

JAMES J CRAFT

I, CANDY

**“Sissy Sweets” by James J. Craft
A Tales of Transformation Story**



2010 eBook Edition

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SISSY SWEETS

I was *not* a baker. I was a banker. I know that there is only an ‘n’ between the two, but it was a significant difference. My father was the baker in the family, as had been my grandfather and my great grandfather before him. In fact, as far back as my family tree would go, we were bakers... ‘pastry chefs’ to some... but bakers to most.

But not me.

I was different.

My name was Carl Christopher Sweet... and I was a banker.

It drove my Dad nuts that I wouldn’t carry on the family tradition of baking. But to his dismay, I learned very early in my life that I was more interested in rising interest rates than rising dough. It wasn’t that I *couldn’t* bake... I could... in fact I could do it quite well, as I proved many-a-time in my youth... I could bake as well as any member of the family. I just didn’t *want* to.

I spent my teenaged years working – begrudgingly – in my father’s kitchen. He was determined to make me love what had been the only thing he had ever known, and determined to make me want to take over.

For years I toiled in the bakery, miserable, taking out my unhappiness on my Dad and his employees. I would openly defy him and taunt and torture the people that he hired, as I was really challenging him to fire me.

But he never did.

I did, however, cause more than a few of his workers to quit, which – in hindsight – spoke volumes about where Dad placed his loyalties. He would evidently rather lose a good worker, than have to fire his own son.

Not that he and I got along well... far from it in fact.

He would routinely ask after one of my ‘outbursts’ “What the hell is the matter with you? Why don’t you see what you’ve got here?”

To which I would reply “There’s *nothing* wrong with me Dad, I just don’t *want* this.”

He would then shake his head and wander off, muttering to himself about how much blood sweat and tears he had put into building his bakery, and how I didn’t appreciate what I had.

But he was wrong... I *did* appreciate what I had, and *wanted* to be a success like him... just not by using blood sweat and tears.

At least not with *my own*. I wanted to make my fortune using *other* people’s blood sweat and tears.

And at the age of eighteen, I did just that.

I was hired by one of the nation's fastest growing banks. First as a teller, then as a banking rep, and eventually as a regional vice-president. I made a career out of leveraging everything to the brink in return for big payoffs.

Not that it always went according to plan – I had more than a few losses in my time – but my gains seemed to always bring me back, and that kept me in good standing with the people that mattered most.

To those who didn't matter, I was referred to as 'reckless' and sometimes even 'sleazy' in how I made my money. It was true, I'm not too proud to say, that I deliberately wiped some of my clients out – financially speaking – in order to make others even wealthier.

And those others always included myself.

I accumulated as much as I could. The houses, the cars, the 'playboy' lifestyle, I had it all. But I had *earned* it.

Still, such things weren't meant to last.

By the end of the decade, the banking system was beginning to fall apart. I saw the warning signs and ignored them... including a direct order from my supervisor, not to proceed with my last big deal.

It was a 5.6 billion dollar transaction on commercial paper, backed my sub-prime mortgages of under qualified people across the U.S. and in the U.K.

Sound familiar?

I even leveraged my own personal net-worth to secure what I thought to be the 'king-maker' of all deals. But the day after the transaction went through, it all went wrong. My bank, once thought of to be unsinkable... failed, my clients money evaporated and my own equity was instantaneously erased within the span of a weeks' time.

I went from riches to rags in seven days.

The bank's assets were swallowed up by a government backed consortium and newly appointed trustees looked for heads to deliver to the law-makers in Washington on silver-plates.

The first head to roll was mine.

Not only was I fired... I was charged and fined and subsequently financially wiped out.

In the midst of all this I got the news that father's health was ailing after a lengthy battle with some form of cancer, and that it would only be a matter of days before he died.

As distraught as I was, I was too busy being summoned before various senate committees and being publicly raked over the coals, in between having to sell off all of my various assets around the world, to attend to his deathbed.

So in the end, he died alone in a county hospital while I flew back from the capitol hill on a private jet.

I arrived at the hospital to an empty room, and broke down in tears. I had wanted to say goodbye and felt such immense guilt at having missed the chance. In my mind I promised myself that I would somehow make it up to him.

