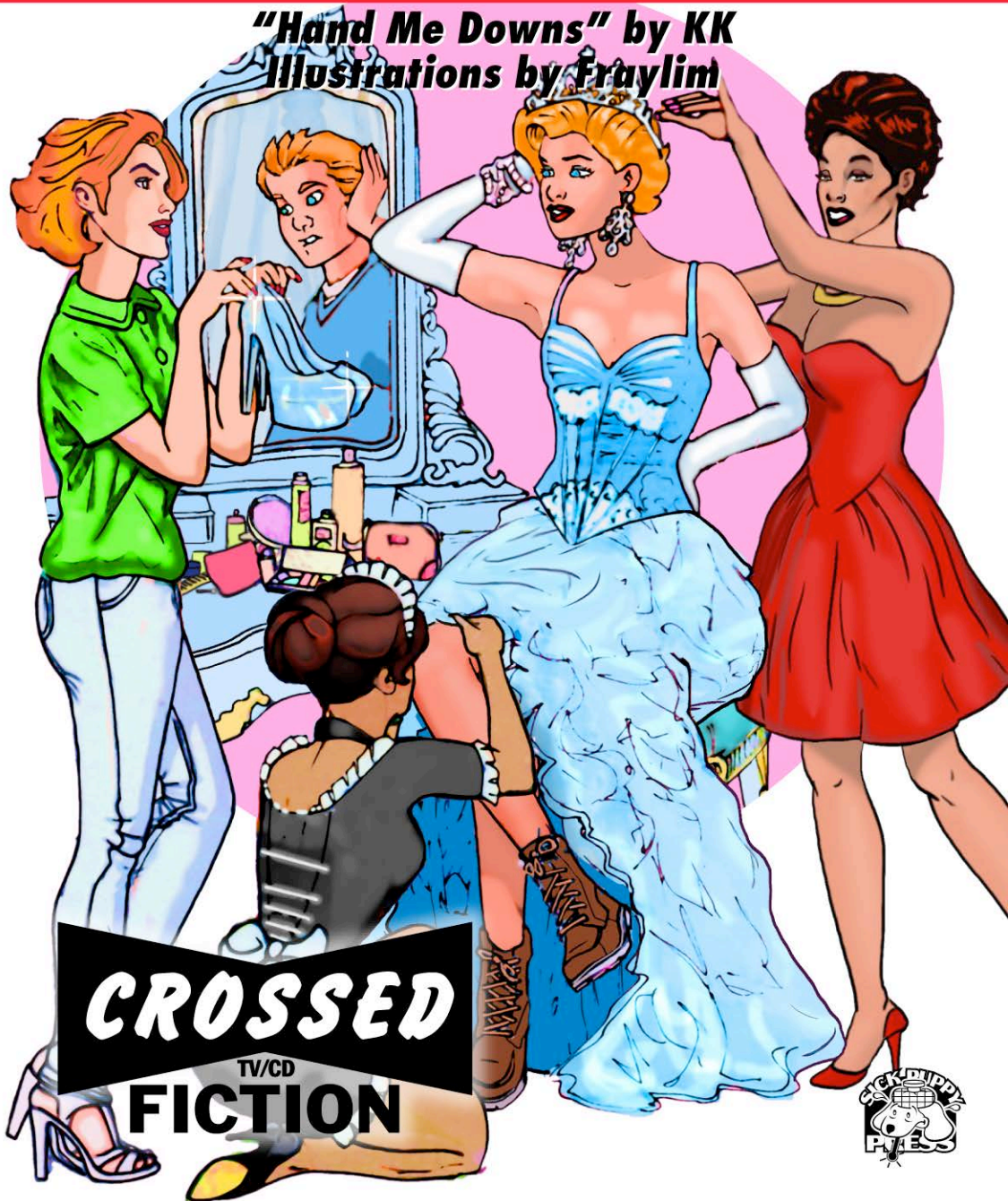


ADULTS ONLY

98 pages 30 illustrations

IF THE SHOES FIT

"Hand Me Downs" by KK
Illustrations by Fraylim



CROSSED
TV/CD
FICTION



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IF THE SHOES FIT

**Story by KK
Illustrations by Fraylim
A Crossed Fiction Story**



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j6p@sixpacksite.com
www.sixpacksite.com

HAND ME DOWNS

Sidney Tremaine was wearing a powder blue T-shirt with “Princess” written on it. It wasn’t his first choice to wear this afternoon, nor his first choice to wear in on any afternoon in his fifteen plus years on this planet. But that was where he found himself on this day.

Growing up with his sister and father in the crumbling suburbs had presented him with many challenges. He had fought through most of them bravely. But this was not something he had prepared himself for, and he could certainly be excused for not having prepared himself for this situation.

He had out-grown just about everything in his closet, his last pair of pants had finally split at the seams, and his last plain shirt was torn to shreds. He had been hanging on to them for months beyond when they should have been thrown out. Where most people would have gone to buy replacements, Sidney wasn’t flush with cash. Neither was his father.

With his big sister studying abroad, and his dad without work for months, the family finances were dry. His father had just a few changes of clothing, and they were far too large to even try on. His muscular father was huge, and you could fit three or four slender Sidneys inside just one of his shirts.

That left Sidney with little choice but to dip into his sister’s old hand-me-downs, the only clothing left for him to wear.

So that was why Sidney Tremaine was wearing a powder blue T-shirt with “Princess” written on it in sparkly silver letters. And he was not happy about it. Not at all.

“Come on,” his dad, Marvin Tremaine, wheedled him. “It’s not that bad! It’s blue! Blue is a very manly color.”

“It says ‘princess’ on it,” Sidney said stubbornly. “And it’s about the only blue thing she has in that wardrobe! Everything else is pink or purple or, or see-through!”

“It’s just for the summer,” his dad reassured him. “Look, finances are tight, especially with your sister Ellie off on that exchange program for college, so we’re both going to have to make a few sacrifices. For me, that means no more beers with the guys on Fridays. For you, it means wearing a few of your sister’s hand-me-downs while we build up enough money to get you a new wardrobe in fall. It’s not my fault you wore holes in everything else you own!”

Sidney grumbled, but he knew his dad was right. It was his own fault he’d managed to lose most of his wearable clothes by tearing his pants and his shirts

falling off his skateboard. His in-line skating hobby had left everything he owned ratty and full of tears.

His older sister Ellie, away studying in France, had volunteered her wardrobe as a temporary measure – she'd taken everything she really liked with her, naturally. So yes, it was Sidney's own fault that he was in this predicament... but that didn't mean he had to like it.

"And these crappy pants are too short," Sidney lamented, pointing downward. The jeans fit snugly and, though he would never admit it, a lot more comfortably than his ratty old ones, but they ended halfway down his calves. It was a far cry from his usual uniform of baggy jeans and hoodies, that was for sure.

"They're supposed to be, I think," his dad said, frowning. "They're called... um..." He snapped his fingers. "Cut offs!" he exclaimed.

"Right," Sidney said sarcastically.

"Nobody who matters is going to see you anyways," his dad said. "Hurry up, will you? Some lady finally bought that big house on Oak Lane, and I want to make sure I get her business! Lord knows that place is in dire need of a good gardener. Probably some rich old hag with wrinkles and attitude..."

"I'm not going anywhere," Sidney called over his shoulder, "until I find a shirt that doesn't sparkle – and isn't pink!" He ran back up the stairs to his sister's room, and scavenged through her drawers. "There's got to be at least one," he muttered. "Aha!" He spotted a relatively unisex looking red T-shirt with a monkey on it. A little cutesy, but nothing too bad. His dad was already out the door, so he hurried after him, changing on the go. Sidney was already in the passenger's side of the work truck, halfway down the block, as he finished tugging the stretchy shirt over his skinny frame—or at least, tried to! "Aw, crap," Sidney muttered, pulling desperately at the bottom of the shirt. He'd been fooled by one of Ellie's midriff-baring 'belly' shirts, and now he was showing off his navel like some kind of showgirl. Blushing fiercely, Sidney shrank down in the seat.



His dad looked over and laughed good-naturedly at the sight.

“Bet that blue shirt aint looking too bad now, huh?” his dad joked cheerily. “Don’t worry, I’ll explain your, uh, ‘situation.’ Don’t want to scare off a potential employer, now, do we?”

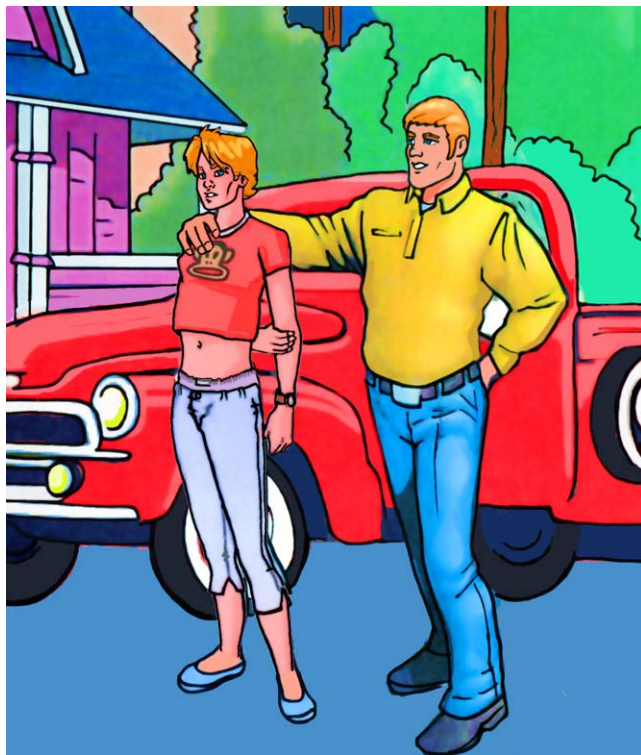
“Speak for yourself,” Sidney said sulkily. “Lawn care might be your favorite thing to do all summer, but it sure isn’t mine.”

