

**J O E   S I X - P A C K**

# ***SURRENDER TO CANDLEWICK***

**Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack  
Book Two of the “Housewives of  
Candlewick Court” series  
A Tales of Transformation story**



2017 Digital Edition

Design & layout © 2017  
Story & Illustrations © 2017 Joe Six-Pack  
All rights reserved.

The body text is printed in New Caledonia.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the copyright owner. All characters and situations are fictional.

Printed in the United States of America.

[j6p@sixpacksite.com](mailto:j6p@sixpacksite.com)  
[www.sixpacksite.com](http://www.sixpacksite.com)

## PREVIOUSLY

*In the story “In the Family Way,” Colin and Elliot Finch began a cat-fishing con to snare a lonely, gullible man into their trap. They caught a single father by the name of Doug Brundell, a genius genetic engineer. When Colin’s girlfriend leaves them high and dry for someone to play the part of a dream girlfriend, Colin finds himself disguising himself and taking up the role of “Dorothy.” Alongside him is his brother Elliot, who begins to play the part of Colin’s daughter.*

*Now several dates into their so-called relationship, Colin has become more and more obsessed with making himself the perfect girlfriend for Doug. However, his relentless obsession with changing his appearance to become the woman of Doug’s dreams seems to be having several side effects. Elliot, his 19-year old brother no longer objects to filling his role as a fourteen-year-old girl, and a little bit of “Emily” seems to be emerging from Elliot, even in his down time. Another unexpected turn is that Colin is adapting to his role as a mother all too easily, even wearing dresses around the clock, and wearing clothes cut for a much smaller, more slender woman without alteration. Or is it Colin who’s being altered?*

*In the story “Agent of Change” we met a young man who desperately wanted to have weight-reduction surgery. His father objected, but didn’t stop him. That was too bad, because the doctor they chose, Susan Hackstaff, hates men and was looking for a new victim. Now, the poor sixteen year old finds himself a 43 year old woman selling real estate. His father and even his doctor don’t fare well, either.*

*Finally, we met multi-billionaire Craig Luger, a fugitive from justice who has bankrolled the mysterious Candlewick Court development. He throws the switch to activate the development, designed to attract those fated to change genders, and expects the first residents to arrive very soon. In the pages ahead, the first residents finally arrive as the community takes shape.*

# SURRENDER TO CANDLEWICK



## IN THE FAMILY WAY

### PART 3

When Colin informed Elliot that they had scheduled another “bring the kids” date, the reaction was not what Colin had expected. His 19 year old brother was giddy.

“Where?” Elliot wanted to know.

Colin liked his enthusiasm. “A picnic!”

“Will Aiden be there?” Was the next question. “Have you picked out the outfits yet?” Was the one after that. “What are you going to make?”

With that kind of excitement, preparations for the trip took all of their time until the weekend came. Colin hadn’t put much thought into his picnic idea, beyond that he liked the idea of being outside and behaving like he and Doug were a couple. So it wasn’t until Elliot mentioned it that he realized he was going to have to put the food together.

While he had that to chew on, he needed to get their clothes together, too. After much deliberation, he had selected a red polka-dot dress with a collar and 3/4 cuffed sleeves. A pair of red espadrilles and a white belt were the perfect accessories.

For Elliot, he chose a salmon-colored short skirt and denim sleeveless top with pockets. Some brown sneakers and a necklace went with it.

“I don’t know,” Elliot said when he got a look at it. “Can I try it out, just to make sure?” Elliot asked. “Just, you know, wear it around so I’m comfortable in it?”

“Yeah, sure, go for it. Just don’t spill anything on it.”

“You’re going to wear yours all day, right?”

“Yeah, I guess I can.” Colin was about to ask why his brother wanted to play dress-up, but figured he was just getting into his role, like they normally did.

It was about an hour later when the older brother, in his polka-dot dress and apron, was staring at the fridge trying to figure out what he could make. Sandwiches were all he was prepared for, and peanut butter and jelly ones at that. In fact, the whole fridge was a nightmare of neglected jars and bottles full



of spoiled food. He had to fight an odd urge to clean the fridge, if not the whole kitchen, right there and then.

“What do people eat at picnics anyway?” He asked Elliot.

“I’ve never been on one,” the younger brother replied.

“I’m gonna google it.” Colin fed it into his phone. “Hot dogs? No, can’t do that. Hamburgers? No.” He was reading. “Cole slaw? No. Pasta salad...”

“We can do that!” Elliot said. “Just boil up some macaroni and cheese but skip the cheese.”

“We can then add mayonnaise and salad dressing. Boom. Pasta salad.” Colin liked this idea. “I’ll boil the pasta. You try to find mayonnaise or dressing.”

“Got it!” Elliot said.

“You can be Mommy’s little helper,” Colin said, wincing as he said it. That was just the sort of thing that could set his brother off.

“Yeah, okay,” Elliot said with half a smile.

*Whew*, Colin thought to himself.

By the time they were done with the so-called pasta salad, it was clear that that wasn’t quite a full meal. Elliot had dumped some potato chips into a container, but both knew they had to have something else of some sort.

“A dessert!” Colin said, suddenly realizing what was missing. “What do we have left to work with?”

Elliot took a second look. “There’s a jar of olives, half a box of frozen waffles, two cans of okra, raspberry jam, and Cool Whip,” he reported.

Colin was worried the concerned expression on his face was messing his immaculate make-up. He paced on the kitchen floor in his heels as he tried to think of a way out of this mess, castigating himself for not being more prepared. Usually, he was the master of preparation. Had he thought he could just whip up a full picnic like some sort of domestic goddess? Then, as if from nowhere, the answer was suddenly clear to him. Why hadn’t he seen it before? “I can work with that,” Colin said.

He mixed the raspberry jam and Cool Whip with a whisk and whipped it into a sweet frothy filing, sandwiched in between two toasted waffles. “Belgian Raspberry Whipped Delight,” he said when he had them done. “So simple a child could do it,” he added.

Before he even knew it, he had filled a tub with paper towels and ice cubes to maintain moistness and a chill, wrapped the treats in saran wrap and sealed it all up to survive the hour or so before they would be served. “They’ll thicken as they chill.”

“Where did you learn all that?” Elliot asked, impressed.

“It’s not that hard to figure out. Just simple kitchen skills.” It came so easily to him, the young man didn’t want to brag. He was kind of embarrassed to take credit for the idea. Colin checked the clock. “Oh, shoot! We’re out of time!”

“It’s okay, Mommy. You did great.”

“I couldn’t have done it without you, sweetie,” Colin said. “There’s no time to do any more. We’ll have to go as-is. Crud. How do I look?”

“You look... Very nice.” Elliot said, blushing.

“Nice? That’s all?” Colin removed his apron and turned himself left and right so Elliot could take a closer look. “Are you sure? My face? Does my dress look okay? I didn’t spill anything on it, did I?”

“No... You... You look amazing. You really do look like... A woman. A very pretty woman.”

The comment from his brother was unexpected. “Um, really?”

“I don’t know how to explain it, but you really do look like a mommy... Mommy.”

Colin had been noticing his slimmer waist, his leaner legs and smoother skin lately. He had been telling himself he was getting conceited, that he didn’t really look as good as he thought he did. But hearing compliments from someone besides Doug made it hard to ignore the truth anymore. He was cutting quite the feminine figure lately. His eyes involuntarily darted to the pills on the kitchen counter. Doug’s pills.

“I’m just more comfortable in a dress, I suppose,” he said to Elliot. “Losing weight helps.”

“Yeah, I guess it does,” Elliot said. “It really does.”

“You should talk. If I didn’t know myself, I’d say you really were a young girl. You look as much like an ‘Emily’ as if you were born a girl.”

“I *am* a girl, Mommy,” Elliot said with an impish smile. “And *you’re* really my Mommy.”

“Of course,” Colin replied, going with his brother’s suggestion. “At least for the next few hours.”

They parked the van as far away as possible from the park, to avoid its discovery, and met Doug and Aiden promptly at 11:30 at the entrance. It was a lovely, pastoral park, with a large pond and a creek that wound through the dozens of leafy green trees that lined the way. The weather was pleasant and mild, and birds were still chirping from the morning. It was picture postcard perfect.

“My, my. Don’t you look lovely,” Doug said when he arrived. Dressed in a suit, he kissed Colin with a peck on the lips.

“You both look very nice,” Aiden said, unexpectedly speaking up.

“Well, thank you, Aiden. How polite of you!” Colin was as just as impressed at his opening remark as he was with the way he was dressed. Aiden had gone with a crisp white dress shirt, buttoned up to the top button. His hair was neatly slicked back and he stood with his hands folded behind him, and a pensive look on his face. “And so well dressed!” Colin added. The compliment brought a genuine smile to Aiden’s face.

“I couldn’t ask for two lovelier ladies for a picnic at the park!” Doug jumped back in, laying it on thick. “Let me handle that basket. It’s what the men are good for.” He picked up the large picnic basket and carried it as he stuck out his arm for Colin. “Shall we?”

Colin took his arm and leaned into him. “Dress shoes for a picnic? A suit?” He asked.

“Sneakers felt too casual, and I knew you would be dressed to the nines. It’s the least I can do.”

“Well, you look amazing. You were born to wear a suit.”

“I have to agree,” Doug said.

“Mommy!” Elliot shouted, startling Colin. “They have boats!”

As Colin looked in the direction Elliot was pointing, he could see a few hobbyist remote control boats zipping along in the pond. Knowing his brother loved remote control anything and couldn’t pass up a WWII naval TV documentary, he wasn’t surprised to see the excitement on his face. “Go ahead, sweetie.”

Elliot was off like a shot. “Keep her out of trouble Aiden,” Doug said. Aiden ran off after Colin.

“She loves boats,” Colin explained to Doug.

“Maybe she’ll grow up to be a cruise ship director,” Doug suggested.

“Or something like that,” Colin replied. He noted that Doug appeared to be standing taller, not slumping like he had a tendency to. With his crisp blazer and tie, he could have been dressed for the office, but Colin did appreciate the effort to look professional, even at the park. He liked to think Doug was feeling more confident and sure of himself, and wanted to take more pride in his appearance. If he had been a small part of that, Colin was satisfied that his plan was coming along nicely.

They were probably a bit overdressed for a picnic, as Colin compared the way they looked to the others at the park, but it didn’t much concern him. He was dressing the way Doug wanted him to, and looked the way Doug liked a woman to look, and that was what mattered the most.

The two chose a spot by the creek, and laid out the picnic blanket. Colin unpacked the basket, laying out every item carefully on the best plates he had



been able to find back home. With every item, Doug gave an appreciative “ooh” and “ahh.”

He couldn't help but notice as he set up the plates and flatware, that Doug was helping by taking the items from Colin's long-nailed hands as making sure they touched as much as possible. Colin did his best to let his hands linger and then lean into Doug suggestively.

“I can't believe how nice a day it is,” Doug said, laying back. “I feel like I'm in a movie.”

“Which movie?”

“*Mad Max*.”

Colin laughed at the joke.

“I love the way you giggle,” Doug said.

Had he actually giggled? Colin hadn't even thought about it. He was just laughing at a clever comment. But yes, now that he thought about it, it had come out as a tinkling little giggle. He had even demurely covered his mouth with his fingers when he did it. *This impersonation is getting to me*, Colin thought.

“Perhaps I'm thinking of *On Moonlight Bay*. I'm always getting them mixed up.”

“Oh? Yes...” Colin stuttered. Was he supposed to know a film called “On Moonlight Bay?”

“You've never heard of it,” Doug inquired.

“I've never heard of it.”

“It's an oldie. I watch a lot of old musicals from the fifties. There's something about the style, the innocence, the way people lived back then. I'm a sucker for a good fifties film.”

“What's it about?” Colin said, getting closer to Doug. He adjusted his dress skirt as he folded his legs under him.

“It starts Doris Day as a teenage tomboy,” Doug said, looking into Colin's eyes. Colin liked to make sure he made direct eye contact with Doug whenever he started to tell a story. He wanted to look spellbound. “She lives in a nice part of town and when the rich neighbors move in next door, she falls in love with the neighbor's boy, both of them head over heels. But if she wants to marry him, she has to learn to be a proper young lady to impress him and his family. Her father doesn't approve of the rich family's ‘old fashioned’ ideas about marriage, but she's truly in love, and becomes the perfect wife for her future husband.”

