

JAMES J CRAFT

***THAMES
GREENE***

by James J. Craft
A Tales of Transformation Book

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illustrations by Joe Six-Pack



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THAMES GREENE

The sign said it would be the finest master-planned community in the country. It was hard to argue. The builder controlled everything. From the roads coming into the new town-to-be, to the parks, commercial spaces, and schools... Everything was indeed “master-planned.” It was exciting to think that you could be a part of a new town that was being built from the ground up. That was exactly what Hank was thinking as he drove past the new development’s massive stone gates. He worked in the city, and true... City living did have its perks. It was nice to be so close to everything, but he knew it was no place to raise kids. There were so many bad influences. The air was bad. There was crime... Etc, etc.

Maybe Thames Greene was the answer... The answer to his question of “where to move so that will be better off?” The artists’ rendering of what the finished community would look like was exactly what Hank was hoping for; lovely brick homes on tree lined streets, kids playing in state-of-the-art recreation facilities, neighbors you actually wanted to meet. It was, in a word, perfect. That and the prices were right, very right. Better than just *right* – it was a bargain. Hank knew he could easily sell his old two-story row house in the city for far more than a house of twice the size would cost out here. And with the planned interstate bypass expressway extension and commuter rail-link, he and his wife could easily get in and out of the city. Worst case, it might take another 20 minutes. But those twenty minutes would well be worth it in the long run.

Ira thought the same thing. A co-worker had told him about Thames Greene. He had boasted about how fantastic his new home was going to be, and how cheap... make that inexpensive. Ira’s interest was piqued. He had spent the last few years in a modest town house in a nondescript part of the city while his executive counterparts hung their hats in large, opulent homes in affluent neighborhoods. He was, to be blunt, jealous. But his jealousy did not make him fool.

His wife had stayed home to raise the twins, Martin and Connie, hence they could ill-afford the house that Ira so longed for. Until now anyway. Housing prices in the city had doubled since they purchased it years ago. And his brother the realtor, insisted that if he ever wanted to sell, it would be sold in a day. These new homes were as nice as almost any of his colleague’s homes, and were certainly in his price range. Ira longed to finally have a house he could be proud of. One that he could invite people over to see. One that his associates might even be envious of. He could see it all starting to line up... All except one thing. How to convince his wife Marjorie. He pondered the angle. He hadn’t become an executive financier by allowing obstacles to remain in his way. There had to be an approach he could take.

His son Martin was starting to hang around with a crowd that both Ira and his wife concerned. He was slipping in school, talking back to his parents, staying out late, even smoking and drinking underage. To add insult to injury, he had no plans on what to do with the rest of his life. Ira had arranged an internship for him at his firm, but Martin had declined. He argued that “Just because you’re some big important business man, doesn’t mean that I have to be one.” Unfortunately Marjorie supported Martin on the issue, so Ira was forced to back out of the internship plan

he had made for his son at work... a source of great humiliation. Moving out of the city to a brand new town, with a brand new school, where all the kids could leave their old habits and stereotypes and cliques behind was exactly what was in order. At least that was what he would tell Marjorie in order to get what he wanted.

The Thames Greene sales center was a collection of seven homes, interconnected to the main office building, so that interested persons could browse through them all. Ira was in the second home from the end, called the "Empire A." It was a stunning two story that included a finished basement, and a master bedroom with adjacent bathroom that would rival a five-star hotel. Ira could easily see himself living in it. There were two other rooms on the floor. One for his daughter and one to possibly use as an office, as he was sure that Martin would want to live in the basement bedroom beside the oversized family room. His wife Janice would fall in love with the kitchen, and the dining and living rooms were perfect for entertaining. It was exactly what Ira had been pining for.

"Pretty nice huh?" Hank said to Ira as he browsed the model house next to the one he was determined to buy. Ira looked up from his brochure with a smile, "Yeah... I can't believe how nice this is... And the price..."

Hank laughed in agreement, "You got that right!"

Hank continued on his way back to the sales office. He was going to sign the papers right now. Joan, his wife, would understand. She wanted to move just as much as he did, and this was such a good deal that she would forgive him for not consulting her first.



The Thames Greene project manager watched the taillights of the last two cars disappear into the night. It had been another blockbuster day of sales. At the rate the units were selling, they would have to begin preparing phase two for development almost a full six-months ahead of schedule. On his desk were conditional offers from two successful inner-city men. Ira, and Hank all seemed to be more the anxious to move and the project manager would do all that he could to accommodate them. He had already called in extra crews and hired extra tradesmen from all over the state to keep construction on schedule. The last thing he wanted to do is get behind the proverbial eight ball. The big-wigs at LCI's head office in Virginia would not be impressed.

As it was, LCI's CEO was a little "disappointed" that the Thames Greene project wasn't yielding better results. Scott Penner was used to the company's other divisions, where a breakthrough in pharmaceutical science could net a double-digit return in no time flat, or he could boost the stock share by purchasing their nearest competitor. But being a land developer and home building was an entirely different bowl of wax, and even though LCI had hired the best and the brightest, they were experiencing some growing pains... To say the least. Still, Scott was confident he had made the right choice. He could have simple chosen to sell off the twenty-thousand acre plot of land, formerly known as the Thames and Greene farms. After all, no one in the executive office was even sure why the company had purchased the farms in the first place. Whatever the reason had been no longer mattered as the land had already been written off the books, meaning that any

profits made developing the property would be “found-money.” And with up to 5,000 new homes planned, Scott was certain that there would be plenty of it. He needed the boost in the profit margin as he continued to clean up the previous CEO’s mess. It was true, that his predecessor had returned the company to profitability from near ruin, but he had also left the company’s board of directors to answer for some big questions. Questions that everyone from the FDA and EPA, to the families of former employees of the company’s Edenwood division wanted answers to. The shoddy record keeping and entirely missing documents only compounded things. Something had gone on... Something was amiss, but what exactly happened was only known by one individual, and that individual had since been replaced by Scott Penner.



Joan Anderson was hardworking and level headed. She had spent the last 18 years at home, raising her and Hank’s children. She prided herself on being known as the “practical” one in the household, the one who kept everything running neatly and efficiently. As a mother, she was in her element. But once her son Julian entered grade twelve, it dawned on her that her baby no longer needed her as they once did.

So she re-entered the workforce. Not that she had to. Hank’s job at the plant paid well... Very well. But she had felt that her usefulness as a mother was nearing its end. And she *did* have a degree in nursing that she had worked so hard through correspondence school to get. And nurses were in demand. But getting back to the matter at hand...

Joan was caught completely off guard when she listened to her excited husband ramble on about the new house they had bought that day. They had bought!?