“Well, if you had some other job, you wouldn’t have to help me out so much,” his dad pointed out. “And besides, you said yourself your buddies are all on vacation, so you’d be bored stiff just hanging around the house. And a summer of work will be good for you! It’ll put some muscle on those bones of yours!” Sidney tried his best to smile.

“Yeah,” he said. “Maybe you’re right.” But he knew, deep down, that as much as his former high school All-American dad might like, he was definitely not taking after him in the muscles department. At fifteen, Sidney was still skinny as one of his dad’s rakes, with slim shoulders and soft skin that he had inherited, along with his blue eyes and red hair, from his late mother, who had passed away when he was too young to remember.

Since then it had been him, his dad, and his big sister Ellie. She also took after their mother and was extremely good-looking, with a pretty face, killer body, and perfect smile. She had been popular all throughout high school, constantly the center of attention, and was now just as popular in college – whereas Sidney was pretty much a non-factor in school, socially. Although he was pretty good on his rollerblades, him and his skater buddies weren’t much for sports or school popularity. Heck, even the skateboarders laughed down at them. That definitely hurt in the girls department!

Sidney was trying to convince himself that maybe a summer of landscaping and gardening would make all the difference. Maybe he would finally get his



growth spurt, gain some muscles, a bit of a tan, and enough money to buy a good wardrobe for school in fall. He could finally be someone who at least existed to the opposite sex. Sidney kept that comforting thought in mind as they pulled up the drive of an extremely large house. Nobody had owned the Oak Hill mansion for years, and the lawn, although it had been given lip service by a contracting company, was in serious need of repair. Sidney sighed as he imagined a long summer of trimming bushes and planting flowers.

"I'll wait here," Sidney said, slinking down in the seat to hide himself.

"You're coming to the front door with me," Sidney's dad insisted, when his son made as if to stay in the safety of the car. "Tremaine Lawn and Landscaping is a family business, remember?"

"Okay, okay," Sidney relented, as he got out. This would be embarrassing, but it wasn't like his dad was going to get the job. He'd be seen for only a moment as the homeowner just shut the door in his dad's face like they always did. He'd be back in the car in ten seconds. Despite that, Sidney was red-faced as they made their way up to the porch, still trying to tug the silly shirt down. There were a few potted plants around already. His dad rang the doorbell and stepped back, slicking down his hair with one hand, ready to give his usual spiel.

Both father and son's jaws fell open, however, when a gorgeous Latina woman with an hourglass figure and tight white summer dress opened the door!

"Jes, hola?" she said, in a thick, sultry accent. "Jou are from the moving company, I am assuming?" Her spanish pronunciation made her "y's" into "j's."

"Uh... N-no," Sidney's dad stammered. "We're from Tremaine Lawn and Landscaping. I spoke to your, uh, your maid on the phone? You must be Mrs. Vasquez."

"Miss Vasquez, now," the beautiful woman said tartly. "Miss Isabella Daniela Vaquez." Sidney remembered his dad saying that she was a rich old widow... of course, he'd been wrong about the 'old' part. Ms. Vasquez didn't look a day over thirty-five, and she was stacked. Sidney did his best not to stare at her cleavage as she tapped her pouty lip with one fingernail. "Ah, jes, the gardener. Mia did mention. Jou are looking for work, jes? This place, it looks horrible. I want flowers in my flower beds!"

"That's one of our specialties!" Sidney's dad exclaimed. "I noticed you have a few chrysanthemums out here already, that's, uh, that's one of my daughter's favorite flowers. They're great. We could definitely work with that." Ms. Vasquez's eyes fell on Sidney for the first time, and she looked confused for a moment, then smiled.

"And how old is jour daughter?" Ms. Vasquez asked. "What is jour name, darling?"

Sidney's blue eyes widened as he realized what had just happened. With his floppy red hair, slim build, and sister's clothes, she had mistaken him for the 'daughter' his dad had just mentioned. He had been mistaken for a girl once or twice when he was young, but he'd thought those days were behind him. His cheeks blushing like beacons, Sidney opened his mouth to correct her, but his dad, who was still staring at Ms. Vasquez with stars in his eyes, cut him off.

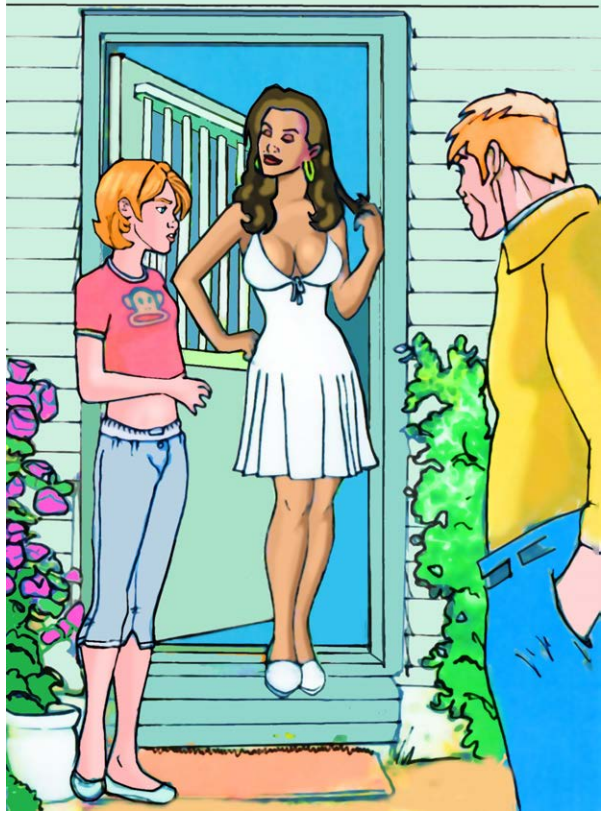
"Oh, Sidney's fifteen," he said. "Maybe we could discuss your, uh, needs? In the gardening department, I mean."

"Of course," Ms. Vasquez said, giving that sexy smile of hers. "I would love to do that, but I'm afraid I'm on my way to the salon. Maybe another time, perhaps?"

The look on Marvin Tremaine's face could only be described as terror-stricken. He was watching the biggest job he had been up for in months just slip away. "Uh... Well... We could talk about it on the way?" He suggested. "I'll drive you!"

Ms. Vasquez replied with disinterest. "No, no. I must bring my boy, my little Rodrigo. I can't leave him here just with my maid." She started to turn, but then her eyes locked on Sidney. "My four-year-old son, he is such a lovely boy but a bit of a rascal. He needs constant attention." She then began to examine Sidney even closer, giving the boy the feeling a fly must have when in the web of a spider. "I am in desperate need of a babysitter. Perhaps your daughter could watch him for me? Only for two hours, and I would pay, of course. You can change out of your gardening clothes, too, darling."

Sidney gathered himself to protest in his deepest voice possible, but it betrayed him with a squeak as he stammered, "I'm not really a..." Before he could



finish his sentence, however, the sound of a young boy wailing made Ms. Vasquez turn back and snap something in Spanish.

“I am sorry, one moment,” she said. “I will be right back. Don’t go anywhere.” She gave Sidney’s father another dazzling smile and disappeared. Sidney turned to his dad, who was still staring dumbstruck in the general direction of the door. Of course, he could hardly blame him... Ms. Vasquez was without a doubt the most beautiful woman Sidney had ever seen outside of TV. However, that didn’t mean he was about to let this case of mistaken identity slide.

“Dad!” Sidney had to kick his dad in the shin to get his attention. “Dad, she thinks I’m your daughter!” he said in a furious whisper. “Set her straight, why don’t you?” His dad blinked, still slack-jawed.

“Oh,” he managed to mutter. “Oh, yeah. Right. Look, Sidney, I don’t want to embarrass her or anything, it was an honest mistake... that long ‘skater dude’ hair of yours, I told you it makes you look like a girl!”

“Fine,” Sidney huffed. “If you’re too ga-ga over her to say anything, I’ll tell her myself.” He swallowed, ready to set the record straight as Ms. Vasquez reappeared in the doorway, stiletto heels clattering appealingly, but then stopped as she fished two hundred dollar bills out of her designer purse.

“Two hours, two hundred dollars?” Ms. Vasquez asked sweetly. “I do not know how much babysitters are usually paid here in America, but I know everything is more expensive, jes? This seems enough?”

Sidney promptly shut his mouth. He didn’t know if he had ever held a hundred dollar bill in his life – never mind two of them, – and here he was being offered a hundred bucks an hour to watch some little kid. The wheels were turning in his mind. *What if he just came clean, and then immediately offered his services as a male babysitter? That wasn’t so outlandish, was it?*

“I am so glad to find a nice young girl,” Ms. Vasquez beamed. “Boys do not have the same motherly instincts, do they, darling?”

Okay, that settled that. Sidney gulped. With two hundred dollars, he could buy himself some brand new jeans and shirts, no problem. It solved his wardrobe problem, not just for summer, but for school in the fall, as well. And if that meant pretending to be a girl for one afternoon, well... in Sidney’s eyes, it was worth it.

“Two hundred seems fair,” Sidney said weakly, blushing and pointedly not looking at his dad.