“It sounds silly,” Colin said.

“Oh, it certainly is. Very silly.” Doug, betraying his usual nature, grasped Colin by the shoulders and kissed him, digging in with desperate lips.

Colin, taken quite by surprise, shook for a moment, his male instincts firing off on contact, but held himself together to let what was going to happen, happen. After all, he had been working towards just this kind of thing for weeks and months.

Doug pulled himself away and then recoiled. “Sorry,” he said, looking embarrassed.

“There’s nothing to be sorry about, darling,” Colin said. He realized this might be a moment where Doug would lose his nerve, so it was up to Colin to make sure he got the right signals — and at this moment, the right signal was to go back in, so he kissed him back.

There was a genuine warmth in Doug, something Colin didn’t expect to find there. When they had first met, the man looked as cold as a fish and uncomfortable in every way. Colin dreaded the idea of having to just touch him. Now, in his nice suit, an air of confidence to him and a hint of impulsiveness to him, Doug was nearly a different person. Now, Colin could cope with the situation. He could manage it. He could stay in a lip-lock with Doug for nearly two minutes, which is just what they had done.

“Buh!” Doug said, separating himself. “I need to breathe!”

Colin found himself gasping for air as well. As he steadied himself, he took a tissue from his purse and wiped Doug’s face where he had left his mark. “Lipstick. Hold still,” he instructed. He dabbed at it, moistened it with his licked thumb and dabbed some more. “There you go,” Colin said as he finished up.

“Uh... Well...” Doug fixed his hair and straightened his tie. “Do you think it’s about time to eat?”

Colin got to his feet and called out. “Kids! Time for lunch!” He yelled, in a surprisingly melodic tone. “Come and eat!” He had to scan the area for any sign of Elliot and Aiden, as they were no longer by the pond. Colin spotted them in the playground area, playing on the slides. That seemed a little young for the both of them, but they did look like they were having fun, and they were mixing with the other children there. “Aiden! Emily!” He called out again.

They came scrambling over the grass and landed on the picnic blanket like sacks of flour. “I’m starving!” Elliot said, grabbing for the food.

“Manners!” Colin said, slapping his brother’s outstretched hand. He then grabbed a can away from Aiden. “We’re not a pack of wild wolves!”

Aiden, shocked, looked to his father for support. “She’s in charge,” Doug said to his son.

Colin took his time. “Now, adults first. Douglas, let me have your plate...” Colin went about the methodical work of portioning out each plate with food,

and then admonishing anyone who dared start to eat before everyone had been served.

“I’m going to die of hunger!” Aiden whined.

“Listen to our hostess, young man,” Doug reminded his son. “You could learn a thing or two from her.”

Once they ate, Colin used his newfound power of manner enforcement to needle his brother and Aiden about their eating habits. He wasn’t happy until Elliot was taking smaller “More lady-like” bites and Aiden finished chewing before he talked.

They all enjoyed Colin’s special dessert treats, which were perfect. “Now leave the clean up to the women,” Colin said, much to Elliot’s visible displeasure.

“I don’t mind helping,” Aiden said.

“Let them do their job,” Doug told him.

They left the basket behind as strolled around the park for a few minutes as they walked off their meal. As they watched the ducks being fed and the tiny boats speed through the water, Colin and Doug were holding hands, looking like a couple very much in love.



“Are you and Emily’s Mom getting married?” Aiden asked his father as they drove home.

“Err...” Doug responded. “What? Us? No.” He then waited a long moment before he added, “But would you be okay if we spent more time together?”

“I guess,” Aiden replied, trying to look disinterested.

“Because I think we will.”

“Fine.”

Doug then waited for the moment to settle fore asking his next, extremely loaded question. “But if she was going to be your new mother, would that bother you?”

It was another long, protracted pause before Aiden answered, “I could live with it.”



Back at their apartment, Elliot and Colin dropped the spent picnic basket on the floor and then wobbled into the living room and crashed.

“Being a kid is exhausting,” Elliot said, his face half-immersed in a pillow.

Colin, collapsed in a frayed easy chair was staring up into the ceiling. “I was sure I was going to be discovered. All I could think about was any second I was going to blow the whole thing.”

Elliot turned his head. “You were perfect. It’s like you were possessed by the spirit of motherhood. You were... *Perfect*.”

“As if. You were the one who nailed it. I thought you had lost your mind and started to truly believe you were a little girl.”

Expecting a reply, and not getting one, Colin lifted his head so he could see his brother. He had pushed his head deeper into the pillow.

“Gonna suffocate yourself,” Colin advised. He still didn’t get a rise out of Elliot so he took a closer look. That was when he noticed the heaving of his shoulders.

He got up, concerned, and shook his brother’s arm. “Elliot?” He asked.

Elliot separated his face from the pillow, only to show the mess he was making, with tears coming from his eyes and his face messed up as he was trying to hold back his crying. “I’m s... s... Sorry.” He said, trying to talk as his emotions fought him.

“Dude?” Colin asked.

“I... I just miss Mom... So much...” He grabbed the pillow and tried to stuff it over his face again, ashamed of what he had said.

Colin had to think for a second, because he wasn’t sure what their mother had to do with anything. That was when he looked down at the flare of his dress and realized where this was all coming from. “Oh, shit,” He said as he knelt by his brother. “I’m sorry. I know. I miss her too, bud.”

In all the years since she had passed away, the both of them hadn’t shed a tear over it. From Colin’s perspective, he absolutely felt like breaking down every time he thought about her. Therefore, he had tried to stop thinking about her. Over the years, he had gotten quite successful at it. Maybe his brother had been doing the same, he figured. Now it was coming out, thanks to his little disguise.

“Wh... Wh... Why? Why am I crying?” Elliot sobbed. “I can’t stop crying!”

Colin patted him on the back. “It’s all right. It’s okay.” Elliot then turned and grabbed on to Colin, pressing his tear-soaked eyes into his brother’s chest. Impulsively, Colin started to pat him on the head. “Shh. Shhh...” He said. “It’s okay, sweetie. Just cry it out.”

“I... I want my Mom back,” Elliot said, trying to explain himself, as he continued to cry.

Colin continued to comfort him. “It’s all right, honey. It’s okay.” Now he was the one who felt like crying. At least he had the advantage of being dressed in

women's clothes, he thought to himself. *Why is that an advantage?* He then asked himself. *Why would he think that?*

Because, as he admitted to himself, he had never felt closer to his mother than he did when dressed up. The familiar scent of her perfume which he wore, her jewelry on his body, the feel of silky undergarments and stockings. The taste of a woman's lipstick on his lips. His mother hadn't felt so real to him in such a long time, and he had the comfort of her presence in the way he dressed and the way he acted. Who was he to keep that kind of ease of mind to himself?

"Would you like me to stay like this?" Colin asked.

The answer was the anguished clutch of Elliot's hands at the sides of Colin's dress. He also felt his younger brother nod his head ever so slightly. He didn't need him to say it out loud. It was a strange question that required a difficult answer.

*This could also work in my favor,* said the hustling, con-artist part of his mind. "I'll make you a deal," Colin offered. "I'll be Dorothy if you'll be Emily." He needed a way to talk his brother into being "Emily" full-time if they were going to move in with Doug, as Colin planned. He knew that was going to be trouble when the day came, and this was just what he needed to cajole him into doing it.

"For how long?" Colin said, looking up at Colin.

"A while. Until we decide to stop," Colin replied with a comforting smile.

"Is this weird?"

"It doesn't have to be." Colin said. "We were going to have to do it more often anyway. You know, when we move in to their house."

"How long is that going to be?"

"Sooner than you might think. So we might as well, right?" Again, Colin wasn't going to make his brother say it out loud. "You're going to be Dorothy's little girl from this minute on, okay? And Dorothy will be Emily's mommy, all right?"

"But what if..." Elliot started to ask.

"Shush," Colin answered. "No going back. No complaints. No go-backs. We're in it as if it were real."

Elliot started to tear up again, and Colin held his head to his chest and hugged him.

"Thank you, Mommy," Elliot said, in a small, unsure voice.

"For what, sweetie? That's just what mommies do."



It was a quiet night, as Elliot didn't seem to want to really explore the new arrangement in any significant way. He watched TV, ate, and went to bed.

Colin was just going to let him ease into it for now. However, tomorrow would be a different story. He was very willing to make the sacrifices necessary to get Elliot completely on board and under control. Having his younger brother be Emily for the duration was a big win, even if it did mean that he had to be Dorothy full-time. He was used to it enough by now that it wasn't going to be too hard to fake being a woman 24/7, and he was ready to deal with everything that being a woman entailed.

It started that night, when Colin had to stop himself from stripping down and jumping in bed in shorts and a tee. He headed across the hallway to his mother's room and picked out a silky nightie that appealed to him. And while he was there, he just decided that the big fluffy bed in that room was far more comfortable looking than his half-dead beaten old mattress.

Drifting off to sleep, Colin's thoughts focused in his plans. With Elliot now no longer a worry, it was time to close the deal on Doug. As he stretched out under the cool sheets in the slick, soft material of his nightie, he was sure that success was almost inevitable. Every day, he would make himself more and more irresistible to Doug.

He wanted a more traditional woman, and he would be that woman. He would dress like the women in those musicals he loved. He would be the innocent and fun-loving girl of Doug's dreams. He would let the "man" make the decisions and lead the way. He would build up his confidence and make him feel great about himself. He would be the ideal housewife just waiting to be proposed to. Doug was going to be putty in Dorothy's long-nailed hands.



Colin was up extra early the next morning, because he didn't want to let his younger brother think twice about what he was going to do.

"Emily honey! Wake up!" He called out as he came down the hallway, already dressed for the day. "Get up, lazy bones!"

Elliot, groggy and confused pried open his eyes to see Colin in his full Dorothy splendor, pulling the sheets off of him.

"I want you dressed and ready to go, Emily! Mommy has a big day planned." Colin walked over to the bags where "Emily's" clothes were kept. "Do you want me to pick something out for you? Yes. Why don't you wear this nice 2-in-1 dress. You'll look lovely in that."

"What...?" Elliot began to speak in his deep, throaty morning voice.

Colin cut him off. “Emily. Don’t play games. We need to get going. I need you ready in ten minutes. Dressed, hair combed and waiting in the living room. Understand, sweetie? I can’t leave a little girl here by herself all day.”

Elliot had the faintest hint of a smile on his lips. “Yes, Mommy,” he said, in his Emily voice.

“Time to move, then,” Colin said, as he left the room. “Those would go well with some black tights and ballerina flats. Ten minutes!”

The first stop they made was at a pawn shop. A pair of diamond and gold cufflinks Colin had been holding on to from his father’s belongings fetched a little less than three thousand dollars.

Elliot almost spoke up when he saw them being hocked. They were the last things left behind by their dad, and had been considered untouchable by the both of them. It was if Colin was selling off his last memories of their dad, and Elliot, for a moment, felt like he should stop Colin.

But it wasn’t his place to interrupt the adults. He trusted Colin to know what he was doing.

The next stop was at the salon. Just before they went in, Colin took off his wig and placed it on a styrofoam head, then into a large box, and pinned a large



floppy hat to his head instead. "I was told you did work on styling wigs," he said to the girl at the desk.

The receptionist took the box and looked inside. "Oh yes, we do. You'll want to talk to Hildy."

Hildy was the stylist who had worked with Dorothy on her first visit to the salon, and was pleased to have a returning customer. Colin showed her the wig and then presented a few printouts of hair from the fifties movies he had scanned for hairstyles.

"It's a little retro, isn't it?" Hildy said.

"That's the idea," Colin replied. "Can you do it?"

"Yes! Retro's my thing. Could you tell?" She said, patting her elaborately styled hair. "I can have it for you tomorrow. Drop by any time after noon to pick it up."

"I'll see you then. Come along, Emily." Colin waved goodbye as he led Emily back to the van. "You're being very well behaved," he said to his ersatz daughter. Elliot just kept walking.

The next stop was at a vintage dress shop that Colin had found on the web, hoping for the best. The assortment wasn't quite what he was looking for. "Do you have any more foundation garments? Body shapers, girdles, corselettes?"

The girl who was helping him was apologetic. "This is all we have. I know it isn't much, but it's not something we get a lot of."

