recommend it for Seth."

Seth felt a headache beginning in his temples. He knew he'd be having a big fight with Amy about this very soon.

Karen was gloating. "In six weeks, he should be figure-trained and we won't use it the night of the party."

"Can I put my blouse down?" Jason asked his wife.

"Yes, sweetie," Karen said with a little pat on the butt.

Seth spotted something on Jason. "Are you wearing fake breasts?"

As Jason tucked the blouse into his skirt, he nodded. "It helps me..."

"It helps Jason feel more like a real woman," Karen clarified. "It pushes the chest tother and gives a hint of cleavage. It's all very convincing. I have to say that shoe salesman who tried to get an eyeful was sold."

Seth gave his friend a quizzical look, and noticed Jason's deep embarrassment.

"Oh? Did he get some attention?" Amy asked with a grin.

"When we bought him those pumps he fell in love with, the salesman at the counter took his sweet time with him."

"Please, Karen..." Jason said, mortified.

"Well, let me tell you," Karen continued, "this salesman was quite the smooth operator. He felt up Jason's foot and he giggled like a teenager."

"He tickled me," Jason insisted.

"All I know is that we got a 20% discount, a wink and an invitation to come back any time."

Jason took a deep breath. "It was humiliating."

"You were smiling."

“I was being polite.”

“Yes, well, anyway,” Karen continued, “Since my blushing husband protests, I suppose we should stop teasing him.”

Seth looked for himself. Jason was blushing. Just slightly, but he was. He wondered why he was having such an emotional response. After all, he was just playing along with his situation. You can’t suppress a laugh when tickled, so that was understandable.

Or was there more to it than that? Was Jason embarrassed for other reasons? Seth couldn’t imagine that Jason, the guy who he had known for years as a bit of a ladies’ man — and someone who definitely pressed the boundaries of a monogamous marriage — was anything other than completely straight.

But as Seth saw his friend blush, he could also see what looked like a slight smirk on his face.

“So I think you’ll understand if I don’t want to renegotiate our little contract,” Karen said to Amy.

Amy had to agree. “Yes, yes. I can see where you might think you have the upper hand at the moment. But that will change, won’t it, Seth?”

Seth wasn’t terribly enthusiastic about backing his wife up, but he knew he had no choice. He couldn’t just concede. “Yes, dear.”

Seth left the house and went back home, defeated. Instead of putting a stop to this crazy bet, it felt like it was going into overdrive. Worse yet, he seriously doubted that he or Jason was in full control of this situation.



When Seth got up to the bedroom, he looked forlornly at his shirts and jeans. He was looking so forward to their familiar, comforting feel again.

Amy saw his expression as she unburdened herself of her purse and coat. “Don’t even think about it, Seth.” She closed his closet door and opened hers. “This is a code red situation. Everything is on the line and we’re already far behind. If we want to beat those cheaters, we’ll need to double, triple and quadruple our efforts.”

“Cheaters?” Seth asked.

“Therapy? Injections? My God, if I had known that was something we could have done, I’d have done it!” She growled. “I thought this was going to be a friendly, civil competition, but no! That witch is playing for keeps!”

“I have to admit, that visit did scare me a little.”

“Honey, I know this is hard, but you have to trust me when I say that we’ve got to beat them at their own game.”

"I don't want to do anything crazy, Amy. If this is going to out of hand, I would just as soon..."

"Concede?" Amy said, with anger. "I know you have a funny idea in your head that if we lose, we'll just go back to life before we were rich. Everything will be hunky-dory and we'll all skip through the tulips. Am I right?"

"Look, Amy..."

"Am I right?" Amy insisted on an answer.

"Not skipping through the tulips, but..."

"Seth. I know life hasn't been the same for us since the company was sold, but you have to realize that we can't go back to the past. We can't change what's happened. You and I live completely different lives now, and being poor won't magically change us back to who we were."

Amy put her hands on Seth's shoulders. "If we have any hope of improving our marriage, getting to a better place together, it's by moving forward. Going back to two years ago is just a fantasy."

"I... I guess I know that," Seth said.

"Then you have to agree with me that we need to control our situation, and losing this bet is going to make things worse, not better. If we lose, we lose all control. We lose the future. We have to win, Seth. We have to."

"You're right, of course."

"Then do you trust me? Can we try to win this thing?"

"I don't want to hurt anyone."

"If we win, I probably wouldn't actually take the *all* money from Jason. He's your friend. And Karen doesn't deserve to live on the street. God knows she'd probably get herself killed in five minutes if she had to provide for herself. I wanted to take this bet to prove, once and for all, that Karen can't always have her way."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. The only way for us to control our fate is winning."

"Then what do we do?"

"First things first. That beard of yours has to go, it's already showing through your foundation. I'll call a specialist." Amy grabbed her phone and walked away to go make a call.

Seth kicked off his shoes, and unbuttoned his blouse. He checked the time, and saw it wasn't even six yet. With a few hours to go before bed, he buttoned his blouse back up and slipped his shoes back on. He didn't see any sense in getting undressed yet.



With over two months to go before the party, there was no huge rush on the part of Seth and Amy to do anything drastic, so they spent a few days working together on what they planned to do.

Seth had enjoyed seeing the resolve and focus in Amy. With a project to concentrate on, she was more like the girl he met in college than the idle rich woman she had become.

It was a strange thing to think about, but dressing like a woman had brought Seth closer to his wife.

The first step they took was, indeed, to have laser hair removal on Seth's face. He was hesitant at first, but decided to go ahead with it, when he realized he'd eliminate the half hour shaving every morning for the rest of his life. That kind of efficiency gain appealed to the programmer inside.

The process took no more than an hour, which was surprising, but he was told he'd need to have sessions every week until it was permanent. One thing Seth hadn't realized about his hairless face was how young it would make him look. It really took ten years off, and now he was worried he'd gone too far. But the laser was supposed to be temporary, unless you kept getting treatments, so his beard shadow would be back.

He couldn't stop touching his face for days, it felt so smooth.