“Good!” Ms. Vasquez exclaimed. “I will leave in a half-hour, so you can run home and change into your regular clothes, darling, instead of those old things, while your father gets the paperwork!”

“Paperwork?” Sidney’s dad asked. “You mean you’re hiring me on the spot?”

"Jou seem like a very strong, capable man," Ms. Vasquez said coyly. "Why not? I want you to get started as soon as possible, of course! Ciao, darling!" She wiggled her fingers in a wave and pulled the door shut again, leaving the Tremaine males stunned on the doorstep.

"Well, I guess I have a nice big summer-long project," Sidney's dad remarked, but his son could tell that he was thinking more of all those opportunities to see Ms. Vasquez, not about planting flower beds! As for himself, he was suddenly in a predicament.

"I have to make sure she doesn't figure this out," Sidney muttered. "I mean, it's just one afternoon... but what did she mean by *regular* clothes?"

"Something nicer than that, I'm guessing," Sidney's dad said, as he gestured at Sidney's clothes. "I mean, you look ridiculous."

Sidney want to punch his dad in the jaw, but he had long learned to suppress his anger at the things his father said. He was one of those people who spoke faster than he thought, and his thinking wasn't that quick to begin with. It drove Sidney nuts.

"I mean, she seems like quite a glamorous lady," Marvin Tremaine continued, "She's probably used to having well-dressed employees. Maybe I should put on a nicer shirt..."

"I don't have any nice clothes!" Sidney objected. "Unless you mean..."

"You can wear your sister's old school uniform," Sidney's dad said, snapping his fingers. "That should do the trick! Now come on, we'd better hurry so we can get back..."

"A skirt?" Sidney practically shrieked. "Are you serious?"



On the brief drive home, Sidney was too caught up in visions of brand new clothes. Maybe even new video games. *Heck, maybe I'll skip all of that and get a really nice new pair of rollerblades.* But that was before the situation began to really sink in. As he bounded up the steps to his sister's room, however, his steps got slower with each stair, and reality set in. He had to fool Ms. Vasquez and her maid into thinking he was a girl, and if they realized he wasn't, it would not only be humiliating, but probably a negative for Tremaine Lawn and Landscaping, too. And that meant wearing a skirt.

"Okay, Sid, you can do this," Sidney muttered to himself. "It's just a piece of fabric, right? And you're getting paid 200 bucks for a one-time thing. She already thinks you're a chick, so as long as you don't give her any huge giveaways, she has no reason to start thinking otherwise." Feeling only slightly more reassured, Sidney opened the closet he had recently been rooting through, and his

eyes landed on his sister's old school uniform. Well, he knew that went together, so there wouldn't be any question of him not knowing how to put together an outfit. Boy, if his buddies could see him now, he would definitely be ostracized for not only the rest of high school, but probably the rest of his life, as well. Sidney grimaced and took the blouse and skirt off their hangars.

It wasn't as complicated as he'd feared it might be: the plain white blouse was more or less the same as any button-up shirt, although the buttons seemed to be on the wrong side. The tartan skirt, however, was a heck of a lot shorter than he remembered it being on his sister! He reluctantly pulled off his pants and stepped into the feminine garment, wiggling it up his hips and doing the zipper. As he'd feared, it only reached to mid-thigh. Sidney blanched. The bizarre sensation of a breeze between his legs was just too weird. He had a fine layer of leg hair coming in, but it was soft and mostly on his calves, so he figured as long as he wore the long socks that accompanied the uniform, he would be all right. He pulled the white socks up to nearly his knees, then, with some difficulty, buckled his feet into his sister's old black Mary Jane shoes. They clacked loudly on the floor as he walked, but that was nowhere near as bad as the swirl of fabric around his thighs as the skirt swished with each step. Sidney planted himself in front of the full-length mirror and inspected his reflection.

No doubt about it, he did not look particularly girlish. He knew his posture was all wrong, and he looked hopelessly uncomfortable in the shoes, which had a slight lift to them, but he had no idea as to how he might correct it. Despite all that, as he brushed his hair forward over his forehead a bit, he *could* see how he might pass as a very, very tomboyish girl. He had rather delicate facial features, with big eyes and a dainty nose, and his small stature definitely helped. Maybe this wasn't so crazy after all...

"Whadda ya think?" he asked his dad, clomping awkwardly down the stairs with his skirt pinned down with both hands. His dad, to his credit, managed not to burst out laughing.

"Not the prettiest girl at the party," he said, restraining his mirth. "That's for sure! But I guess... from a certain angle, if the lighting isn't too good..."

"Let's go before I lose my nerve," Sidney groaned. "And dad... don't tell Ellie about this, okay? I'd never hear the end of it!"

"My lips are sealed," Sidney's dad promised. "Wow, that Ms. Vasquez is really something, isn't she? That dress! My God..."

Sidney rolled his eyes. It was obvious that his dad had managed to fall head-over-heels for the wealthiest widow on the block in a matter of only minutes. He hoped the infatuation wouldn't last too long... not that his dad didn't deserve to be happy, or find someone new, or anything, but it had been just the three of them for so long... and besides, Ms. Vasquez had to be a little out of his league, financially.

They trooped back to the pick-up truck, Sidney dashing inside as quickly as possible to avoid the possibility of some nosy neighbor catching sight of him, and then he hunkered down as low as he could in the seat as they drove. By the time they were back at Ms. Vasquez's place, a very expensive Bentley had pulled up into drive. Judging by the sunglasses and driving gloves, Sidney guessed the man waiting inside it was Ms. Vasquez's personal chauffeur! *Gosh, just how rich was this lady?* Sidney swallowed his nerves and got out of the car, managing to flip up his skirt and reveal his cotton briefs. Luckily, nobody was there to see it. Blushing, he followed his dad back up to the porch. Ms. Vasquez was just stepping out, purse on her shoulder.

"Ah! Just in time, my gardener and my babysitter," she smiled. "Where do I sign? Here? Very good." Sidney's tongue-tied dad indicated where to sign, and she scrawled her signature with a flourish. She sure wasn't one to read the fine print, but Sidney had the feeling his dad was going to make sure she had the best-looking property in town, irregardless of what she was paying.

"I can get started right away with the mower," Sidney's dad said eagerly. "It'll be looking ten times better by the time you're back!"

"That would be so lovely," Ms. Vasquez sighed happily. "And Sidney, darling, you look... um, how do you say? More... presentable." Her gaze took in Sidney's scaly knees and she frowned. "Your mother, she must be very busy."

"Sidney's mother, my wife, passed some twelve years ago," Sidney's dad said gruffly, Ms. Vasquez's spell wearing off for the first time. "It's been just us and his... er, her older sister, ever since." Ms. Vasquez's beautiful face converted into the picture of sorrow.

"Oh, how tragic," she said. "I am so sorry. No girl should have to grow up without a mother! Though I am sure you have done a very admirable job..." She trailed off.

"Marvin," Sidney's dad supplied. "Call me Marvin."

"Marr... vin," Ms. Vasquez repeated slowly, smile back in place. "Jes, well, I must be off. Rodrigo is playing inside, darling, I told him you would be watching him. My maid, Mia, is busy in the kitchen. Please, don't let him have too many cookies. Ciao!" She swished her way down the porch steps with one last seductive glance in the direction of Sidney's dad. With his considerable height, muscular build, and strong jaw, he had a tendency of attracting looks, and it seemed that even the ultra-wealthy Ms. Vasquez was not immune. But for the first time he could remember, Sidney's dad seemed *just* as interested in her.

"Okay," Sidney's dad said. "Uh, good luck, Sidney. I'll get to mowing. Just remember not to burp out loud, or anything like that, and I bet you'll be fine."

"I hope so," Sidney said weakly, watching the Bentley pull away. Taking a deep breath, he stepped inside. Ms. Vasquez's house was not yet fully furnished, but what Sidney could see included a crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling

and polished oak banisters that looked extremely expensive. Feeling more anxious than ever, he slowly made his way towards the sound of a small kid making car noises.

Seated in the living room, in the middle of a vast variety of toys that Sidney would have been jealous of to the extreme had he been five or six years younger again, was a small blonde-haired boy of about four years old. He looked up as Sidney entered, then pointed questioningly to the race track.

“Play cars?” he asked. Sidney glanced around, but it sounded like the maid was busy in the kitchen.

“Sure,” Sidney said, sitting down awkwardly in the skirt. “I used to love playing cars!” And it was as easy as that – the two hours seemed to pretty much fly by as Sidney had quite a bit of fun building with Lego blocks, racing plastic cars, and having action figure battles. Rodrigo was a happy little guy, who didn’t seem suspicious in the least of his temporary babysitter, and didn’t start crying once. Mia, the extremely attractive brunette maid, gave Sidney a very curious look when she came in with snacks, and seemed to be trying not to laugh as she left, and Sidney spent the last ten minutes wondering worriedly if she’d guessed the truth. When Ms. Vasquez arrived with her hair and nails freshly-done, Mia didn’t say a word about it. Rodrigo ran up and hugged his mom, who managed to hold him far enough away so as to not mess up her immaculate hairdo, and showered him in kisses.

“Did he give you any trouble?” Ms. Vasquez asked, as Sidney very carefully got up, smoothing his skirt the way he remembered seeing his sister do.

“No, not at all,” Sidney said, in a soft voice. “Um, we had a lot of fun.”

“We played cars, and built a castle, and made a big super hero fight!” Rodrigo bubbled excitedly, going over to tug on Sidney’s hand. “Can Sidney come play tomorrow?” Ms. Vasquez raised one perfect eyebrow.