As the days passed, I found that I missed my father terribly – especially since we had remained so distant since I left the family business all those years ago. Since my mother had left us many-many years before, he had been the only family I had left in the world. Now, with both him and all of my material possessions gone, I felt for the first time – truly alone.

But every cloud has a silver lining.

As he was *my* only family left in the world, I too was *his* only family in the world. Which meant that the bakery... and the valuable downtown property that contained it... would be left to me.

The day that his lawyer called me to tell me to come review the will, my mind filled with vivid fantasies that my father had somehow amassed a small fortune selling his bread and buns, and it would be enough to help me rebuild my life and fortune accordingly.

At bare minimum, I figured there should at least be enough in his estate to keep me afloat until the market for greedy bankers like me improved.

But dear old Dad, however... had different plans for me.

I went to his attorneys' the day after my father's funeral. The lawyer was prestigious looking man with silver-grey hair, who barely smiled at all.

"Your father has left his entire estate to you," his lawyer began. I smiled widely, anticipating what was going to be said next.

"However..." He paused for a moment, seeing me start to smile, "There are some fairly rigorous conditions that the late Mister Sweet has placed on this happening."

My smile diminished some, as *that* was not at all what I had anticipated him saying.

"In order for you to completely inherit his estate, Carl," he continued, "You continue running his business for the next three-hundred and sixty-five days."

"What?" I cried. I knew that my father had always believed that I had a natural talent for baking. I also knew that he always believed that all I needed was to be shown... or rather *forced* into it... in order to change my mind about it... and quit my career in finance to become a baker.

But *this* was ridiculous!



“There has to be another way...” I pleaded, “I can’t run a bakery! I’m a banker!”

“Well Carl,” the attorney finally turned a small grin, “It seems that your father had other ideas. So you have a choice... either run the bakery for a year, or forfeit your inheritance.”

I gasped. I suddenly wasn’t missing the old coot as much.

“And if I do... if I walk away... where does the money go?” I asked.

“There are appropriate provisions in the will to account for such a scenario,” the lawyer’s smile dried up, “But I’m afraid that those are *very* privileged.”

“Privileged!” I repeated, “But I’m his son!”

“Yes Carl, we’ve determined that, but the will is the law here, and it clearly states that you must be on-site for a minimum of eight hours a day and a minimum of six out of seven days... for the next twelve consecutive months... before you can have any part of the estate.”

He paused for a moment before continuing, “So my advice to you would be to ride it out... honor his wishes, and in a year’s time, the business... and the build-

ing – which by the way is likely what you are *really* interested in – will be yours and yours alone.”

I felt my blood pressure rise, “Is there anything *else* I should know?” I spat.

“Well Carl, the business has to be successful while you are running it. Your father knew that you didn’t *want* to run it... and figured you’d just try to bankrupt it then take the money and run. Which, judging by the looks on your face... looks to be true,” he paused again, “which is why, Carl... your father insisted that we appoint a trustee to monitor you... make sure you don’t intentionally screw things up.”

I immediately felt even more enraged. Here I had what was potentially a million-dollar nest egg... just waiting to be picked... and my father... even after death, was screwing around with me and *still* insisting that I be a baker instead of a banker.

I took a deep breath and thought back to my promise at the hospital. I realized that I needed to do this in order to have some kind of closure in my life.

Also because I was broke.

I gritted my teeth and took a deep breath, “So who is this trustee?” I growled, “and when can I meet him?”

“His name, Carl... is Matt Munroe,” the attorney smiled widely, “and he’s as eager to meet you as I’m certain you are to meet him.”

“Oh...” I forced a smile of my own, “I can’t *wait!*”



The next day, I met my new ‘corporate babysitter’ at the bakery. He was a tallish man, not terribly unattractive... I guess... and with cocky bravado and self-affirming confidence that would have been second only to my own... if not for the fact that I needed him to make this work. So instead, I forced myself to act far more subdued than normal. He, on the other hand, waltzed right into the shop and introduced himself.

“These are very exciting times,” he gushed after we shook hands, “I’ve been looking over your dad’s financials... and I see a *lot* of opportunity here.”

I chuckled loudly at his announcement, “Frankly Matt, the only opportunity I’m interested in is the opportunity to liquidate the assets and sell the building.”

He took that comment poorly, looking as if I had personally insulted him. “But you haven’t even given it a try Carl... how can you say such a thing about your family heritage?”