"Tsk," Colin said. "Oh, but you do have seamed stockings!" He said, walking over to a display. He pulled a pair off the table and got a closer look. "That's a must buy."

"You have good taste," the girl said.

"Well, my boyfriend does," Colin said. He smiled at saying the term "boyfriend." It sounded a little ridiculous. "Can I try the stockings on with the dresses?"

"Of course! You'll need a suspender garter though."

"I'm already wearing one," Colin was proud to say.

As he tried on the six dresses he had picked out, he was complimented by the salesgirl on each one.

"You have the perfect figure for these kinds of clothes," she said.

"I just wish they *all* fit me," Colin said. He had settled on two of them, and was on the fence about a third that was a little loose around the waist. They were expensive, but with his new purse full of cash, he was feeling daring. "I really like the aqua chiffon. Do you do alterations?" He asked.

"We don't. Sorry."



“A girl like me should just learn to sew for herself.” *Why had he said that?* Colin wondered to himself. “Well, I’ll buy it anyway and try and get it altered.”

“You know who might? You can try this place.” The girl picked up a business card from her desk and blew some dust off of it. “La Fifi’s. They’ve been around forever.” She handed the card over. “They’re supposed to do alterations. They might also have some of those foundation garments you’re looking for, too. It’s worth a shot, at least.”

“Well, I can take a dress and get it altered anywhere, can’t I?”

“You really want a place that knows how to fit for vintage underwear. Modern underwear doesn’t fit quite as well with real vintage dresses.”

“Thank you. I’ll look them up. And thanks for the tip.”

Elliot, who had been waiting in the car, was staring out the window when Colin came back. “Are we done?” Elliot asked as Colin carefully laid out the dresses and bags in the back of the van.

“Not yet. I still have to...” Colin’s phone rang and he took the call. “Hello? This is...” He checked the caller ID. It was Doug, calling from work. “...Dorothy.”

“I had a great time at the park yesterday. Dessert was wonderful,” Doug said.

“I’m so glad, Douglas,” Colin said, sweetly.

Immediately Elliot rolled his eyes and sighed. He went back to staring out the window.

“I wanted to return the favor and invite you and your daughter to dinner tomorrow night,” Doug said. “Somewhere nice. Semi-formal.”

“Oh, okay...” It was a sign of how deep Colin was into his disguise that the first and most important thing that crossed his mind was figuring out if he had anything to wear. “I’d love to. It sounds wonderful. Emily will be so excited!”

“How about Da Vinci’s? Italian?”

“We’ll be there. I can’t wait.”

“Neither can I.”

Colin ended the call and immediately looked over to Elliot. “New plan. We have one more chore to complete.”

“Ugh,” Elliot said, letting his head fall back in anguish.

Colin could see on his face that he badly wanted to get into an argument, the only thing holding him back was the agreement to stay in their roles. “Don’t you dare,” Colin said. “Be a good girl for Mommy.”

Elliot crossed his arms and pouted.

Curious, Colin took a long drive out of his way to check out the business card he had just received. It took a little hunting, but he found ‘Madame La Fifi’s

House of Paris Fashion' but it was closed up tight, which was heartbreaking. Colin could see a huge assortment of vintage clothing on sale in a store that was twenty times the size of any vintage shop he'd seen so far. In fact, it didn't even look like a purposely vintage shop, just a shop from the fifties or sixties that was still around in the modern age, fallen through a tear in time.

The windows were dusty, the insides were dark and it was hard to get a good look, but it was exactly the kind of store Colin needed, filled with outfits Doug would go wild for. Unfortunately, the door was locked, and it didn't look like it had actually been open for a while.

So Colin took the van over to the last vintage store on his list, which had a website with a promising selection of dressy outfits. "Something nice for a dinner out," he asked the clerk at the store.

"Something formal?"

"Formal-ish. Not too fancy." This time, Elliot was accompanying him. "And do you have anything for my daughter?"

The clerk wasn't very confident. "We might have a couple of items? Maybe?"

Colin was on his way to looking at what the clerk was about to show them, when he stopped his high heels in their tracks. "Oooh," he said. "Gloves." A mannequin was wearing a pair of white over-the-elbow gloves and it grabbed Colin's attention right away. That was so Doug. However, opera gloves were a little too formal for a family dinner.

The rack of children's clothes was sparse, and only a few items were even going to fit Elliot. Colin picked two outfits off the rack, and handed them to his younger brother, but as he was looking for a third, Elliot had already slipped away into the changing room.

So Colin went about finding his own dress for the big date, and was falling in love with a pink brocade cocktail dress with rhinestones when Elliot reappeared.

His outfit was a blue plaid pinafore dress and a matching blue bolero jacket with a peter pan collar. He was also wearing a blue beret to complete the outfit.

"Oh, that's cute, but's a little young for you, sweetie," Colin said. There was just something about it that made it look all wrong for Elliot. "You better put it back. I don't know if they have what we're looking for."

Elliot took a step back to the dressing room and then stopped. He turned around. "But I like it," he said. "You got a bunch of stuff *you* like."

Colin didn't expect any pushback from Elliot, especially when it came to buying a dress. But he had a point. "Well, if you like it, we can get it," he told him.

The bright, broad smile Colin was rewarded with told him he had made the right decision. "Thank you, Mommy," he said, with a hint of a blush.



Colin took a second look at his brother, and tried to pinpoint exactly what he didn't like about the outfit. He just looked so... small and... child-like in that outfit. In fact, he looked smaller and shorter to his eyes. Upon further thought, Colin decided that it was perfectly fine for the dinner. It was a cute look, even if Elliot looked a little too young for 14.

They wound up buying not only Elliot's outfit and that pink cocktail dress but Colin had chosen a neat skinny black tie for Doug and even one for Aiden, as well. After all, if he was going with a classic retro look, the men needed to do it as well, he reasoned.



When the night of the big dinner came, Colin had settled on the pink dress after several coin flips. He was regretting his little spending spree, because now he had too many dresses to wear and not enough occasions to wear them all.

He exited his mother's bathroom after a nice relaxing bath. The foaming bath stress relief bottle was just sitting there, unused and lonely, so a bubble bath it was. He dabbed his sensitive skin dry and rubbed himself a generous layer of moisturizer before he was ready for his date.

If the Colin of just a few months ago was watching, he would have screamed dire warnings to his future self. He was going native, old Colin would have said. However, the current Colin was seated on his mother's bed, examining his body, gently grazing his fingers over his skin, hopeful to find it smooth and flawless. Satisfied that he didn't have any hair to take care of, as he hadn't for weeks now, he powdered his skin and put on his bra & panties.

The big secret hidden in between his legs wasn't so big anymore. A quick tuck and a slight wriggle of his hips was enough to conceal everything he needed to maintain the illusion. His old self would have fainted straight away to see his precious clam hammer a shadow of its' former self, but the current Colin was only satisfied when he could detect no trace of it left in his silky briefs.

He fed his arms into his favorite bra, because by now, he had a favorite, with the straps adjusted just right and the support the way like liked it. Today, though, he found it uncomfortable, as he tried to fasten it up properly. It pinched him like it never had before. After fighting with it, clasping it and unclasping it, he found that if he just got rid of one the two inserts he had in each cup, it fit like a glove. It was his own flesh filling out those cups now, feeling natural and cozy. Colin paid no attention to it, continuing on with his dressing and beauty ritual as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

Neither did he take note when he pulled the straps of his waist cincher to the tightest setting, giving him a 24-inch waistline. He didn't notice that the seamed silk stockings he put on, made for a woman with medium length legs

and size seven shoes, fit him perfectly. Nor did he give any hesitation about spritzing perfume behind his ear to encourage Doug to smell him there — and a spray went in his cleavage, too.

He stepped into the voluminous tea length crinoline petticoat that would make his dress look spectacular, and finally, eased the dress over himself.

“Emily!” He called out.

“Yes?” Elliot responded, coming to the door. He was dressed in his coral romper, his feet in white sandals.

“Could you... Uh... Help me out with the zipper?” Colin asked, slightly embarrassed.

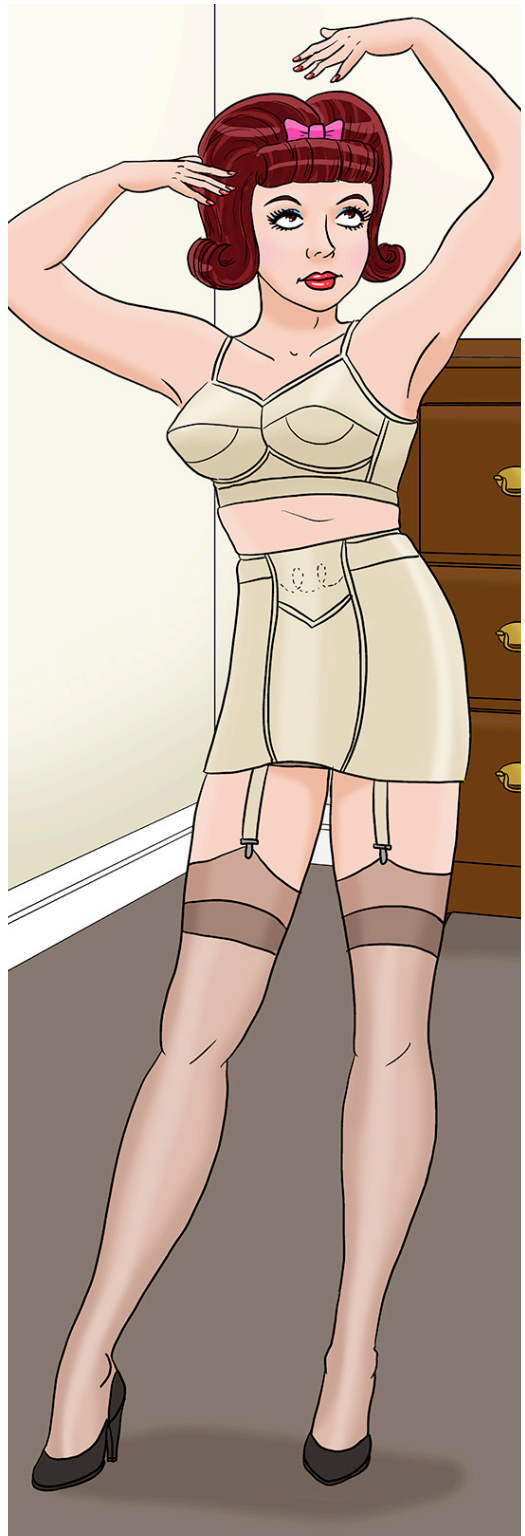
“Okay.”

As Colin turned his back, he never even saw that his 19 year old brother had to stand on the tips of his toes to reach when he zipped it up to the neck. “Thank you, sweetie. You should be getting dressed, too. Do you... Er... Need Mommy to help you?” He really didn’t want to press Elliot. He had been totally “in character” for two days now, and Colin was worried he was going to do something to break the streak.

“I don’t think so,” Elliot replied, thoughtfully. “I think I got it.”

“Okay, good. But let me know if you need my help.”

“All right, Mommy,” Elliot replied and he turned to walk back to his room. It was funny to hear how naturally the word



“Mommy” just came out of his mouth. The hint of emphasis he used to use was completely gone.

Now it was time for the final touch. He grabbed the large round box that was resting at the foot of his mother’s bed and opened the lid. Inside was the newly re-styled wig he had picked up this afternoon from Hildy at the salon. Colin was overjoyed with how it turned out. It was just like he wanted it to look.

The color was a rich dark brown, like triple-stained wood. It was parted from ear to ear, creating a wave of immaculate bangs in the front and a volumized back that looked elegant and sophisticated. “I’ve missed you,” he whispered as he put on the wig, and fastened it to his hair, securing it in place. Now he looked complete. What’s more, he felt complete.

He grabbed a small clutch purse and checked his pristine makeup in the mirror. He blew himself a kiss. “Are you all set?” Colin called out in his soft, melodious Dorothy voice.



“You are absolutely breathtaking,” Doug said, as he arrived. They had agreed to meet at a local café, where Doug would then drive them to the restaurant.

“Such flattery,” Colin replied with a bashful turn of his cheek.

“And who’s this little lady?” Doug said to Elliot.

Elliot just giggled as he squinted his eyes.