“Rodrigo usually despises babysitters!” she exclaimed. “My, my. I don’t know, Rodrigo. That’s up to Sidney! Now, run along and tell Mia to clean your face, honey, you have some chocolate on your chin.” Rodrigo toddled off, leaving Ms. Vasquez to fish the two hundred dollar bills, as promised, out of her purse. Sidney stood awkwardly, trying not to look too eager, or too much like a boy disguised as a girl, but just as Ms. Vasquez was about to hand them over, she stopped. “You know,” she said thoughtfully. “I will be going to the salon again on Monday, at this same time. Do you think you might be interested in, how do you say, a regular engagement? Rodrigo loved you! Most babysitters are too boring to play with him, they would rather read magazines and chat on the phone with their friends... or boyfriends! One hundred dollars per hour, two or three times per week? What do you think?”

Sidney’s mouth fell open. One hundred bucks an hour? On a regular basis? Forget buying video games, he could buy a plasma screen TV in a matter of

weeks! The prospect of that much money left him speechless, but there was, obviously, one big problem.

“Is that not enough?” Ms. Vasquez frowned. “Perhaps we could arrange a raise later on? I would hate to lose the only babysitter Rodrigo has ever enjoyed!”

“N-no, that’s really generous,” Sidney stammered, clutching nervously at the hem of his skirt. “I... uh...” He’d thought two hundred bucks was a fortune, and now he was being offered the chance to earn far, far more. He would have enough for a whole new wardrobe in fall, heck, maybe he could even save up enough to get a decent car when he turned sixteen and earned his driver’s license – if there was anything that could bolster his popularity with the girls, it was definitely having his own car.

If it was between this and a summer of hard labor for next-to-zero pay with his dad, well, what teenaged guy could say no to that much cash? Heck, he would be crazy to refuse! Even if it did mean that he was going to have to dress up to do it.

“Then jou accept!” Ms. Vasquez filled in for him, beaming brightly.

Sidney just let her assumption go. He wasn't able to muster up the fortitude to actually say the words out loud.

“Wonderful!” the gorgeous golden-skinned woman said. “I will see jou at the same time on Monday, then. Rodrigo will be happy to hear it. Ciao, darling!” With that, she handed over the two hundred dollars and scooted Sidney out the door. Feeling somewhat shell-shocked, Sidney stumbled his way off the porch, hardly caring that he was wearing his sister’s school uniform in broad daylight. His dad was just packing up.

“Well, you pulled it off,” Sidney’s dad said, raising his eyebrows. “And now you’re two hundred dollars richer! That’s not so bad, is it?”

“Dad, she offered me the same money to do it again on Monday,” Sidney groaned. “And I said yes! She wants me to be her regular babysitter!”

“Oh, jeez,” Sidney’s dad exclaimed. “You really have a way of getting yourself into things, Sidney. You’re really willing to pretend to be a girl twice a week all summer?”

“For that much money?” Sidney sighed. “I guess I am.”

“Not if you’re gonna lose me this job!” Mr. Tremaine said. “If she figures you out, you’ll cost me the biggest contract I’ve gotten in three years!”

“You were the one who got me in this situation in the first place!” Sidney pointed out.

“Yeah... You got me there.” Marvin pursed his lips. “So I guess we’re screwed.” He pondered the situation further for a silent three or four seconds. “Okay, if you’re gonna do this, you gotta do it right. You’re gonna have to work harder at this. Really make it convincing. Be all the girl a boy can be.”

Sidney was pretty sure no father had ever given this advice to their son. “Me? I don't know anything about being a girl! I'm a guy! I'm practically a man!”

“Pffft,” his father replied.

“Don't laugh.”

“Sorry, champ. Uh, if I could make a suggestion. It might be a good time to send Ellie an e-mail.” his dad suggested.

“Oh, God,” Sidney said resignedly. “She'll love this...”



As Sidney predicted, his sister Ellie laughed her butt off for about ten minutes straight when he asked for help. She laughed for a clear two minutes and when she had gathered herself and put on a serious face, she then broke down and laughed for another minute. When the tears of mirth finally subsided, however, she was ready to get down to business.

“This is serious, right? This isn't some sort of prank,” she asked through the screen of the beaten-up family laptop Sidney shared with his dad.

“No,” Sydney replied.

“Anna's not putting you up to this, is she? Are you hiding, Anna?”

“No,” Sydney said again, exasperated. Anna was Ellie's best friend from school.

“Seriously. What's the joke?”

“There's no joke!” Sydney said loudly and impatiently. “Just make this quick, okay?”

“Huh,” Ellie replied. “Okay. Uh... I think it's totally do-able.” She started to take the task seriously. “I mean, I still remember someone thinking you were my little sister at the grocery store once, and if you're borrowing my clothes it must mean you're still pretty shrimpy and haven't hit any growth spurts yet... no offense.”

“None taken,” Sidney muttered, deeply offended. As if he needed the reminder of his scrawny physique.

“And you start on Monday, huh?” Ellie mused. “So I only have a weekend to convert my brother into a dainty vision of girliness? It takes most fifteen-year-old girls fifteen years to learn everything, you know!”

“Crap, Ellie, it's not like I'm entering a beauty pageant,” Sidney griped. “I just have to be, you know, passable. She already thinks I'm a girl, remember? I just have to keep it that way.”

“Right,” Ellie said, sounding slightly disappointed. “Well, take me up to my room and we’ll get started. What does dad think about all this, by the way?”

“I think as far as he’s concerned, it’s just one more ‘in’ with Ms. Vasquez,” Sidney sighed as he carried the laptop up the stairs. “It’s about all he’s talked about for the past 24 hours. It’s worse than when you had your first big crush on Josh the quarterback as a freshman!”

“Funny you should mention Josh,” Ellie said mysteriously. “I was... No, we’ll talk about him later. Our priority is making a woman out of you.”

“Hoo. Ray,” Sidney said sarcastically.

“No attitude, missy!” his sister scolded. “I’m helping you out of the goodness of my heart, remember?”

“And not because you’ve been begging dad to let you dress me up as a girl for Halloween for the past, say, fifteen years?” Sidney shot back teasingly.

“Well, that might have something to do with it,” Ellie admitted with a sly grin. “Okay, set me down on the dresser. First thing’s first, I need to see what I’m working with, so strip.”

“Aw, come on, Ellie,” Sidney said, blushing. “I’m your brother!”

“My sister,” Ellie corrected. “And it’s nothing I haven’t seen before. Keep your briefs on, obviously, but everything else – off. Snap snap!”

“Fine,” Sidney acquiesced. It was true that there were plenty of old photo albums with the two of them running around butt naked, but he was fifteen now. Despite what his dad thought, that meant that he was practically a man... in age, if not in physical build. Reluctantly, he peeled off the monkey T-shirt (“Ooh, forgot about that one,” Ellie giggled) and then slid out of the jeans he’d found, standing bashfully in just his briefs in front of the laptop’s web-cam.

“Okay, no chest hair yet, that’s a good sign,” Ellie said matter-of-factly. “And your skin is still all nice and smooth. Yep, I think there’s some definite potential



here. Okay, if you're going to be a convincing girl, you're going to have to dress from the skin out as one. That means panties and bra."

"Panties and a bra?" Sidney yelled, then lowering his voice in case his dad overheard. "Come on, I'm not wearing your underwear! That's way too weird!"

"Well, I don't think you want to go buy your own, do you?" Ellie countered. "Besides, 'weird' and 'not weird' are just figments of our imagination made up by society. If you don't think it's 'weird,' then it's not." She giggled. "I just learned that in our philosophy class here. The teacher is such an old hippie... but, right. Back to business. Go check my top drawer, there should be some nice plain panties and some white cotton bras that I left behind." Sidney gulped. Even with his sister's express permission, breaking into her underwear drawers was a taboo it was quite difficult to overcome. He approached the dresser reluctantly, then opened it and pulled out the uber-complicated-looking contraption that he recognized from the laundry hamper (and from lingerie billboards and some magazines stashed under his mattress) as a bra.

"Wow, these cups are so small it might just fit me," Sidney said snarkily, hoping to add a little levity to the situation.

"Yeah, hilarious," Ellie exclaimed, but she laughed immediately afterwards. "Okay, panties first. I'll look away. And make sure you tuck!"

"Tuck?" Sidney echoed, bewildered.

"Yeah," Ellie said casually. "You know, tuck your 'equipment' up inside as much as you can, and push your pee-pee back between your legs so you're flat. Girls don't have a bulge when they wear jeans, and I'm assuming you don't want to wear a flouncy little skirt, right?"

"How do you know all this?" Sidney demanded, turning away from the laptop. "You're starting to scare me!"

"I have Google search open in another window," Ellie laughed. "Tips for cross-dressers and drag queens. There's tons of great stuff!"

"I'm not a cross-dresser!" Sidney contested hotly. "I'm just... uh..." He sighed. "Okay, I'll see what I can do. Close your eyes!"

"Trust me, I have no desire to see my little brother's tiny little—"

"Hey!" Sidney interrupted. "Come on, at least let me keep a little dignity!" Face red, he quickly shucked off his briefs and studied the nylon panties. They were plain, as promised, and probably only slightly more snug than what he'd been wearing a moment ago. Still, the fabric was definitely not what he was used to, and the fact that they were his sister's was more than a little disturbing. Deciding there was no sense in prolonging the inevitable, Sidney did his best to 'tuck' his soldier out of sight before quickly snapping the nylon panties into place. To his embarrassment, he seemed to have done a more than adequate

job in disguising his maleness – his crotch was a perfectly flat V in the mirror. It was, however, deeply uncomfortable.