“Listen Matt,” I continued, “This whole thing is a sham, all I want to do is get this year over with so that I can get on with my life.”

“Get on with your life?” he guffawed, “*This*, was your father’s life... and his gift to you... and you’re making a mockery of it?! You *disgust* me, Sir.”

I was shocked at his reaction. Clearly the man was unstable. “I’m sorry Matt,” I tried to begin what I was sure would be a long process of apologizing, “I just never figured that an appointed trustee would get so worked up over a silly sweet shop”

Matt’s eyes changed from anger to a curious look of wonder, “Silly Sweet Shop,” he chuckled, “You might be on to something to something there Carl” he paused for a moment to build the anticipation, “... but first thing’s first”

He slapped a heavy book on the counter and opened the cover. The multi-page document had a dazzling array of charts and graphs with statistics for this, and estimates for that.

“I’ve looked at everything that your father was doing... and the real problem, Carl... is that this place isn’t all that it’s cracked up to be. He’s been losing money for years, the estate is in deep debt actually... so if you’re looking to ‘get on with your life’ as you so eloquently put it, then the *first* thing that you will need...” he paused to make sure I was listening, “is to offer a product line that people actually want to spend money on. One that you can produce cost effectively... that has the highest possible margins with the quickest turn-overs. And from what I’ve seen... the products that you should focus on are pastries, cookies, squares, cakes and other deserts.”

He paused to gauge my reaction – which was muted to say the least - then continued, “Sweets Carl... Sweets.”

“Right. Sure Matt... Sweets, yeah I get it. Everything except the part about the massive debt.”

He slid the booklet around for me to see. I browsed through the financials and quickly discovered that although my father had been a heck of a baker... he was a *lousy* businessman. In short, if I sold the building today – it would just barely cover the debt he had incurred after years of selling baked goods that nobody wanted.

I turned back to him with a nauseated expression.

“I’ve done the research Carl,” Matt continued... his demeanor having returned to overly optimistic, “and this City has plenty of bakeries... too many in fact... but no-one specializes in pandering to sweet-tooths. And believe me, there are *lots* of them around.”

“Well yeah,” I agreed, “I *know* there are...”

Matt cut me off mid-sentence” I *know* you know Carl! But then *why*, pray-tell, would we not try to take advantage of them?”

“We?”

Matt frowned, “Carl... this is going to be a partnership from now one... or maybe that is a bit of an over statement. I’m running the show and you’re here for the ride... but you will be working *hard* along the way. And when we’re done... *I* will be in for *huge* promotion... and *you* will have your little nest egg to sell.”

“What?”

“That’s the condition of the creditors... they wanted to call the loan upon the death of your dear old dad... but I saw what they didn’t Carl,” he replied, “Can I call you Carl? Or Carl Christopher? Or is C.C. better?”

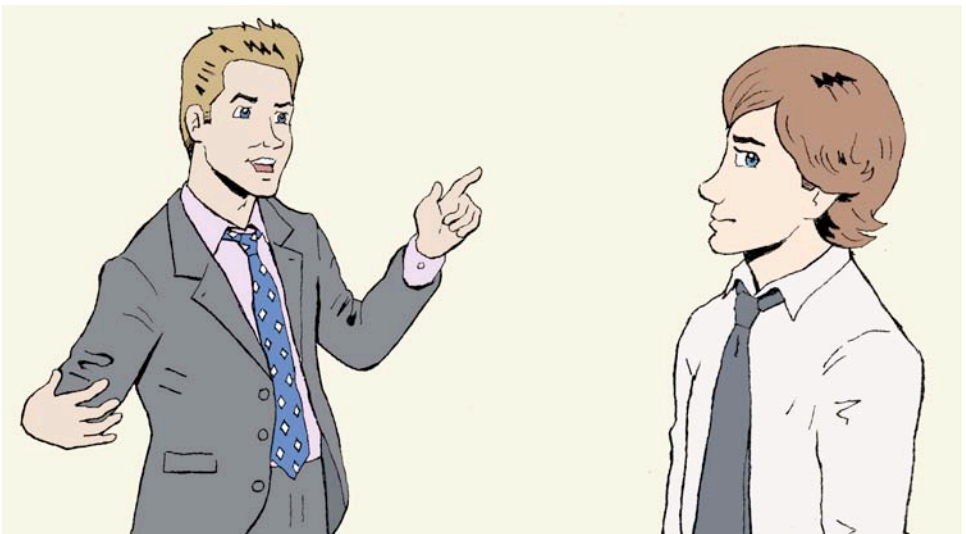
I simply glared with him with a horrific expression. Not only did I have to spend a year working in the business that I hated, not only was that business in debt so badly it was just barely getting by... but now I would have to spend the year taking orders from this idiot?