Meanwhile, Seth used his idle time to master the art of the high heel. In the space of five days, he had graduated from his one-inch to three inches. He had little interest beyond that, because the boots that came with his costume were only three inches. Yet he was persistent, wearing his heels all day long, even when it felt like his feet were cramping up.

Amy had an expensive human-hair wig fashioned for him, in bright blonde, to replace the cheap one that came with his Halloween outfit. The instructions that came with it suggested he should clip it on, rather than use something like glue to keep it attached. So Seth decided to skip his usual scalp buzz cut for a while. By the end of October, he figured he'd have enough hair to work with.

The wig was "classic cheerleader" in that it was long and wavy, with a sort of seventies look to it. He named it "Debbie" as it reminded him of the hair for the main character in "Debbie Does Dallas."

He was also brave enough to pierce his ears, an idea he had long entertained. Not that he ever wanted to wear earrings, but he was attracted to the mystery of a man who had obviously pierced his ears and let them grow over. He always saw guys like that as having some kind of secret, wild past. So he let Amy do it with a potato, ice cubes and an ice pick — and a few glasses of scotch.

The debate about a corset was just as heated as Seth had feared. Amy was adamant, that it was the best thing for Seth to get a female figure, but Seth had little interest in that. “What about padding?” He asked.

“You can’t make your waist thinner with padding,” Amy pointed out.

“You can make the top and bottom bigger, and that makes the waist look smaller,” Seth argued. “It is science.”

“This has nothing to do with science. It’s beauty.”

She had a point, Seth admitted to himself. If there was one thing in the universe that ran counter to the irrefutable logic of science, it was a woman’s sense of fashion and beauty. At least that had been his observation in life.

Eventually, they reached a compromise. A full-body shaper with padding. It was tight in the waist — but not too tight — and padded in the chest and hips.

With the new body shape, he found he could even wear most of his wife’s old wardrobe now. She was happy to let him have her “beat-up rags,” as she called them. Those “rags,” of course were the very same clothes that had attracted Seth to his wife in the first place.



One morning, Seth was walking down the large upstairs hallway when he saw his wife out of the corner of his eye, slightly obscured by some plants. For all the time he was married to her, she still turned him on. Her body was slim and shapely, and she knew how to use what she had.

Seth stopped in the bathroom, where he snuck a couple of Amy’s relaxation pills out of the medicine cabinet, and swallowed them. His wife would give him hell if she knew he was taking any kind of pill, but he couldn’t deny they made him feel better. After cleaning up all the evidence, he headed back. As he did, there was his wife again, back turned, looking fine. He decided to sneak up behind her and give her a little pinch and get a squeal out of her. Seth didn’t get far because he konked his head right into a mirror.

After he remembered about the new hall mirrors Amy had installed up here a couple of weeks ago, he then realized he wasn’t lusting after his wife. He was turned on by his own reflection.

The plants hadn’t let him get a good look at the head or face. The curvy body he had seen dressed in his wife’s clothes was his own.

“I heard a noise!” Amy called from downstairs. “Is everything okay?”

“I am fine,” Seth called back. “Sort of,” he added, to himself.

Taking a second look, he realized how far he had come. He was no longer just a pale imitation of a woman, he was good enough to fool men. Or, at least, himself.

He did a full turn in the mirror to get a better look. Maybe he was just too used to seeing himself in the bedroom mirror or in the bathroom. Out here, in the hall, it was as if he was seeing himself in a dress for the first time.

The strangest thing of all was what he was feeling. Inside.

“I have the weirdest boner,” he said. He slapped himself in the face. “This is getting out of control.” Seth resolved there and then that he was going to have to talk to Jason and try to stop this madness.



Seth was in a black cocktail dress, in the back of his car, checking his nails while he waited for Jason to finish with his makeup.

“I like what you’ve done with your eyebrows,” Seth said.

Jason smiled as he looked at himself in his compact. “Oh, thanks. It wasn’t easy. Tweezing is far more painful than you think.”

“Tell me about it.” Seth pointed to the ends of his brows. “I got like a quarter of an inch on this one and had to give up.”

“It’s not fun at all,” Jason replied, as he puckered up for his lipstick.

“And then, because I did one eye, I had to do the same to the other, even if...” Seth stopped himself when he realized he was talking makeup and beauty tips with his friend. “Are you just about ready to go?”

“All set,” Jason replied, “hand me my purse.”

Seth honestly couldn’t believe he was having this kind of conversation with Jason. Here they were, two perfectly well-adjusted guys about to have dinner in dresses and wigs.

Seth was still intent on getting Jason to give in a bit on the bet, but he hadn’t had any opportunities to talk to his friend. Karen had taken his cell away and was filtering his email, just so Seth couldn’t “influence” her husband. Even now, in the car, he could see Karen’s eyes flashing back from the front seat every so often to monitor them.

Earlier that week, Amy had suggested they go out to have a nice dinner with Jason and Karen. Seth knew this might be the only chance he had to try and sway Jason, so despite his extreme terror at going out to dinner — in public, in a dress — he had to do it.

Seth had noted that the wives had dressed down slightly, going with more of a ‘working professional’ look than the husbands had. He was wearing a simple



black dress with thick straps over his shoulders, a tight waist and a flared skirt that ended at his knees. He had been coerced into wearing seamed stockings, with a garter, and velvet three inch opera pumps.

Jason was in a deep purple dress, with cap sleeves and a v-neck that was displaying his famous fake cleavage. The dress was showing his corset-enhanced figure and a short flirty skirt. His legs were bare and his matching purple shoes had four inch heels.

When they got out of the car, Seth also noted an obvious panty line on his friend's behind. He never thought he'd ever see that.

Karen had worn slacks and a blazer while Amy had a blazer and pencil skirt, and both were wearing flats — which made the husbands stand out even more.

When Seth had to finally face other people, his already unstable knees just gave way. The eyes of the valet at the door, the quick glance from the girl at the desk, and the incidental looks from people waiting for the next table had him barely able to move.

“C’mon, sweetie,” Amy said, hoisting him up, discreetly. “You’re going to look like you’re sloppy drunk.”