Doug was ebullient. “Such fashionable young women! I dare say everyone will be jealous of us at Da Vinci’s.”

“That reminds me,” Colin said, handing two long flat boxes to the men. “I got a present for both of you.”

“A tie!” Doug said with a smile.

“A tie?” Aiden said, as his shoulders dropped.

“I’ll put it on right now,” Doug said, unfastening the tie he was already wearing. He discarded it and started to wrap the new tie around his collar.

“Do you need help?” Colin said to Aiden, taking the tie from the box without waiting for an answer. She crouched down in front of him and flipped up his collar. “Don’t fidget,” Colin told him.

“You know, I’d have been happy to pick you up at your place,” Doug said.

“Honestly? I would die if you saw our little hovel,” Colin said.

“I’m sure it’s not as bad as you describe it.”

“No, it’s worse.” She then finished up with Aiden. “You’re quite the ladykiller!” He told with young boy.

“Aiden...?” his father prompted his son.

“Thank you,” Aiden hesitantly sputtered. He looked a little ashamed to be wearing a bow tie, but he didn’t fuss with it. Colin wasn’t sure if the old Aiden might re-emerge when a goody-goody little tie was put on him, so he was pleased to see him stand and take it, albeit visibly uncomfortable.

“You look nice,” Elliot told him. That put a hint of a smile on his face, and relaxed him.

“You look better,” he replied, almost in a whisper.

Doug clapped his hands. “Let’s get going, we have reservations!”

From that moment on, Colin let Doug run the evening. Fortunately Doug was more than ready to do just that. He opened up the car door and helped Colin out as he gave the keys to the valet. He held the door open for the “ladies” and then took care of business with the head waiter.

“Brundell, table for four,” the man in the tuxedo said. “Right this way.”

The waiter made for Colin’s chair, but Doug took the initiative and pulled it out for his date.

“Thank you, darling,” Colin said as he arranged his skirt properly.

“Aiden,” Doug said, to nudge his son. He promptly stopped what he was doing and assisted Elliot with his chair.

“Thank you!” Elliot said with an earnest smile.

The waiter handed out the menus to everyone, and said he would be back in a few minutes. Colin put the menu down on the table. “You can order for me,” he told Doug.

“L... Uh...” Doug looked flummoxed, but then he steadied himself. “Of course,” he said.

While he was scanning the menu, Colin took care of the “kids.”

“Elbows off the table,” he advised Aiden. “Don’t undo the napkin until the food comes, Emily,” he told his brother. “If either of you need to use the bathroom, now would be the time to do it. Once the food is here, there won’t be time.”

“Mooooommm...” Elliot groaned.

“I won’t bother you about it again.” He paused. “And I don’t want to hear that kind of tone from you in public, young lady.”

Elliot folded his hands in his lap. “I’m sorry, Mommy.”

“You know I love you, sweetie.”

The phrase might have just been a casual thing to say, but Elliot immediately brightened up, looking like he had just won an award.

“How long is this going to take?” Aiden asked. “I wanted to watch TV tonight.”

The challenge to Colin's parenting skills was on. "Aiden, I'm sorry, but this is going to probably be a while. But I'm sure it'll be better than TV. You're going to have a wonderful meal served to you, the best you've had in quite a while. Choose something that sounds good! Then, when we're all done here, it'll be time to go get ice cream."

"Ice cream!" Elliot yelled, almost too loudly.

"Simmer down. Now focus on what you want to eat, because you want to make the right choice!"

Aiden picked up the menu and studied it closely, quieting his displeasure and giving him something to do. Elliot did much the same from his seat, although he was whispering "ice cream!" under his breath.

Colin turned around and returned his attention to Doug, who was staring at him with the strangest expression on his face. "You should be looking at what's on the menu," Colin said.

"I've already made my choice," he said, his eyes fixed on Colin. "You're so good with kids."

"I... Suppose it just comes naturally," Colin said, with a uneasy smirk. He happened to glance at Aiden's tie. He thought back to when he had tied it for him. When, if ever, had he learned to tie a bow tie? He had done it without even thinking. "Just a mother's instinct?"

Dinner was quite good, Colin enjoying Doug's choice of a fancy salad. They found a walk-up ice cream store two blocks away and strolled through the warmly-lit streets for the rest of the evening as they finished their desserts.

Colin was quite aware that Doug has holding him closer than was absolutely necessary. "Your hair is amazing," he told Colin. "And you smell wonderful."

The man was completely under his spell, Colin told himself.

It wasn't too late when they returned to the apartment, but when they got inside and Colin went to go deposit his purse, he returned to the living room to find his brother out cold, dozing away.

The only way to get him to bed was to pick him up and carry him, something Colin found surprisingly easy, even in his high heels. "Have you gotten lighter? Or...?" Colin silently asked his brother.

He laid him down on his bed, stripped him of his clothes and pulled a nightshirt over him before tucking slumbering Elliot into bed.

"Good night, Emily," Colin said as he turned out the lights.

"Night, Mommy," he could hear very quietly coming from the bed.





It was a couple of weeks later that Colin was seated at the kitchen table with a notepad, going over his strategy. He tapped his long, red nails on his glossy red lips as he was reviewing the steps needed to bring off his grand scheme.

The first and most difficult part of his plan was complete. Through cunning, manipulation, and an impeccable sense of subterfuge, Colin had gotten Doug Brundell, the mark, to fall in love with him. His creation and execution of the Dorothy Farmer character had come off beautifully. If Doug suspected anything, Colin sure hadn't been able to detect it.

Colin was not above self-congratulation, and he admired his own ability to fool a grown man into believing he was a woman. At first, Colin had been frightened every time he was seen in public, sure he would be discovered. Any pair of eyes could see through his disguise and ruin his plans. Gradually, he realized that he was able to fool just about anyone and everyone. Now, going out to pick up something at the drug store dressed in a wig, skirt and heels was no more a concern than it was when he was dressed as normal — which was not that common, these days.

So Colin asked himself, what was the next step? He wrote it down on the pad: Next steps. He underlined it.

Now that he had Doug right where he wanted him, how could he make sure he'd be able to steal him blind? Colin figured Doug was the type to keep a few thousand dollars around the house for emergencies, so he'd have to get that information out of him, somehow. Likely he had valuables, such as jewelry, watches, family keepsakes, that sort of thing. Colin had it all written down. Money, jewelry, watches.

Now if he really wanted to clean the chump out, he'd need access to the bank accounts. An ATM would only allow a few hundred dollars to be taken out each day, and Doug would probably be smart enough to cut it off after a few hours once he knew he was being robbed.

However, if they got married, then he'd have access, but that would probably be impossible. No, what Colin was going to have to do would be get Doug to buy something extremely valuable and portable. Something he could take and cash out.

The obvious thing was jewelry. He could fence jewels quickly and without being traced. What he needed was for Doug to have some fancy jewelry. Then it came to him: an engagement ring. He needed to get Doug to propose to him. It would be perfect. Quick to liquidate, small, and he wouldn't have to sneak it out.

Colin held out his hand and imagined a big, glittery diamond ring on his finger. "That's exactly what I need," he said to himself.

He wrote that down, too. "Get Engaged to Douglas." He circled it. Colin added a couple of hearts, idly.

The young man's train of thought was derailed when he heard a noise. It came and went. Came and went. It was repeating. Colin slipped his heels back on and stood up, looking for the noise. As he danced this way and that, trying to pinpoint the source of the low, buzzing sound, his full skirt twirled around him. The sound wasn't from the pot on the stove he was using to cook a sauce for dinner. No, it certainly wasn't from the radio which was playing a little oldies big band. It was coming from the... Trash?

He popped open the trash drawer. It made a noise again. "Eeek!" He squealed. He really hoped it wasn't a mouse. The thought of it being a mouse terrified him. Standing on a small step stool, Colin used a broom handle to poke the trash. It didn't respond. It just kept buzzing away. After a minute of convincing himself it wasn't a little rodent, because it was buzzing too regularly, he got off the stool and started to pick through the trash.

"A cell phone?" Colin said, when he found the culprit. It had been set on vibrate. After wiping some discarded food off of it, he recognized it. He called out. "Elli..." He caught himself. "Emily?" He called as he walked from the kitchen area to the couch.

Elliot looked up from the TV. He was sitting on the floor, in a pair of purple shorts and a pink cap-sleeved tee shirt, his hair tied into two stubby tails, leaning against the couch as he was watching. "What?"

"Missing something?" Colin said, displaying his soggy phone.

"Oh... Uh... I threw it away."

"Is it broken?"

"No... I just don't want it anymore."

"There's, like, a hundred unanswered messages on here!" Corin pointed out.

Elliot shrugged and looked back at the TV. "I guess."

"C'mon! It's practically your whole life on this phone. You can't just throw it in the trash."

"Well, I did."

Colin grunted. "It's a cell phone! It's worth at least..."

"Eight dollars on trade in," Elliot replied. "Not worth it. Just put it back in the trash, okay? I already cancelled the service."

"I'm not going to throw out a perfectly good..."

"Please, Mommy."

"Don't you 'Mommy' me!" Colin shot back. "Just abandoning your..."

Then the phone rang. Colin checked the phone in his hand, but that wasn't the one. He took his eyes off of his brother to glance back at his purse, with his phone inside. It was his own phone back in the kitchen that was going off.

Colin headed back to the kitchen to answer the call. “I appreciate that you really want to make this whole thing work, but I can’t let you just...” He picked up the phone to check the ID. It was Doug. “Great timing.” He looked back at Elliot when he was just about to answer. “Where did you get that?” He asked.

“Get what?”

“That.” Colin pointed at the large stuffed rabbit in Elliot’s lap. He didn’t remember seeing it just a moment ago.

“Mr. Moppit?” Elliot replied, as if he was confused he was even being questioned. “I’ve always had Mr. Moppit.”

“I...” Colin’s phone continued to ring. He had to answer it. “We’re not finished, here,” Colin said as he took the call.

“Hello? Douglas?” Colin’s expression went right from perplexed and frustrated to pleasant and delighted instantly upon talking to Doug. “I was just thinking of you.” He turned away from his brother so he could distance himself from whatever Elliot was up to.

“I’ve got something very exciting to tell you, Dorothy,” Doug said. “I got a promotion.”

“You did?” Colin exclaimed, genuinely happy. “That’s wonderful! Did you get a raise?” That was why Colin was so happy for him. More money equalled more to steal.

“A generous raise. It’s a managerial position... Less time in the lab and more time behind a desk... But...” He stopped himself. “But I couldn’t have gotten it without you, my dear Dorothy. Your confidence in me had meant everything to me. Ever since you came into my life, things have been going my way. And I want to share it all with you.”

“Oh, Douglas...” Colin was tempted to tell him to go buy a big, expensive ring right now, but he kept his impulses in check.

“They’re giving me a couple of weeks in between ending my current responsibilities and beginning my new job. So I wanted to take you and Emily down to Cancun. What do you think?”

Well, he couldn’t steal a vacation, so he had to pause. “I don’t know what to say!” He gave himself a moment to think. At least a vacation with the four of them was another family-like activity. “It’s so unexpected.” Then again, Colin mused, maybe this was just all an excuse to propose to him in a tropical locale. “Emily and I would love to go.”

The happiness in Doug’s voice was obvious, even over the phone line. “I’m so happy. We’ll talk more when I get off work. But it’ll be this next weekend, so there’s not much time.”

“*This* weekend?” Colin exclaimed. “I’ll have to begin packing right away!”

“Well, I’ll leave you to it. We’ll talk later.”

The gears in Colin’s mind were already spinning. “Yes. Of course. Congratulations, Darling.”

“Thank you. I can’t wait to see you in a swimsuit. I’ll call you.”

The line went dead as Colin began to pump both of his fists in the air. “Boom shaka-laka!” He shouted. “Whoo-woo! All aboard the money train!”

Elliot was already on his feet and standing by Colin’s side, having heard their side of the conversation. “What is it, Mommy? Is it good news?”

“You and me are going on an all expenses-paid vacation to Cancun,” He said, holding out his hand for a high-five. Elliot just stared at it, puzzled, before Colin took his hand back. “Mr. Moneybags got a promotion, and is going to celebrate by taking us all down south of the border. Hotels, free meals, the works!”

“That’s in Mexico, isn’t it?”

“Yup. Sunny, tropical Mexico.”