“We really lucked out!” Hank proclaimed.

“Wait just one second,” she said sternly, “There was no ‘we’ involved here. This was all you. You unilaterally decided to buy us a new house, in the middle of nowhere, away from all of our friends and family and our jobs and our kid’s schools and without even thinking to consult your wife first!?”

You big dumb muscle head! She thought to herself.

“But...” Hank tried to say.

“But nothing!” Joan snapped “This is, by far, the most impulsive, selfish, childish thing you’ve ever done Hank! I may be your wife, but should have the simple courtesy to ask me before dragging me and the family off to some God-knows-where cardboard cutout housing development!”

Hank’s heart sank. He had done all those things, but it was in everyone’s best interest. If only she knew what he knew, Hank thought to himself. He would have to do his very best to explain it.

“Honey, this is for the best, trust me. Our house is almost paid for, and its worth a lot more then what we paid for it.” He paused, watching her body language for a moment before continuing, “A *whole lot* more! We’ll get a brand new house in a brand new town, and have a pile of money left over when we’re done!”



Joan's brow furrowed, "Hank, why do we need more money. We've already got money."

Hank sighed, "But what if something happened? What if, say... One of us lost their job?"

"Hank dear, I can assure you that there's no chance of me losing my job. Those idiots would be lost without me," she rebutted. She thought about her job at the medical lab where she worked. *Them... get rid of me?* She chuckled aloud... But her facial expression quickly changed when she realized what her husband was implying. "Unless..." she gasped, "You lost your job?"

"No-no-no" Hank tried to keep his composure, "Not yet. Well I mean..." his voice trailed off as his eyes became misty. He took a deep breath before he continued, "You know things haven't been great..."

"But I thought it was getting better," Joan interjected.

"It was, but..." Hank sighed, "They're closing the plant at the end of the quarter. April 29th."

Joan could tell by the look on her husband's face that he was crushed. His job had been his life for so long, he had always taken such pride in his work. Immediately, she knew he needed comforting now, not chastising. She leaned forward and kissed him, then wrapped her arms around him, "Then we'll move to this Green place and we'll get through this," she spoke softly to him as she embraced him. She gritted her teeth as she cursed at herself for giving in. She hated to lose arguments.

"They did say that they were going to move some other divisions here from Cincinnati," he tried to sound confident, "and all of us with seniority will get first crack at any new positions."

Joan smiled at him, “and I’m sure you’ll be first in line,” she said, never believing it for a moment.

So that was that. Joan was just going to have to get used to the idea. Then Andersons were moving from their upper class neighborhood on the city’s upper west side, to Thames Greene, the new master planned community from LCI Developments.



In another part of the city, another husband was trying to convince his wife that the move to Thames Greene was for the better. So far, Marjorie Heath was proving to be something of a hard sell. She was perfectly happy in their middle-class town home in their middle class neighborhood. She was perfectly happy to take the bus to go shopping for groceries. She figured that her husband Ira should be perfectly happy too. The problem was, he wasn’t. Worse, he couldn’t just come right out and tell her that.



So after a half hour of convincing, Marj was starting to come around.

She could not deny the fact that the influences that were being introduced to Martin’s life were less than good. And it was also hard to deny that moving to a freshly built, sterile community far away from said influences wouldn’t be good for their son. Capitulation was not something that Marjorie took lightly, such as when she decided to abandon a promising career to be a housewife... But in this case, she knew that Ira had done his homework. She also knew that he wanted – secretly – to be like all the other guys at the office with their big, fancy houses. *Why couldn’t he just come right out and say it?* She wondered.



The next day, standing on freshly-turned earth, Alfonso watched his step as another giant cement truck wheeled past him. He trudged over to where he had left

his equipment and scratched his chin. He was at the construction site that would become phase two of the Thames Greene development, contemplating his best interest. Alfonso was the most respected, most talented, and oldest excavator operator on the site. He had seen and heard it all, and so when he heard the sound of his bucket scraping metal on metal he knew he had a choice to make.

The sickening scraping sound was fresh in his ears. He had heard the sound once already that day, on the neighboring basement he had just dug. He figured it was a rock the first time. Maybe some buried debris the second time. But what were the chances of it happening a third time? Obviously pretty good. There was no question about it in his mind. There was something buried here. All over the site, actually. He was running out of ideas. Especially when the side of the forty-five gallon drum he had uncovered was so clearly visible.

He could have called his foreman over, and by all rights he should have. But that would have slowed the whole thing down to a stop, and all eyes would be on him for having sounded the alarm. On the other hand, if he simply raised the bottom of the hole by an inch or two, no one would be the wiser. The gravel would get laid, the concrete floor would get poured, and whatever it was he had uncovered would never be thought of again. Besides, it was probably just some old empty fuel drum that some farmer who had owned this property had buried instead of disposing of properly. Crazy farmers, Alfonso thought to himself, always making trouble. And so, having convinced himself that it was in fact someone else's fault, the crusty old backhoe driver gently sprinkled an layer of soil over what would become the basement floor, then moved on to his next dig.



Four months later, holes that Alfonso had dug had been filled with poured foundations, and finished with carpeting and recessed lighting. Above them, beautiful homes now stood, homes that were all anxiously awaiting the arrival of their new occupants. It was moving day.

The street was busy... *very* busy. There were moving vans and rental trucks everywhere as new families hurriedly loaded their belongings into their new residences. Dunney Drive, the longest, widest street in the neighborhood, was crammed. Ira could barely navigate the wide rental van through the masses. He was headed to number 171, the house he had first seen at the sales center all those many weeks ago. His daughter Connie, was seated beside him excitedly scanning the new street that would now be called home. Marjorie and Martin followed him in family SUV. One-Seventy-One was the only house on the street with an empty driveway.

To the right of them, at 169, a moving van was in the final stages of being unloaded. It appeared to Ira that his neighbors at were to be a nice young family much like his. After backing the truck into his new driveway, Ira smiled as his new neighborhood quickly introduced himself and his son. Hank seemed to Ira to be friendly enough, and he had a son, Julian, that didn't look like a troublemaker, even if they were both wearing matching tank tops from "Cold's Gym." Ira was getting a good vibe already.

Julian Anderson was getting a good vibe too. As he looked to the house on other side of them where the Heaths were unloading their rented van. Julian flashed his best smile at the girl in the tight shorts that was carrying a box down the ramp and into the garage. She smiled back, but kept walking. This had some potential, Julian thought to himself. Definitely.