Seth righted himself and just did his best to tune out everything around him. He kept his eyes low and on the floor, just watching where he was going to step next and concentrating on it, one velvet-heeled pump after the other.

He was relieved to find they had been seated at a booth, where he could not only be hidden partially, but where he didn’t have to fuss with a waiter being

chivalrous and helping him with the chair. Seth had been playing that moment over and over in his mind for two days now.

“May I start you beautiful ladies with an appetizer wine?” The man said. Seth took his menu and used it to shield his face.

“Chenin Blanc would be wonderful,” came a soft, lyrical and feminine voice from... Jason.

Seth dropped the menu in his lap, he was so stunned.

“Very good.”

“Dude!” Seth said to his friend.

Everyone’s eyes, including the waiter’s, immediately glared at Seth. His voice was not so soft, nor lyrical, nor feminine.

Seth coughed. He cleared his throat.

“Poor dear. That cold really did leave you with a bad throat, didn’t it?” Karen said, giggling.

“An order of bruschetta for the four of us,” Amy said quickly, to distract the waiter. “We’ll be ready to order in ten minutes.”

“Yes, of course,” the waiter said, walking away — with his head turned directly back towards Seth.

“What the fuck was that?” Seth hissed at Jason.

“I’ve been practicing.” Jason said, in his normal voice. “I’d be pretty easy to spot as a man if I talked like one, don’t you think?”

Seth glared at Karen, who grinned at Amy, who then glared back at Seth. Another gauntlet had been thrown down. Now, Seth was going to have to work on a woman’s voice. For now, though, he was just going to have to put that task aside. He was on a mission tonight.

The trouble was, it was very difficult for Seth to keep his mind on this task. He was looking at every single person, his eyes zipping around the room, left and right. Was anyone looking? Was anyone suspicious? Who was staring? He was too scared to blink, fearing that in that microsecond he might miss something.

In fact, he was so preoccupied, when he looked back at the table, Amy and Karen were gone. He had missed them leaving.

“They went to the ladies’ room,” Jason explained.

Seth was so frightened to be left alone, he knocked over his water glass — and then knocked over the salt shaker when he tried to save the water. Fortunately his water glass was empty, because he had already chugged it down to try and cool his flop sweat.

“Nerves, Seth,” Jason said. “You’re about to fall to pieces.”

"I guess you're right." Seth reached for his purse and took a couple of Amy's relaxation pills. He then stole her water to swallow it down.

"Better?" Jason asked,

"I'll be good in a few," Seth took a deep breath. "Look at us, man. We're two guys in dresses going out for dinner with our wives. This has already gotten, I don't know, a thousand percent crazier than I ever thought it could get."

"Yeah, tell me something I don't know," Jason replied, tossing his long hair gently.

"We have to stop this."

"Seth, like I already said, this something that works for both of us. For just a little embarrassment here and there, we'll both be in a better place, win or lose."

"I'm not so sure. I don't think I really want to go back to being poor again. Amy was saying that..."

"From the gentleman," said the waiter, dropping off a martini in front of Jason. He glanced towards a table with three men, one of which was looking back at Seth and Jason's table. He got up and started to approach.

"Oh, man," Seth said. "He's coming over." He started to grip the tablecloth and pull it towards him.

"Stay cool. I can handle this," Jason said, steadying himself.

"Name's Paul," the man said, a sparkle to his smile. "Hope you like martinis."

Jason took the new drink, tossed the olive and drank it down in one gulp. "Name's Jason," he said in his deepest voice. "Thanks for the booze, bro."

"Ah. I see," Paul said, as he turned on his heel and returned to his table.

Seth waited until it was clear. "That was fantastic."

"I'm going to pay for it later," Jason said, rubbing his temples.

"Anyway, the bet..." Seth continued. "I just think that..."

"We're back!" Karen sang as she worked her way into her booth seat.

"Miss us?" Amy added. She glanced at the new martini glass on the table. "Where'd that come from?"

"You should have seen it!" Seth said with a big smile. "This guy ordered it and sent it the table, and Jason was all 'hey bro.' It was crazy!"

"A man ordered you the drink?" Karen asked. "How nice of him. You should thank him."

Jason shook his head. "He's not coming back, trust me."

Karen clucked her tongue. "That's impolite, Jason. A lady is always polite. Next time that happens, either accept it and accept the man's cordiality or send

the drink back. It's not fair to him. He's just trying to be friendly. It's not his fault he finds you attractive."

Waiting for the snappy comeback, Seth was sorely disappointed. "You're right, of course," Jason said. "I was just feeling a little... Impish, I guess."

Impish? Seth thought to himself. That was a new word for him.

"Who sent it?" Karen asked.

Jason pointed to a nearby table. "Tall guy, brown hair. Said his name was Paul."

"Well, I'm going to go apologize." Karen got up and walked over to Paul's table. No one could hear the discussion, but Karen definitely looked to be asking for forgiveness.

"What do you think she's saying?" Seth asked.

"Probably just being nice. You know Karen, she's a bit of a bitch, but she's never impolite." Amy nodded towards Jason. "Sorry."

Jason shrugged. "I live with her. She's definitely a bitch. A nice bitch, but a bitch."

"What's she doing?" Seth asked.

As the three watched, Paul took Karen by the hand and led her away. Karen broke it off for a moment and walked back to the table. "We're going dancing," she said as she grabbed her purse.

"Karen?" Jason asked.

"I wanted to apologize, he offered to go dancing, he's handsome, so why not?" She turned to Jason. "My husband is out of town."

"Karen..." Jason said, but cut himself off when he saw Paul approaching.

"You had me going, there," Paul said to Jason. "You do a fine imitation of a man. Karen told me you like to pull that stunt."

"Oh," Jason spoke in his feminine voice. "No hard feelings, I guess."

"Nah. I enjoy a good joke, uh..." He was holding on a name.

"Jasmine," Karen inserted. "Jasmine, say you're sorry."

"I... I'm sorry," Jason replied.