“But that means we’ll need...”

“Clothes!” Colin interrupted. “You and I are going to need a whole new wardrobe!”

“No, I mean, documents. Passports.”

“Oh yeah, that’s right.” Colin scratched the back of his hand. “That’s not that hard, though, I know some people.” Then a look of real concern came across his face. “I’m going to have to wear a bathing suit!”

The two boys wasted no time. Colin got his brother in the van and it was another sweep of the vintage stores, this time looking for the best in tropical beachwear. They didn’t find much, and what they did find was expensive. Colin had already spent every dollar left from selling his father’s items. Now he was dipping into the insurance money.

He had a heck of a time finding a swimsuit, too. He eventually just gave up and decided he’d just have to make up an excuse or talk himself out of any occasion requiring him to dress in one. Besides, he might not be able to keep his secrets in such a tight, form-fitting getup.

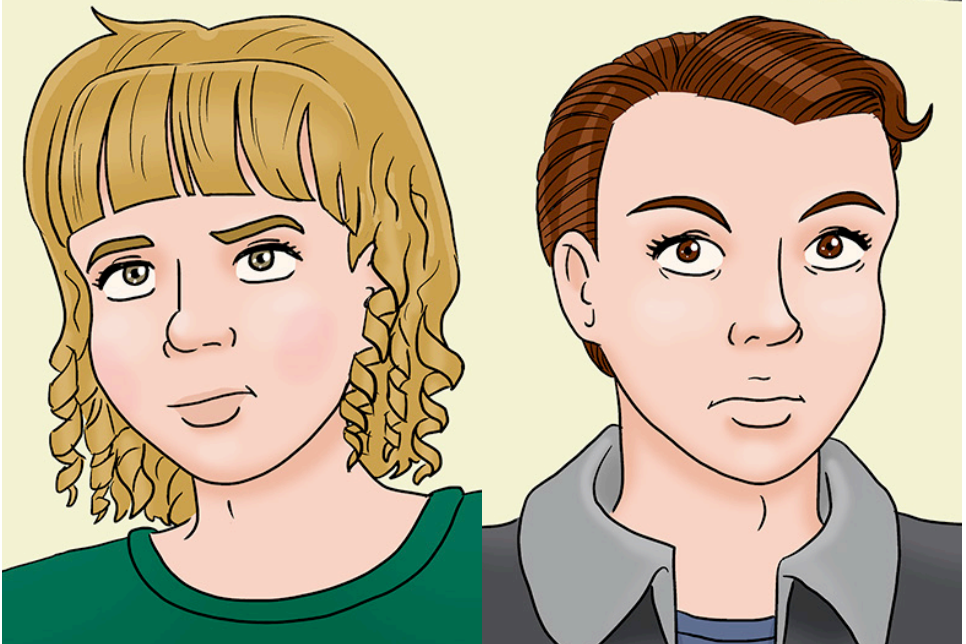
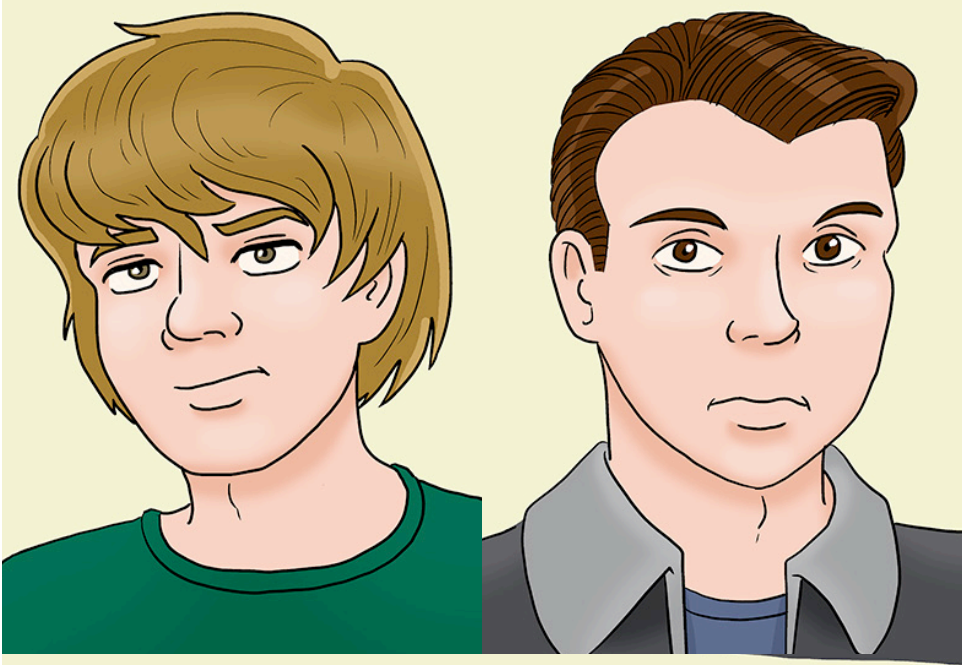
Colin had made several purchases of old-fashioned shorts and sarongs that he was going to pair with conservative tank tops and a beach coat or two. That was the best he could do.

Much to Colin’s chagrin, Elliot had selected four or five two-piece bathing suits for himself, being a little more daring in his younger body.

“I swear I have no idea what our sizes are,” Colin said, trying to select a sporty tunic for walking around. “At first I was a 12, then a ten, then an eight... I think

I'm a six now. It's so irritating to have to size up clothes every single time I go shopping."

"I can't even wear my old clothes any more," Elliot said. "They're too big for me."



“I know exactly how you feel,” Colin replied. “Women’s sizes are so unpredictable.” Neither of them could even process why that was a serious issue they should be concerned about. They were oblivious to the true nature of their predicament. Something was blocking them from seeing reality as it was. Even looking in the mirror, on the rare occasions when they were dressed in their usual clothes, they didn’t see the changes they had gone through.

“But thank goodness I can wear all of Mom’s old shoes now. She’s got some real sexy strappies I just love,” Colin said with a smile.

“I wish I was a pretty as you, Mommy,” Elliot said.

“Aw. You’re very pretty in your own way, sweetheart.”



“Settle down, now.”

“But I’ve never been on a plane before,” Elliot said. “It’s so scary.”

Colin tried to soothe his brother’s nerves. “It’s okay, sweetheart. It’s okay to be scared, but there’s nothing to be afraid of.”

“What if we go too high and can’t come back down?” Elliot asked.

Colin wasn’t sure if his brother was putting on some kind of master class of acting, deliberately teasing him, or just masking his own fears by behaving like a child. Whatever he was doing, though, it was starting to tick Colin off.

Doug had booked them the aisle section on the flight to Cancun, four seats, all together. It was Colin and Elliot’s first flight, as they never had much money growing up, or anyplace to go. They were not as prepared as they should have been, and just getting to the flight had been fraught with problems. Luckily, neither Elliot nor Colin had been selected for any thorough physical examinations going through security, and their forged passports didn’t get any extra scrutiny.

Getting a taxi was harder than Colin ever thought possible, as most of them ‘didn’t go to the airport.’ Getting the bags out of the cars — and they had managed to fill several suitcases with their clothes — required assistance. Elliot, as a girl, wasn’t going to be expected to haul two huge suitcases through the airport, even if he was fully capable of carrying them, and Colin couldn’t manage much more than a single small case in his heels.

The check-in was a long wait followed by problems confirming their seats, the security was fraught with pitfalls, the gate was slow and the flight was delayed. All in all, when they finally met up with Doug and Aiden at the gate and got on the flight, it was with a sense of having survived a gauntlet of ancient ritualistic trials.



Now Elliot wouldn't stop complaining about being scared. He was fidgety and nervous, unbuckling his seat belt and standing up every ten seconds before Colin had to push him back in the seat. Colin leaned over and growled a quiet message into Elliot's ear. "Mommy's gonna throw you from the plane if you don't get it together, fuckface."

Elliot was shocked, but got the message. "Sorry," he replied, just as quietly. "I was in character."

"Everything okay over there?" Doug asked from his side of the section. Elliot had the window seat, next to Colin and Doug had the aisle, with Aiden in between the two "adults."

"Just fine!" Colin replied. "Just some words of courage."

"Is she a little nervous?" Doug said, trying to sound sympathetic. When he looked over, he recognized that both Emily and Dorothy were looking a little fraught. "You know, why don't you and Aiden switch seats, dear? Let the children sit together."

Actually, Colin liked the current arrangement, with his insulation from Doug. He didn't like the idea of spending the long flight having to deal with Doug's affection. "Well, I wouldn't want to upset the stewards..." Colin said.

Doug laughed. “They’re professionals. It’s fine.”

“Yeah! Come over here, Aiden!” Elliot said with enthusiasm.

“Well... All right...” Colin reluctantly got to his feet and tried to awkwardly slide to Aiden’s seat as the smaller boy pulled up his legs and crawled over the armrest. Once he was next to Elliot, his face lit up with delight. “You’ve never been on a plane before, have you, Emily?”

“No,” Elliot replied.

“I’ve been on lots of them. I know what to do.”

Elliot smiled at the reassurance.

Colin was smoothing his skirt out as he sat down, and felt Doug’s hand on his arm. “See? Things are gonna be fine. I fly two or three times a month for work. It’s nothing to even be concerned about.”

Despite himself, Colin did, actually, feel more relaxed and at ease. He put his slim, long-nailed hand over Doug’s, his bracelets clinking as he did. “Thank you,” he said, genuinely meaning it.

“Well, who do we have here?” said one of the female Flight Attendants, stopping by before take off. “Such a well-dressed group!” Doug was in a crisp suit, Colin in a new button-up dress and hat, Aiden in a dress shirt and slacks, and Elliot in a simple sundress with a ribbon in his hair. Together, they looked like they were decades out of time, direct from a Pan-Am ad from days gone by.

“It’s her first flight!” Aiden said, pointing to Elliot.

“Is that so?” The attendant said, smiling and playing along. “You know what we have for our first time flyers? How about some coloring books and crayons!” She pulled out two packages from a bag she was carrying.

Colin interrupted. “They might be a little old for...”

“Coloring books!” Aiden and Elliot said, in chorus, as they outstretched their arms for the gifts. As they grabbed them and started to rip open the crayon boxes, Colin just looked on, watching the nineteen year old boy in a dress and his fifteen year old friend act like they were only ten. In a way, it was the most mind-bending thing he’d seen in some time.

“What do you say?” Doug prompted.

“Thank you!” Elliot and Aiden replied.

“When do you serve drinks?” Colin asked the attendant.

The flight was surprisingly trouble-free. Elliot and Aiden fell asleep after about an hour, and the rest of the time Doug and Colin spent watching an old black & white movie Doug had found on the in-flight entertainment system.



Once the flight landed, Colin was all too ready to let Doug take charge from that point on, and let him deal with the paperwork, security and arrangements. He had gone through more than enough of that earlier. He was almost disappointed to see how easily Doug managed it, and before he knew it, they were in the hotel shuttle, heading out, with two sleepy kids in tow.

Doug had booked a room for Elliot and Colin, and another adjoining room for himself and his son. There was a flurry of unpacking, checking out the view and exploring their accommodations — and kids jumping on the beds.

“First thing I have planned is a tour of the jungle,” Doug announced. “We need to be downstairs and ready to be picked up in twenty minutes.”

“Already?” Colin said, “I was hoping to just relax...”

“We’ll have time to relax tonight!” Doug said. For a moment, Colin regretted having given Doug all this confidence. His new take-charge attitude was wearing on him.

Quickly, he had changed Elliot out into a tunic top, shorts and sandals. “Just about ready?” Doug said with a knock on the closed door.

“Almost!” Colin said, as he stood in his room in a bra and panties, frantically trying to unpack his things to find what he wanted to wear. Under the piles of outfits he had packed, he finally decided on something that would suit his mood and the location. He slipped into a navy skirt and a white sailor-style top. Now, he just had to find the earrings he got to go with this outfit. And where were his sunglasses? “Help mommy unpack, honey,” he said to Elliot.

They just made the tram, with seconds to spare. The trip was definitely made for the tourists, as it followed a paved road into a swampy area, and it wasn’t long before they were riding large boats into dense, but carefully arranged, vegetation. That led to a small plaza with a restaurant, gift shop and parking lot. To the side was a small zoo, which entertained Aiden and Elliot as they watched tigers, snakes and alligators in their cages.