Ira had also seen the boy next door – what was his name again? – smiling at his daughter. Maybe his first impression had been wrong... But if was going to have some kid after his daughter, maybe it was it was better to have the boy living next door, rather than somewhere where he couldn't be traced. Besides, this boy's father looked like a reasonable guy, with a helluva handshake, *did he say his name was Frank, or Hank?*



Life had begun quickly in Thames Green, but after that first day, things progressed ever so slowly. It was the way of suburban life. Sedated and lethargic.

Hank's son, Martin, wasn't pleased to be living in Thames Greene. He longed to be back in the city with his pals. He spent his first week in suburban hell playing with his Superstation in the basement. He started thinking it wasn't too bad. The basement was well furnished, cool, and best of all, no one bothered him. But by the middle of week three, Martin was growing increasingly bored with his video games. He had tried to lounge around and listen to his MP3 player, text his old friends, but that got old quickly too. He had already rented almost every game at the local video store (which, by the way, sucked ass as compared to the one he used to visit back in the city). He had downloaded just about every rowdy punk rock song known to man, but those songs were only fun to play when his Dad was around. There simply wasn't anything to do but lie on the couch and watch a steady diet of Judge Jodie and Terry Stringer.

A new challenge for Martin was presented in the beginning of his fourth week in "the Greene" (which is what people seemed to smugly call this sterile urban prison). It was something he never expected to have trouble with.

Getting into his pants. His baggy jeans it would seem were *anything but*. It was like someone had shrunk them while he wasn't looking. That or he was putting on weight – which was highly unlikely. His stomach was still flat and his waist still looked slim, but then there were these damn pants. He cursed aloud as he tried to wiggle them up over his hips. It was always his hips as of late. The pants fit fine until he got to his hips. Damn stupid pants! How was he supposed to look dangerous in form-fitting clothes?

Connie was standing in the hall quietly chuckling as her twin brother cussed and fought with his denim pants. "I told you all those French fries would make you fat," she teased.

He could only turn and glare, "Shut up." He gave them another tug before collapsing onto his bed in defeat. "Dammit!" he cried aloud.

"I don't know why you're even wearing pants," his sister continued, "its like... Ninety out side." She looked down at her cute light blue shorts.

“But I’m not going outside” he chided, “and besides, I never wear shorts Con, you know that.” He resumed his seemingly pointless task of dressing from a horizontal position on his bed.

“Well... I’d let you borrow a pair of my jeans, but I’m pretty sure you won’t want to wear them,” she chuckled.

Martin only glared. “I’m not wearing girls’ jeans. I’m not some kind of queer.” He continued to fight the pants and get them over his thighs. He was grunting and growling in anger.

“Then I’ll get you some of my shorts, then.” She said merrily.

“Get out of my room!” Martin yelled.

Connie shrugged and walked away, listening as her brother cursed at himself, still losing the battle with his clothes. She made her way back to her new room, and was seated at her desk for about five minutes when she heard her brother at the door. “Gimme your damn jeans,” he said. Connie smiled smugly and looked up, tossing the pair she already had ready for him.

A few minutes later, Martin was quietly slipping his twin sister’s stretchy, low riding, flared legged jeans over his hips... With no problem at all! “Crud.” He said to himself, angry that they did fit after all. *Maybe she’s right about the French Fries after all*, he thought to himself.



Julian Anderson was getting restless. It wasn’t his idea to move out to this burg. His life had been fine. He was the top jock in school, and had his little corner of the world by the tail. He was starting on the football, basketball and baseball teams. He was dating the hottest girl in school. And her best friend, too.

In class, he was the smartest kid in most of his classes. He wasn’t a brain, but he didn’t take those sort of classes. He knew the teachers, and they liked him. Some cut him breaks. That was just the way he was. Julian was the sort of kid who could charm the skin off a snake.

With so much going for him, he was crushed to leave his school. That was not just where he spent his days, but it was his private kingdom. He knew how to operate that place.

Now it was going to be a new school. With new kids and new teachers. He had no doubt he'd still be the fastest, strongest, best-looking guy there, but being the top dog was more than that.

He was going to need something cute to hang on his arm.

He got up and looked through his window, across the way at his neighbor's house, looking at the silhouettes in the window shades. Which one of them was her?

The best way to fix the problem was to be pro-active. If he wanted some eye candy, to pump up his profile, he was going to have to think big. Maybe two or three girls would be enough to show everyone what kind of man he was. And the girl who lived in the house next door was going to be his first conquest.





Later that day, Martin was playing *Stealthforce II* on his game console, which he had plugged it into the big screen TV he had *somehow* managed to convince his Dad to buy. Connie flopped down on the opposite end of the couch Martin was sitting on. She sat quietly, grinning stupidly at her brother. He wasn't able to concentrate, knowing what was surely coming. After a few minutes Martin finally turned to his sister with an angry sneer, "What's your problem!?" he growled. Connie simply looked him square in the face and continued to smile like a Cheshire cat. Martin's blood began to boil. He wanted to punch his infinitely annoying sibling in the shoulder, something he would have normally done and had been doing since he discovered he was slightly stronger than his twin. But instead, he simply threw down the game controller, stood up and started to leave the room.

This action caught Connie completely off guard. She had full well expected to be punched. Indeed, she even thought she deserved it. But Martin hadn't hit her. Instead he was simply going to leave. In *her* jeans, no less. She chuckled aloud, causing Martin to stop dead in his tracks, turning towards her in anger. However, his anger turned to something of a look of embarrassment. He blushed slightly as he looked down at his legs. Connie's pants were snug fitting, semi-low riders, with slightly flared legs. They were made of stretchy denim material that was unlike anything he had ever worn before. The jeans had actually expanded to take the shape of his body. And even though she was now mocking him terribly, the jeans weren't killing him like all the ones he had worn in the past few weeks. It was going to be hard for him not to want to wear them again. So he simply flipped his sister the bird and continued to storm off to his room.

Martin had always preferred tee-shirts and baggy jeans or cargo pants, with the belt somewhere around his thighs. It was an ensemble that had been wearing nearly every day for months, possibly even years. But now he was giving serious thought to why Connie's jeans fit so well. And hell, they felt better. Even his mother and father's curious eyes when they returned home from work that day could not deter him from doing what earlier that day he would have never even thought.

Ira rolled his eyes when he saw Martin's new choice in fashion. *This must be some kind of retribution*, he thought, *acting out to show he doesn't like living here*. Ira knew that Martin was not too pleased about moving out "The Greene" as people were referring to it as. He had taken away all contact with the bad influences that Martin had become so enthralled with, so this was the only way that his son could get to him – by wearing his sister's jeans. Ira furrowed his brow and grimaced as he passed Martin in the hall. He was determined to not let his son's antics get to him.

