

ELIZABETH GREY

Carmenica Diaz

Volume I: The Lady is Waiting

Volume II: Heart

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*Please note that **Elizabeth Grey: The lady is Waiting** and **Elizabeth Grey: Heart**, were first published as two separate volumes. This is the first time that both volumes have been available in the one edition.*

ELIZABETH GREY

The Lady is Waiting

And the lady is waiting
At the end of my day

Paul Williams

Volume I: THE LADY IS WAITING

Part 01: No matter what it takes?

The bus driver was arguing with an old lady in the front seat and I tried to make myself small, to hide while they yelled at each other in a language I had never heard before. How did the world change so much, so quickly? It was almost like it changed while I wasn't watching.

Here we were in the year George Orwell warned us about, 1984, and, late a night on a rainy street, it all seemed remarkably true except we didn't have Big Brother, we had Big Sister – Margaret Thatcher! First the Falklands and now the poor bloody miners, she is the supremely scary woman.

Life doesn't get any better than this, I imagined Maggie saying, her cheeks taut, harsh narrow gaze, *you should contribute, young man, stop being useless and own up to what you are, stop pretending and stop dreaming!* Smiling wryly at my imaginary Maggie, I told her we both knew I could never do that, it just wouldn't do!

I turned to stare at the buildings in the rain, raindrops running down the window and, for a moment, I was tempted to trace the raindrops with my finger. *You are*, a voice that sounded like my old headmaster said silently, *adrift with no connection and no purpose. You are a waste of space!*

It was cold, I was fighting the 'flu and I wanted to get to my flat where I could crank up the heat and get dry. Some idiot behind me was playing his rather large radio loudly and I

fought the urge to turn around and suggest that Wham's '*Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*' wasn't the greatest thing to hear at eleven at night but sanity prevailed and I just burrowed into my shabby coat.

I'm not terribly brave, I've always been an outsider and not comfortable with my life and I couldn't even pretend to be able to participate in a fistfight. I think we all believe that we'll be brave when the time comes but I know, I'm not, I am always afraid, always hiding in case the real me is revealed.

It had been another half-empty night at the club where I played and those that had braved the wet to hear some music weren't impressed by what they found. I tried to give them what they wanted but I knew, as they were pretty sozzled, that I wouldn't be able to satisfy them.

'Hey mate, play something better than this old rubbish!'

Obviously, not lovers of jazz or the piano, I thought as I tried to slump down a little so they wouldn't suddenly get angry with me. One of the advantages of being short is that I could slump a little behind the instrument, use the piano to hide behind.

They bellowed out for some New Romantic stuff but I didn't play it, I loved the old jazz songs but, unfortunately, no one wanted to hear them anymore.

'Can't you play what the punters want, Allan?' Robbie the owner always asked, 'or tell them to sod off?' I would just shrug and turn away. I hated male bravado and the confrontations that resulted from it. How do you play Spandau Ballet on a piano without coming off as a wanker? I never

dared sing, I tried it once at school and the howls of laughter at my high voice put me off for life.

I am here, I told myself, riding this bus because of pride, circumstance and talent.

Pride because I would not allow my brother Edward to help me financially. *Edward, thank you for the offer but, I would say pathetically, I'll make it on my own, I'll be famous too one day.*

‘It’s only money, you idiot, take it!’

‘I don’t want the money,’ I tried to explain; ‘I want to be famous.’

To be needed, loved and wanted, things I could never discuss with anyone else but, I knew if I did try to talk about it with my mum she would understand. Of course I never did, there was the mother-son relationship to preserve, to keep safe by pretending to be what I wasn’t. I couldn’t be what I wanted.

‘Fame isn’t everything, Allan,’ he would say but we both knew he was lying.

‘Not to you, you’re famous, you know what it’s like.’

‘Why don’t you stop complaining and be a man for once,’ he would snap, ‘just be a man and take control of your life! You are such a...