The tour ended with a zip line, which Elliot and Aiden couldn’t have been more excited about. “I’m sorry, they’re too small,” said the operator as they got to the top of the tower. “You have to be this tall.” He indicated a sign with a cartoon parrot that couldn’t have been more than five feet high.

Colin was incredulous. “Too small? They’re teenagers!” As soon as he had said it, though, he looked over to the two teenagers who were definitely smaller than the five foot sign.

“I don’t want to anyway, Mommy,” Elliot said. “It’s too dangerous.” He headed back down the walkway.

“Look after her, okay?” Doug asked Aiden.

“Yeah, okay,” Aiden said, annoyed he couldn’t ride the line. “Wait up, Emily!”

Doug turned to his date. “Ladies first,” he said.

“Me?” Colin said. “No, I was just here to help the kids!”

“Oh no, you’re not sweet-talking your way out of it.”

“No, really, honey. Not me. I’m being serious.”

“Too late!” Doug was already help the ride operator strap Colin up.

“Douglas! I... I can’t!”

“Step to the line, and you want to grab the straps here and here,” the operator said, pointing out where to put his hands. He was in a tight harness securely in place, already connected to the steel cable that stretched over the length of the clearing, at least 200 yards wide. “Tuck in your legs when you get to the end. Set? Here we go!”

“Wait!” Colin pleaded, he reached for Doug’s assistance.

With a gentle push, Colin was on his way, and he started to slide down the line. A high-pitched scream followed immediately, and Colin continued to wail all the way through, much to everyone’s amusement. Colin was only halfway down when he started to feel his wig letting go, and he had to clap one hand on his head to keep it from flying off. At the same time, the wind was whipping up his skirt, threatening to invert it completely, and showing off everything.

When he got to the bottom, Colin was in a state of panic, making sure that he looked normal, as he was sure the wig was cocked to the side and someone had to have been looking up at him from underneath. It was then that Doug swept in on the zip line, laughing all the way.

“You should see your face!” Doug said.

“That was not funny!” Colin fired back. “I was not prepared! What if something...”

Doug grabbed him by the shoulders and planted a big fat kiss on Colin’s lips. “I didn’t think it was possible, but you’re even cuter when you’re angry.”

“We’re going back to the hotel!” Colin said, before storming off. Doug was still laughing.

By the time they had rounded up the kids, the tram was ready to take them back to their lodging.

“You looked funny, Mrs. Farmer,” Aiden said. Elliot giggled.



By the time they had gotten back, and spent an hour or two in their rooms, Colin had cooled off enough to join everyone else for dinner in the outdoor hotel restaurant.

It was a breezy but very warm night, with torches lit and flickering in the darkness. "I already ordered for you," Doug said, when Colin arrived. "is everything okay?"

"It's fine, now," Colin replied with his most earnest smile. It didn't advance his agenda to be difficult with Doug, so he had been telling himself that over and over again to calm himself down. "I'm just not fond of falling from great heights, that's all." He just couldn't help but make a small dig.

After a dinner of Mexican seafood, the very mention of a dessert menu sent Elliot and Aiden into a frenzy. "Ice cream!" Elliot demanded. "Choc-o-late!" he clarified.

"Cake!" Aiden declared. "Caaaake!"

"Children!" Colin snapped. "Do you really think you can get what you want by yelling?"

"But I want chocolate!" Elliot insisted.

"Chocolate cake!" Aiden suggested.

"That's it," Colin said. "No dessert for two rude children."

"Whaaat?" The kids whined.

"No!" Colin cut them off. "Now Douglas and I will have dessert and you can sit there and watch us eat it. Then, maybe you can think about how rude you were."

Elliot was pouting. "It's not fair! Why do you..."

"Not one more word, young lady!" Colin shot back, with a scolding finger. "This is not the night to get on my bad side!"

Doug waited for Colin to start ordering to whisper to Elliot and Aiden. "Don't worry. I have a special surprise for everyone tomorrow."

"A surprise?" Aiden yelped. "What is it?"

Doug shook his head. "Well, it wouldn't be a surprise then, would it?"

As they headed up to their rooms, Colin tried to get the information out of Doug. "A surprise?" Colin said in a quiet voice to avoid being overheard by the children, who were a few steps ahead of them. "What kind of surprise?"

"Like I say, a surprise."

"You can tell me," Colin said, sidling up to Doug.

"Nope. Not until tomorrow."

"C'mon... Not one itsy-bitsy hint?"

"Well... You can swim, can't you?"

"I bet I can swim faster than you," Colin replied. "But that can't be the surprise, can it?"

“Okay, you dragged it out of me. We’re going to do a little swimming with dolphins tomorrow. That means I finally get to see you in a revealing, skin-tight suit.”

“Oooh...” Colin said, poking Doug in the chest. “I’m not sure you’ll be able to control yourself, Douglas.”

“I’m willing to risk it.” They were at the doors of their rooms.

“Careful what you wish for,” Colin said, blowing a kiss to Doug and then thrusting his backside in his direction.

It wasn’t until the door shut that Colin realized what he was doing. He had let the moment get the better of him. Why was he always getting so carried away with his flirting?

“A swimsuit for swimming,” Colin said to himself. Then, realizing what he had just done, he gasped. “A *swimsuit!* For *swimming!*”

Once Elliot was settled in his PJ’s and watching cartoons, Colin got up. He was too nervous to sleep or even watch TV. His big, fat mouth and his... Exuberance... in playing this role had just trapped him. The swimming was not going to be an issue, as he had learned it at the Y in the after school programs, back in his teen years. He wasn’t too bad at it, either.

Now he had to deal with the fact that he had intentionally avoided buying a swimsuit, thinking he’d be able to talk his way out of it. Now, he had just talked his way *into* it. Any contact with water was going to show the shaping garments he relied so heavily on. This was a disaster!

That wasn’t even the worst of it, as he thought further. His wig, which had nearly flown off earlier, was going to be obvious in the water. He couldn’t do it! He had to find a way out of this mess!

When Colin finally looked up, he had wandered all the way out of the room and down to the lobby. It was still a little busy, in the late evening, with guests roaming about. There were a half a dozen little shops lining the walls, and fortunately, there was a small apparel shop that was still open. Dashing inside, he purchased eight women’s bathing suits, everything the shop sold that wasn’t a bikini. He didn’t have any idea what might look good on him, and he didn’t want to risk trying them on in the shop. He’d decide which to wear later, after he got a look at himself.

As he left, he also saw that a salon was open, and he checked the hours before they closed. They would be open for a little while. Not knowing what else to do, he approached the first person he saw.

“Hi!” Colin said in his best approximation of a person who was trying to not look as panicked as he felt. “Um, look... This is going to sound a little crazy... I don’t know if you can tell, but I’m wearing a wig.”

“No,” the woman at the salon said, her expression not changing one bit. A toothpick was hanging limply from the corner of her mouth. “You could have fooled me.”

“I’m serious,” Colin said, not picking up at all on the woman’s dry sarcasm. “I really am!”

“I’ll take your word for it,” the toothpick woman said.

Colin saw she had a name badge on. It read ‘Laurie.’ “Um, Laurie, is it? I was wondering if there was anything you could do to make sure it doesn’t come off. It’s already nearly flown off once, and I’m supposed to go swimming tomorrow. Is there anything I can do?”

“Well, are you weaving it?” Laurie asked, happy to answer a question she cared about.

“I don’t even know what that is,” Colin said with an embarrassed expression.

“So, that’s where you use your own hair to weave into the fabric of the wig, holding it as tight as possible.” Laurie gestured to her chair. “Hop up and I’ll see what I can do.”

“Okay...” Colin said, unsure if he really wanted anyone else to see his hair underneath the wig. But he figured he would be all right, as his hair had been growing out. “I have a couple of hairpins keeping it in right now.”

“See, they can just fall out or lose grip. A weave will prevent that. Although it doesn’t last more than a few weeks.” Laurie pulled a salon cape around Corbin’s torso. “Any longer than that, and you’d need to do extensions. Those’ll last for freakin’ ever.”

“Extensions? What’s that?”

“We take factory hair and bond it to your existing hair with heat and glue. It looks just as good as the real thing. Gives you all the length you could ever want.”

“Oh.” Colin took only one second to think about it. “Could we do... *That?*”

Laurie looked at a clock on the wall. “Sure, why not? I got nothing else to do for the next three hours.”

“Great!” Colin said, again not picking up on the sarcasm.



“Did you do something?” Doug asked as they headed out on the morning tram.

“Do something?” Colin replied, feigning obliviousness to the question. He had spent three and a half hours, until 11:30 that previous night, in the salon chair having his hair bonded, colored and styled. You bet he knew what was

different. He had a full head of massive, immaculately styled hair, and it was all his. “Like what?”

“I don’t know,” Doug answered, pondering the problem. “But something about you is different this morning.”

“Maybe I’m just in a better mood.”

“No, it’s more than that.”

“Is this the surprise?” Elliot asked, interrupting the repartee.

“Yeah? Is this it?” Aiden added. “I think this is it. It has to be it.”

“Where are we going?”

“We...” Doug paused, milking the moment. “Are...” More milking. “...Going to swim with real dolphins today!”

“*Dolphins!*” Elliot shrieked, at a volume and frequency that likely interfered with orbiting satellite communications.

Aiden wanted some color. “Like near them... Or...?”

“Well, yes, and also with them. One at each side. You hold on and they take you along. At least, that’s how I think they do it.”

Elliot was overheating with excitement. “Dolphins, dolphins, dolphins! I love dolphins!”

“How big are they? Do they eat people?” Aiden asked Elliot.

Elliot and Aiden huddled together in their seats. “They’re so cute! They’re like the puppies of the water!”

The afternoon was full of happy squeals and yelps of thrilled kids. And splashing. A whole lot of splashing.

“Is it okay for our kids?” Doug asked, hoping not to repeat the problem they had yesterday. “They’re big enough, right?”

“We have sessions for little kids like yours all the time,” the instructor replied. “Even toddlers.”

Elliot was the first to do it, since he was the most excited, followed by a somewhat timid Aiden who quickly got into the flow of things once he realized the dolphins weren’t bloodthirsty beasts of the deep. Then, after Doug had his turn, it was time for Colin.



He made a show of it, undoing his sarong, stepping out of his flip-flops, foot by foot, and setting aside his sunglasses, making sure Doug was watching his every move. He had been very careful with his swimsuit selection, a white one-piece with a dark navy blue band at the waist to help make him look more slender. Colin was also sucking in his stomach for all he was worth, having gone without any figure-shaping garments for the first time in forever. He sat on the side of the tank, dipped the tips of his toes in the water, then slid himself in.

His little display was doing the trick. Doug had his eyes locked on him and a dumb little look on his face.

The instructor had Colin get in between the two dolphins and grasp the front of each dorsal fin. On command, the dolphins took off like a living water ski and propelled Colin through the water for two laps around the large tank. It really was quite the experience as he listened to the dolphins chatter away and playfully nudge him as they turned this way and that. They seemed to enjoy the company. Elliot was right, they were like puppies.

The entire event had gone off as well as Colin could have hoped. Just twelve hours ago, he was ready to swim out into the sea and not come back. Now his plans were back on track for Doug.

With their session over, the kids laughing and splashing each other, and Doug still keeping quiet while he watched Colin with very interested eyes, Colin used the ladder to slowly rise from the water, imagining some sexy starlet in a teen movie as the boy is knocked loopy by the gorgeous girl coming out of the pool.

“Psst,” Colin heard from a few feet away. He was too bust turning his wet hair from side to side to bother with anything right now. “Mommy!” He heard. That would have been Elliot hamming it up as Emily, probably want him to help with getting dressed or something. “Colin!” snarled Elliot.

That grabbed Colin’s attention, and his eyes sprang open, with a scowl on his face for having his moment interrupted.

“Boobies,” Elliot said, in a low voice. He gestured at the chest to indicate what he was talking about.

“What?” Colin replied with exasperation, tired of Elliot’s over-the-top shenanigans as a girl. He looked down to see that one of his breasts was now located in the middle of his stomach and the other was migrating towards an armpit. The white material of the suit, now wet, was somewhat transparent, showing his breasts to be what they were — fake inserts.