The idiot did not wait for me to reply.

“Anyhow C.C., what I am saying is that the non-desert side is the non-profitable side. Clearly it’s what almost brought your father down. You just can’t compete with the big bakeries on buns and rolls. There’s no money to be made in bread. If you want to turn this business around... and pay off all that debt... and maybe even make a little profit... than we are going to have to divest ourselves of those product lines and focus on what we can make the most money on.”

He paused again.

“Deserts C.C.! Sweets!” He paused for a moment deep in thought, “Hey... I like that... C.C.’s Sweets!”



“C.C.’s sweets?” I repeated aloud.

“Yeah!” Matt replied enthusiastically, “That’s the new name of this business I think C.C. And I guarantee its going to turn this place around. In and in twelve short months we’ll have made accomplished our goals.”

“Really?” I asked skeptically, “We’ll pay back all the debt and be ready to sell this place selling just sweets?”

“No C.C., not *just* sweets,” Matt smiled, “C.C. Sweets – the very sweetest sweets in town!”

I looked at him puzzled, “Matt, I think this is crazy. I’ve been a banker my whole life... and I can’t see that there is any way that you can make this work. I would *never* have approved such a crazy idea... how you even got this far eludes me.”

“You’re right... it does sound crazy...” he sighed, “but I’ve done this kind of thing before C.C., and I *know* it will work. And pretty soon you’ll see! We’re going to have customers lined up outside waiting to buy your sweets C.C.!”

I chuckled. He was nuts. Unfortunately, I didn’t have any other options.

“What other choices do I have?” I asked.

“Well,” he began, “You *could* walk away, in which case the bank takes control of the assets and I do what I was going to do *anyway* but when I’m done, the bank sells everything... and therefore... keeps everything for itself.” He shrugged with a sarcastic smile. “I guess it’s up to you, C.C.”

I looked at Matt with a hesitant smile while an equally wicked smile crept across his face. I could tell that he was serious... and that my life was about to change forever.

“Yeah... I guess it is” I groaned.



I signed the massive agreement that Matt had included as part of his corporate summary that afternoon, and the very next day we started to divest the bakery of anything that wasn’t a sweet. Anything that wasn’t a desert was gone, and that included all packaging and equipment. It unfortunately meant that I was divesting myself of a few of my father’s long-time clients as they had only purchased his breads and buns and were not interested in ‘sweets’.

“Don’t worry,” Matt smiled, “We’ll get them back. Them and lots more.”

I hoped... or rather *prayed* that he knew that he was doing. So did the remaining customers that continued to drop in in the days ahead. They all seemed a little confused by the new direction, but were all happy to see that the business was staying open, and agreed to stay with us regardless of the menu. By the

end of the month we had opened up twenty-five percent of the kitchen by getting rid of old product lines, and I had fulfilled my requirement of spending enough hours and enough days in the shop... by about double.

Matt started the next month with a new box of clothes for me. He had designed a new logo for the bakery and had had a new uniform made up for me to wear. White pants and shirt with a candy-striped apron.

“Why, exactly, do I need to wear a uniform?” I asked Matt as I glanced disapprovingly at the articles of clothing

“You’re the face of the business, C.C.,” he said, “People need to connect with a real person behind the company.”

I told him I thought it was a little much... he just chuckled, “If you think *this* is a little much... just wait until you see what’s next!” He handed me an appointment card for a hair salon in town. The name sounded familiar but I had never been there myself. I always figured it was for women, not guys.

“What’s this for?” I asked, holding the card up for him to see.

“It’s for an appointment Carl,” he snickered, “That’s why it says ‘appointment card’ on it”

I rolled my eyes, “Yes, I gathered that, Matt.” I paused to read the card over... it was for a place called ‘Nancy’s Boutique and Salon.’ “This doesn’t look like a place I’d normally go to...”