Truth be told, Martin did not yet realize his newfound pants were going to upset his Father; he was only interested in comfort for right now. "Can I borrow another?" he asked Connie sheepishly as he poked his head in the doorway. His sibling's jaw dropped. This morning he was dead set against wearing her stuff, and now... here he wanted more to wear. Smiling warmly, she nodded and told her twin that she would leave him some clothes while he showered. Martin's face lit up

as he skipped off to the bathroom, “Thanks Sis!” he shouted on his way. Connie just rolled her eyes, “boys” she muttered.

Skipped?



The next day, Julian Anderson was thinking more boyish thoughts. He had seen the cute girl that lived next door several times since the move in. Their parents had briefly introduced them to each other, but that was weeks ago. He made a concerted effort to be outside whenever he thought she would be. He even went so far as to remove his shirt so as show off his impressive, defined, chest. Julian had been “Mr. Popular” at his old school, and he had every intention of doing the same here in Forest Green or whatever this place was called.

But being Mr. Popular required him to have legions of adoring girls, which currently presented a problem, as he knew none. Little Miss Connie next door was important, as she would be the first to be infatuated with him. So when he thought he spotted her in his neighbor’s backyard, he moved quickly. Slipping off his shirt as he slid open the patio door. Thank God they haven’t built the fences between our houses yet, he thought to himself as he strutted proudly across the freshly laid sod. His prey was working in the garden, facing away from Julian as he approached. She didn’t notice him standing there, which afforded the young jock ample time to take in the view of her very nice, round, and pert ass. The kind of ass that screamed to be slapped, encased in the tight stretchy beige material that her girly cargo pants were made out of. He could even see the tops of her white panties protruding slightly from the top of the pants. Sweet! He thought to himself as he cleared his throat. The helpless victim of his adoration turned around then stood up with a smile.

“Can I help you?” Martin asked.

“Uh... Er...” Julian sputtered a few times before regaining his composure, “I, uh... I... My name is Julian. I just wanted to introduce myself.” He thrust out his hand in an effort to make it believable. Martin rose up from his position in the flowerbed and shook Julian’s hand, “Nice to meet you.” He smiled, “Do you normally sneak up on people when they’re doing chores?”

Julian was cautious. he had the vague feeling that this kid was... Flirting with him? “Uh, no... Not usually” he replied. “So how do you like it here in the Greene?” he tried to make it sound like he was genuinely interested, even though he couldn’t care less.

“Its okay,” Martin replied, “But there’s really nothing to do here. It’s kinda boring.” Realizing that he had just been caught working in the garden, not the most masculine of pursuits, he tried to cover. “Oh, uh, I’ve never helped my mother pull weeds before... Ever. But I’m sick of playing video games... And it’s so boring out here... and all of my friends are back in the city... And a bunch of them have summer jobs, so I can’t hang with them or chat with them online... So... You know...” He looked down at his sister’s pants on his body. “Here I am.”

“You like video games?” Julian asked innocently, cursing himself for furthering the conversation.

Desperate not to talk about his situation he responded enthusiastically, “Oh yeah! Before I moved here, I was the best customer of the video store down the street. I have them all!”

Julian didn’t doubt it. This loser looked like a total loner. But he was still his ticket to meeting his hot sister.

Martin paused, “Why, do you play?”

“Oh yeah all the time.” Well not really. His Dad had long ago told him that video games were a poor substitute for working out. “What kind of system do you have?” Julian inquired, again wishing his big stupid mouth would just shut up.

“I’ve got a PlayBox 500” the other boy in the tight girly jeans said.

Julian’s eyes lit up, “Really!?! I’ve only a SuperStation 2. I’ve been thinking about asking my Dad for a PlayBox. Is it any good?”

Martin’s eyes lit up, maybe he was about to make his first new friend, “Totally! You want to see?”

Moments later Julian was playing BloodSport on the Heath’s big screen TV with his new friend Martin. As an added benefit, when Martin’s sister Connie came home from her job, she happened to walk right by them with what looked like a load of laundry to place in the bedroom next to where the boys were playing.



“Marty,” she said as she walked exited the room, “I put some old stuff that I don’t wear anymore on your bed. Let me know if anything fits.” Martin blushed deeply and remained quiet, hoping that his new pal hadn’t heard his sister, and hating her for trying to embarrass him.

Julian was too fixated on Connie’s ass to fully comprehend what she had said. It didn’t dawn on him until later that Connie’s ass and Martin’s ass looked almost the same. In fact, he thought Martin had a pretty cute butt.

He shook his head in disgust, *What the hell am I thinking?*



Ira was thinking about relaxing when he got home from work that day. He struggled out of his shoes, into his slippers and yawned as he headed downstairs to watch T.V. His hopes were dashed the moment he entered the basement family room. Martin, still wearing those *Damn Girly* pants, had hooked his gaming console up to Ira’s prized flat screen TV again. To his left was the neighbor’s kid. Ira paused for a moment, a noticeably gruff look on his face.

“Hi Mr. Heath” Julian smiled. Ira simply nodded, “Hey there.” Martin continued to ignore his father, which made Ira’s blood boil. But rather than make a scene in front of Julian, he decided to swallow his pride and go back upstairs to the living room. The TV was decidedly smaller, but so too would be the conflict.



Julian couldn’t help but wonder if his new friend was gay... Not that it should that bother him. He was feeling a lot more open minded in the weeks that passed since he first mistook Martin for his twin sister. The two boys had spent nearly every hour of every day in the Heath’s basement playing Martin’s Game Box. Julian had learned quite a bit about his new neighbor and was beginning to understand Martin’s reasoning for wearing those hip hugger pants like he did. That it just started out as a matter of comfort... And then, when Martin realized how much it was ticking off his father when he wore them, he had become determined to wear them *every* day.

Martin may have not been the most masculine guy Julian had ever met, but the kid had balls. When his dad virtually ordered him out of the pants, Martin upped the ante. He started to wear girly tops, and even girly under things. Well, at least Martin claimed to be wearing girls’ underwear... Not that he was looking. But he *had* noticed the lacy waistband of the panties Martin was wearing when he bent over to change the discs in the Game Box console the other day.

Though Julian thought he understood, and liked the idea of getting adults to blow their top, he was in no hurry to join him. At least... He didn’t *think* he was. Whatever quarrel Martin had with his Dad was between *them*. Julian and his Dad had a pretty good relationship. So good in fact that when the two macho men were chatting about Martin’s choice of attire, Julian was surprised to hear that Hank seemed to share his son’s thinking that such clothing looked quite comfy. Even days later when Julian was showing off his new stuff he had just bought, it didn’t even phase

him. He had purchased hip hugging jeans and trainers with a slightly thicker sole and partially elevated heel. Well, Martin deserved a little support in his war against his Dad, didn't he?