“Erp!” Colin yelped. “Towel!” He shouted at Elliot.

Elliot had chosen his moment wisely, as no one had been looking in their direction anyway, except for Doug who was at a distance, watching from the rear. Little Elliot tossed Colin a towel which was used immediately to cover his frontside, just as everyone turned their head to see what the noise was all about.



Colin's eyes locked onto Doug, who the one person he knew that had been looking. Colin froze in place, hunched over, a grimace on his face. His hands began to shake. What had Doug seen?

"Everything okay, honey?" he asked.

Colin heaved in relief. "Just lost my balance there for a second. Nothing to worry about." He immediately scanned the area for the restrooms. Seeing one, he made off as fast as his bare feet could travel on wet cement. "Back in a jiff!"

He made the necessary repairs quickly, and returned just moments later.



“Problems?” Doug asked.

“A woman thing,” Colin replied, now covered by a beach coat. “You wouldn’t understand.”

As for the rest of the trip, the two children clearly had the time of their lives, reliving every second of the swim session over and over, telling stories back and forth for the whole ride back to the hotel. Colin had the lapels of his beach coat grasped closed with his free hand, and refused to let go, and when they pulled into the hotel, he scurried off the tram and up to the room before anyone else.



By the time the four travelers had sat down for a late lunch, Colin had changed out into one of his many dresses, and wrangled his rouge boobs into place. Elliot was by his side, in a modest little sun dress, kicking his legs back and forth as he read through the kids menu.

“Do you know what you’re going to get, sweetie?” Colin asked Elliot. He nearly swallowed his words, as Elliot was a grown person who was well capable of ordering for himself, and was not going to take this kind of question as anything but an insult.

“Alllllmost,” Elliot replied, slowly, clearly still working on an answer.

Colin gave his brother a suspicious sideways glance. He was expecting a snappy comeback, but just got his “darling daughter” response instead. Not that he was complaining, because Elliot was proving himself to be a master at putting this “Emily” character over.

“I forgot my wallet,” Aiden said.

“You won’t need it...” Doug began to say, but before he could even complete his thought, his son was out of his chair and headed to the entranceway back into the hotel. “You’ll need a key!” Doug reminded him.

“I have one!” Aiden called back as he sped off.

“What do you want to order?” Colin called after him, however Aiden was already gone. Colin just went back to reading the menu. “Well, all right then.”

Doug had a hint of a scowl on his face. “We’ll just order a burger. He always orders burgers.”

Forty-five minutes later, after the food had arrived and everyone else at the table had already worked their way through their meals, Aiden’s burger was sitting at his empty spot, cold.

“I should go check on him,” Doug said.

“No, you stay. I’m already finished,” Colin said, pushing his seafood salad away. “Stay here with Douglas, all right, Emily?”

“Okay Mommy!” Elliot replied with a big smile as he stole some fries from Aiden’s abandoned plate.

Even though the hotel and the restaurant were filled with families and happily married couples, Colin’s clacking heels did attract quick peeks and stolen glimpses from the men seated in the open-air eatery. He even got lingering looks from the women, that, if Colin had a deeper insight into female psychology, he would have recognized as jealousy. He walked by the salon on his way to the elevators and waved at Laurie as she blow-dried a plump middle-aged lady’s short bob. Colin gave her a thumbs up and mouthed the words “love it” as he passed by the window. Laurie did not look impressed.

Getting up to their shared rooms, Colin got the door lock to work on the fifth try of his card key swipe and let himself in.

“Oh my!” Colin heard himself say as he saw Aiden.

He was standing there, petrified and bug-eyed, in one of Elliot’s dresses and his lips smeared crudely with Colin’s lipstick.

“Oh my, oh my, oh my!” Colin repeated, not able to do much more in his shocked state.

Usually, his sharp mind would have kicked in immediately and started to calculate how he could use this to his advantage. A fully engaged intellect might have figured that he could use this as blackmail to keep Aiden under his control. He could report this to Doug, who might have the kid shipped off and taken out of the picture, making his plans to rob Doug of all his possessions even easier.

However, Colin’s mind was not able to think of those things right now. He felt as though he had a wall in between his con-man instinct and the rest of his conscious mind. Instead, all he had was a flood of emotion.

“I...” Aiden spoke. “I... Was just playing around...”

Without really thinking about it, Colin shut the door behind him and then got down on one knee in front of the clearly terrified young man. “You, uh, seem to have accidentally put on my daughter’s clothes.”

“Please...” Aiden said, his body trembling. “Please don’t tell my Dad...”

Still, Colin’s usual sense of seizing the opportunity was nowhere to be found. In his head, it felt like he was flicking a dead lighter, and not even getting sparks. He reached over to adjust a drooping sleeve on the boy’s dress and pulled it back up. “It’s just between you and me,” he said.

Aiden dropped his head and started to whimper. Sensing a complete collapse was imminent, Colin began to reach out, only to have the young man completely fall apart as he ran into his arms. In an instant, Aiden was reduced to quivering and sobbing into Colin’s shoulder.

“Shh, shh...” Colin found himself saying as he patted him on the back. “It’s okay...”

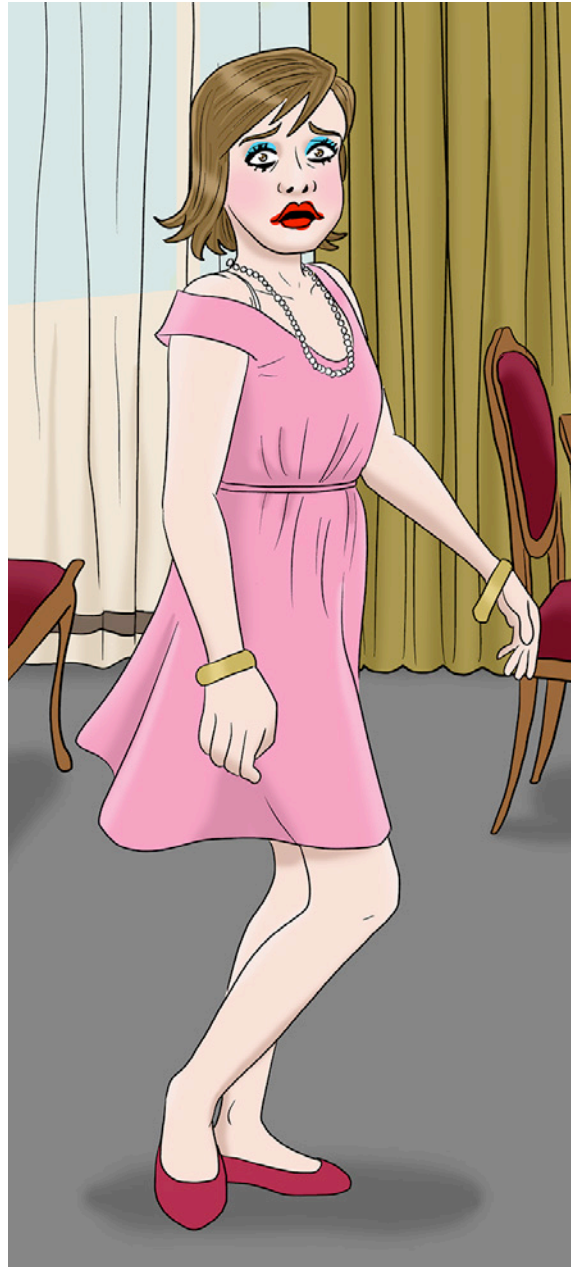
Down at the restaurant, Doug was trying to engage Elliot in conversation, but Elliot was far too busy eating Aiden’s burger to do much talking. “You have quite an appetite for a little girl,” Doug said.

It was plain to see that Elliot’s options were to either stay true to being Emily and stop stuffing his face — like a good little girl would — or to just keep chowing down and hope it wouldn’t blow the months of work he and his brother had put into this whole thing, and therefore land them in jail for eternity and destroy their lives. He took another huge bite. “Mmmm-hmmm,” he hummed as he chewed.

Doug’s phone vibrated. “It’s from your mother,” he said, reading the text message aloud: “Aiden’s fine. Give us a few minutes. Then you can come up.” He put the phone away. “Wonder what that’s all about.”

Back in the suite, Aiden’s head was buried in Colin’s shoulder, as the young boy was sobbing uncontrollably. He was bawling so hard that he couldn’t breathe and was seizing up for air, drowning in his own anguish.

“Shhh,” Colin found himself saying, like his mother used to say to him when he was crying. “Shush. It’s going to be fine. I promise. Everything will be just fine.”



Eventually, Colin had to gently push Aiden back, as it felt like he never intended on letting go. He wiped what remained of the boy's tears away with his thumbs. "I'm sorry," Aiden said. "I know it's wrong."

"It's not wrong," Colin said. He had grown somewhat sympathetic to a male urge to wear dresses over the past few months. "It's not wrong at all. You're just as God made you."

"You're not mad?" Aiden asked.

"I'm startled, certainly. But I could never be angry with you, honey." For reasons beyond his understanding, Colin felt like this boy's appointed protector. Even Colin understood that an attraction to wearing women's clothes was not a passing fancy, and he wasn't going to make Aiden push these feelings away and hide them. "Now, do you feel like you can tell me why you're dressed like this?"

Aiden thought about it, then nodded.

"Does wearing a dress make you feel better?"

Aiden nodded again.

"Is this your first time?"

Aiden shook his head in the negative.

"Does your father know?"

Aiden shook his head again.

"Do you want to be a girl?"

The boy just avoided eye contact as he looked down at his hands.

"All right," Colin said. He may not have been able to use his finely-honed con-man skills, but those same skills had blessed him with a piercing insight into people, and his calculating mind already knew how this was going to play out. Aiden was going to keep dressing up whenever he got the chance and would continue to hide it, until Douglas found out about it, humiliating the both of them and poisoning their relationship. He needed to stop that inevitable progression right now. "I'm going to ask you to do something for me, okay?"

"Wh... Whu... What?" Aiden replied, nervously.

"I'm going to help you look as pretty as any girl, okay?" As Colin made the offer, he could see the boy's face light up with excitement and joy, and he knew he was doing the right thing. "But you need to trust me. You need to be strong."

About twenty minutes later, Doug had been given a text to 'come on up' and to 'bring an open mind.' The curious man got the key card to work on the fourth swipe, and the door to the suite opened. Immediately, Colin caught it and jumped into Doug's way, blocking him, and forcing him back out the door.

“What’s going on?” Doug asked, concerned but with a smile on his face.

“Honey, why don’t you use your own entrance,” Colin said, handing a keycard to Elliot. “Watch some TV and Mommy will be with you in a moment, okay?”

As soon as Elliot had let himself into their room, Colin exhaled. “What’s the story?” Doug said. “What’s happened?”

“Sweetie,” Colin said, placing his manicured and slender hands on Doug’s chest, as he got intimately close. “Promise me you’ll take what you’re about to see like a grown man, okay?”

“Uh... Sure?” Doug said with a smirk.

“No, seriously,” said Colin, with gravitas. “Don’t laugh, don’t yell. Don’t be angry. Just be understanding. This is a moment which could be the most important one of your life, and I need you to do everything you can to just stay level-headed and calm. Can you do that?”

“I suppose?”

Colin glared into Doug’s eyes. “Promise me.”

“All right. For you, Dorothy.” Doug tenderly grasped Colin’s hands and dialed back the bemused expression on his face. “Show me what you need to show me.”

Colin pushed the door back open and led Doug inside. “Are you ready, Abigail?”

Taking steps that were no more than an inch or two apart, Aiden walked around the corner, in one of Elliot’s tropically colored sun dresses. His hair was perfect and neat with a pink bow on the side. His face was made up with pink lip gloss and a hint of mascara. The bush on his cheeks was natural.

“I don’t understand,” Doug said, looking at Colin.

“This is Abigail. She’s your daughter.”

Colin clutched Doug’s hand tightly, almost to the point of cutting off his blood flow, but Doug was doing the same.

With a whole lot of awkward silence and a growing tension, Colin had to try and get things started before either Aiden ran away or Doug started to get demonstrative. “I found Aiden up here, trying on a dress, and we talked,” he said. “I don’t want there to be secrets between you two, and I wanted him to be honest and tell you.”