"Don't wait up," Karen said to her husband. "Have a nice dinner!"

They turned away and Jason could see that Paul had a very firm grasp on his wife's butt.

Jason turned to Amy and Seth. "Did you use the word 'bitch' earlier?"

"You can't let her do that!" Seth said, adamantly. "She's your wife! She's going out with another man!"

"In any other circumstance, I'd agree with you." Jason picked at his dress. "I can't really get in a fight in this getup, can I?"

Amy agreed. "Especially in those shoes."

"You need to stop her!" Seth demanded.

"Seth, when Karen wants to do something, you really can't stop her."

"But..." Seth was wondering why Jason kept coming up with excuses. His wife was not just going out with another man, she was doing it right in front of them. That was as cardinal a sin against marriage as he could imagine. Jason should have stopped it all, but instead, he was watching them walk right on out of the restaurant, in an embrace. "But..."

It became clear to Seth that of the four of them, he was really the only one who had a problem with this. Still confused, but obliged to temper his emotions to match the mood of his friends, Seth swallowed his concern.

The waiter dropped their appetizers onto the table. "More bruschetta for the rest of us," Jason said.

Seth's opportunity to be one-on-one with Jason had passed. He couldn't try to talk him out of the bet with Amy around, as she was all in favor of seeing this through. Every time he tried to steer the conversation in that direction, Amy interrupted or changed the subject.

If Seth was going to talk Jason out of this, he knew he was going to have to pick another time.

The rest of the evening was uneventful from an outsider's perspective. From an insider's view, though, Seth had never had a more eventful night in his life. He had to think about every move he made that night, planning what he was about to do, imagining himself doing it in his head, making sure it was the right thing to do, and then doing it.

When he cut his meat, he had to visualize himself doing it first. He couldn't stick his elbows in the air and go at it, he had to keep his arms to his side. That took twice as long to make the slice. Big pieces would force him to open his mouth too wide, so he needed small pieces. Cleaning his mouth required a targeted dab of his napkin, not a crude scrub back and forth. He couldn't pick up his beer and wait to finish chewing and then swig it down, he had to finish his chewing and swallow, then reach for his wine and sip it demurely.

He had to expend more mental energy in one hour than he had in the past calendar year.

"I'll order the cheesecake and we can all share it," Amy announced when they were finished.

"Can't we just go?" Seth whined.

Amy frowned. "This is the first night out for me in three weeks, and I'm not going to go home a second early."

"You two can split the cheesecake. I'm full." Jason placed his lipstick-stained napkin on the table.

A quick look at Jason's plate revealed that he hadn't even eaten half of it — and the portions were small to begin with.

"You're going to starve," Seth said.

"I'm never hungry anymore. It's strange. Ever since I started seeing that therapist."

"You have to tell me who it is," Amy said. "I need to drop about five pounds."

"I can't," Jason said, apologetically. "It's a secret. Karen would kill me if I told you guys."

"Well," said Seth, "Jason made that promise. What about... Jasmine?"

Jason laughed. "Karen's been trying to come up with a name for me for days. She says Jasmine makes me sound exotic."

Amy leaned in for a close look of Jason's face. "You do look kind of... I don't know, Korean or Japanese or something with the way you do your eyes."

"Chinese. At least, that's what Karen decided."

"You let her choose your name?" Seth asked.

"If it entertains her, that's just fine by me." Jason finished off his glass of wine. "What about you?"

"Haven't even thought about it," Seth answered. He gave Amy a look, as if he was asking for her opinion.

"I'm gonna start a list," she said. "First thing when we get home."

Seth sighed. "Fantastic. Now I gotta put up with this name crap. Don't start a list, at least let me pick one myself."

"Veronique!" Amy said.

"No, I'll do it myself," Seth replied.

"Wanda Jean!"

"No."

"Chantrelle!"

"You're making my case for me."

"Fine," Amy said, relenting.

Amy and Seth did indeed split the cheesecake, and Amy wound up paying for it, as she was the only one with a credit card. She left a generous tip, hoping that was enough to compensate the waiter for their odd behavior. When they got up and left the restaurant, Amy decided to take a moment to stop off in the restroom before heading out.

Seth was so intent on using this one last window of opportunity to talk to Jason, he actually forgot what he was wearing and what he looked like. “You have to get Karen to stop this bet, Jase,” he said. “You have to.”

“C’mon, Seth. We’ve been over this before. Besides, is it really so bad? I mean, yes, it’s kind of humiliating at times to be dressed like this, but it certainly isn’t dull.” Jason checked his lips in the reflection of the window. “It’s an adrenaline rush.”

“Maybe it doesn’t bother you, but it’s killing me.” Seth shook his head. “Killing me, dude. I want to call this off so bad. What the hell were we thinking?”

“You really just need to relax and let it slide off your back. My therapist has made me understand that.”

“That therapist again? What is he, some kind of...” Seth saw his wife returning, and his time was limited. “Please, dude. If I could just talk to you and make you see.”

Jason’s head dipped, weary of hearing Seth beg him to call off the bet. Seeing that Amy was almost close enough to hear them, he lowered his voice. “Come over tomorrow. Eleven o’clock. Don’t tell Amy, and Karen won’t be home.”

“Great. I’ll be there.” Seth held out his fist for a bump.

Jason used his slender, long-nailed hand to gently push it down. “Ladies don’t bro-bump, sweetie.”

“Ready?” Amy asked. “You two look like you were up to something.”

“Us?” Seth said. “You know us girls, we’re just naturally chatty.”

When he got home, Seth was relieved to finally be away from prying eyes. Still, he was as jittery as a man who had fallen into a vat at the Red Bull factory. It took him at least five hours to wind down, and fell asleep sometime after three.

His dreams that night were visions of his future. A future of being arrested for impersonating a woman, being found out at a bar and beaten up, or discovered by a friend and exposed with pictures on the internet.

Seth also ran through his dinner over and over again, only this time, in his mind, he was found out every time. He saw himself running from the restaurant, falling over in his heels as he was being chased. He’d try to hide, but they’d always discover him wherever he was.