“For the bra, you probably want to put it on backwards first, do up the clasps, and then spin it around,” Ellie suggested. “How are the panties fitting?”

“Not comfy,” Sidney groaned, beginning to struggle with the bra.

“You’ll get used to it quickly, according to what I just read,” Ellie said cheerfully. “And besides, you only have to do it for a couple hours a couple times a week, right? But the last thing you want is that sexy maid of hers’ noticing a little bulge when she bends over to clean things!”

“Ellie!” Sidney protested, blushing. Mia the maid *was* very attractive... but he wasn’t some love-sick loon like his dad. Sidney was only in this for cold, hard cash.

“Lighten up and let me look at you,” Ellie instructed. “Did you get the bra on?”

“I think so,” Sidney muttered, spinning it so the empty cups now hung over his chest, then slipping his slender arms through the straps. He was as red as a fire-hydrant by the time she’d instructed him on how to adjust the straps on his shoulders, use a pair of balled-up panty-hose to fill in the cups a little bit, and undo the clasps again. She wasn’t satisfied until he’d repeated the whole procedure about ten times, but Sidney had to admit by the last repetition that he thought he would be able to do it on his own in the future. “But do I have to use the pantyhose?” he complained.

“It’s okay if you’re flat-chested as a girl,” Ellie said. “You can claim that you’re just a really late bloomer. But flat-chested girls don’t enjoy it, Sidney! So yes, you have to stuff a little bit.”

“Speaking from experience...?” Sidney muttered under his breath.

“Heard that!” Ellie barked. “Okay, time to do something about that hair. I don’t really trust you with scissors...”

“Me either,” Sidney agreed.

“But there’s got to be something you can do to make it a little more feminine,” Ellie decided. “Sit down at the vanity... bring me with you! I mean, the laptop. And we’ll see what we can do.”

“This has got to be the weirdest night of my life,” Sidney muttered, walking over to the vanity with the laptop in hand. The bra cups protruded distractingly in front of him while he walked, even though he knew they were tiny compared to most, and the way the straps were digging into his shoulders was extremely distracting. *A hundred dollars an hour*, Sidney reminded himself, sitting down at the vanity. *A hundred dollars an hour...*

After helping Sidney in finding her leftover hair care supplies, Ellie instructed him on how to style his scruffy, bushy hair. With the aid of some pictures on

how to brush it out into a slightly girlier style, he used some hair-spray and a comb to tease out a semblance of bangs. A hair-band completed the look. It still wasn't particularly feminine, but a definite improvement over his usual shaggy mess.

Next came what Sidney was dreading most: a make-up lesson. If his buddies could see him sitting in front of a mirror in bra and panties, learning the difference between mascara and eye-liner, he would die of embarrassment. Luckily, Ellie had a light hand.

"You won't be good at it without tons of practice," she said. "And with your hair and mannerisms, I bet Ms. Vasquez already thinks you're definitely more of a tomboy, so a lot of makeup would just be strange."

Sidney exhaled a heavy, tense breath. "Good," he said.

"All you really need is a bit of blush for your cheekbones – your skin is already really smooth and clear – and then some lip gloss and a bit of mascara. Nothing drastic, I promise."

"Nothing drastic?" Sidney complained. It sounded like a death sentence to him.

Following his sister's step-by-step instruction, Sidney managed to do his mascara for the first time without clumping – or poking his eye out. The blush went on a little heavy the first time, making him look a little clownish, but on his second try it was better. Fortunately, the lip gloss wasn't sparkling pink or anything, and was more like a normal chap-stick. When all was said and done, his face did look a little bit different in the mirror. In fact, he had the sneaking suspicion that in poor lighting, with better hair, he might even be kind of, well... pretty – but still quite recognizable. He definitely didn't want to run into his buddies like this, so maybe it was a good thing they were all off on vacation with their families.

Ellie had him clip and file his nails next, having him apply a varnish she promised was 100% clear, and then, at last, the final hurdle had arrived: clothes.

"I'm going to go ahead and guess that you don't want to shave your legs," Ellie said, sounding slightly disappointed.

"Bingo," Sidney answered.

"Okay," Ellie sighed. "So that puts a lot of cute skirts and shorts out of consideration."

"Then I can wear jeans?" Sidney suggested hopefully.

"You're never going to learn how to move like a girl in jeans," Ellie said. "Too much like your regular clothes. No, I have a nice pair of palazzo pants that should work all right. Breezy and super-comfortable. You'll love them. As for your top... do you know what a camisole is?" Sidney shook his head wordlessly. Ellie sighed. "Bring me over to the wardrobe, I'll give you a tour..."

After some protest over the white camisole, on account of it being lacy, Ellie finally convinced him that nobody was going to notice it under the soft blue cardigan. Once he'd pulled on the pants, which were, to Ellie's word, quite comfortable, she had him slip into some socks and buckle on a pair of black shoes with a slight heel. With some final hemming and hawing, Sidney was finally declared 'complete.' Looking in the mirror, Sidney didn't know whether to be relieved or just slightly disappointed that there wasn't a more radical difference after so much work. When he expressed this to his sister, she laughed.

"Oh, the work is just beginning," she said. "The biggest indicator of gender isn't clothes, Sidney, it's body language! And there's a definite difference between 'tomboy' and 'actual boy,' so don't think I'll go easy on you. Boot-camp has only just begun..."



Truer words had never been spoken. Sidney was in for an exhausting evening, as Ellie set about drilling him in what seemed to be every feminine gesture or mannerism imaginable: one hour was spent practicing walking, sitting, and picking things up in a feminine manner. "Even if you're not wearing a skirt, girls are used to moving in certain ways," Ellie explained. The next hour was spent teaching him how to put together outfits on his own, another hour on speaking in a higher, more feminine voice, and so on.

He certainly wasn't the belle of the ball, but by the time his dad got home, Sidney could tell he had made some definite progress by the shocked look on his father's face.

"She really did a number on you, huh?" his dad said, finally breaking into laughter after an awkward silence. "Looks like I have two daughters, now!"

"Very funny," Sidney said darkly. "Ellie had to log off, but she left me a big list of things to practice and says there's more to do tomorrow. I didn't think being a girl temporarily would be so much work!"

"But it *is* work," his dad pointed out thoughtfully. "And you're getting paid a pretty penny! Please don't mess this up, Sidney. Ms. Vasquez is a really nice woman, and, well, she'd be mortified to find out her mistake, I'm sure..." Sidney only rolled his eyes. Once again, it seemed everything was about Ms. Vasquez. After following his sister's e-mailed instructions on make-up removal, Sidney was relieved to change into his old pajamas and crash into bed. He had some very odd dreams, one of which might have involved him wearing a skirt while his sister and his friends all laughed their heads off at him, but he didn't remember them come morning.

Day two of 'Girl 101' proved to be much the same, but had expanded to lessons on how to eat and drink in a more 'dainty' fashion as Ellie described it.

She thought it would be important for when Mia brought them any snack – he couldn't gulp down his food like a boy, wipe his mouth with his sleeve or talk while chewing, or she might start getting suspicious, if not of his gender, then of his manners. There was also more work on his voice; it still hadn't broken, luckily. Ellie coached him on raising his pitch, softening his breath, and using a more feminine vocabulary when he talked. *At least it was better than being out in the sun pulling weeds with Dad*, Sidney kept telling himself.

By the time the day drew to a close, Sidney wasn't sure if he was feeling more nervous or less nervous about starting his new job the following afternoon. He was certainly more feminine-looking than before, but he was also now aware of about a thousand different things to remember about being a girl. Sitting when he used the bathroom, for instance, in case Mia somehow managed to listen in, and sitting with his thighs held together. His sister assured him that he would be fine.

"They already think you're a tomboy, remember?" she said comfortingly. "So anything you do that's a little, well, boyish, they'll probably pass it off as you going through that particular phase of life, is all."

"I sure hope so," Sidney said. "If not, I have a feeling I have a long summer of gardening work ahead of me... with a very embarrassed dad."

"She can't be that beautiful, is she?" Ellie scowled. Sidney shrugged.

"I dunno, sis," he admitted. "I think she'd give some supermodels a run for their money!"

"Well, I bet her boobs are fake," Ellie giggled. Sidney laughed, and all his uneasiness slowly trickled away. He could do this. After all, "normal" and "not normal" were just figments of imagination made up by society, so there was nothing weird about pretending to be a girl for 100 bucks an hour, Sidney told himself. Nothing weird at all...



Despite all of his internal pep-talking, Sidney was nervous as a cat when Monday morning rolled around, to the point that he nearly did take his eye out with the mascara wand. But soon enough he was presentable, wearing a stretchy pink T-shirt that now showed the slight swell of his stuffed bra along with a pair of loose flowing pants with a floral design. The half-inch heel of Ellie's patent black shoes was no longer giving him much trouble. In fact, his main worry was someone he knew seeing him. The neighbors mostly kept to themselves, which was a relief, but Sidney still hunkered down as low as he could in the passenger seat as his dad drove them to Oak Hill. Just as she'd said, Ms. Vasquez was halfway out the door to the salon when Sidney came up the steps.

“Hello, darling, how nice to see you again,” she beamed. “Cindy, yes? Go on in. Rodrigo is watching a movie on the TV, that “Alice is Wonderful” movie, but I know he will be happy to see you again. I will be back in a few hours! You are such a savior to me, I really need the break! Such a handful, aren’t they? Boys? Girls are much sweeter and simpler to raise!”

