

The Lab Rat



Jessica Matthews

An "Adult Tv" Novel

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The Lab Rat

by Jessica Matthews

Linda and Martina found George in the postgraduate bar. 'I just heard,' Linda said, hugging him tightly. 'You didn't get into the research programme this year. But don't give up; it's not the end of the world. You might get a research post next year.'

'I don't think I'll be here to try,' George replied. 'I've run out of money, and by next year, there'll be another crop of enthusiastic graduates competing for the same few posts anyway, and I'll be a year out of date.'

'Don't be so pessimistic.' Linda clung onto him. 'I've got faith in you. Think of all the plans we've made.'

'I hate to feel that I've let you down.' George and Linda had planned their careers together, moving up the academic ladder as a unit. 'You've got a place for next year. I can't hang around and be a burden, especially when I can't contribute much.'

'Why George, I need you.' Linda's eyes filled with tears. 'I don't want to lose you.'

'And I don't want to go, but there are things we can't control. I think we should be prepared for plans to change.'

‘I’m not losing you!’ Linda held onto George’s hand with a look of desperation. ‘We’re going camping next week, and we’re not going to talk about anything like this until we’re back and everything has been tried.’

‘You know I love you, Linda. You know I want to build our lives together, but I’m not going to hold you back. I’ll go and see the professor again and grovel and beg if I have to, but there must be something I can do here.’

‘That’s more like it! Now take me home.’

‘I think you kids had better hold on,’ Martina said. ‘You’ve been the most beautiful couple ever since you arrived here. I remember when you moved in together. That tiny apartment you had off campus. If you could survive there, you’ll survive anywhere.’

‘If only I could be on my way towards tenure like you.’ George smiled wistfully. ‘I want to give Linda so much. It’s a bit hard to see where we go right now.’

‘I’ll give it some thought,’ Martina said. ‘Ask around.’

‘I’d be happy to take anything, even a lab rat’s job to stay on.’

‘There must be something.’ Linda brightened. ‘Every research lab has to have a few lab rats.’

* * * * *

A week or so later after the camping trip, there was a message on the answering machine when Linda came out of the gym: ‘Hi Linda. Could you call me or drop round to my office when you get this message. I think I may have found something for George, but I’m not sure he’s going to like it and I wanted to talk to you first. Love you both, Martina; and you know my number.’

‘I’m so glad you came round,’ Martina said as she and Linda settled into a booth in the coffee shop later that day. ‘I was dreading trying to explain this on the telephone.’

‘That sounds really mysterious.’ Linda’s eyes widened with anticipation. ‘You might as well tell me

straight. What isn't George going to like? If it's something that allows him to stay with the University, I'm sure he'll be so pleased.'

'Well, I'm not so sure, and I don't want to mention it to him without talking to you first,' Martina said. 'It's a behavioural research project, with funding that isn't entirely clear. They need a lab rat with some qualifications in psychology, behavioural science, or some related field.'

'You're making it a little spooky.' Linda laughed.

'Maybe it *is* spooky,' Martina said softly. 'But there's a guarantee of a scholarship once the programme is completed.'

'I'm sure George would jump at that!'

'So am I. And that's why I wanted to speak to you before I breathe a word of this to him.'

'So come on, tell me. What are you not saying?'

'Are you ready for this? Here goes. They want a boy with a certain set of characteristics. George would fit them. They want to change his appearance so that he looks and sounds like a girl. When they've done that, they want to send him out into the world and watch how he adapts or fails to adapt. He'll have set objectives, and be required to provide a written account of each stage as the programme develops. He'll get no direct help from the programme director or any of the staff, but they will provide basic necessities.'

'What kind of basics?'

'I'm not altogether sure, but a basic income, somewhere to live, and a car was mentioned. There was some suggestion of a clothing allowance as well. And I think any candidate would be able to negotiate extra benefits.'

'He'll like the car, but it's a bit much to take in.' Linda sat back. 'I can understand how they might want to study behaviour, but I can't understand who would fund it.'

'Or who would be a volunteer for the programme.'

'You said George would fit the characteristics. How would he?'