It was now Matt’s turn to roll his eyes, “Clearly” he agreed, “But this place just happens to be the very best in town... and I only deal with the very best. *You* Sir, need a haircut and manicure *desperately*”

“I can’t get a mani...” I began to protest, but he cut me off mid sentence.

“It’s about maintaining a polished look Carl. Your customers are going to expect it... so you better be prepared to deliver it.”

My face scrunched up as I formulated a reply, but Matt continued before I could speak, “And besides... you signed a contract agreeing to do as I recommended... so unless you’re prepared to breach a contract... one on which the ink is *barely* dry... then I think you’ll be headed to Nancy’s downtown as soon as you’re done here...” he looked up at the clock on the wall as the big hand moved the twelve, signifying that it was now 5:01, “which is right now... off you go... and don’t you dare be late!”

I grumbled the whole way to the car about how I could let myself get into such a predicament, and was soon on my way to the where Matt had made my appointment.

When I arrived, I shyly introduced myself... as a ‘friend of Matt’ and that I was here for my appointment. I was still certain that this wasn’t a place that men frequented... no matter how important their appearances were. The front half of the store looked like a high fashion boutique – for women – while the back

end was clearly a beauty salon, with pictures of women getting their hair and makeup done on every wall. Even the color scheme was decidedly feminine.

“So you must be C.C.,” I heard a voice behind me say.

I turned around to see an attractive woman smiling warmly at me.

“Um... yes,” I replied “Do I know you?”

She grinned but didn't answer. “ You know that Matt is going to run that place one day... I swear. He's a smart one. We've worked together a few times.”

I looked blankly at her.

“Oh, I'm sorry,” she giggled as she extended her hand to me, “I'm Nancy... the owner. Matt requested that I work on you personally.”

“Work... on me?”

She giggled again, “Well sure... what did think you came here for? A social call? Right this way Cissy.”

“I'm sorry?” I retorted, “What did you just say?”

“I said... right this way C.C.,” she pointed towards the back of the salon, “That is your name isn't it?”

I nodded, with an uncertain expression then slowly followed her to the rear of her establishment, where she seated me and clipped a cape over my shoulders before leaning me back into the sink to rinse out my hair.

“Yeah... Matt is pretty amazing. You would not believe the things I've seen him do. I just know that you're going to be impressed,” she chuckled, “You'll be completely reinvented when he's done working his 'magic'.”

I nodded, half in agreement and half in worry.

Nancy took the better part of an hour on my hair, adding golden blonde highlights and shaping it into what she called ‘a good foundation for a future hair-style’. It sounded rather foreboding to me, but I really didn't have much of say. If I refused, Matt would have me in breach of contract... and I had too much at stake for that... so I allowed Nancy to do her work. The result was, at best – androgynous- at worst- slightly feminine- with sweeping bangs and a slight length maintained at the back, almost like a mullet, but less manly.

“Now let's take a look at those nails,” Nancy proclaimed after showing me my new coif.

“Yeah,” I said, “Matt said I needed a manicure. That's just like a cleaning and polish, right?”

“Yeah,” Nancy chuckled, “...that's it.”

I was weary of the expression on her face, but allowed her to do her work none-the-less. She started by soaking, then cleaning and filing each nail on each finger on each hand, and then proceeded to do the same on each of my

toes. It seemed benign enough that I began to lose interest and started to day-dream by the time she returned to working on my hands. When she was finished however, I wished that I had paid closer attention, as she had given me a new set of acrylic white tipped, trimmed and clear polished



nails. They were the kind of nails that women routinely wore around the world... but on a guy?

“What the hell?” I cried out, “I thought it was just a cleaning and polish! How am I going to mix dough and bake stuff?” I whined.

“Simple dear,” she smiled, “You’ll just have to wear gloves like every other girl that works in a bakery.”

“But I’m *not* a girl working a bakery...” I whined, “I am the *owner*. This is all just a temporary thing.”

“Hush now dear,” Nancy interjected, “A nice girl like you shouldn’t be complaining so much. It’s un-ladylike.”

“I’m *not* a lady,” I growled, trying to get in the last word. She smiled and removed the cape from around my neck at allow me to leave. I frowned as I got up from the seat and headed for the door.

This was demeaning. Matt and I would have word about this.