‘What?’ I would primly demand, knowing what he was on the verge of saying but he never came out and said it.

‘Nothing,’ he mumbled. ‘It’s just that you could look...you know...a little mascul...’

‘Thanks a lot for your advice. Though it’s not terribly helpful!’

‘Not terribly helpful,’ Edward would mimic and I would flinch, he was so hard and not at all empathetic. Sometimes he saw my reaction and would just smile and nod. He would murmur, ‘of course, Allan,’ and smile again; a sad smile and that hurt me more than anything.

Pride, circumstance and talent.

Circumstance because of the accidents of birth, that is, Edward was born before me. Edward, my older brother was tall, handsome, imposing and brilliant as Hamlet and whatever other role he decided to play. I was smaller, skinny or as Mrs Pratt from next door would say, bordering on malnutrition.

At an early age I had to wear glasses and later I didn’t have girls hanging on my every word, wanting to take me home to their mums. Not that I really wanted them to. I didn’t get the fuss the blokes at school would make over certain girls, the way they would ogle and make lewd remarks. It was strangely foreign to me, another world that I was not a part of.

What I did do was try to mimic their behaviour, copy their words and phrases. If one said that ‘Bonnie was a good looking tart’, I would file it away and use it later, with a deep voice, of course. Looking back, I don’t think I was successful with *that* pose either.

I yearned to be friends with the girls but in the teenage years, girls can be rather cruel to someone different and not one of them. So, they ignored me.

The blokes would ignore me as well. It was as if they decided that I wasn’t a part of them, didn’t understand the code or something but I just put it down to my size. Let’s face it, I am rather weedy but nobody cared what I looked like when I

sat behind my piano and played. That's what I tell myself, anyway.

Pride, circumstance and talent.

Talent is the sore point, I suppose. There is no question that Edward is a successful and talented Shakespearean actor while I play piano in a small and rather seedy jazz club where Robbie, the owner, tries to dud me out of my meagre tips.

Not much call for jazz in a world where Margaret Thatcher controls everything and Cyndi Lauper dominates the music waves but I loved playing. It was like I slipped into another world when I began to play, a world where everyone was extremely nice to short, thin, short-sighted, piano players.

The streets were slick and water was running through the gutters as I quickly walked towards my flat. I hoped the bovver boys who ran the streets wouldn't pick on me and shrugged deeper into my coat, tucking my hair into the collar. I wanted to be nondescript and to fade into the wallpaper so they wouldn't beat me up.

Jean had firmly told me that I had succeeded and I *was* nondescript and invisible. 'You're like a grey carpet, Allan,' she had snapped, 'a carpet that slides in and pretends it's always been there. You want to be invisible? Well, congratulations because you are! You're asexual, a thing!'

'That's a bit harsh,' I had protested, especially as that was after our first meeting for coffee. Jean was a trumpet player in another band and she lived downstairs in the same building as I. She was constantly forgetting her keys and buzzing me to let her in and then one day we had struck up a

conversation and then I found myself asking her for a coffee. It was like Jean had steered me into asking, like I had no control.

Invite a girl out and get told you're a carpet – well, that was par for the course in the *wonderful* life of Allan Stratton!

'No it's not,' Jean said, stirring her coffee and looking around, probably for the exit. 'Allan,' she said suddenly serious, 'are you gay?'

I spluttered in my coffee. 'What? Would I ask...?'

'Don't get precious, it's not like you were going to ask me around for a little *how's your father?*' Jean's voice had an incredulous tone and I lowered my head. I would never have asked her, sex really didn't interest me that much especially when I thought I would have to show my less than masculine body. I was never overly attracted to women, just followed my peers although I wasn't that successful. Here I am, a virgin at twenty-two, not a thing one would scream from the rooftops.

'No, I'm not gay,' I protested automatically, looking down.

Jean sneered a little, lit a cigarette and began making eyes at the young bloke who was at the coffee machine. 'You seem to be looking over there all the time,' she said, nodding in the direction of the coffee machine. 'Can't blame you though, he is tasty.'