‘He’s the right age, the right build, and has the relevant qualifications. His sexuality is known, and he has no adverse markers like prejudices, religious or political activism. In short, he’s as clean a lab rat as they could wish for, provided—’

‘Provided what?’

‘Provided that he’s willing to go along with the programme, and that he accepts all the conditions, and he’s willing to undergo a little modification to fit in.’

‘Don’t make me ask too many questions.’ Linda sighed. ‘Just tell me the worst.’

‘He’ll have to accept some minor and reversible cosmetic changes to alter his appearance, otherwise the whole experiment fails before it starts. He has to be believable in his altered role so that the research makes valid observations.’

‘I don’t think he’ll like the cosmetic changes bit.’

‘Oh, it’s not that special, just some hair removal, a bit of dentistry, maybe hair colouring, nails; nothing permanent and nothing that we don’t go through every week. Think of it as us girls getting our own back on a man.’

‘I like that interpretation.’ Linda laughed. ‘Will he have to do hobble skirts and six inch heels too?’

‘I’ve no doubt it could be arranged,’ Martina replied. ‘I know the professor in charge.’

* * * * *

‘So that’s the programme.’ Martina handed a sheaf of papers to George. ‘It’s a bit unusual, and quite demanding. You’d be both the subject of the experiment and the reporter too.’

‘I remember some years ago, a researcher stained his skin from white to black, to write about the differences in attitude he experienced,’ George said. ‘I guess I could do the same. I’m not clear about how much they intend to change me physically though.’

‘I don’t think that’s been finalised. They didn’t think they’d get the funding or find a subject, so I think there’s a lot of the programme which is open to alteration and negotiation as it goes along.’

‘Think of it like going into space.’ Linda said. ‘You’re going on a journey into the unknown.’

‘Now you’re just being silly.’ George laughed.

‘Not really.’ Martina said. ‘It’s something which people have done before, masqueraded as the opposite sex, but this is a different angle. Your behaviour will have to change in reaction to your changed appearance and people’s expectations of you. You’ll have to work hard to avoid being found out. You’ll have to be really careful in some situations too.’

‘It’s a challenge,’ Linda said.

‘But I haven’t even applied yet,’ George said. ‘I’ll have to read through all these conditions and be sure I know what I’m letting myself in for.’

‘But you’ll do it, I know you will,’ Linda replied. ‘You want that guaranteed scholarship at the end more than anything.’

‘Yes, I’m desperate to stay in the university. I need that scholarship if I’m going to progress.’ George pulled out a sheaf of papers. ‘I got the application forms here.’

‘What? They’re not online.’

‘No, the lady in the office explained that they didn’t want applications from all over the place. They’re only issuing forms to people within the university itself, with the right qualifications. I have the academic qualifications, but I have to pass a medical if I’m selected.’

‘We’d better make a start then,’ Linda said. ‘When do they have to be in?’

‘As soon as possible.’ George replied. ‘They ask some very personal questions. I’m a bit scared to give so much personal information.’

‘You shouldn’t be,’ Linda assured him. ‘Think about it. They want to start with a clean subject, a neutral. They don’t want someone whose hobby is entering beauty competitions.’

‘Why ever not? Surely they’d be ideal?’ George asked.

‘No, they would be entirely wrong,’ Linda replied. ‘Remember what Martina said. They want to change you and then see how you adapt in various situations. They don’t want someone who has a good idea of how to act anyway. That would give an entirely false picture and spoil the results.’

‘I understand,’ George said. ‘But I’ll have to do forms alone. I think there are too many personal questions about things since I was a young teenager.’

‘And even though we’ve been together for the past year, you don’t want me knowing your secrets.’ Linda laughed. ‘It’s all right with me. Your past is a deep and dark secret, never to be revealed.’

‘I’ll fill them in tomorrow, and hand them in to the office as soon as I’ve done them,’ George said. ‘Now, where was I talking you for dinner?’

* * * * *

‘I wonder what it will be like to have a girlfriend,’ Linda said as George’s hand started early morning wandering while they lay together.

‘It will still be *me*, even if I’m selected,’ George said, sliding down the bed, his tongue flicking across her stomach as he moved further. ‘And why are you asking that question?’