“She insisted on calling me a girl Matt,” I complained later when he came to work the next day, “she said I was a lady. What the hell is *that* about?”

Matt just laughed, “Oh that’s just Nancy’s way. She calls everyone a lady C.C., even me. It’s just her thing.”

“Somehow I *doubt* that,” I scoffed, looking him over in his stiff white pants and shirt. It was a *stark* contrast to what *I* was wearing. The pants he had purchased for me were partially lycra, and stretched to fit around my waist and hips... and thighs... and knees. The shirt was about the same. Plus the stupid candy-striped apron was completely over the top.

“You just need to trust me to do what I do best,” he said, “You just go back to the kitchen and do what you do best C.C.... leave the heavy lifting to me.”

I’d been in the kitchen for pretty much a month straight, so if he wanted me to continue then I’d continue. At least there wasn’t anyone else in there to see me. Besides, as he had pointed out the other day, even though I sort of owned the place... I *was* under contract to listen to him. So what choice did I have?

“No choice at all,” I grumbled to myself as I started to bake.



The next week or so was very busy at the store. Matt had hired a contractor to ‘freshen up the façade of the building in preparation for the new signage and paint colors that were all part of Matt’s marketing plan. His plan for me, however, was to labor away in the kitchen to prepare an assortment of tasty confections for him to sample. He would routinely taste my wares when not schmoozing clients and checking on in the contractor’s work. He suggested that I take a variety of treats out to the contractor’s work crew, to get their opinion as well. I wasn’t crazy about the idea, since I felt a little self-conscious the ‘uniform’ that Matt was making me wear, but he said I looked just fine and that if anyone was staring at me that it meant he had done his job well.

But as I took the tray around to the offer my samples to the workers, I thought I looked positively silly, but since no one made me feel uneasy, and since I had little choice in the matter, I stopped thinking about it altogether. They were, after-all... only dumb, tight white pants and tops with a silly striped apron. It wasn’t *that* bad.

Was it?

A few weeks later, though, the situation started to change. One day, on what was supposed to be my day off, Matt personally drove me across town for what he called my ‘next appointment.’

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“You remember, my old friend Nancy from the salon?” he smiled, “To her place.”

“Oh no,” I replied. “Seriously? She’s crazy.”

“That’s Nancy, all right!” Matt chuckled as he opened the car door for me, encouraging me to get out. I sighed and slouched my shoulders as I exited the vehicle.

Upon our entering, Matt and Nancy immediately huddled to whisper back and forth to each other, only stopping from time to time to take measurements of nearly every part of my body.

“Are you two conspiring against me?” I asked Matt.

“You’ll see in a minute dear,” Nancy grinned as she disappeared into the stockroom.

True to her word, she returned minutes later from the back with a series of boxes in hand. The first contained some kind of strange white undergarment that had to be laced up from the back. She told me to exhale before she started tightening the straps. I yelped aloud as the device compressed my torso.

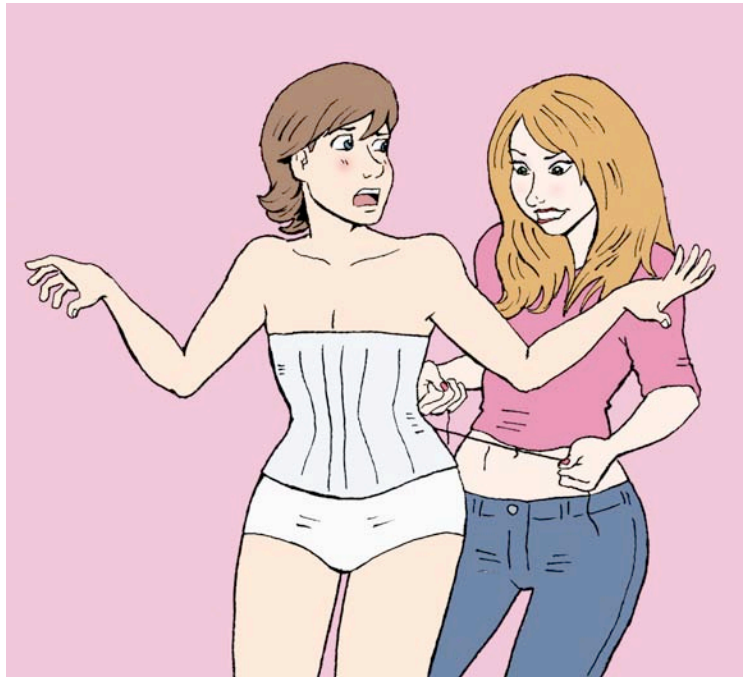
“What the hell are you...” but Nancy was relentless... ignoring me entirely... she ordered me to exhale again. This time I knew better then to waste precious oxygen on complaining, so I complied with her request... only to have her squeeze the tortuous appliance even tighter around me. This continued for two more minutes until I felt as if my insides would start to pop.