I watched the young man and realised there was no way I could ever be as attractive as him. Jean nodded and walked over, leaning on the coffee machine to talk to him, leaving me alone at the table.

No wonder people consider suicide after dating.

The heating was off and I laid my coat over the bed to give me a little extra warmth before slipping in. The sheets were cold and a bit clammy and I tried to remember when I last washed them, when did I go down to the laundrette?

The telephone rang an hour later.

‘Hello?’

‘Allan? Is that you?’

‘Mum? Are you alright?’

‘Allan, Teddy’s in trouble, they rang me to say he’s vanished, gone!’

‘Slow down, Mum,’ I said, rubbing my eyes, ‘what’s happened to Edward?’

‘He was on a tour in Europe and he’s gone. The Government telephoned me. He’s gone!’

‘Calm down Mum, who did you speak to?’

Painstakingly, I got the details and slowly put the telephone down, telling Mum that I would try to find out where he was. Edward had been with the Royal Shakespeare Company and performing in a festival in Prague but had suddenly decided to go alone to Budapest where he disappeared.

The government official who had called Mum was cold and distant, saying that Edward had gone off on his own against instructions and there was nothing the government could do. The Soviets weren’t helpful and the Thatcher government did not have easy access to Moscow and its satellite countries.

I tried to find out but it was like hitting my head against a brick wall. For two weeks I traipsed up and down Whitehall,

knocking on doors, standing in draughty waiting rooms and then to be told coldly that there was nothing Her Majesty's Government could do, Edward was on his own.

Robbie, the owner of the club, rang me and told me not to bother coming back.

'But Robbie,' I whined, 'I need the work.'

'Find something else. I've got this hot looking bird that sings as well as plays. Her voice isn't great but she's got all the right proportions – can't see her own shoes if you know what I mean.' Robbie snickered down the line.'

'But my fans...'

Robbie was still laughing when he hung up.

Although I kept trying to find out what happened to Edward, I was beginning to believe it was hopeless. One official had taken pity on me, taken my elbow and led me to a corner where she had said pithily, 'your brother has been rather silly, I'm afraid he's gone. There is no hope.'

'What do you mean by that?' I had desperately asked.

She looked me up and down over her glasses. 'Are you really his brother?'

'Yes, why?'

'You look so different, he's so masculine and...well...'

'You *know* my brother?'

She had laughed coarsely. 'Like in the biblical sense? Well...yes.' She had winked and left me alone in the draughty corridor.

It seemed Edward was gone and I wondered how I was going to tell Mum.

It took me an hour to prepare myself to call her. Mum had been injured in an accident a long time ago and had lost her right leg below the knee but she was a very strong woman who had raised both Edward and I on her own. How do I tell her that her favourite son was gone, probably dead?

My fingers lingered on the telephone, thinking it wasn't fair that I had to make this call. I stared at myself in the mirror, brushed my long hair from my face and tried to see a strong resemblance between Edward and myself. There wasn't one. He was tall and robust, very masculine while I was smaller and thin, almost effeminate. Of course, my longish hair didn't help but I was a jazz musician and with that hair and the glasses, there wasn't a strong resemblance. To be perfectly honest, there was no resemblance at all.

For the millionth time in my life, I wondered if I was adopted and then discounted it. I had Mum's eyes and her hands while I assumed Edward took after the father we had never known.

The telephone was in my hand when the buzzer went.

It was ten o'clock, I noticed, who would come around at this hour? That tart downstairs has probably lost her key again.

'Yes?' I said into the intercom.

'Allan Stratton?' The voice was female and spoke in upper class plum tones.

'Who wants to know?' In this neighbourhood it could be a trick, the local lads get some bird to call up, I let her in and suddenly I've got a room full of trouble.

'My name is Angela Marsh...'

‘Never heard of you,’ I said, my nervous voice moving into a higher register.