‘I was wondering if I should ask Martina. You know: get a little girl-on-girl practise in so that I’m ready for the new you.’ Linda stopped talking and moaned softly as his tongue found a special spot.

Then the alarm rang. George abruptly got up.

‘That’s not fair!’ Linda complained.

‘You’re right,’ George agreed, ‘but I’d better get these forms completed and handed in.’

‘I still don’t understand why it’s on paper and not online.’

‘I’ve read the forms and the questions they ask,’ George said. ‘I’m not sure I’d like to put all this information online.’

‘So you do have secrets.’

‘Whatever; it’s just better not going online. Now I’m going to get into the library, look up a few things, and get the forms handed in.’

A couple of hours after George handed in the forms, his cell phone rang. ‘Is that George?’ a cultured, feminine, accented voice asked. ‘This is Professor Zenakis. I’ve received your forms and wondered if you’d come to my office for interview tomorrow morning.’

‘Does that mean I’m in with a chance?’

‘I can’t say, but I’d like to meet you.’ The professor gave directions to her room. ‘I’ll see you at ten.’

Some hours later, George was sitting with Linda and Martina having coffee in one of the shops on the mall nearby.

‘I’m not sure what I’ve let myself in for,’ he said. ‘Maybe it’s a bad idea after all?’

‘Don’t back out without even trying,’ Linda said. ‘It’s your chance for the scholarship next year.’

‘You can’t give up,’ Martina joined in. ‘It may be the chance of a lifetime. You’d get a publication out of it and who knows where that might take you.’

‘Straight to the mental institution,’ George said. ‘I think I must have been mad to apply. I can’t see myself living as a girl for however long this stupid project takes.’

‘We live as girls all the time,’ Martina snapped back. ‘What’s wrong with that? Are you superior? Can’t you do it?’

‘Okay, I was only saying—’ George said limply.

‘Just go for it,’ Linda said. ‘No more doubts, just do it. I really think you should, if only because I’ve never heard of anything like it before.’

‘Yes, think of the income, the expenses paid, the car, not to mention the scholarship after the project,’ Martina added. ‘I’ve never seen such a generous offer before.’

* * * * *

Full of trepidation, George crossed the campus well before the appointed hour, to find the professor’s door locked in a seemingly empty building. He wandered aimlessly around, and watched as he waited. At ten past the hour, he saw a woman approach the door, unlock the keypad and enter. Her waited a few moments and then knocked on the door.

He entered. The office was larger than he expected, with not only a desk but a conference table and soft seating area beside a balcony, with a view of the countryside around the campus. This was clearly a more prestigious office than those he had been in during his undergraduate years.

‘You must be George.’ She held out her hand for him to shake. ‘I’m Anna Zanoukis. I know I don’t look like a Zanoukis, but grandfather came from Greece.’ She was a short blonde lady, with blue eyes and seemingly bundled-up energy, dressed all in black, with bangles that jingled as she shook his hand. ‘Yes, I’m George,’ he said lamely.

‘We’ll have coffee and then we can relax and talk through your application and the project as a whole,’ she said. ‘Let’s sit on the balcony and then we can get to know each other.’ She took his arm as they took seats in the sunshine. After the coffee machine buzzed, she brought two cups with cream and sugar.

‘It’s an unusual project,’ George started hesitantly.

‘Yes, it is, and that’s why it needs a special person to carry it forward,’ Anna replied. ‘I didn’t realise how difficult it would be to find someone when I started, but here you are.’

‘Am I the first candidate?’

‘No. But looking at your application forms and your appearance, you could be the right one.’

‘My appearance?’

‘Appearance is really important. This is a serious piece of research, but I do need someone who is going to look the part. You’re a little chubby for what I had in mind, but I’m sure with a bit of diet and exercise you could meet the targets. Without giving away secrets, I thought your application forms and now your appearance make you the strongest candidate. Tell me: have you a girlfriend?’

‘I do, she’s Linda, and she’s the one who encouraged me to apply for this.’

‘And she’ll support you? She does realise that you’ll be looking and acting like a girl throughout this project?’