In fact when Julian informed his father that he had purchased them the other day at that Langdale's store where Connie worked, using her employee discount, which made them less than half the ticket price... Hank simply said, "Cool"

With his father's semi-approval in his head, Julian would return to see Connie the next day. And the day after that. He simply wanted to fit in a little more with Martin, and he of course there was the opportunity to flirt with Connie. Of course, whatever Connie told him to wear, he did. And whatever he wore, Connie told him that it "looked great" on him. That's all that Julian needed to hear. He bought everything without even thinking. When a pretty girl tells you to buy something, he had no resistance.

He was also in no position to disagree with her opinion. She could have said he "looked great" in an oat bag and he would have bought it and convinced himself that she was right. As it was, when he bought the flared jeans and embroidered pastel shirts, he looked in the mirror and was compelled to agree. Not that such behavior was abnormal for him. He was never known as much of an independent thinker or trend setter, but rather as someone who carefully watched others and then took on their trends as his own. He had taken his queue from his Dad. Spot a trend, observe others reaction to it, and if it will serve you... Make it your own. The canvas shoes with the wedge heel was one such example. They had taken him some time to get used to... But Julian was managing. And even though the new pants were snug... Even a little bit tight fitting, they *were* extremely comfortable. Just like Martin and Connie had said they would be. Besides it really didn't matter, since Martin and Connie were the only ones that would see, since all they ever did was hang out together, play video games, watch music videos... Even occasionally go shopping and browse through the stores in town... *Oh wait a second*, he thought, *I guess some other people would see me*. Oh well.

What was I thinking about? His train of thought was so easily sidetracked lately. *Oh Yeah... Connie*. The fact that he got to talk to Connie was an added bonus too. She was the cutest girl he had seen so far in Thames Greene, and he was determined to start the school year with a steady girlfriend. So if he had to sacrifice some of his self respect by dressing like a queer... He would. Its not like they were painful or uncomfortable to wear. They were extremely comfortable. *Did I already say that?*



After a few weeks of Julian going over to Martin's house, Julian's mother finally insisted that her son invite Martin and his family over for a swim. Joan, Julian's mother, was eager to play hostess, and Hank was eager show off his new swimming pool. The buyout package from the plant had been more lucrative than he thought, and after he had heard the splashes and laughing from the people next door all day, he was convinced that he should have one too. Ira was not quite as keen about swimming. He wasn't very interested in going over to have a barbeque at the Anderson's either, but Marjorie was insistent. She was determined that her

small-minded husband would interact with their neighbors regardless of his misconceptions of what they might be like.

“You’re the one who wanted to live here!” Marjorie pointed out. “And if you wanted to live in place that has better neighbors, then you have to be one yourself!”

Ira rolled his eyes and grunted. Even five minutes before they were supposed to show up, even after his wife had spent half of yesterday making snacks, Ira still actually hadn’t consented to going. “If you want to go, go.” He had said three or four times.

“We’re all going.” Marjorie insisted. “You’d be insulting our new neighbors if you don’t.”

“They don’t care.” Ira insisted. “You know how these things go. You girls will start talking, What’s-his-name, Hank will be working the grill, the kids will be playing and I’ll be just sitting around, bored as hell.”

“Well of course you’ll be bored, if you don’t try and be friendly.”

“The best kind of neighbor is the one who keep to themselves and doesn’t bother anyone.” Ira insisted.

“Sound wonderful.” Marjorie stood directly in front of Ira. “Now get moving or we’ll be late.”

Begrudgingly, Ira capitulated, and indeed, he spent much of the night on the deck, nursing his beer by himself. Just as predictably, his neighbor ran the grill, swam and carried on with the kids.

Ira sighed as he watched. This “Hank” character was a real piece of work. He acted like he was God’s gift to human kind. First, he had the nerve to tell Ira that he didn’t have any beer around the house, because he had banned “unhealthy” drinks from his household. Fine way to treat a neighbor. Ira had to go home and get his own. And they weren’t even grilling up meat. No, “Hank” said that they had all given up meat as a family. Ira hadn’t even touched what he had been given – some sort of shish kebab with “Chik’n” flavored wheat gluten. Ira heard his stomach rumble in hunger.

Although Ira had to admit that whatever he was doing, it sure paid off. His wife was hot, and Hank himself had a very trim physique. Not an overly-built weight-lifter’s look, but kind of like a triathlete or something. He didn’t seem to have an ounce of fat on him. Ira could tell, because he was wearing a pair of those idiotic European swim trunks. Speedos. They left little to the imagination. He was only half-surprised to see that Martin was wearing something very similar, probably just to annoy him. But he was a little startled to see that both his son and Hank’s son Julian were wearing similar super short, super tight, low-rise suits that looked like something out of his daughter’s closet, not his son’s. It made what Hank was wearing look tame.

As he thought about it, Ira did recall his daughter *had* been bragging about getting all of them into new suits, so he figured it must just be the style. Now that she was working at Langdale’s department store, she had really been aggressive lately in shopping their clothes to everyone she knew. But Connie wouldn’t lead the boys wrong... Would she? And so, feeling self-conscious and very much out of place, he pretended to suffer from indigestion and sat the swimming session out.



Another week passed, and Ira watched as Martin went over to Julian's almost every day to go swimming in the Anderson's pool. And when they weren't swimming, the boys were in the Heath's basement doing god-knows-what. Ira's fashion sense continued to send off alarms, as every time he saw the boys, they were wearing their tight pants with flared legs. Ira figured that Martin was doing it to push him, but that didn't explain why Julian was doing it too... Or Julian's Dad for that matter. Ira was convinced that Martin's most recent purchase of tight flared pants and calf-high black boots was meant to send him over the edge.

But although infuriating his Dad has been the original impetus for his wacky wardrobe that Connie had helped him to design, Martin was now actually starting to buy clothes purely because he *liked* them. Take for instance the boots with the tall four-inch wedge heel. After a few days, Martin had learned how to walk in them, by distributing his weight a little differently, with a slight sway in the hips... Now he couldn't help but walk that way almost all the time. He wore the boots and pants with a long, snug fitting T-shirt hid most of the wide, black leather belt with a double row of silver studs across it, that hung across his hips. It was a good thing that Connie worked at Langdale's and could get him an employee discount on the new clothes he was purchasing lately. There was absolutely no way he could afford to pay full price, and there was absolutely no way he could get into his old stuff anymore. But then, why not just buy new, bigger pants? One reason was that his father was so strongly opposed to his new look, he was committed to sticking to his principles. His Dad was not going to tell him what he could wear. And the second reason was that Those baggy pants seemed to be going out of style anyway. Tight was in. At least, that's what Connie said.