‘I’m Edward’s girlfriend!’

Stunned, I pressed the button that released the front door and I heard the door click open. *Girlfriend!* Edward had never mentioned a girlfriend!

The flat was a mess but there was nothing I could do about it as I heard her footsteps outside the door.

‘Mr Stratton?’ she said when I opened the door. She looked me up and down and I nodded.

‘Yes, come in.’

Angela looked around the flat and I inwardly cringed. She was well dressed, long blonde hair and was very attractive in a Sloane ranger type of way. *Just the sort of girl, I thought, that Edward would have as a girlfriend.*

‘Are you really Edward’s brother?’ she asked, peeling gloves off and thrusting them into her handbag.

‘Yes! Are you really Edward’s girlfriend?’ I asked, pointing at the only chair that didn’t have clothes hanging on it.

‘No,’ she said calmly, sitting. ‘I just said that. Edward doesn’t have one particular girlfriend,’ Angela said a little sadly. ‘As you probably know, he enjoys playing the field as it were.’

‘No,’ I said a little off side, ‘I *don’t* know.’

‘Well, we’ll leave that. Look, I *am* his friend though and he’s in trouble so I want to help him. I understand you’ve been trying to find out where he is?’

‘Yes, my head is still sore. From bumping into brick walls,’ I explained when she looked at me quizzically. ‘I don’t understand why an actor would be kidnapped...’

‘Your brother hasn’t confided in you?’

‘Uh, no...what about?’

‘I’m surprised; I was led to believe you were close.’

‘Teddy probably thinks we are close but we’re not really, we never talk or share.’

‘I’m sorry?’

‘We don’t really talk,’ I explained, feeling strange because of the way she watched me, ‘he thinks we do but it’s so superficial, just rubbish really and we never talk about what’s important to us, what’s...’

‘I get the picture.’ She looked at me strangely for a moment. ‘Well, he’s not actually an actor.’ Angela looked uncomfortable and tried to smile.

‘Not an actor?’ I laughed. ‘For someone that’s *not* an actor he seems to appear in an awful lot of plays and the odd Royal Command Performance!’

‘Yes, perhaps,’ Angela said briskly, ‘but it’s just a cover...’

‘Cover!’ I looked at her stunned. ‘What is he, a secret agent or something?’ I was preparing to laugh when her next comment floored me.

Angela gave me a thin smile. ‘Actually, he is.’

I sat down heavily on my unmade bed. ‘Like James Bond or something?’ I asked in a low voice. ‘Double O Seven?’

‘I’m sure Edward likes to think so,’ Angela said primly, shaking her head in one quick motion, and I shook my own head, trying to clear it.

I stared dumbly at her. My brother, the one I thought was a wonderfully talented Shakespearean actor was, in reality a James Bond type! And then I realised that the talent I had envied him for was just a game; it meant nothing to him and was just a cover for his *other* activities! My stomach churned.

‘I feel sick,’ I moaned.

Angela looked around the flat as if she suspected I had *already* been sick somewhere in the mess and then tried to look concerned. ‘I know it’s a bit of a shock.’

‘A bit of a shock! That’s a bloody understatement,’ I said moodily.

‘I suppose it is but the fact remains that your brother has vanished and I was rather hoping you may want to help find him.’

‘Help find him,’ I yelled incredulously. ‘Me? Why don’t you get on the old blower and ask Maggie Thatcher to send in the Royal Marines or something. Can’t have Double O Eight And A Half disappear, can we?’ I tried the old plum-in-the-mouth voice but didn’t succeed.

Angela looked away. ‘I’m afraid we can’t do that. The government has decided that your brother is not as indispensable as Edward would have thought.’

‘Why?’

‘I’m afraid I can’t tell you that.’

‘For your eyes only,’ I said scornfully, ‘or something like that!’

‘Yes, something like that.’

For a long moment I stared at her and unflinchingly, she stared right back. ‘I don’t know how I could help,’ I said at last.

