

Chapter 6

I'm snuggled in a chair in Doc Symmons' office, trying to explain to him how someone who has tried to rape me can sit across the table from me at lunchtime and drink my milk. "It's the way it works," I say. "The world isn't the same for adults and kids. I can't squeal on Johnny Ray. Not to anyone. I can't say anything to my parents, because they think I'm a pervert. They wouldn't back me up. They'd say that I brought it on myself. Johnny's parents and the police would say it was just a prank. He wouldn't get into any real trouble—only enough to make him mad, and then he'd be determined to get even, and things would be worse than ever. I can't do anything in the lunchroom, either. If I made a fuss, we both would go to the principal's office, and I'm the one Mr. Mendez doesn't want to see. Johnny is real good at sucking up and staying out of trouble. Like as not, I would get sent home and he would just get detention hall and then he would be mad, and if he was mad, he'd get even."

Doc Symmons doesn't have a couch, but his chairs are like marshmallows. They gather around me and seem to protect me from the world. When I sit in them in the gloom of his office, with soft music playing in the background, I say things I wouldn't ordinarily say. That must be why I tell Doc about the little something extra that I put in my milk at lunchtime.

He looks surprised, and makes a notation on his yellow

legal pad.

I told you Doc was crazy. I told you about him running around loose. Now I'm going to tell you how he is crazy, and why I got sent to him.

Doc Symmons is forty-five years old, married, with two kids. He's balding. Once a month he gets in his car and drives to the city and dresses up in women's clothes and has a "tea" with other men who dress like women. That's sick. I mean, it arouses him. I've

seen him at the Four Corners Mall, in wig and pantyhose and high heels (and a dress, of course), looking like June Cleaver after a hirsute attack. I must admit that he comports himself like a lady. He doesn't try to use the women's restroom or anything, so the mall management lets him come and go as he pleases. Most of the folks in town know about him. He's unbelievably unselfconscious about being a man in a dress. He's active with a club of transvestites which has had representatives on Geraldo and Donahue and The Oprah Winfrey Show. I said transvestites. Doc doesn't like that word. Doc is a heterosexual crossdresser, and he'll proudly say that to anyone.

Now I hate to judge anyone—for who am I to talk?—but I don't really approve of what Doc does. Men should be men, and women should be women, and I don't understand why he would want to get dressed up like he does. I know what I am. I'm a woman: dresses. I know what Doc is. He's a man: pants. I have no desire to wear a suit and tie. What makes him want to wear skirts?

Don't get me wrong. This is America. I believe that Doc has the right to dress any old way he pleases, and it's his business and no one else's (even if I don't understand it). He doesn't hurt anyone. His wife is supportive, or at least pretends to be, and his kids don't seem to mind, and they're no more screwed up than anyone else's kids, and less than most. He's a good husband, and a good father, and a good

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by Dallas Denny

citizen, and a good psychologist—although like I told you, it was the marshmallow chair that made me tell about the hormones in the milk, and not anything in particular that Doc did.

I got sent to Doc because my parents and the school and my family doctor considered that there was something wrong with me. Ma and Pa weren't sure what to do, but felt they had to do something. I guess they saw a certain logic in what they did: sending a boy in a dress to a man who wears dresses. But it's not the same.

Doc knows that he and I are birds of a different feather. I realize it. Mary June realizes it. The trouble is that people like Johnny Ray and my parents and Miss MacKenzie don't see the difference. I can't comprehend that people think I'm a boy. Yes, I have the Problem, but that's the only boy-thing about me. And I don't exactly wave it around in anyone's face. So why can't people let me alone? Why won't they acknowledge that I'm a girl? Why don't they pay attention to the part of me that they see instead of the part of me that they've never seen and will never see and may not be in existence that much longer anyhow? My Problem, I mean.

I feel like barraging Doc with questions. "Doc, why do people give me such a hard time? Why does Pa hit me? Why does my Ma yell at me? My name is Laura. Why does everyone call me Leroy? Why does Miss MacKenzie call me Mr. Sykes? Why does Johnny Ray stalk me and Mary June when we go smooching? Why does Justis MacElhenny like to watch? Why do I keep having to drive further and further down the interstate in search of jobs?"

My session has been rescheduled because Doc is going to be out of town at a transvestite—excuse me, cross-dresser—meeting. It's the first time I have been in his office so late, and at eight o'clock, the beeper on my watch goes off to remind me that it is time to take a pill. I remove the vial from my pocketbook and shake a magic purple candy-coated marvel onto my palm, like I always do. I look at it, and suddenly know what questions to ask. "Doc—what if I had been born a hundred years ago, when there were no estrogen pills? My voice would have changed and I would have got a beard and an Adam's Apple and all kinds of body hair and I wouldn't have any breasts or hips. I would have been taller, and my hands and feet would have been bigger. I would have turned into a boy, like Johnny Ray." I thought for a minute. "What if I hadn't got hold of the pills when I did? What if my mother hadn't had those hot flashes? I would have ended up as a boy instead of a girl. What if I had wound up with all those male features and

then found out about the pills too late for them to really be effective? Would I have taken them, knowing I would be at best a funny-looking woman?"