With a sly smile, Nancy moved on to give me a new pair of undergarments – ‘panties’ she called them – in white to match my cincher... which was apparently the name of the convoluted devil device that I had been forced to wear. After that I was given a snug fitting white tunic top that fell to mid thigh, with a pair of super tight fitting, white lycra pants.

“They aren’t pants love,” Nancy corrected me, “They’re leggings”

“Leggings?” I whined, “But aren’t...”

Matt wouldn’t have me whining, “That’s enough of that C.C.!” he scolded me;



“You’ll not take that tone with Miss Nancy. She is merely trying to help you... to help *us*. You’ll speak to her with respect. Is that understood?”

Feeling dejected I slumped my shoulders forward and nodded.

“Now apologize to Miss Nancy for your rude behavior” Matt continued.

I was quite concerned by his aggressive tone, but new better then make a scene.

“I’m sorry Miss Nancy” I whimpered.

“That’s perfectly alright Cissy,” she smiled, “I’ve dealt with more than a few of *your kind* before. I’m sure your manners will be *much* better the next time I see you.”

My kind? Much better manners? Next time? Cissy... had she called me a Cissy?

Matt ordered me to twirl around in the tunic and leggings as Nancy adjusted the outfit and Matt made comments.

“We’ll have to do something about that VPL,” he said matter-of-factly.

“The tunic will cover it for now, just as long as she doesn’t bend too far over or let the tunic ride up,” Nancy replied.

“We’ll have to switch over to a higher cut when we go to full-blown hose,” he said.

“That’s no problem,” Nancy agreed, “We can even go right to a thong.”

Matt just nodded, “That’s probably what should happen.”

I felt like I wasn’t even there. I knew they were talking about me, but the conversation made little-to-no sense. High-cut? Hose? VPL?

The only word a recognized was ‘thong’ but I couldn’t understand how it applied to me. The two of them continued to chatter with each other while my outfits were boxed up and an invoice made.

It was apparent in the way that they talked, that Nancy’s earlier statement... that they had worked together before, was true. In fact it almost looked to me like they were and old married couple.

What was I getting myself into?

My confusion must have showed in my body language as Matt and I drove back to the shop in silence later that night. He kept looking over at me from the driver’s chair, as if wanting me to strike up a conversation.

Finally he broke the silence and came right out and asked, “Is everything okay C.C.?”

I sighed and looked down, “Well... sort of... it’s just that... I...”

“It’s a lot to experience in a short time... I know,” he interrupted.

“Well it’s not just that” I continued, “It’s that...”

“You’re unsure about the product line... I get it,” he interrupted again, “but you don’t need to worry about a thing. I’ve done the research... this *will* work.”

“Well... there’s *that*, but also I just...”

“Don’t worry, I know that you don’t feel like you have no-one to confide in... it’s perfectly natural. You can tell me anything you like whenever you need to. This whole image makeover thing is quite a lot at once C.C., but I’m here to guide you through it.”

I sighed. *Allowing me to get a word in edge-wise would be swell too Matt*, I thought to myself. I glanced at my reflection in the mirror, was this really just an image makeover... or was it complete and total redo? And how was it going to help me make more money in the end?

I just wasn’t so sure anymore.



Matt kept a low-profile for the next week while I was busy working in the kitchen. He pretty much stayed up front, serving customers and monitoring the contractors’ progress.

When he *did* come back to check on me... he mostly kept quiet and shot me a tentative smile.

A week or so later however, he was bursting at the seams when he came back to the kitchen.

“Well,” he began with a giddy expression, “I’ve got some *great* news. I’ve crunched our Q1 numbers and we’re on the right track. Margins are up, expenses are down... and we are actually making headway on that debt load. It’s *very* exciting CC.”