‘But if there is a way, you would?’ She was like a shark, straight in when she sensed blood.

‘Well...’

‘What if you vanished, do you think Edward would sit around?’ Angela gave me another thin smile after that.

‘No,’ I said moodily, ‘after what you’ve told me, he’d probably steal a helicopter and destroy an army before rescuing me and then annihilating the villains.’

‘I suppose he would,’ Angela said with a glimmer of a real smile.

‘And then run off with the gorgeous female spy.’

‘Yes,’ Angela said sadly, ‘he probably would do that as well.’

We sat in a long silence, rain on the windows and noises from the other flats around us as, I assume we both thought. ‘What do you want me to do?’ I finally said with a sigh and Angela smiled in triumph before returning to her serious and business like expression.

‘I must tell you that apart from a few of Edward’s friends, we are on our own.’

‘Oh great!’ I said ruefully.

‘We know the KGB has him as they’ve made overtures to swap Edward back for one of their own.’

‘Why don’t we swap?’ I leapt in. ‘There’s your answer!’

‘We have *actually* thought of that,’ Angela said wryly and I felt chagrined. ‘The negotiations could take ages, even if

both sides agree and at the moment our government is not giving an inch. The good news is because of the negotiations, we can bet that Edward will not be ill treated.'

'What if the government doesn't negotiate?' I asked quietly.

'I'm sure they will as the KGB has hinted they will simply announce that Edward is a double agent, pretend he is one of theirs! That will destroy any confidence the Americans, French and Germans will have in our intelligence network. Edward will never come back and the press, of course, will have a field day.'

'Famous Shakespearean Actor Soviet Spy,' I murmured and she looked at me sharply. 'Sorry, just imagining the headline. What do you want me to do?'

'We need someone in place that can readily identify Edward with no hesitation, someone that is unknown to the KGB comrades and who has a plausible reason to be in the Eastern Bloc.'

'Me? But I'm his brother, they'll see the passport...' The thought of a Soviet prison made me sick again. I wouldn't last five minutes in any prison.

Angela gathered her purse and stood up. 'Let me worry about that. Let's meet for breakfast tomorrow and I'll fill you in when you've had a chance to think it through. All right?' I nodded and she named a posh restaurant that catered for the business crowd. 'Have you got a suit and a tie?' Angela asked after looking me up and down.

'Yes, of course,' I replied, feeling a little insulted.

‘Good.’ She extended her hand. ‘I’ll see you there at eight?’

I nodded and, as the door closed behind her, I sank back down on the bed. *My brother the spy*, I thought wryly, *I could always write a book. What am I going to tell Mum?*

‘Mum? I didn’t wake you, did I?’

‘Just dozing, dear, have you heard anything?’

I took a deep breath. ‘I think I’ve got somewhere, through sheer luck really. From what I know, he’s alive...’

‘Thank god!’

‘...but he could be held by the Russians in prison.’

‘Prison? Why would they put Teddy in prison? What could he have possibly done...?’

‘We’ll have to find out, don’t worry Mum, I’m on it. I’m going to see what I can do.’

Mum was silent and I imagined all the thoughts flying around her head. ‘You’re a good person, Allan,’ she said quietly. ‘I always thought you were the sensible one, the brave one. You were always the one willing to talk, to listen and to compromise.’ I was shocked and opened my mouth to say something but Mum continued, ‘I always hoped that Teddy would lose some of his selfish ways and be a bit more like you. I know life isn’t kind to you but you’ll make it yours one day. Thank you for everything, love.’

‘That’s ok, Mum,’ I murmured, at a loss for words. ‘Goodnight.’

‘Goodnight love.’

I didn't sleep that well, tossing and turning until I groggily got out of bed. After washing my face I put on an almost clean white shirt, a tie that was stain free and my old navy blue suit.