Ira bit his tongue when saw what his son was wearing. He was about to ground the boy for a month when Marjorie calmed him down. "He's just trying to get to you dear," she said, "you're the adult here, don't forget to act like it. Just ignore



him. If he wants dress like *that* then just let him. He's only embarrassing himself." Ira would eventually relax and agree with his wife. Besides, he knew that the new clothes weren't cheap, and without a source of income, Martin's aggravating behavior would eventually come to a halt.

It had too.

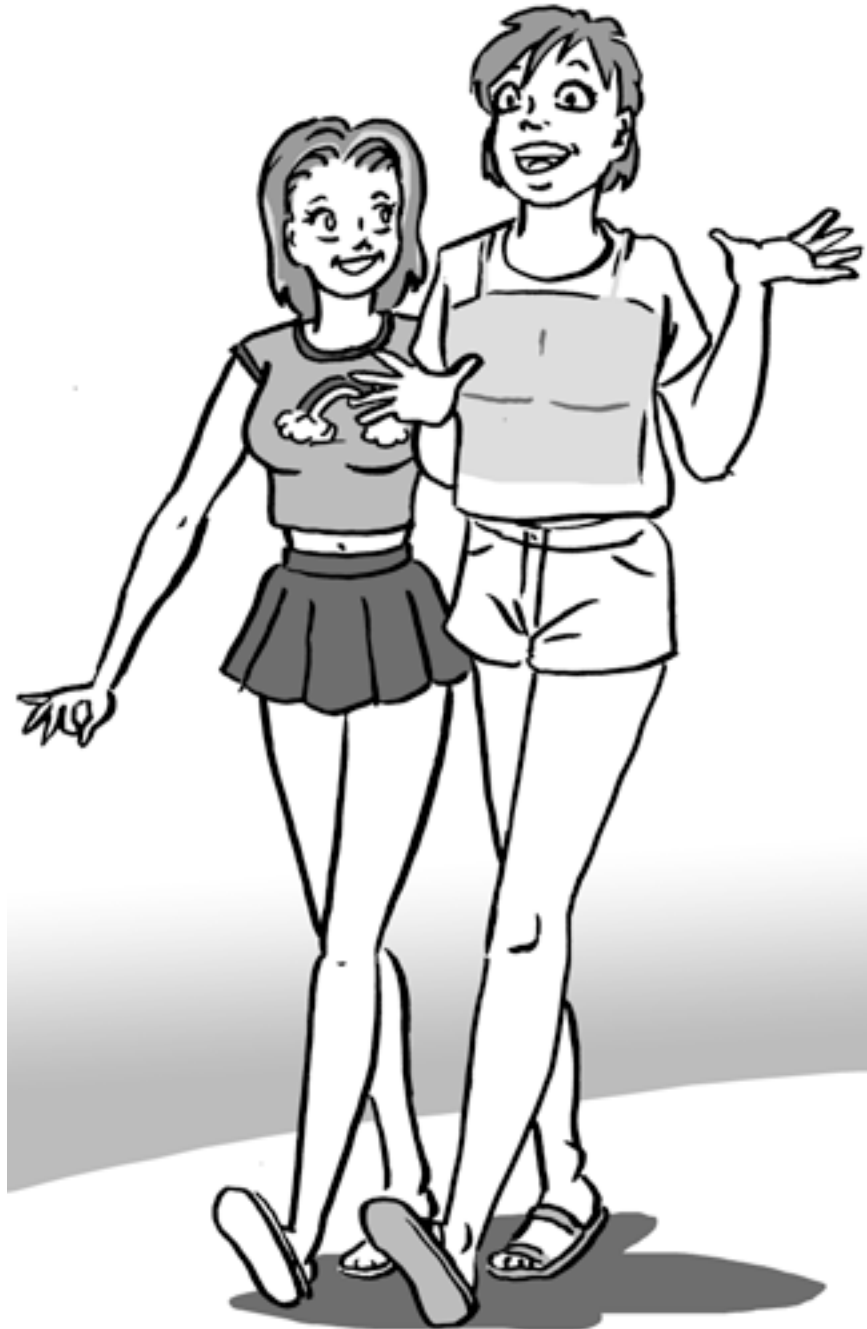


Julian was headed in a similar direction, running out of money thanks to his new clothing habit. Julian was a bright kid, though, and instead of letting the inevitable bankruptcy happen, he had decided to apply to the local diner for a job washing dishes. He had Connie suggest what he'd look best in, and went to the interview wearing a tight-fitting semi-transparent light blue colored top over a snug fitting black tank top to his interview. A tank top that had very thin straps on the top, almost like... What did Connie call it again? A camisole top? A 'cami?' It didn't matter; all he knew for sure was that Connie had used her employee discount to buy it for him so it had cost him practically nothing. And he wanted to look good for his interview.

Aside from his clothes, Connie had convinced Julian to use thin black eyeliner to circle his eyes. Julian had no intention of letting her talk him into this, as it was something that would have certainly gotten him beaten up back in the city. But Connie had convinced Martin that it would make his eyes "pop" and look more awake and attentive when he talked to the interviewer... And after she showed him how to properly apply it, Julian was powerless to resist. She was the cutest girl he in town. She might even be the cutest girl he had ever met. He would do pretty much anything she asked of him. He would wear these decidedly effeminate pants and girlish tops if she asked. He would wear girly eyeliner if she asked. He would even shave his legs and armpits for her if she asked.

Which is, of course, what had happened. When Connie commented that he would look so much nicer in his nice tight high-cut bathing suit if he shaved his legs and armpits... And chest... Just like Martin had done... Well, he did it without giving it a second thought. The feel of his smooth legs against his hands was on his mind as he sat with his hands in his lap in the manager's office at the "Diner on the Greene." He had worn a pair of shorts that day, with sandals, his new "fav" footwear. The shorts were short... Very short, and hung low on his hips much as his pants had. His hip. His wide, fat, hips. He pouted. He was so disgusted with himself for having put on so much weight. He had switched to eating only salads and fruit instead of his usual stuff. Even the health food his Dad had him eat looked heavy and fatty to him now. So was it a good idea to get a job in a Diner? Fatty food was something that would prove to be increasingly difficult to avoid if he got the job. But still, he would have to do it. *Being fat was gross!*

Waiting patiently outside the diner, Connie was contemplating her luck. She had always had boys after her before, but nothing could compare to this. Julian was a total puppy-dog. If she told him to sit, he sat. If she told him to jump, he would jump. If she told him to sit, he would sit. If she told him to wear cork-soled sandals, he would wear cork-soled sandals. In fact, he would wear almost whatever she told him to, and even though she knew he was trying to impress her so he



could ask her out, she couldn't help but feel their relationship was never going to amount to any more than a friendship. She had never really considered that she could be "just friends" with a guy, but then, Julian was different. She was reminded how different he was when Julian came out of the diner – after having got the job – and he was giggling like a bubbly, chatty girlfriend.