“It’s... it’s Sidney,” Sidney stammered, but Ms. Vasquez was already swishing past him to greet his father, her ‘favorite gardener’ with a very coy smile. Sidney glanced back at the brewing romance and shuddered. Ms. Vasquez was gorgeous, yeah, but he didn’t even want to consider how complicated things might get if things actually went beyond flirting. The truth would definitely have to come out, and Sidney would be out of a job!

The movie Ms. Vasquez had been talking about turned out to be “Alice in Wonderland,” and little Rodrigo was so enthralled with it that he barely looked up when his new babysitter entered. By the sounds of it, Mia was once again doing dishes in the kitchen.

“Easiest money ever?” Sidney questioned under his breath, grinning despite himself. Sure, he was wearing his sister’s hand-me-downs, and a bra, and a little bit of makeup. But he was lying around in the shade, inside a true-to-life mansion, while a cool little kid watched his favorite cartoon and an attractive maid swished around in a terrifically short skirt and brought them cookies. And he was getting paid to do it! This beat gardening hands down, and probably beat his buddies’ summer vacations, too.

“Iced tea?” Mia asked sweetly, bending down to offer him the tray and incidentally giving Sidney a perfect view of her generous cleavage. Sidney blushed, knowing he couldn’t stare—it might give him away! Rodrigo, on the other hand, had barely even noticed her intrusion, still glued to the TV screen.

“Um, thanks,” Sidney replied, using the soft voice he’d been practicing with his sister. He took the tall glass of iced tea from her and gave it a small sip. Not bad at all.

“It is a special brew from my village,” the pretty Latina maid said shyly. “It helps young girls to find their husbands.”

“Oh!” Sidney exclaimed, blushing. “Um, well, I’m really... too young for boys... my, uh, my dad says...”

“You haven’t gotten big yet,” Mia said slyly, cupping her own very sizeable breasts with both hands.

“Um... nope...” Sidney said weakly, doing his best not to drool.

“Don’t worry,” Mia smiled brightly. “I was same! Very skinny and flat.”

“That’s hard to believe,” Sidney admitted, blushing again. “Thanks for the drink, though!” Mia smiled again and flounced off to start dusting the large oil portrait Sidney had only vaguely noticed on his first day in the house. It showed

a very beautiful looking and life-like Ms. Vasquez, smiling and holding the arm of a small, slender, dark-haired man that Sidney assumed was her late husband. It was obviously a few years before Rodrigo was born. Mia dusted the picture frame carefully with a wistful expression on her face, and Sidney wondered what exactly had befallen Mr. Vasquez. He didn't look like much next to his gorgeous young wife, but it gave Sidney a bit of hope. Maybe small, scrawny guys like him could still manage to end up with beautiful women with a bit of luck!



Looking away from Rodrigo as he sat quietly, Sidney caught a tiny flash of Mia's stocking tops as she went up on tip-toe, and there was an immediate stirring in his pants. He shifted uncomfortably, but he couldn't very well adjust himself in front of his young charge. "One day, you'll understand what I'm going through," he said, once Mia had flounced off once more. "Man, and she probably bathes you, too! Lucky little guy." Rodrigo looked up, grinning.

"Alice in Wonderland!" he shouted, pointing to the titular character as she ran across the screen in her blue dress.

"Sure is," Sidney said cheerily. Not the movie he would have guessed for boisterous little Rodrigo. When Sidney was little, he'd been more a fan of Superhero cartoons. So long as he was wearing a bra, Sidney guessed he couldn't sit in judgment!

The afternoon flew by without a hitch once again, and once again, Sidney left with a cool two hundred dollars in cash. He was in high spirits as he hung

around waiting for his dad to finish packing up. Some might have even called it gloating, but Sidney's dad was quite happy enough as it was, what with Ms. Vasquez revealing that she might be getting a pool installed. The chance to see her in a bathing suit was obviously on the forefront of his mind as he whistled merrily, shoving the rakes into the back of the truck. Sidney hardly cared, though. Not when he was going to be the richest kid on the block in a matter of months!

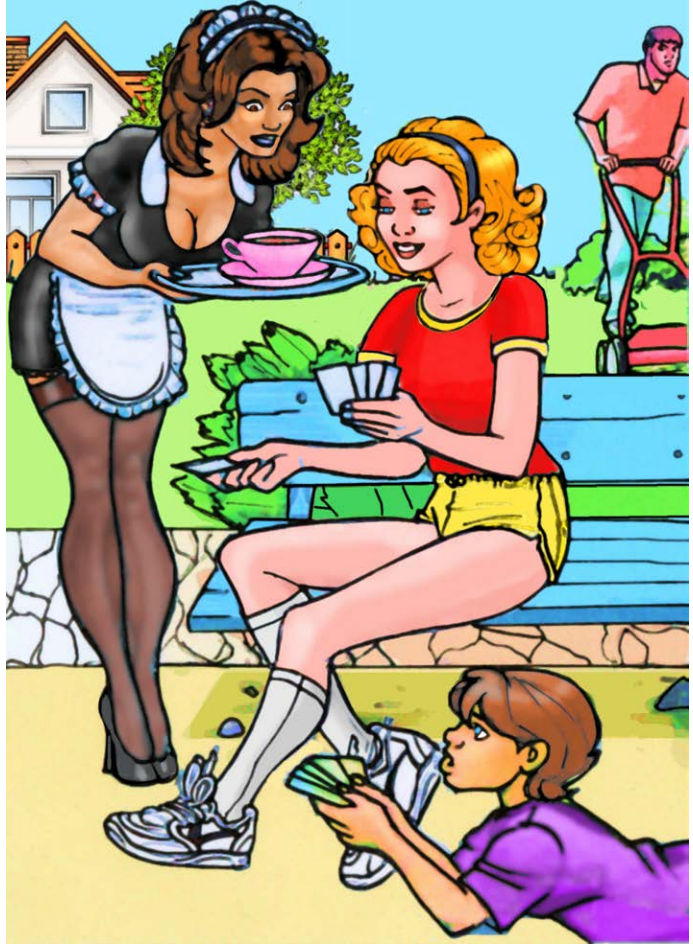


Sidney's new double-life as Sidney, the skater boy, and Sidney, the (female) babysitter, developed a pleasant rhythm over the following weeks. Aside from a brief foray to the mall to buy some new hoodies and jeans, he was stockpiling the money underneath his bed, saving up for something really big – a car wouldn't be out of the question by the time fall rolled around – and he counted it pretty much every night. Putting on some mascara and a stuffed bra was a small price to pay for this kind of dough, and he'd even worked out a fool-proof system for the days his dad wasn't working on Ms. Vasquez's property. He would walk to the public park in 'boy mode,' then quickly change in the family bathroom before leaving in his 'girl' attire, rollerblading his way to the big house on Oak Hill. On the way home, he swapped back. That way, no accidental observers would ever put together the fact that the red-headed tomboy and the red-headed skater punk were one in the same.

Life was great, and despite himself, he was growing pretty fond of Rodrigo, and had a substantial crush on Mia the maid, despite the fact that she was around twice his age. He could never say no to her iced tea, even though it seemed to make him slightly nauseous now and again. The only other thing

that bothered him was a certain itchiness around his chest area, particularly his nipples, which Ellie suggested was a mild allergy from the cotton bra. But putting that one little wrinkle aside, Sidney was definitely enjoying his highest-paying summer on record. Everything was so easy; girl for a few hours, guy for the rest of the week, then listen to his dad blather on about Ms. Vasquez while they watched TV or did the dishes.

He should have known that something was bound to give.



It was a Monday afternoon, and Ms. Vasquez was leafing indifferently through her mail as she waited for her babysitter to show up, when a brightly-colored advertisement caught her eye. She lifted it out, observing the glossy picture of a beautiful young woman wearing a tiara, and read the details. The town was hosting a regional teen beauty pageant in a matter of months, and searching for volunteers to help with organizing the event. Ms. Vasquez smiled distantly, remembering her many years as a beauty queen in her own country and how it had set her up for the rest of her life – there was a reason she'd married rich, after all. She had adored the glamor and thrill of competition, and was nothing if not a fierce contestant. Perhaps helping with a pageant would be a nice way to revisit those memories.

Of course, running around setting up chairs and asking for donations was nothing compared to the prestige of actually competing. She obviously couldn't enter herself, but she supposed the next best thing to winning a beauty pageant... Ms. Vasquez smiled to herself. Yes, the next best thing would definitely be grooming the winner! Coaching her, teaching her all the tricks of the trade, molding her into a vision of flawless femininity and grace. There was nothing Ms. Vasquez enjoyed more than a challenge, and what would be a bigger challenge than the babysitter?

The more she thought about it, the more enthusiastic she became about the idea. Sure, Cindy was making a bit more of an effort now, usually wearing at least some make-up, albeit clumsily applied. She was wearing outfits that, while bland and almost prudishly modest, at least didn't make Ms. Vasquez's eyes hurt. However, the 'tomboy' image was still firmly in place. It would be hugely rewarding to take Cindy from 'tomboy' to 'temptress,' and the gardener's child certainly did have potential with those pretty blue eyes, nicely-shaped lips, small nose and delicate features. Still flat as a board, of course, but that wasn't a problem that couldn't be solved.

With only a few minutes of deliberation, Ms. Vasquez was decided. She checked her watch and realized Cindy would be showing up in only a few minutes' time. Smiling slyly, she picked up her phone and dialed the salon. She needed to make a slight change to her appointment.



Sidney should have realized something was up when Ms. Vasquez answered the door smiling like the cat that swallowed the canary, but he was too distracted with the straps of his sister's bra to notice. He'd managed to do it up far too tight, and now it was digging into his shoulders.