He only got about five hours and woke up in sheets sopping with sweat and his heart was pounding away like it wanted to burst from his chest. “I spent three hours in public last night dressed like a woman,” he said to himself. “What the hell am I doing? What the *fuck* is wrong with me?”

Seth staggered to the bathroom, and looked at himself in the mirror. He was a wreck. His beardless face looked almost alien to him. His skin was clammy, and

his eyes were puffed up from lack of sleep. This whole episode was going to be the end of him, he was sure of it.

Seth swallowed down a few of his wife's pills to calm down. It was almost ten, and he had the idea he had to be somewhere this morning. He started a shower and while he was shaving his pits, he remembered that he had a secret meeting with Jason in an hour. That barely gave him time to dress and do his face.

He was tempted to run over there right now and see what the aftermath of Karen's little stunt was. The more he thought about it, it just had to be a tweak on Jason. She'd never openly date another man like that, would she? Sure, in the "best wife ever" competition she'd finish in a last-place tie, but even she wouldn't sleep with another man in front of her husband.

After toweling off, Seth changed into a pair of white panties and sat down at the mirror to work on his makeup. He had been able to do the whole routine himself for a few days, now. He wasn't necessarily an old hand at it, but he was eager to learn and not have Amy do it for him, like he was a four year old.

He found that just a light foundation worked best for him, especially with the beard gone. He had reasonably smooth skin for a man, so most of his attention was on making his nose look a little slimmer and to accent his cheeks just right. Although every time he did his eyes, he added a little more detail to them.

Amy was quite right about a properly fit bra. The new ones she had bought for him felt much better. Once stuffed, it looked quite natural. A nice long-sleeved red blouse caught his eye and he matched it with a black knee-length a-line skirt. Since he was going to be out, he packed a purse and then a pair of black two-inch heels. As an afterthought, he spritzed himself with a tiny bit of his wife's perfume.

As he clipped on his earrings, he went to go look for Amy. She was on the phone, as usual, and didn't seem to be paying attention to much else. With no time to waste, Seth slipped out the back and into his brown sedan he had hidden in back of their six-car garage. He'd explain himself later.

"Hey," Seth said when he was greeted at the door by Jason. He was wearing a breezy blue dress with a white cardigan sweater. His makeup was immaculate and his hair was flawless. Seth almost felt jealous about how good he looked.

"Hi!" Jason replied, brightly. He stepped forward in his four-inch heels and hugged him lightly, surprising Seth. "You smell nice."

"Oh, uh, thanks." He had no idea what to do after getting a compliment like that. "So, where's Karen? Did you..."

"No, I haven't seen her since last night," Jason said, testily. "She had a scheduled meeting in the city this morning with the charity council she's involved with, which is where she is I suppose. But she hasn't called."

"If Amy ever pulled that kinda crap with me, I'd..."

"If Karen even so much as let that idiot touch her, I'll... I'll..." Jason's anger was blazing like a wind-fueled wildfire. "That woman will be out of this house and living on the street tonight!" He was too angry to just let it go at that. "And that jackass Paul better know that I'm gonna chase him right out of the fucking sate! And I can make it happen, too! I'm rich, goddamn it!"

"Take it easy, okay?" Seth said. "I'm sure she's just yanking your chain."

"Even if she is, she's going to learn that I..." He trailed off. "I made some tea to try and calm my nerves. Want some?"

"Sure," Seth said.

Jason led him over to a small table where a steaming pot was waiting. "Have a seat." Jason and Seth sat across from one another, as Jason poured out tea into two tiny teacups.

Seth felt a little queer, sitting as the two men in dresses and skirts sat for a civilized cup of tea. Jason blew lightly on his tiny china cup as he crossed his legs at the ankles.

He decided that keeping his friend calm trumped his need to complain about this decidedly strange situation. So he kept quiet. Then, he looked at his tea. "It's green," Seth observed.

"Green tea is ridiculously good for you. It helps cholesterol, burns calories, fights infections... You should seriously try it. The girl who does my tanning swears by it."

"Ah," Seth said, trying to sip the tea without gagging. He was shocked that Jason was meeting with someone outside their little group to handle tanning, but he didn't seem bothered by it. Seth thought that maybe he was being a little too paranoid about remaining hidden. "I was going to say, your skin looks different."

"It's a combination of some light tanning and some self-tanning lotion. It's a little darker than it probably should be, but Karen said it looks good on me." His expression suddenly soured. "That stupid bitch."

"If she knows what's good for her, she should probably stay away for a few days," Seth observed.

Jason frowned. "I want to lock her out and teach her a lesson, but honestly, I do need her. She's been in charge of this whole costume enterprise. I'm kind of shocked she's not here. She usually never misses one of my sessions."

"Sessions?" Seth asked. "Oh, the therapy? Is that happening now?"

"The doctor will be here in about a half hour. Maybe she'll be back by then. Anyway, you said you wanted to talk?"

"Yeah," Seth took a moment to gather his thoughts. "Look, I know you are going to go through with this. That is clear to me now. You are also doing far better than me, and I am going to lose."

"There's still several weeks to go, Seth, you could..."

"Face it, you're ahead by miles. I will never catch up. And frankly, I do not want to. This was a mistake from the start and I don't want to make any more sacrifices." He felt his chin. "I am never going to have my beard back like it was."

"You got it removed?"

"Laser treatment. It is supposed to grow back most of the way, eventually."

"Oh, same here. Appointments every week. It's such a pain. They get the strays with electrolysis and..."

"You see, this is what I am talking about! You are obviously able to get into all this *madness*. Not me! I do not want to be a bad copy of a woman. I want to just give you whatever you want to stop this, and let me go back to writing my code!"

"You could still write code now, you know. It doesn't matter how you dress, does it?"

"Looking like this? I can not concentrate! I have not written a line since this all started. That is I why really, really need it to stop."

"You're serious, aren't you? I thought this was just an act to try and get me to slack off a little."

"Do I look like I am kidding around?"