"What if I had married, or had a good job as a man? What if I had children? Would I have been able to walk away from life as a man? Would I have even wanted to? Or would I have wanted to, but decided that it just wouldn't be worth it?"

I would like to have answers to those questions, but Doc just closes the yellow legal pad, meaning that my fifty-minute hour is over. He begins making tiny "Your time is up" movements, and we stand up and he walks me to the door. As he does, his eyes cut to my pocketbook and his hands are shaking and I realize something: he would like to take estrogens himself. Doc Symmons, the family man, the community man, the professional man, the cross-dressing man, would give a million dollars if he could turn back the clock and lay hold of some estrogen tablets when he was thirteen years old. The realization hits me then: he's more like me than I have thought.

That's something I'll have to consider. I can't savor the thought because I need all my wits for the receptionist. The Casio grinds and hiccups. "That will be twelve dollars and fifty cents, Miss Sykes," she says, but there is ice dripping off her tongue when she says Miss. Well, screw her, if she can't take a joke. "You're so welcome," I tell her, and pay her, and I take the receipt and roll it up in a little ball and pop it in my mouth and make a gulping motion but don't really swallow it. As the whites of her eyes start to show her surprise, I turn and walk quickly away. I put the wadded receipt in a waste receptacle by the elevator. As the door opens, a woman in her thirties steps out and gives me a little "lady to lady" smile.

That smile is in stark contrast to the reception I get downstairs in the Bonne Ton Shoppe from my sister Lucinda. Lucy is the assistant manager. "Leroy!" she hisses. She darts her eyes nervously from side to side to see who is watching. "Get out of here! You'll disgrace me!"

I stare at her. "Disgrace you? In what way?"

"Just look at the way you look!"

I am dressed in penny loafers and pantyhose, a white blouse, and a gray skirt. I'm wearing tiny diamonds in my ears, and not much makeup. My hair is held up by imitation tortoiseshell combs. "What's wrong with the way I look?"

"You're a boy. Act like one."

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That's a challenge and a dare, and I am tempted to embarrass her by doing just that, but I don't want to jeopardize my status at the Bonne Ton, for it's the best clothing store in town. So I don't do anything. I just stand there looking feminine and demure, which probably embarrasses her more than if I had made a scene.

"Leroy, don't do this to me!"

"Lucy, I am who I am. I gotta buy clothes to cover my butt. Now, you gonna sell me some, or are you gonna stand there spitting like a snake?"

She grudgingly lets me select a skirt, but balks when I start into the dressing room. I just glare at her and go on in. When I finish the purchase, she practically scoots me out into the mall.

"Well, that's evil stepsister number one," I sigh.

Evil stepsister number two is at the house. I nearly trip over her as I go through the doorway. "Hello, Clo," I say. Clorinda is a neat freak. She has a toothbrush and a tub of sudsy water and is on her hands and knees, scrubbing the metal weatherstrip at the bottom of the door. "Look at what I'm having to do. You don't do enough around the house."

"Sis, I go to school and I work all the time. I fix all the meals and I do all the shopping and I pay the light bill and I scrub the commodes and I carry out the empty soft drink cans from Ma's rooms. How can I be expected to find time for anal-compulsive tasks like spit-polishing the weatherstripping?"

"Someone has to do it!"

"No, Clorinda. No one has to scrub the doorstep. Most folks get along fine without bothering."

I know what's coming next. "Do you want your poor mother to have to do it?"

"No. But there's little danger of that happening, since to the best of my knowledge she's never done such a thing in her life."

"You know she likes the house clean and neat," Clorinda grumbles.

"Look around," I say. "It's clean. It's neat. It's cleaner and neater than it used to be when she was cleaning and neatening it. Give me some credit for doing something."

"The tile in the bathroom needs scrubbing," she mumbles. She can't resist a parting shot. "Some daughter you turned out to be."

Good things come in threes. Marinda calls as I'm getting supper. "Hello, Leroy," she says. "How is your mother?"

"She's fine," I tell her.

"And how are you?"

"Fine."

"Leroy."

"Yes, Marinda?"

"I've been talking to Mark, and he is all for you coming to church with us on Sunday."

"Marinda—"

"The Lord will heal you of this foolishness. Just let him into your heart."

"Marinda, I appreciate the thought. I really do. But I get no kick out of having a bunch of busybody Christians pray over me on a Sunday evening. Thanks, but no thanks."

"Leroy—"

"I'll be glad to go and worship, Marinda. I miss church. But you don't want that."

"If you mean can you wear a dress to church, the answer is no. It's perverted, little brother."

"I'm not perverted. And I'm nobody's brother. Why do you persist in thinking of me that way?"

"Because it's a mortal sin, what you've done. What you're doing." I hear her sigh across the miles. "Put your mother on the line, please."

"Leroy—"

"Yes, Marinda"

"Jesus loves you."

THE END

International Foundation for Gender Education

IFGE is a non-profit organization serving those persons interested in or affected by crossdressing and transsexual phenomena. IFGE publishes the *TV-TS Tapestry* journal and other materials. ***For more information:***

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