"Cindy, darling!" Ms. Vasquez exclaimed. "How nice to see you. You are always so punctual. So trustworthy."

"Um, thank you?" Sidney managed, slightly confused. He hardly bothered to correct her about the name anymore.

"You deserve a reward," Ms. Vasquez said meaningfully. "Don't you agree?" Sidney slowly nodded his head. If it meant another infusion of cash, he wasn't about to disagree with her judgment. "So, that is why Mia will watch Rodrigo today," Ms. Vasquez beamed. "And you will come with me to the salon!" Sidney's mouth fell open. That was not what he'd had in mind at all.

"Oh, I... I couldn't," Sidney stammered.

"You can, darling, and you will," Ms. Vasquez said firmly. "I know you are still, how do you say, in your tomboy 'phase of life.' But you are becoming a woman

now, and with no mother or sister here to guide you, I see it is my duty to ensure you grow to be a lovely young lady and not a... well... what you are now.”

“I have high self-esteem!” Sidney protested. “I mean... I... I like how I look!”

“And it is wonderful to have confidence, darling, that will help you greatly,” Ms. Vasquez beamed. “But you will gain an entirely new sort of confidence when you are confident in your emerging womanhood, and your feminine beauty, as well. I see so much potential in you, darling! You are like a beautiful butterfly trapped in a cocoon of poor taste and poor grooming habits.”

“I... I groom myself,” Sidney said weakly.

“Darling, I will not, how do you say, make mince of my words,” Ms. Vasquez frowned. “Your hair looks like you allow your father to cut with his hedge clippers. And you are always wearing pants or long skirts because you neglect to shave your legs, no? This is a problem, darling. We will fix.”

“But won’t Rodrigo be upset with you?” Sidney demanded, making one final last-ditch effort to save his skin – or rather, his remaining sense of male dignity.

“Nothing that an ice cream or cartoons cannot fix,” Ms. Vasquez said, utterly dismissively. “Now, I will not take no for an answer, darling! I know you are intimidated, but you must learn to embrace your feminine side, not run from it! When the ladies at the salon have finished, you will love your new look. You will feel like a new person! And you will never want to go back, I promise.”

“Never go back to the salon, I bet,” Sidney muttered. But he knew he was stuck... Ms. Vasquez thought she was doing a poor girl a huge favor, rather than putting a poor boy in an extremely uncomfortable situation. A salon full of girls... what if someone from school was there? What if he was recognized? The thought was almost unbearable.

“We will have the entire place to ourselves, darling, I phoned to tell them,” Ms. Vasquez smiled. “I want their full team working on you. You, ah, need quite a bit of help.” Sidney blushed, unsure whether to be glad or insulted. But at least there wasn’t any need to worry about a pretty classmate seeing him having his nails done...

“Okay,” Sidney said bracingly, knowing he couldn’t turn down the offer without risking this cushy job. After all, if he offended her by refusing her ‘reward,’ she might decide she could find some other babysitter, and that would mean Sidney’s miraculous flow of cash would be cut short. “I’d, um, I’d love to come to the salon with you!” Sidney lied, doing his best to paste a smile onto his face. Ms. Vasquez gave a happy sigh.

“I knew I liked you, Cindy,” she beamed. “What girl does not want to look beautiful? Come along, darling, Peter will drive us. I can hardly bear the excitement, can you?”

“Hardly,” Sidney gulped. He had a feeling he was going to regret this decision, but there was nothing for it but to follow Ms. Vasquez to the waiting Bentley. He was infinitely glad he hadn’t chanced a skirt today – he was sure he would fail horribly at getting into a vehicle with Ms. Vasquez watching. His employer slid in gracefully from the other side, joining him in the expansive back seat. Sidney had never been in a car this nice before, but he was too busy dreading their destination to appreciate it much. He didn’t even have the heart to sneak looks at Ms. Vasquez’s gorgeous, perfectly-tanned legs. He might have been able to help him cook up some excuse, if only his dad had not been busy all day planting trees at the park, and that meant he was at Ms. Vasquez’s mercy.

“Jes, much potential,” Ms. Vasquez smiled, looking him up and down again in a way that made Sidney extremely nervous. He did his best to respond to her cheery small-talk, and fortunately, she didn’t need much help to keep a conversation running full-tilt. Still, his insides were churning with nervousness as they pulled into the parking lot of an upscale salon down-town. The chauffeur parked at the doors, then jumped out and ran around to open the door for them. Ms. Vasquez slid out as sinuously as any movie starlet, gracefully taking her chauffeur’s arm for support. Sidney felt like a sissy doing the same, but since Ms. Vasquez was watching, he accepted the chauffeur’s help and awkwardly thanked him. He couldn’t help but look forlornly behind him as the driver hopped back in the car and drove away, leaving Sidney stranded in broad daylight dressed as a girl. This was nothing like hiding inside Ms. Vasquez’s house, or even like rollerblading quickly down familiar and pretty much empty residential streets. Downtown was packed full of cars and people, and he felt sure that any one of them was just waiting for the chance to shout, Hey, isn’t that Sidney Tremaine?

“Cindy?” Ms. Vasquez questioned. “Are you not feeling well, darling?”

“You know, I’m, I’m really not...” Sidney started to say, seeing a possible life-line.

“Well, nothing will help more than a nice manicure and pedicure!” Ms. Vasquez beamed. “So relaxing! Now, come along. The estheticians are waiting.”

Sidney had no idea what ‘estheticians’ were, but he didn’t like the sound of it at all. Gulping nervously, he clumped after Ms. Vasquez, forgetting just about everything his sister had told him about moving in a feminine manner. As they passed through the sliding doors, Sidney was hit by a barrage of feminine scents: floral candles, nail polishes, bleaching solutions, perfumes – it was enough to make a guy’s head spin.

The interior of the salon was very expensive and stylish looking, but also, to Sidney’s great relief, as empty as Ms. Vasquez had promised it, apart from a collection of pretty but bored-looking girls wearing matching smocks. They brightened up immediately when they saw Ms. Vasquez, who glided over to them and exchanged enthusiastic greetings and air-kisses with each in turn. She

was obviously a favorite regular. Sidney was hoping that the gossiping and greeting would go on forever, but it subsided all at once when Ms. Vasquez pulled him forward.

“And this is Cindy, my hard-working and very loyal babysitter,” she beamed. “She has such a way with little Rodrigo, like you wouldn’t believe! They do share some, ah... boyish interests.” She smiled apologetically in Sidney’s direction, as if it were an insult. “But she is not so good at other things, as you can see. Hair, makeup, clothing...” The girls tittered, and Sidney felt his face go red. Here he was, ashamed of being too masculine! “She needs your help, girls,” Ms. Vasquez finished. “And I know you won’t disappoint me. Have fun, darling!”

“You’re... leaving?” Sidney squeaked. Suddenly, Ms. Vasquez had gone from slightly overwhelming to a shining beacon of familiarity and trust.

“I have to do a little shopping,” Ms. Vasquez said airily. “Do not trouble yourself, darling, I will be back before you know it. Ciao!” She wiggled her fingers in a goodbye wave and was out the doors in an instant, leaving Sidney now completely alone in a salon.

“First time, huh?” one of the beauticians giggled. “Don’t worry, Cindy, Ms. Vasquez was totally right. You have great bone structure, and such nice skin. When we’re finished with you, you’ll be gorgeous, girl!”

“Good?” was the best Sidney could manage, in such a small voice it set half the girls to laughing again.

“Gosh, I’ve never seen anyone so nervous about a little makeover!” the beautician laughed. “Okay, out of those clothes, Cindy. We’ll give you a little robe, don’t worry.” Sidney gulped. This was the moment of truth. If they didn’t peg him for a boy now, they never would. Slowly, Sidney removed his shirt, revealing his bra (he was utterly certain he’d stuffed one cup bigger than the other) and then his jeans (boy, was he ever glad he’d taken Ellie’s ‘tucking’ requirement to heart). But if the beauticians were onto him, they gave no sign of it, only smiling and handing him a short terry-cloth robe which he gratefully wrapped around himself. The air-conditioning in the salon was cold, and he could feel goose bumps growing on his legs. Of course, that wasn’t the only thing growing on his legs, and judging by the horrified looks on the girls’ faces, they weren’t going to stand for it.

“I, um, haven’t shaved them in a while,” Sidney stammered. “I get razor burn really bad?”

“Waxing it is,” the girls chimed in chorus. Before Sidney could form a rational argument against the idea, he found himself being ushered over to the waxing table, where he did his best to lie down without exposing his panties to the world. Two beauticians immediately began coating his legs, ankle up, with the warm goop Sidney guessed was wax. *Okay*, Sidney thought to himself. *Okay*, so

this would be a problem if you had gym class, but it's summer, and there's plenty of time for it to grow back... it does grow back, right?

"Hey!" Sidney squeaked, as one of the girls took a peek through his robe and tugged at the elastic waist of his panties.

"Sorry," she giggled. "Just checking your bikini line. At least that's nice and neat." Sidney's cheeks reddened. He didn't have much more than a bit of fuzz downstairs. Who would have thought that would turn out to be a good thing? His attention was diverted from that close call, however, as the girls working on his legs began pulling off the strips!

"Ouch!" he wailed, as what felt like half his skin got torn up along with the leg hair. "Can't you do that more..." But he was distracted yet again as each of his hands were seized and put into a sort of glove filled with lotion of some sort.

"You're in dire need of moisturizer, girl," one of the beauticians scolded. "You won't have this awesome complexion when you're thirty unless you take care of it, you know!"