A crackle of gravel from the driveway caught both of their attention. Seth scrambled to the window, fighting his footwear. Jason just put his cup and saucer down, uncrossed his legs and gently glided to the window to check for himself.

"Who is that?" Seth asked, panicking.

"That's Doctor Grumman, my therapist. He's early."

"Send him away!"

"Seth, he already knows. That's what therapy is about. I've told him everything."

"But I..."

"Shush, now," Jason said with a smile. "In fact, I think he'll be a great help to the both of us." The doorbell rang and Jason immediately headed to the door.

"No! You can not!"

"Calm down, for goodness sake!" Jason said before disappearing down the hallway.

Seth looked this way and that for a place to hide. He started in one direction, and then stopped and headed in the opposite. He couldn't be found looking like *this*, his deep brain center of primate panic told him. He had to get...

"I can't wait for you to meet him," Jason said as he re-entered the room. "He's a little nervous, though."

All Seth could do was turn and face the man, and try to not fall apart in a mess of sweat and dread.

"This is Doctor Grumman," said Jason, introducing the man to Seth. He was a man probably in his late forties with slick-backed hair that greyed at the sides. "Doctor Grumman, this is Seth."

"Ah, yes, Seth. As you might guess, your name has come up once or twice." The doctor smiled and extended his hand. "No need to be nervous. This is strictly confidential, and as you can guess, I'm quite familiar with this kind of situation. Gender issues are my specialty."

Seth knew his handshake was weak and his skin was clammy, but he shook the doctor's hand anyway. "Hi," he said.

Jason went over to put a comforting hand on Seth's shoulder. "Seth and I were just talking, Doctor, and he was saying that he's feeling like he's already lost our wager."

"Well, if you don't mind me saying so, Seth, you make for quite an attractive woman. I don't think you've lost anything quite yet." Being called attractive by another man was all sorts of wrong and didn't help Seth's frame of mind one bit.

"Yeah, okay. But Jason has me beat. I would rather just concede and move on."

Jason spoke to the doctor. "Neither of our wives would ever allow that, and frankly, neither would I." He then clasped his hands together. "But I had a great idea. If Seth is having such problems with adjusting, why couldn't you help him out? He could use a little confidence boost."

Doctor Grumman was skeptical. "I don't think your wife would approve."

"My wife isn't *here* right now," Jason growled. "Besides, I'm sure Seth would be happy to pay you."

"Are you sure?" Seth asked Jason. He immediately liked the idea. More than anything, he wanted just a little relief from this constant anguish over his life in disguise. From the first time Jason had gone to see this doctor, he had been in much better mental shape. If the doctor could do that for him, he was all for it.

"I think it's the right thing to do," Jason said. "You're my friend. The doctor has helped in ways I can't even begin to list."

"You wouldn't be letting me do this if you weren't so far ahead," Seth said.

"Mmmmm... Maybe." Jason smiled. "But I don't want to see you miserable. Plus he's fantastic with the weight loss. I barely even eat at all anymore! The pounds just come off every day! That'll help, contest or no contest."

"I did bring my checkbook," Seth said to the doctor.



"I'm not going to guarantee results," Doctor Grumman replied.

"Can we get started?" Seth asked.

They went into the den, where there was some privacy. The process of starting a session was more complicated than Seth first assumed. He just assumed he was going to lie back on the couch and just spout stuff from his mind for a while, like he had seen on TV. That wasn't how Dr. Grumman worked.

"I'm not a normal therapist," Dr. Grumman said. "My job might be to analyze, but it's also to pro-actively help. And when dealing with cases like yours and like Jason's, it's best to remove all the mental barriers between you and the help you need."

The doctor produced two capsules. "These will put you in a more receptive state of mind."

"Like truth serum?" Seth observed.

“Well, something like that. But more effective.” The doctor handed Seth a glass of water, which Seth took and swallowed the pills down. “So, while we’re waiting for that take effect, let’s get started. Now tell me about...”

The next thing Seth knew, he was leaning to the side, seated on the living room couch, and he snapped back into consciousness.

“Huhwuh?” Seth said, as he realized he was now in a different room all of the sudden.

“Welcome back, Seth,” Jason said with a knowing grin. “It can really throw you, can’t it?”

Seth was shaking his head like a tambourine, trying to clear the fuzz in his mind. “What the hell happened?”

“As he describes it to me,” Jason said, “he uses a mix of traditional therapy and drugs to open up the mind. They make his suggestions more effective.”

“What did I take?”

“It’s a custom formulation of a few things. I forgot what he told me when I asked. Nothing crazy, though. He *is* a doctor, after all.”

Seth tried to stand, but he felt dizzy and his limbs didn’t quite respond on command. He got up a couple of inches and came right back down.

“Poor thing!” Jason said. “Just stay still, it takes a few minutes to get everything back. I can make some more tea.”

“No,” Seth replied, “No, just let me sit here a while.”

The doctor came in, and gave Seth a warm smile. “Back amongst the living?” He said. “You reacted pretty strongly to the drug. You aren’t taking any medications already, are you?”

Seth immediately thought about those little pills he had been sneaking from his wife. But those were for his nerves. They wouldn’t really factor into whatever the doctor gave him, he figured. “No,” Seth replied.

“Humph,” said Doctor Grumman. “Well, you did wonderfully during the session. I think you’ll find that dieting will be a lot easier now, in addition to some other suggestions I...” The doctor’s phone started to ring. “Hold on, I have to take this.” The doctor got up and left the room.

“How long was I out?” Seth asked Jason.

“Two hours.”

“*Two hours?*” Seth repeated, in disbelief. “Geez, it only felt like a minute or two. Are you sure?”

“Yeah, absolutely sure,” Jason said. “I watched two episodes of *Downton Abbey*.”

"I didn't do anything stupid, did I? He didn't make me cluck like a chicken or anything, correct?"

"No, but if you find any eggs in your panties, I know nothing about it."

Slowly a new wave of anguish came to Seth, a worry about what had happened during his lost two hours. He supposed it was all just counseling and therapy — but what if it wasn't? "Are you sure?"