Of course he was excited. Everything had paid off. The clothes, the eyeliner, the manager even complimented him on his shoes. He was to get started the following week, and even though he was pretty sure the manager hadn't gotten his name right through the whole interview, he was excited to start working.



Julian's new job wasn't too hard, and he was quickly awarded with the one true joy of working. A paycheck. It afforded him the luxury of a mini-shopping spree, the likes of which made Martin insanely jealous. Julian's cart was filled with snazzy embroidered hip hugger jeans, new black flared pants for work, new shoes and boots and sandals and the cutest looking tops for lounging around.

Jealous? How could Martin feel jealous? His friend was breaking his back working hard labor. But it was starting to occur to Martin that what he really needed was a job, and fast. But no-one wanted to hire him. Maybe it was his look? It was a little bit... Well, different. It was only intended to irritate his dad. Not alienate his potential employers. He had dropped resumes all over the town to no avail, and was ready to give up, until...

One night, while watching Dime-elodeon, the kids network what Connie seemed to be watching *all* the time lately, Martin lamented his lack of meaningful employment. For her part, Connie was largely ignoring him, instead trying to focus on the newest episode of Spongebob.

She was perfectly happy watching her show, telling her brother to shut up, until something he said piqued her interest..."Maybe I could fill in for you one day, if you wanted the day off!?"

Connie turned and looked Martin in the eye, "Huh?"

"You know, I could take your shift at the store and you just pay me for those hours. You were saying you thought you were working too much anyway... Weren't you?" Martin said.

It *was* true. She *did* think she was working too much. The thought of spending the day reading 'teeny bopper' magazine, watching cartoons and playing in the yard *was* pretty appealing. She could even go hunting for her old collection of Bambi Dolls, something she had been meaning to do lately.

But it wasn't like her brother could just come in and do her work for her. It was the women's department, and Martin wasn't... Well, let's think about this for a minute, she told herself. She looked her brother over carefully. It wasn't like she interacted with the staff much at work. She barely even knew their names. Her manager was still calling her "Becky," after the girl who used to work her spot.

And the way her brother looked right now... He had already worn some of her clothes, after all... Martin would just need is a little makeup and some work with

his hair. And it's not like he had never worked retail before. He had, in previous summers, stocked shelves, and occasionally helped customers at the local hardware store back in their old neighborhood in the city

"Pleeeeee!" he begged his twin.

"Tomorrow!" Said the TV, "Tune in for the all-day Strawberry Shortcake and Friends marathon!"

Well, that was the clincher. Connie just sighed, pretending to give in. "Fine", she moaned, "We'll try it... But if I get fired..."

Martin cut her off, "You won't get fired. I really need the money, you'll see!"



Martin was standing in the ladies' wear section of Langdale's Thames Greene store. Not one person had suspected that he was anyone other than Connie. She had helped him with his hair and makeup, and given him a pair of the tight black flared pants she usually wore with a nice casual top. Though he insisted on wearing his new wedge heeled black calf-high boots, the long legs of the pants hid most of them from view.

He had been practicing his twin sisters soft speech, slight lisp, and limp wrested hand gestures. He also practiced walking in short steps with a slight sway of the hips. In every measurable way, he was almost a perfect copy of Connie.

This is going to be soooo easy, he thought to himself as he helped customers find the clothes they wanted... Or maybe at least the ones that Martin *thought* they wanted. It wouldn't dawn on anyone until a few weeks later, but 'Connie' was definitely pushing a lot more blacks and purples than she ever had.

A few weeks later? Well, Connie had less and less interest in her job. She had her little hobbies, like playing with her old toys she loved so much. Martin was happy to go in, so what was the harm?

"What's with all the black and purple she's selling?" one sales girl asked the store manager casually one day, "And what's with those boots she's been wearing?"

The store manager took it all under advisement. Connie was, after all, one of the better summer students he had hired. He certainly didn't want to do something to cause her to change her ways on sales.

At home, though, Martin made no secret of his filling in for his twin sister. He wanted his Dad to be extra pissed off... And this would really be feeding fire. His Dad might be forced to move the family back to the city... Back to all of Martin's friends. His lips curled at the outer corners as a smile formed.

"It's *so* easy." He said, "Everyone just assumes it's Connie. I even get hit on!"

Marjorie burst into laughter. Ira nearly choked on his mashed potatoes.

"It's illegal," Ira proclaimed, trying not to let his voice crack from the thick coating of potato that still lined his throat.

"Oh, it is not," his wife retorted, "There's nothing wrong with it." She turned back to Martin who was even more pleased that his mother was publicly disagreeing with his dad on the subject.

“In fact, maybe I’ll come down and see you one day and you can fill me in on all the latest trends.” She giggled.

Ira simply scoffed and went back to eating.

Connie mindlessly prodded her broccoli, “Can I be excused?” she whined.

“Eat your broccoli” Ira grunted.

“But mommmm, I don’t wanna eat it... It’s cold...” she paused, then lowered her voice, “and the new episode of Bambi Girl is on!”

Marjorie grinned, “It is?”

Connie nodded.

“Well let me put our plates away and we’ll both go watch it,” her mother said.

Ira shook his head, grunted disapprovingly, and continued to eat. *No wonder things are going to hell...* He thought, *I’m losing control of my family.*



Bambi Girl was huge... Ten years ago. Eight year old Connie Heath, at the time, had accumulated a massive collection of Bambi products. Now, the company that made Bambi was re-marketing it all to the next generation. Ten, twelve, and thirteen year old girls were buying Bambi dolls like they were going out of style. Bambi’s new cartoon was a hit. And slowly but surely, eighteen year old Connie Heath was re-discovering her love of Bambi dolls.

Recently, she had spent hours with her brother in tow, digging through boxes in store rooms and closets, boxes and boxes and *boxes* of “Bambi-dolls” and accompanying clothes and accessories. She had amassed a gargantuan collection years ago, and never threw it out. Back when she was a little kid, she was so obsessed that her parents had worried about her growing up to be some kind of anorexic, image obsessed fashionista type. But thankfully they were wrong. Connie had turned out just fine. Although, she did like clothes... So much in fact that it was part of the reason she had applied for the job in women’s department.