My hair was long, not through any desire for fashion but because I never got around to getting it cut so I usually wore it in a ponytail. I thought it was pretty cool for a jazz musician. Culture Club was on the radio and I sang along as I examined my face. I shaved two days ago and didn't need to shave again so I was probably ready.

Angela was seated at a table when I arrived. 'Sorry, I'm late,' I said sheepishly, 'I underestimated the time it would take to get...'

'Never mind. Here's a menu,' she said, thrusting it into my hand. I stared at it and told the waiter I would have tea and toast. Angela looked at me sharply. 'You can have more than that, you know.'

'I'm not hungry,' I said, looking around the restaurant. There was no doubt I felt completely out of place. 'Do you want to tell me what the plan is?'

'Not here,' Angela snapped, 'we'll go for a walk after breakfast.'

'You don't like me very much, do you?' I asked softly, smearing marmalade over the toast.

Angela looked at me sharply and then recovered. 'Like has nothing to do with this, Mr Stratton, this is about *other things*,' she finished meaningfully and I looked around, expecting to see Russian spies with microphones hiding in the potted palms.

‘If you say so,’ I said, biting into the toast. *This is all very strange*, I thought, watching Angela primly sip her tea, *it’s all a bit far fetched, like a movie script or something*.

We finished breakfast in silence and then started walking through the park. The wind was cold and I wished I had an overcoat. The newspaper placards were screaming about Thatcher and the miners.

‘Have you thought about it?’ Angela pulled her coat around her shoulders and waited.

‘Yes. I’ll help.’

‘No matter what it takes?’

‘I suppose so. I have to tell you I’m not really the jumping out of aeroplanes sort, though.’

‘Hopefully then, you won’t have to parachute in.’ Aghast, I stared at her and then she produced that thin smile. ‘A joke Mr Stratton, just a small joke. You will be quite safe.’

‘Tell me about it, then,’ I said walking on and she walked by my side.

‘You will join a jazz orchestra that is leaving London in a few weeks for a tour of East Berlin, Prague and Budapest, invited by the Soviet government and sponsored by the British government as part of a cultural exchange program.’

That got my interest and I perked up. ‘I’ll be performing?’

‘Yes, the orchestra requires a pianist and, hopefully, you’ll be accepted. While you’re away, the negotiations will be underway and, with some luck, a swap will take place and you won’t be required to do anything.’

‘But...if it doesn’t?’

‘We’ll need you to identify where Edward is, city and location, please. That’s it; I have a friend who will get Edward out.’

‘Just like that?’

‘Just like that.’

‘This friend, is he a friend of Edward?’

‘No, he’s actually a friend of mine. He’s never met Edward.’

‘Ok.’ I sighed. ‘It sounds simple, apart from how I’ll find where he is, but what about my passport? The authorities will know the name, won’t they?’

‘You’ll have a cover, don’t worry about it.’

‘A cover, what kind of cover? If I’m undercover, why not get someone else?’ *Sillier and sillier*, I thought, *it just sounds so silly*.

Angela stopped. ‘There is no one else, Mr Stratton! We need someone who can play jazz piano and identify Edward and I’m afraid, you’re the only candidate! Believe me, if I could find someone more suitable, I would but whether you like it or not, you’re it!’

‘Sorry,’ I said miserably. ‘It’s all a bit of shock.’

And a bit scary, I thought, *I’m not a brave person*.

We walked on in silence. ‘Tell me the rest,’ I said after a moment, ‘what’s the cover?’

Angela looked away, studying a young couple dressed in the latest fashion walking hand in hand down the path. ‘Perhaps you’ll understand when I tell you the name of the orchestra?’ I nodded. ‘It’s Heather James All Stars.’

I was dumfounded and stopped dead in my tracks. ‘Heather James? That’s an all woman band! There’s no blokes in that band, I’d stick out like a sore...No! You don’t want me to...No! That’s crazy!’

Is it, the awful inner voice that knew all my secrets whispered, is it so crazy? Wouldn’t you like to try? Come on, you know you would. You’ve thought about this constantly for as long as you can remember.