"It's not like I have calluses..." Sidney began to protest, but another girl immediately appeared with what looked almost like a mouth guard.

"Two hour teeth whitening," she beamed. "We'll just pop this in and let it work while we do the rest of you, okay?"

"I guess I would like a whiter smile," Sidney relented. He opened his mouth and accepted the molded plastic. It was full of whitening gel that fizzed, not unpleasantly, against his teeth as he closed his mouth. The beauticians exchanged sly smiles and a wink or two. The mouthpiece meant that there would be no more complaints for two hours. Sidney saw the logic a few minutes later, when they began applying the same wax to his armpits. The best he could do now was wiggle uncomfortably and make a few small whimpers, and after a while he gave up on that, too.

He was totally resigned to his fate by the time they switched him to a salon chair, at which point his legs were smooth as a baby's bottom and thoroughly moisturized, along with his hands and feet. The manicure / pedicure came next, which, if he was honest with himself, Sidney did find rather relaxing, just as Ms. Vasquez had said. The girls bemoaned the state of his cuticles, but having his mouth occupied was now an advantage, as all Sidney could do was shrug in response to their questions regarding his usual nail-care regimen. Of course, they then struck back with eyebrow tweezing. He knew it would grow back, and his floppy hair could easily cover his eyebrows, besides, but it felt like they were tweezing them away completely. Much more enjoyable was the hair-washing, where he got to lean back and have his scalp thoroughly massaged by one of the prettier beauticians. When she finished blow-drying and reached for her scissors, however, Sidney blanched.

“Don’t worry,” she chided. “I’m just trimming it a little, to give it some shape. I’m not going to hack it all off or anything!” Sidney pondered it for a moment. It wasn’t as if they could make him look girlier by *cutting* his hair, after all. He made a noise of permission and she set to work, snipping here and there and using a comb and liberal amounts of hairspray simultaneously. Sidney looked at the clock and was shocked, he figured he must have dozed off some time during the manicure, because it had already been over an hour. Maybe there was something to all this salon stuff. Now that the waxing was over with, his skin felt kind of nice. His hands and feet definitely did.

“Time to do your makeup!” one of the girls announced, arriving with an enormous case of cosmetic products that clearly put Ellie’s to shame. Sidney eyed it nervously. He had a feeling that he was going to be getting a lot more than a bit of blusher and mascara soon. But makeup could be easily washed off, he reminded himself, so he cooperated as best he could. While two of the beauticians set to working their magic with their little powders and brushes, explaining the process as they went, they gave him tips on how to highlight his best features: “You want to get a boy’s attention with those gorgeous blue eyes of yours!” and “Flawless cheekbones, girl, you need to bring attention to those...” Sidney, still mute, could only make small noises of agreement. He closed his eyes when they told him to, pursed his lips when they told him to, and generally hoped to have it all over with as soon as possible. Ms. Vasquez had to be on her way back, didn’t she? When they finally popped the whitening dam out of his mouth, in order to properly apply his lipstick, Sidney’s teeth felt strange and tingly. At least there was one upside to all this – he’d have nicer-looking teeth.

“Are we done?” Sidney sighed, blinking rapidly as he tried to get used to the weight of the false eyelashes they had painstakingly applied to his upper and lower lids. His face felt totally weird all powdered and painted, especially the waxy taste of his lipstick coating his mouth. They’d also managed to make his hair smell like flowers. Despite his misgivings, however, Sidney had to admit he was slightly curious to finally look in a mirror.

“Not quite,” one of the girls said sweetly, approaching with what appeared to be a blue plastic water pistol of some sort. Jeez, they weren’t going to douse him with perfume or something, were they? To his surprise, she instead put it up against his ear lobe and he received a sharp pinch!

“Hey, I never said I wanted my...” Sidney began to protest, but she had already moved to the other side and repeated the procedure. “Ouch! Ears pierced,” he finished quietly. He put his finger up and found a small ‘keeper’ stud in his earlobe. Great, just great. How was he going to explain pierced ears when his buddies got home from their vacations?

“You’ll have to wear these little ones for a while, but don’t worry, you’ll be wearing all sorts of pretty hoops or dangly earrings soon,” the girl gushed. “Now, I think Ms. Vasquez should be back with your outfit any second, now...”



“My *outfit?*” Sidney echoed weakly. Right on cue, Ms. Vasquez came bustling through the automatic doors of the salon with several shopping bags in hand. When she came to a stop in front of the salon chair, she cut her cell phone conversation short and stared at Sidney with a huge grin across her face that made him somehow even more nervous than the shopping bags clutched in her hands.

“Girls, you are workers of miracles!” Ms. Vasquez exclaimed. “I knew you wouldn’t disappoint me. Cindy, darling, you look lovely!” Sidney grimaced at the umpteenth mispronunciation of his name, but he had to admit that his curiosity was rapidly growing. The beauticians had carefully kept him away from any mirrors, probably to build the suspense, and it seemed Ms. Vasquez had no intention of relieving the tension. “And now your new clothes!” she beamed. “Come, out of the chair, darling, I had to guess your size but I am a genius with clothing sizes, I assure you, I am nearly 100% correct most of the time.”

“Ms. Vasquez, you didn’t have to buy me clothes,” Sidney said, mortified. Boy, would his dad and sister be amused at this. An instant solution to the hand-me-downs problem – only a couple weeks too late, and in the wrong gender, to boot.

“But I wanted to,” his employer said angelically. “Now, come, behind this little curtain, and I will help you get changed.” Sidney gulped. Once he would have relished the idea of cozing up behind the little screen with a woman as gorgeous as Ms. Vasquez, but she was going to be dressing him, not undressing him, which made things more than a little different. Like a condemned man going to the gallows, Sidney awkwardly slid off the salon chair, clutching the terry cloth robe tightly around his body. Ms. Vasquez all but dragged him over to the screen, rummaging through the shopping bags as they went. “I think this top, yes, and this skirt will be simply adorable,” she said, picking out the garments as she spoke. “But first, your new underwear!” That stopped Sidney cold.

“New underwear?” he echoed dumbly. Oh, no, he thought. This was it. The jig was up!

“Well, new bras,” Ms. Vasquez said placatingly. “I know you are wearing those horrid plain cotton bras, and I thought, of course you do not feel comfortable in your femininity! How could you, wearing such garments? So I bought a few new ones, see?” She pulled out what resembled nothing so much as a scrap of pink frills and lace, and Sidney shuddered.

“But I like my bras,” he tried to argue. “They’re, uh, comfortable.” But even as he said it, he had to adjust the strap digging at his shoulder again. Ms. Vasquez pursed her lips in a sympathetic smile and shook her beautiful head.

“Oh, Cindy, you poor deluded girl,” she said. “Enough nonsense, darling! Off with this robe!” With a flourish, Ms. Vasquez divested him of the terry-cloth before Sidney could stop her, leaving him shivering in his underthings. “There

is no need to be shy, we're all girls here," Ms. Vasquez said lightly. "Bra off, darling."

"I really d-don't want t-to..." Sidney stammered, backing away.

"Nonsense!" Ms. Vasquez laughed. "Come on, now, let me..." She reached for the clasps of Sidney's sister's bra, but he managed to wriggle away.

"I'm shy!" Sidney squeaked, looking around for his clothes, wondering if he would have to make a break for it wearing nothing but girls' underwear.

"Don't be silly, Cindy!" Ms. Vasquez snapped, and grabbed Sidney's arm. She was far stronger than he'd anticipated, especially when angry, and judging by the stream of Spanish she was muttering as they wrestled, she was losing her patience. Sidney fought for dear life, trying to slap her hands away, but just as he thought he'd escaped, there was a tell tail sound of the clasp coming undone, and with his one arm pinned, Sidney could do nothing as the bra slipped down his pale chest and one balled-up pantyhose tumbled forlornly to the floor. He stared down at it in something like shock, trying to think up some way to beg for forgiveness, some excuse that would keep her from demanding the money back... Ms. Vasquez was staring at him, mouth open in surprise. The whole salon had gone silent. Sidney crossed his arms across his flat chest, wincing slightly at his newly-sensitive and puffy nipples, realizing with a vague sense of irony that he was acting like a girl who'd just lost her bra, rather than the boy he had now clearly been exposed as. He opened his mouth, still racking his brains for how to explain the whole charade, and then...

"Cindy, darling, why didn't you tell me?" Ms. Vasquez exclaimed. "Oh, you poor thing! Don't worry, muchachita, you are not some freak of nature!"

"I'm... I'm not?" Sidney stammered, confused as all get out.

"No!" Ms. Vasquez said emphatically. "Darling, you are a late bloomer, and that's nothing to be ashamed of! Some girls never get very large at all, you know, but they can still be very beautiful. And there are all sorts of little tricks to give the illusion of, how you say, 'bust!' Trust me, darling, I was not always so lucky as I am now. I understand everything now."

"You... you do?" Sidney echoed weakly.

"Jes!" Ms. Vasquez exclaimed. "This is the root of your insecurity, darling! You feel so ashamed of your flat chested body that instead of enjoying your femininity, you try to escape it and hide it altogether with your tomboyish clothes and behaviors! Well, I won't allow it to stand up, darling! I will come up with a solution! In the meanwhile, you can use these!" She dove to the bottom of her shopping bag and came up with two gel inserts that reminded Sidney of chicken cutlets in their size and shape. "Put your new bra on, darling," Ms. Vasquez said breathlessly. "Today, you are becoming a brand new woman!" Sidney gulped. She didn't know the half of it!