But she blamed her twin brother’s increasingly appetite for her fashion advice for bringing back old memories of the thrill of dressing her dolls... And of creating new and different looks for them. She loved it. That had lead her to find the old boxes of “Bambi” in the basement, and brought them back up her room, just for fun. That and all the Bambi TV she had been watching. At least that’s what she thought the reason was. Helping Martin and his friend Julian dress had been fun, but they were no substitute for dolls. Well, *almost no substitute.*

On one gray, rainy and cool Saturday afternoon Connie had the chance to *really* play with her brother doll... Also known as Martin. The Anderson’s pool was closed, and Connie had the day off. The boys were bored, and Connie’s desire to dress up her “dolls” was growing stronger. She had been playing with her “Pole-dancer-Bambi” all morning when Julian came over whining of boredom. Connie smiled. Julian was going to make it *so* easy for her. He had let his hair grow down into a kind of mullet –long at the back – short at the front, and after he and Martin visited the salon in town, had colored it with bright blonde highlights (hello paycheck!). Martin had added reddish highlights to his hair and hoped it would be

something his father would hate. Never mind that it might complicate his taking his sister's place at work – if she ever decided to come back.

“I know something fun that we can do” Connie said as her smile grew ever more wide.

“What?” The two boys responded, eagerly.

When Connie had finished dressing Julian, she allowed her “doll” to check himself out in the mirror. She even had him strut around the room in his new tricky shoes. He picked up on the proper way to walk in such shoes quickly, and from behind would have fooled just about anyone watching into thinking he was genetically pre-disposed to walking in such footwear.

She had clothed him in a pair of black-blue denim Capri pants that brilliantly displayed his smoothly waxed ankles and calves (why had he let Connie wax him again!?). He had absent mindedly ran his fingers over the smooth skin of his exposed legs (Mmmm... Oh yeah, *that's* why) while she had fixed his new frilly-sleeved peasant top in place before helping into his new peep-toe platform pumps.

Now, it was Julian's turn for makeup, as he watched with excited eyes... Eyes that Connie began to line with black liner, mascara, and just a little tiny hint of pale blue shadow. Then she applied the pink lip gloss to his mouth. He wasn't sure if

this was a good thing or not. He really wanted to impress Connie by letting her do this to him, but he was equally impressed by how “authentic” he looked, as was evident by the throbbing hard-on he had developed as he was watching the girl he liked transform him as she had. He just thanked god that they were safely behind the doors of the Heath household, as there was no telling how much he would have been teased and teased and teased some more. Not that he would have cared much.





Later that day however, Ira Heath had cared much. When he came home to see who he thought was Connie, dressed her dark skimpy clothes and heavy makeup, he began to chastise “her” for making such poor choices, and to think ‘seriously about the impact’ that this might have on her when she started school the September. After all, “How is anyone going to take you seriously in finance, when you dressed like *that* Connie!?” he asked heatedly.

The real Connie then poked her head out of her room, “Dressed like what Daddy?” Ira’s jaw fell to the floor, as Martin burst into laughter. Even Marjorie had to chuckle at her husband’s faux-pare. Martin then took it to the next level when he raised the pitch of his voice, posed femininely, and repeated his sister’s question, “Dressed like what Daddy?” he asked softly, “Like *this*?” he continued, twirling around to model his look for all to see.

Ira’s face turned red, and he stormed off to the living room for a stiff drink. *What the hell is Marjorie letting these kids get into!?*

Earlier in the day, while Julian was getting made up by his twin sister, Martin was getting a makeover of his own. It had started quite innocently when he noticed the ‘Help Wanted’ sign posted in the window of a new store in town. A new store that was decidedly out-of-place for a small bedroom community like Thames Greene. But there it was anyway, FUSE... The boutique for real rebels (well, kids that wanted to rebel against their parents, really). *And*, Martin thought cheerfully as he entered the store, *they’re hiring*.

Inside the store was a collection of all things goth and punk. Wall to wall black clothing with bright swaths of neon pink or lavender thrown in for good measure, and what looked like some kind of salon at the back of the store to boot.

“Can I help you?” a voice called from behind. Martin spun around to see a goth princess in an ankle length black dress and makeup in a morbid black and white palette, smiling... *Well kind of*.

“I...” Martin started, “I saw the sign out front says you’re hiring” he blurted.

The girl’s half smile turned to a half sneer, “Uh... Yeah. But I don’t think you’re the kind of person we’re looking for”

Martin looked offended. “Why not?”

The girl motioned at Martin’s clothes. Make that Connie’s clothes. Dress pants, with a button down blouse and a pair of boring flat soled walking shoes.

Another voice sounded behind him, “Oh, come come now Vega. Give the girl a chance.” Martin spun around... Again... To see a man with a very tall Mohawk and several piercing dressed in black jeans and a black shirt. “Remember how you looked before you came here to work for me?”

‘Vega’ rolled her eyes. The man extended his hand. “Dillon... But you can call me Dill” he smiled. Martin wasn’t sure how to react... So he blushed.

“Mar... Er, Connie” He fumbled.

Dillon chuckled, “Oh?” then smiled.

Martin felt flush. Why was he feeling this way!?

“Sorry. Connie’s my twin sister. I’ve been filling in for her at Langdales”

Dillon chuckled again, “Ah... And now you want to get a job of your own instead of mooching off hers.”

Martin nodded.

“But I do have to agree with Vega that if you want to work here... We’ll have to work on your image some.”

Martin nodded again, smiling, “Okay... What did you have in mind?”

Dillon silently gestured towards the salon at the back. “I don’t know. Let’s just see what happens.”

Dillon led Martin to the rear of the store, and asked, with a grin, “How far do you want to go?”

When Ira came home from a long day’s work, laboring his way through the door and to his favorite chair, he was incensed

too see what his only daughter had done to herself. Here she was, in some sort of crazy Halloween getup, wearing lacy black “foundation garments,” including a very constricting black satin corset, and short “Gaucho” pants over black knee high boots. Boots with a very skinny – very high heel and very pointed toe, and a simple black camisole of a top.

Her nails had been extended by a quarter of an inch, and painted metallic purple and her face dusted with a light loose powder. Her eyes had been outlined with thick black eyeliner, mascara with a bit of purple eye shadow, and on her lips, a hyper-glossy clear gloss that made her lips “pop.”

‘Pop’ like her father’s veins did once he found out that ‘she’ was actually her twin brother.