‘I think she knows what to expect. We have discussed it. We read the description of the project together.’

‘Okay. Now, you know we’re going to change your appearance, and we require you to comply with that change and not to cheat for the duration of the project.’

‘Cheat?’

‘Once we decide you’re feminine, you stay feminine in dress, speech, behaviour, and the rest for the duration. No sneaking back into being one of the boys, wherever you are, and whoever you’re with.’

‘No—no of course not,’ George stammered. ‘I wouldn’t cheat, as it would negate the whole project. I have to admit that I really want the scholarship at the end.’

Anna smiled and shuffled the papers on her desk. ‘We may be able to let you start the scholarship early if all goes to plan,’ she said. ‘First I need you to sign these papers, and then the doctor should be ready to give you your physical.’

‘There’s a lot of reading here.’ George flipped through the papers he’d been handed. ‘What does it all mean?’

‘It means you consent to being on the programme, and that you agree to comply with whatever needs, demands or instructions follow. You know the basic idea anyway.’

‘Yes, you’re going to make me look like a girl and then measure how I react and people around me react. It’s a bit more complicated than that, I’m sure, but that’s the basic idea.’

‘Right, and if you’re happy with that, sign and we’ll get on. It may be that part of my programme could be completed as you start on the scholarship programme. That’s a good place to measure social interaction later in the programme.’ She smiled and handed him a pen.

George signed, and returned the papers to her. ‘I’ll put a copy in your email,’ she said, putting the papers into her desk drawer. ‘Now it’s time for your physical examination. It’s room 442 in the medical block. I’ll call and let them know you’re on the way.’

* * * * *

‘They were really expecting me,’ George told Linda that evening. ‘I had everything measured and recorded. They gave me a sedative for some of the tests, and I remember an injection.’

‘It’s good you’re not afraid of needles.’

‘I never have been. And they told me to run every morning to get the weight down.’

‘I’ve never been able to persuade you to do that.’ Linda laughed. ‘Maybe this is going to be good for your health too?’

‘There were so many things—it was sign here, sample there, and then the measurements, far too many to understand.’

‘Did no one tell you what was going on?’

‘No, I must have fallen asleep afterwards, because the next thing I remember was a nurse telling me I could get dressed and go home. There was no one else to ask, and I still feel a little strange. Not unwell, just relaxed and spacey, if you know what I mean.’

‘Is it a bad feeling?’

‘No, rather the opposite. I feel as if there’s nothing to worry about. Everything feels good and easy.’



‘Maybe you’d better sleep it off.’

‘A good idea.’ George held out his hand to pull her up, and suddenly they were kissing like the first time. Clothes lay where they fell as they tumbled into bed.

‘I think you should go for a medical every day, if it leaves you feeling that horny,’ said. Her hand stroked his groin softly.

‘Maybe this is part of the programme,’ he said as he knelt between her legs. He pulled them up until they rested on his shoulders, and then he slowly moved towards her.

‘I can feel you,’ she whispered. ‘You’re going in the wrong way.’

‘It feels right to try,’ George said in a manner that suggested he wasn’t quite listening to her.

She felt something cold and then a finger tantalising her, slipping in and out easily. His penis followed, pushing and insisting. She moved away, afraid of the pressure. George moved with her, and then slapped her bottom hard. As she recoiled, she felt her muscles tense and relax, and then he pushed again and was in.

He held still, allowing her to get used to the intruder. He heard her breathing coming faster and saw her face tense. He pushed again and again, feeling his sac against her skin. He couldn’t stop and tried to go deeper and deeper until spasms of pleasure overtook him. Spent, he relaxed and allowed his shrinking member to be expelled. Linda sobbed.

‘I’m sorry. I really don’t know what made me do that. I know it’s what bad girls do,’ George said.

‘You don’t seem quite yourself,’ Linda said. ‘Maybe it’s because of all the stress you’ve had today.’

‘I have to see the programme psychologist tomorrow.’ George replied. ‘I’ll ask—’ He didn’t finish the sentence as he fell asleep.

* * * * *

George knocked on Professor Zenakis’s door, and entered.