I just glared at him. “The first quarter was so good because I’m back here doing *all* the work Matt!”

“Oh... well... I guess I should have asked you how things are shaping up back here then,” he said in a smug tone.

I was carrying a tray of goodies to from the oven to the cooling rack, like I had done now routinely every day at ten and three o’clock.

“Shaping up?” I spat, “Did you really just ask me that? Do you have *any* idea how hard it is to work in a freaking corset?”

“No, I don’t. I’ve never worn one,” he said, “But I hear the more you wear it the easier it gets.”

“Whatever,” I scoffed, and set the tray down. I had taken a tray out front earlier for the contractor and his workers to sample. I wasn’t sure I liked their smiles and grins. It was hard to tell if they were pleased with the cookies and sweets, or if they were checking out my legs in my new ‘leggings’. Thank god for the tunic covering my butt, or who knows where their eyes would have wandered to.

Could construction workers be gay?

I continued to unload trays of fresh-baked goodies from the oven to the cooling racks while Matt watched.

“That’s terribly inefficient CC. Try to carry the trays two at time instead of one at a time.”

“I know a way that would be more efficient too Matt,” I snapped, “Why don’t you stop watching me and actually *help?*”

Matt chuckled, “Oh, I’m really far too busy to be back here. And you need the practice of wearing your new booties”

“What are you talking about? What new *booties?*” I glared at him.

“These ones” he smiled, holing up a pair of white ankle-high wedge-heeled boots with a slight platform sole.

“*What?*” I shouted, “There is no way I’m wearing those! This is getting out of hand Matt. I mean ... I understand the new product line, and the branding, and even the renovation out front, I do... but really... the new outfit... the hair... the fingernails... and now the boots? What in the frickin’ hell is this?”

“Listen!” Matt snapped at me, “You have to let *me* do the big picture thinking here, because *that* is what our contract *says* I’m supposed to be doing.”

He paused for a moment before continuing, “and besides... they were supposed to be a congratulatory gift for you for our Q1 results... but I can see that you truly are the spoiled *brat* that your father always claimed you to be.”

I sighed and looked down at the floor. Matt was right. I was acting completely unappreciative towards him for all the work he was doing to make me money – and proving everything my father thought about me to be true. Besides that, the contract said *he* was in charge, and I had to work there *every* day in order to inherit the building. So if I didn’t follow his direction, I’d lose *everything*. I really had no choice.

“It’s not that I doubt you’re going in the right direction...” I bemoaned, “It’s just that I really don’t understand what a lot of this has to do with making a more profitable bakery.” I motioned towards all of my new articles of clothing.

Matt smiled again, then chuckled, “My dear, in order to make this more profitable, I need you to ‘grow into the role’ as *the* focal point of CC Sweets.”

He paused to let it all sink in. Had he just called me *dear?*

“I’m changing your image to better represent the what we are going for at CC Sweets, as part of the overall brand. You’re the owner... the mascot if you will. And people will have a certain expectation of what you will look and act like, which is why I’m making you learn to do all of these new things”

“Huh?” I stared at him blankly.

“Never mind,” he continued, “Just keep practicing with those trays. You’ll be done in half the time... and look fabulous doing it.”



I shook my head... still not entirely sure what he was up to or how I had allowed him to talk me into all of this. Regardless of how confused I was, I did understand being under ‘contract’... so within a few minutes my new ‘booties’ were on my feet, and Matt was tutoring me how to walk in what was equivalent to two-inch heels, while balancing trays of goodies in each hand. Needless to say, we wrote-off a lot of product that day as I tripped and flopped around doing my new balancing act in wedge-heeled footwear.

But after a few days... weeks perhaps, I started to get the hang of it. Matt took me back to the salon to ‘celebrate’ my achievements. Personally, I would have preferred going to a pub or restaurant, which I had suggested to him as an alternative, but he wouldn’t have any of it.

“All that beer will be hard on your waistline CC,” he said, scolding me for my suggestion. I sighed. He was right. It was true; it would be hard on my waistline. I had done such a good job sticking the diet that he had prepared for me ever since the day I was first laced into my corset. It didn’t make sense to blow it now. And besides, I didn’t want to appear to be unappreciative any more.