"Seth, honey. *Relax.*"

"Alright, Jason, are you ready to begin?" Doctor Grumman returned from his call.

"Maybe we should wait for Karen," Jason said.

"That was your wife who called. She just wanted to talk before we began the session. She said it was okay."

"Well..." Jason put his hands on his bare knees pensively. "I guess it's okay then." He got up and strode into the den, and the doctor closed the door behind them.

"Guess I'm watching *Downton Abbey*," Seth said to himself.

It was almost two hours later when the sound of a car in the driveway alerted Seth. Jason and Dr. Grumman were still in session, so this was up to him to deal with. Seth paused the TV, stood and fluffed out his skirt before gliding over to the window to see who it was. It was Karen. "Oh, perfect," Seth said to himself. He walked over to a mirror, primped his hair and went to the front door to meet her.

"Seth?" A slightly startled Karen said. "What brings you here?"

"Oh..." Seth had to think, and fortunately, there was an obvious excuse. "I just wanted to keep an eye on Jason — after what you pulled, Karen."

"Did he need a shoulder to cry on?" Karen replied, with contempt. "Poor baby."

Just then, the door to the den opened, and Jason walked out. Seth's first instinct was to leap behind a chair for protection, to avoid the crossfire, but he just took a few steps backwards to get out of the way.

"Have a nice session, honey?" Karen said.

"Well, well. Look who decided to finally come home!" Jason chided. "What's the matter? Did Paul kick you out?"

"Don't be petty, Sweetie. It'll give you wrinkles."

"So how was last night?"

"He was quite charming. He was a tender kisser."

"He kissed you?" Jason said, shocked and appalled. "What did you tell him?"

"I told him I was married, and he didn't seem to mind."

“Unbelievable! Unbelievable!” Jason threw his arms in the air. He then fell into a chair. “At least tell me I’m a better kisser than he is.”

That remark caught Seth as extremely strange. Just two hours ago, Jason was practically ready to rip Karen’s head off. Where had his rage gone?

“It was like a long, slow dance in the summer rain,” Karen said with a smile.

“I’m still quite cross with you, Karen,” Jason leaned forward. “But you’ve got to tell me all about it.”

“You were cheating on him!” Seth shouted at Karen, just to try and kick-start what should have been a vicious argument.

Karen bit back. “Seth, this doesn’t involve you. This is between Jasmine and me.”

Seth snarled. “His name is Jason.”

“I think it’s time for you to go home, Seth,” Karen said, putting her hands on her hips. “This is a private matter.”

Seth looked to Jason for his say, but all he got was a blank stare in return.

“Fine,” Seth said. He picked up his purse, tucked it under his arm and headed for the door.

Doctor Grumman was also leaving, having heard the noise. “See you next time, Jasmine,” he said.

“Bye doctor! And thanks!” Jason sang back.

Seth checked himself out in the mirror by the door, making sure everything was in place. He let himself out and headed for his car, waving at the groundskeeper who was tending to some hedges. Seth couldn’t help but wonder what had just happened. In just the span of a few hours, Jason went from righteous anger to mildly disgruntled and curious. What had that therapy session done to Jason? Had the doctor somehow altered Jason’s mind to accept his wife’s tryst? But it was a crazy idea to think that one quick session could fundamentally change a person’s behavior.

Seth adjusted the rear view mirror to make sure his lipstick was still moist and his hair hadn’t been strewn about by his short walk to the car. He then looked at himself in his black-lined eyes. “Looks like we’re stuck in skirts for two more months, missy,” he said to his reflection. He then smiled and shrugged. “I guess it’s not the end of the world,” he proclaimed.



With little choice, Seth resolved to see the two months through. He was still quite sure he was going to lose miserably, but he also knew that if he didn’t at least give a decent effort to perfecting his Shocker Girl costume, his loss was a

certainty. You could never know for sure. Maybe Jason would get a broken leg or catch the flu. Besides, even if he did lose to Jason, he didn't want to look like a joke at the Stevenson's Halloween party, when the bet would be decided.

His efforts had been aided by his appointment with Dr. Grumman. Previous to his therapy session, he hadn't really cared about how he looked as a woman. Now, for some strange reason, it seemed like one of the most important things in his life. He felt compelled to check his hair and makeup in every mirror at every opportunity. Seth never realized that his session with Dr. Grumman had definitely altered his mind in many ways.

What Seth also failed to notice was how his attitude had undergone another change. His paranoia about being discovered had vanished overnight. He had no more misgivings about going out and being seen. He went to dinner a couple of times with Amy and even had a trip to the mall for a few new items to add to his feminine wardrobe. He could even interact with the cashier without going into a panic.

The change in his body, though, was the one thing Seth did notice — in most ways. He was dropping weight easily. His appetite was curtailed, and despite his meals always being light, he rarely finished them, feeling a little sick only after a few bites. For that, he owed Dr. Grumman a huge thank you, and wanted to become a regular patient. Strangely, when Seth tried to look the doctor up and make an appointment, he found no trace of the man. He had no record anywhere.

Amy, for her part, found her husband much more agreeable and was delighted at his change in outlook. Seth was no longer so fussy about wearing panties, bras and dresses. She found him taking an interest in makeup and hair and he was rededicated to making himself look as good a woman as possible. She set up a regular routine for Seth to follow, with its sole aim to get him in shape for the party.

With this new receptiveness, Amy created what she called a "ladies boot camp" for her husband. First, she decided to stop using his name whenever possible. She would call him "princess," "pumpkin," or names she used to be called as a little girl. That would reinforce his new status and keep him focused on being a girl, she hoped.

In the mornings, she would wake Seth when she got up and not let him sleep in, like he used to. "Part of the female experience is getting up early to be ready for the day," she explained. "It gives you more time to make your face perfect."

When it was explained to him that way, Seth was more than happy to spend his mornings on his face and his hair. He didn't understand why, he just enjoyed the process of looking all made up.