Angela studied me. ‘You did say you would help no matter what it takes?’

‘But this is ridiculous! I’d never pass, I’d look stupid.’
But, wouldn’t you like to know, really know after all this time?

‘Don’t worry, Mr Stratton you’ll pass, we’ll make sure of that,’ she said firmly. ‘Not to put too finer point on it but you are not a walking advertisement for masculinity. When I first saw your photograph I had to look closely to identify your gender. Look,’ Angela said, taking my arm and steering me down the path, ‘I can assure you that after training and other things, you’ll pass. You won’t be a glamorous sex-symbol but you will seem to be a normal woman.’

‘But...’

Could I really pass, really? The thought was echoing inside me and I tried to shake clear of it.

‘Mr Stratton, I don’t want to risk this mission, you *will* pass but if after seeing how you look and you still don’t want to go ahead, I’ll let you back out and we’ll find another way.’

‘I thought you said there was no other way,’ I said softly.

‘There isn’t a real one,’ Angela said, turning her face away and I wondered if she was about to cry. ‘We always have contingencies, though.’

‘It’s not much of a plan, is it?’ I said gloomily.

‘Perhaps,’ she bristled, ‘you can come up with a better one?’

What did I have to lose, I wondered, if I didn’t help and something happened to Edward, I wouldn’t be able to live with myself. How could I look Mum in the eye if I don’t help? And could I really pass? Could I?

‘All right,’ I said slowly, ‘I’ll give it a try. What happens now?’

I packed a small suitcase and waited outside my flat for Angela to pick me up. Apparently we were travelling to a house in the country where we would see if I could pass. She wouldn’t say anymore than that and bag packed, I had stood in front of the mirror, staring at myself.

‘They can’t do it, can they? The thought that maybe they could excited me, made me smile but I quickly pushed the thoughts away, telling myself to concentrate on Edward’s escape.

Could I really pass?

The fact was, I now had an excuse to try the things I had secretly dreamed off, wanted even but had been so afraid.

A car horn beeped and I saw Angela behind the wheel of a Jaguar. I slipped in, suitcase on the back seat and we roared off. My fingers stroked the leather seats and the ornate

wood panelling. ‘This is rather spiffy,’ I said admiringly. ‘It feels wonderful.’

She looked sharply at my fingers stroking the leather. ‘It’s my fathers.’

Seeing we were heading towards Oxford, I settled back to snooze. What did it matter where we were going? My plan was to be as outwardly calm as possible and just accept everything but I was really a nervous wreck, worried that I would end up being tortured by some brutish East German guard or something when they saw through my disguise.

Could I really pass?

I woke when we were driving down a bumpy lane, fields and hedgerows around us and then turned into the driveway of a rather grand house. ‘We’re here,’ Angela said, turning the car off and opening the door.

I followed her in and she showed me to a bedroom. ‘You’ll sleep here.’

‘Thanks,’ I said looking around and dropped my suitcase on the bed.

‘I’ll give you a few moments to freshen up; the bathroom is through there and then I’ll introduce you to Jeremy so we can get started.’

‘Started?’ I asked, heart pounding.

‘Yes,’ Angela said evenly, ‘we need to see if you can pass? If you decide not to go ahead with this, I don’t wish to lose too much valuable time.’

‘Yes,’ I murmured, ‘of course.’

‘Just one thing,’ she said at the door, ‘don’t tell Jeremy your name. He knows not to ask but don’t volunteer it, ok?’

I nodded and sat down and stared at the closed door. *You're going to dress up as a woman*, a sly voice silently reminded me, *a woman, but can I pass?*

Jeremy was a thin man who smiled when I walked in. 'This is her?' he asked Angela who nodded.

Her? Better get used to it, I warned myself, *and remember, just be calm and accepting.*

'Can you walk around for me, my dear?' Jeremy asked and I did while he watched critically. 'You don't want the works,' he said to Angela, 'just enough to pass?'