Doug started to speak, fighting through a dry throat. “Well, Aiden, is...?” He quickly felt his hand get squeezed again, and restarted his question. “...*Abigail*, is this true?”

Aiden nodded. “I’m sorry,” he said.

“Don’t be sorry,” Colin interjected, before cutting himself off. He knew this was not his place to speak. The father and the child had to do this themselves.

“I... Don’t know what to say,” Doug said. Again, he felt his hand squeezed, this time like a vise grip. “But Dorothy is right. Don’t be sorry. We just need to work this out.” The release of Colin’s pressure on his poor hand indicated that he had said the right thing.

“I don’t want to get yelled at,” Aiden spoke. “Okay?”

“I’m not going to yell at you, Aid... Abigail. I’m just in a bit of shock.” Doug was totally adrift, unable to find a place to really relate to the situation. “Where did the name Abigail come from?”

Aiden looked at Colin, which indicated the answer to Doug’s question.

Colin looked a little embarrassed. “I asked Aiden if he had a name, and asked me to pick one out for him. I suggested Abigail.”

“It’s... It’s a nice name,” Doug said to his son. That seemed to get a hint of a smile out of Aiden.

Colin got up and reached out for Aiden’s hand. “Okay. Let’s take you to talk to my daughter. I think Emily should know. After all, it’s her dress.”

“Okay,” Aiden replied, and walked hand-in-hand with Colin into the next room.

Elliot’s reaction was surprisingly positive. In fact, he was completely unfazed by Aiden’s appearance in a dress, as if he had anticipated this development. Really, Elliot appeared to be far more interested in looking over Aiden than asking embarrassing questions.

When Colin returned to the other suite, he found Doug, still frozen in place with the same far-away look in his eyes he had left him with. Colin sat down next to him on the couch and wrapped himself around him, rubbing his arms to get some life out of the paralyzed man. “You were great,” Colin said.

“I’m not sure I understand what just happened,” Doug said.

“You never even suspected?”

“No. Well, I mean, maybe. I guess there were signs.” Doug leaned back. “I don’t know. He’s been showing an unnatural infatuation with all things feminine lately. I thought was just a part of growing up or something.” He looked into Colin’s eyes. “Should I have figured this out? What did I miss?”

“I’m sure you did everything right,” Colin said. “You are a wonderful father.”

Doug sat back up again. “Now what? Do I send him to a psychologist? Is it just a phase? What?” He put his face into his hands. “What do I do next?”

“Well, if you’re open to suggestions...”

“Anything.”

“I’d let him make the call. Let him be Abigail. Then...”

“How would I explain that? What would everyone say?”

“To who? Think about it, Douglas. This is perfect. We’re a thousand miles away from home, no one knows any of us. He can explore this and see if it’s what he really wants, no questions asked.”

“I don’t know, Dorothy.” Doug ran his hands over his face. “Can you really fool people into thinking he’s a girl?”

“I... It’s... Uh...” Colin was trying not to say too much. “It’s certainly possible, I would think. Hypothetically. It’s worth a try.”

“I just don’t know.”

“It’s this or years of anger, confusion and resentment. Trust me on this,” Colin said, leaning against Doug for comfort. “Don’t give up on me now, Mr. Brundell. You’re doing great. Father of the year territory.”

“I don’t know. I don’t know.” Doug was just barely holding on to reality. “We’ll do it for the rest of the day? Then, we’ll see if he wants to do it tomorrow. We’ll take it day by day.”

Colin bounced joyously in his seat and hugged his boyfriend. “There you go! That’s what I want to hear!” Doug didn’t really respond, he just sat in the same position, unable to really get a grasp on what had just happened to his life in the past few minutes.

His condition didn’t really improve, even as the four of them geared up for a previously planned trip to an aquarium for the evening. Colin could easily read the look in Doug’s eyes as they got ready, as the man was asking himself how he had gotten here. Colin didn’t dare leave him alone for long, scared that a few minutes alone might let Doug give into his male instincts and *demand* that his son go back to normal.



Colin was rushing through his hair, throwing on his A-line floral print dress over his white bra and panty set, jumping into his white pumps before packing a tiny purse full of what he would need for the night out. She returned to Doug just in time, finding him with a cross look on his face.

“Maybe we’re making a mistake,” he said. “Maybe I should just tell Aiden that this kind of behavior...”

Colin had to distract fast. “I should be sleeping in this room,” he said. “You don’t mind, do you? We put the kids in one room and the adults in this one.” He picked up Aiden’s luggage and swiftly carried it into the adjoined suite.

“Wait, what?” Doug said, his train of thought successfully derailed. “I thought you wanted privacy...”

“Oh, I was just being silly,” Colin said as he set the luggage down on what had previously been his bed. “Abigail, Emily, you’re going to share this room, okay? I’ll sleep in the other room. Any objections?”

All Elliot could do was shake his head, and Aiden didn’t muster up more than a shell-shocked stare.

“Great!” Colin said as he picked up some of his own luggage and lugged it into his new room. “We leave in two minutes! Be ready to go!”

“Yes, Mommy!” Elliot called back, dutifully.

“What brought this on?” Doug asked when Colin returned.

“I think you and Aiden need some space.” Colin started back for the rest of his luggage. “Just promise me that you’ll respect my privacy when I need it.”

Doug shrugged. “Yeah, sure.”

The trip to the aquarium went smoothly, and the interior was dark enough to slightly conceal Aiden’s new look from the rest of the world. That was of no comfort to Doug, and Colin could feel the sweat on his hands as they walked along the looking at the underwater displays. It seemed that no amount of body contact, resting his head on Doug’s shoulder or even blowing in his ear could get him to stop fretting.

As for Aiden, he couldn’t have been more comfortable in a dress, and seemed to have shed any inhibitions already. If anything, he was taking a little too much pleasure in his newfound identity, as he matched Elliot’s practiced and sublime imitation of child-like feminine behavior action for action. He was giggling, jumping, running and carrying on in just the way a young girl might.

He squealed at how cute the otters were, he gasped at the beauty of the schools of colorful tropical fish, he was apprehensive to look at the menacing sharks and giggled as he tapped the glass to attract the beluga whales. No one watching his antics would have ever guessed they were watching anything else but a precocious little girl.



There was also little mistake that they were now a functional family. Not two single parents, each with a kid, and certainly not like a middle-aged man and three young adults. Dorothy and Douglas were a couple now, and Abigail and Emily were their children.

When they got to the family-friendly restaurant for dinner, neither Colin nor Doug batted an eye when they were treated like the mom and the dad, with Elliot and Aiden as the kids. They were settling into these roles almost absurdly well.

When handed the kids' menus, Aiden and Elliot scoured them thoroughly, choosing amongst the mac n' cheese, chicken nuggets and junior-sized cheeseburgers. When Colin and Doug were handed the regular menus, Colin automatically set his aside waiting for Doug to make the decision. It all seemed so perfectly normal.

"He seems almost like a weight has been lifted off his shoulders," Doug said quietly, so he couldn't be heard by anyone except for Colin. He was looking at his son, who, in a dress with a ribbon in his hair and a touch of makeup on his face, was smiling more than Doug could ever remember.

"Regrets?" Colin asked.

Doug sat up and squared his shoulders. "No. None. If you've taught me anything, Dorothy, it's to not back down from my decisions."



“So if he wants to do this tomorrow?” Colin mischievously asked.

Doug’s confidence was starting to crumble. “We will... Come to that... When we... If he should choose...”

“You know he will.”

Doug sighed. “I don’t think... Maybe he should just face up to reality and put this behind him.”

“Darling,” Colin said, running his slim fingers along Doug’s hand. “Do what’s right for your child.”

Doug’s shoulders dropped. “This is hard.”

“You will never stop loving him.”

“No, I won’t.”

“Do you want to make it harder to love him today — or for every day the rest of his life as he resents you?”

The beleaguered middle-aged father closed his eyes for a contemplative moment. “I guess I’m in this for the long haul, aren’t I?”

“We,” Colin said. “We *both* are.”

Doug went back to the menu and studied the contents.

Colin decided this was a good time to kiss him on the cheek.

# WRENSHAW PRIMARY

## PART 1

The Emerald Estates development, as hugely successful as it had become, began humbly. When the late Vance Wentworth III instructed his people to start looking into buying the land, they came upon one nagging problem problem: Davis Wrenshaw.

All the land parcels in the area were being acquired through the state's de-commissioning of a state park — except for one particular plot of land. A small home owned by Margaret Elizabeth Wrenshaw, a 71-year old woman who had lived on the land since marrying her husband. His family had built a large Victorian house sometime in the mid to late 1800's, and it had weathered the years valiantly. It looked a little beaten, but also more stately with it's advanced age.

It was just a few months before Magnum Properties was to start bidding for the other larger parcels that they approached Mrs. Wrenshaw about her house. She invited them in for tea and she had a nice afternoon chat with the lawyer Wentworth had sent.

Margaret had once been a schoolteacher in an old boarding school, but had retired. Her husband had passed ten years prior, leaving her a widower, and she always loved having company. Even lawyers.

The lawyer reported back that the property was likely something they could acquire, as Mrs. Wrenshaw was agreeable to selling, but only if she could get a large sum of money to pass on to her grandchildren. All she wanted to do before consenting was to talk to her "college grandson" and get his advice.

That grandson, Davis Wrenshaw, 19, and studying business law, was all too eager to involve himself. Davis showed up at Wentworth's offices and dropped a small stack of papers on the receptionist's desk, accusing the business of trying to con his dear, lovely grandmother out of her house. There were charges of mail fraud, trespassing, intimidation, stalking, fraudulent representation and even theft for the tea the lawyer had consumed. Of course, Davis let it be known that he would stop his lawsuits if they bought the house for fifty times the value.

So began a legal battle that raged on, year after year, even as the development began construction. If one were to look from the air at Emerald Estates, they would have noted a large "bite" out of the almost-perfect square shape of the



land. The builders had to work around Mrs. Wrenshaw's parcel, even if they had hoped that they could get the land later on.

So in a sea of new houses, one large, tall, dark Victorian house stood out from the rest: Margaret Wrenshaw's proud grand home. It looked very much out of place once the development had been completed, as if it had been sent back in time.

Even as Davis Wrenshaw still maintained his exorbitantly high price for the old home, three years of construction were long since done, the ribbon cut at the main entrance, the homeowners moved in and settled. As time went on, Davis knew that his price would just keep climbing.

There was only one hitch with Davis's plan to rake in the money. His grandmother had passed away a year ago.

It was a quiet death, having passed away in her sleep. She was 73 at the time, and alone in her house. Davis discovered her on one of his visits, and as saddened and as dismayed as he felt, he also knew that with her, he had lost

any negotiating leverage for the house and land. She had not completed a will, and her property would go to the state.

Instead of reporting her death as he well should have, he decided that hiding her body would be the best course of action. After all, she would have wanted her family to get the money they were entitled to, Davis reasoned.

So in the back yard, a small field of flowers grew, where Davis had buried her remains.

Davis could then continue to represent her grandmother's interests and get a windfall of money on her behalf. It was just a technicality that she didn't actually exist anymore.

Everything about Davis's plan was working just fine for quite a while. The court proceedings went along slowly but surely, Davis would occasionally trade emails with Wentworth's people, and everything looked good... For a while.



"A summons?" Davis said, when he heard about Wentworth's latest court motion. "A summons."

It made perfect sense that the lawyers for the construction company wanted to call Margaret Elizabeth Wrenshaw to testify, but Davis had never actually figured on the whole thing getting this far.

He tried to get the court to cancel the summons, citing "poor health" for his grandmother, but he couldn't produce a doctor's note to prove it. It was all he could do to just change the court appearance to a deposition in her home.

That meant that lawyers would come see her, instead of having her go to court. Now all he had to do was raise his grandmother from the dead.



"Long time no see!" Davis said as his younger brother, Phillip came off the plane. "You look great! Thin and healthy!"

"Yeah, thanks..." Phillip said. He knew his brother well enough to recognize a snow job when he heard it. He expected little else from Davis, and studying to be a slimy lawyer fit right in with the way he had always behaved.

"So glad you could come!" Davis said, taking one of his bags and immediately heading out. Phillip was immediately suspicious. This wasn't like Davis at all... Unless he wanted something.

"You are gonna pay for my ticket back home, too, right?" Phillip asked.

"That's what I said!" Davis reassured him.