After a microscopically small breakfast, Seth was tasked to work on his voice. Amy had found a few places online that advertised a program to help men

speak like women. A bizarre thought, to her mind, but if they offered it, she would use them. She had Seth practicing every day, which he would do while playing *Plants vs. Zombies* on his phone. I wasn't long before Seth's impersonation of a female speaking voice was just as good as Jason's.

Every few days, Amy would ask Seth to have a little bit of a check-in. She'd weigh him and take his measurements. Every time she looked, she would get excited. Her husband had dropped from 168 pounds, when this all began, to 152 with 3 days to go before the party. He had gone from a 33-inch waist to a 28-inch waist, and his entire body was far more trim than she had ever seen him — even better than his skin and bones days in college.

Oddly, she had noticed her husband was a little shorter. It was hard to tell at first, because he was wearing high heels all the time, but after measuring it, she found that he was now a fraction of an inch shorter than her. He had been 5 foot 9 inches, but was now 5 foot 7 and 3/4.

A little bit of internet research revealed that most people do lose a little height when losing weight, because the body isn't bloated anymore, and the distance between the bones is reduced ever-so-slightly.

Amy kept all this to herself, as she didn't want to freak out Seth. He has behaving so well that she was afraid revealing his dramatic changes would push him back into panic mode.

For his part, Seth didn't notice the changes much at all. He had a vague sense he had been losing some pounds, and he felt better. Because it was happening so gradually, he didn't think they were anything to get excited about. Although Amy always seemed happy when she measured him.

"You lost a couple more, pumpkin," she would say to him. She'd never reveal the actual number. "You're going to need a belt for your favorite skirt!"

Then, with only three days to go, Amy suggested he be in "total cheerleader mode" until the party. That meant wearing his wig, a midriff-bearing outfit (much like his costume) and the white cheerleader boots all day long. It also meant speaking in his new feminine voice for 72 hours.

Seth wasn't wild about it, but he submitted to his wife's enthusiasm and insistence. "I really think we're going to win this thing, princess," she said.

"We'll see," Seth replied. "We'll see."

THE PARTY



As the days got closer, Amy implemented a few new tricks from her arsenal. She had Seth use skin-softening mud-packs once a day. Teeth-whitening strips were added to his daily routine. She even bought a cheerleading DVD for Seth to watch, just in case he needed to demonstrate some rally skills.

Seth let it all go. He just wanted it to be over and agreed to whatever Amy wanted to do to him, just because he knew it would finally be done. He had already packed a suitcase of his clothes — his *normal* clothes, that is — for when Karen and Jason kicked him out of the house. He had booked a week in a Ramada Inn downtown so he had some place to stay while he went apartment hunting.

To Seth, it felt like he had lived two lifetimes waiting for October 31st. He was never so excited to see the decorations go up around town, knowing his emancipation from bodyshapers, pantyhose and heels was coming. Finally, after the longest wait in his life, the day came and it was time for Seth to go to the party.

He thought he would have most of the evening to prepare himself, but just after noontime, Amy had him stand in front of a full-length mirror, nude. He was being fitted, as it turned out.

She had him slip into something she called “cheerleader panties,” which he never really realized were a separate species in the genus of panties. He tried on several sizes before Amy gave up.

“These all reveal too much. Your dick is a problem.” That was a phrase no married man wanted to ever hear under any circumstance. Amy was deep in thought as she stared at the reflection. From what Seth could tell, she was staring directly at his crotch. “Hold on a minute, I’ll be right back,” she said.

“Yeah, I’m not going anywhere,” the nude husband said. He looked down between his legs, with the odd feeling that his little man was suddenly under threat.

“Here we go. Try this.” Amy handed him a thick black rubber bikini bottom. “I bought this years ago for a trip to the Bahamas, never worn it. Probably never will.”

Seth held it in his hands. “It’s really small.”

“That’s the point, pumpkin.”

Seth tugged it up his legs, before it got stuck mid-thigh. It took another two minutes to get it all the way up to his groin. Tug after tug would budge it just a

millimeter, and he was grateful for his hairless legs. Eventually, he was ready to try and hike it all the way.

“Hold it,” Amy said. “Now, tuck the little devil between your legs.”

“You’re not serious. I’m gonna be fidgety all night!”

“You’ll be fine. You can tolerate it for a few hours.”

Seth did the deed, and tucked himself away. With the rubber panties in place, he had to agree that it was an effective mask of his male anatomy. When he slipped on the smallest of the cheerleader panties, they fit snugly and revealed nothing.

Amy clapped her hands together. “Yes!” She said. “That’s what I’m talkin’ about!”

“Most women would not celebrate their husbands lack of a penis,” Seth quipped.

“It’s for a good cause.”

“I suppose the next thing is a ‘cheerleader bra.’”

“Princess, the top *is* the bra.” Amy tossed him the top of the costume, a faithful reproduction of the classic Shocker Girls crop top. “That’s why we’re doing this.”

Having months of practice, Seth expertly snaked his body through the top and adjusted it into place.

“Not so fast,” Amy said. “We haven’t created the cleavage yet.” She went to her drawers and pulled out, what looked to be, two chicken fillets. “Just got these delivered today. These inserts will give you the boost we need.”

They weren’t chicken fillets at all, Seth realized. They were gel breast inserts. “Where did you get these?”

“All girls have these — sorry to ruin the illusion, sweetie. Now hold them in place for a second.” Amy pressed them to the sides of his chest and he diligently kept them there with his fingers. Next, Amy wrapped an ace bandage around Seth’s chest and the inserts, fitting it tightly. The overall effect was that the bandage pressed the gel inserts inward, pushing the loose flesh on his chest together, producing the cleavage necessary to wear the top.

“This is worse than the tucking,” Seth winced.

“Here,” Amy gave him two of her nerve pills. “You already need these.”

Seth didn’t disagree and swallowed them.

“Okay, that’s looking fine.” Seth turned to the side and saw his chest wasn’t particularly large. At least, not as large as a normal cheerleader’s would. However, it did look natural. “Now here you go with these.” Amy tore apart the packaging on a pair of ‘Skin-Tone Footed High Gloss Tights’ and handed the contents to her husband.