'Yes, if he agrees, we'll then do the works.'

'Ok. Give me four hours.' Angela nodded and left the room.

Nervously, I looked at Jeremy. 'What do we start with?'

'The hair, my dear, the hair! Can you take it out of that ponytail?' I did and he inspected my hair, muttering under his breath. 'Has this ever been cut?' he asked disdainfully and I lowered my head.

'Yes, a long time ago.'

'Right, off to the bathroom.'

Initially, I felt a little embarrassed being naked in front of him but he didn't seem to notice and ordered me into the shower. I was in a daze, just following orders and going along as he showed me how to remove the hair from my legs and chatted as he shampooed and cut my hair.

I was like a zombie and passively let him shape my eyebrows and apply make up. I didn't have my glasses on so I had no idea what I looked like.

My face was red when he showed me how to wear the special underwear that pushed my genitals out of the way so to speak. ‘If you go ahead, we’ll get rid of all that hair down there, dearie, it’ll help reduce the size although you’re not a big boy, are you?’

The corset hurt like hell but he was relentless and I gulped when he pushed some jelly like blobs into the corset cups and I suddenly had breasts.

Black tights and a dress, clip on earrings and a necklace and Jeremy was satisfied. ‘Let me look,’ he said and I stood there feeling like I couldn’t breathe and tottering on the high heel shoes he had forced my feet into.

Through the blur, I saw him blink in shock and steady himself against the dressing table. ‘Jesus Nell!’ he murmured to himself, ‘Emma!’

‘Can I see?’ I asked.

Jeremy gathered himself and smiled faintly, his face pale as if he saw a ghost and turned the mirror in my direction. ‘I’ll need my glasses.’ Jeremy gave me the glasses with a shaky hand and I looked in the mirror.

An attractive woman with dark straight hair to her shoulders and rather large glasses looked back. I heard the door open as I turned to look at my reflection. The figure was reasonably curvy, thanks to the corset and I looked passable.

You pass, the sly voice returned, what do you do now? What do you do, now that the question you’ve been asking yourself for years has been finally answered? What do you do?

‘You’ve out done yourself, Jeremy,’ I heard Angela say.

‘Dear, she’ll be even better with a lot more work.’

‘Really?’

‘I guarantee it.’

‘What do you think?’ Angela asked me and I shrugged. *Be calm, don’t show any emotion, I warned myself, don’t give yourself away.*

‘It doesn’t look like me, I’ll give you that but will it fool...’

‘Anyone?’ Angela finished quickly; worried I might give some information away. ‘Perhaps but we’ll need to work on your movements, voice, makeup, everything. Shall we keep going?’

I stared at the mirror and examined myself. The woman was quite attractive, not pin-up material but a warm natural looking woman. ‘I’ll need some new glasses,’ I murmured fingering my old black-framed glasses.

‘You’ll need a lot of things. I take it you’re ready to keep going?’ Angela persisted.

I shrugged again as part of my act but deep inside me, my heart was pounding with possibilities. ‘Why not? Yes,’ I said, turning to her, ‘let’s keep going.’ Angela smiled and told Jeremy that he had me for all day tomorrow and to shoot the works.

‘You’ll have a lot of work done on you tomorrow, it may be a little painful but it’ll be worth it, ok?’

‘I guess so,’ I said but I was immediately worried. What did she mean by painful?

‘Now, there’s a lovely dinner for us downstairs, shall we eat?’

‘I’m starving,’ I grinned and then said reluctantly, ‘I should get changed...’

‘No! Stay in those clothes, you’ll only wear female clothes from now on; you must be comfortable in them and natural. Let’s go downstairs.’

‘Ok,’ I said slowly and promptly stumbled in the high heels. ‘Shit!’ I said as Angela helped me up, ‘these are harder than they look.’

‘You’ll have to get used to them, I’m afraid,’ Angela said with a smirk. ‘Now, let’s *slowly* go downstairs.’