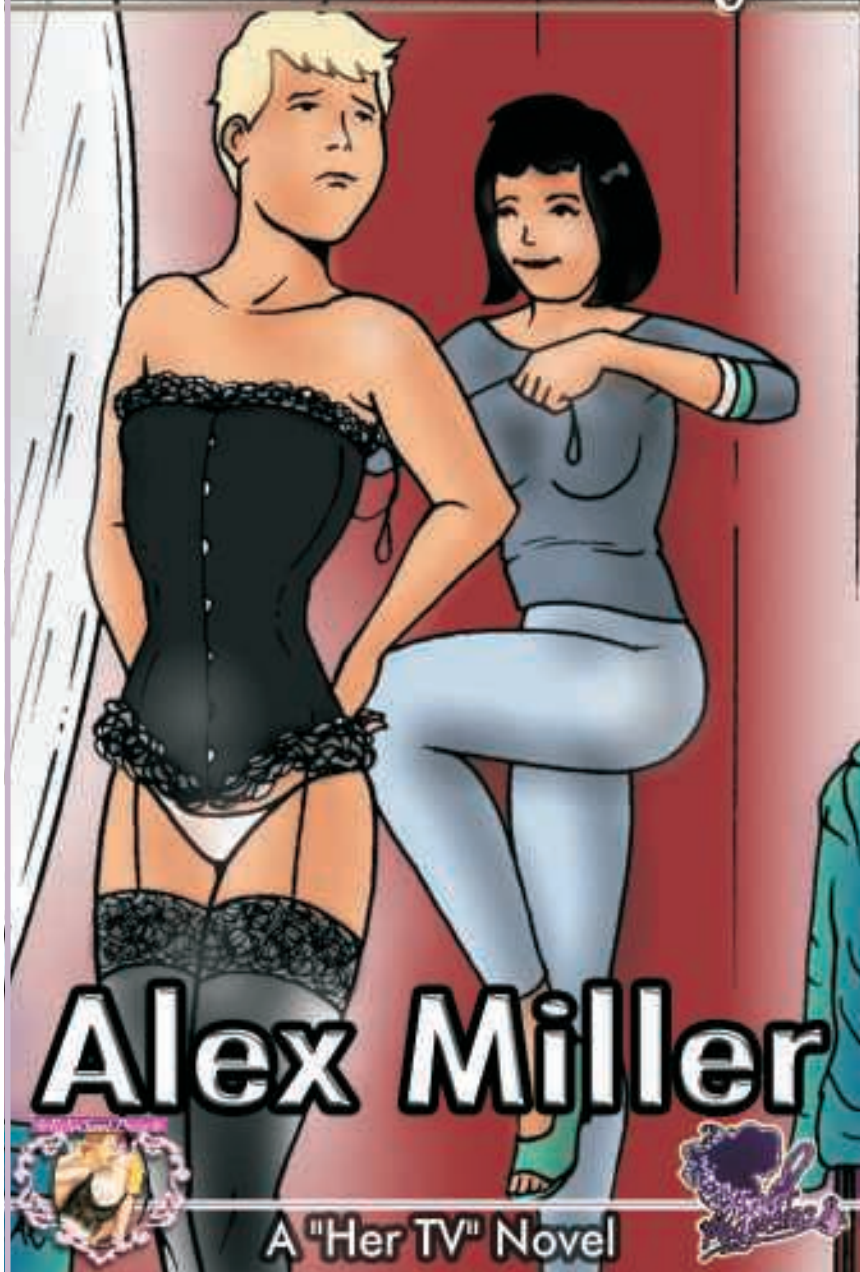


# A Woman to a Certain Degree



## Alex Miller

A "Her TV" Novel

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# A Woman To A Certain Degree

By Alex Miller

I'm going to tell you the story of the demise of Daniel Barnes. How the man he was unexpectedly came to his end. A future nipped in the bud. But I better start at the beginning. Not *his* beginning, that was thirty-two years ago, but the beginning of the end. It started with his sister, a university student getting ready to get her doctoral degree. Not unusual and normally not an impossible challenge. The problem was that she had to successfully deliver a dissertation. Well, the problem wasn't the dissertation. The problem was the subject of the dissertation. A problem she had to discuss with her mentor, one of her professors.

“Angela, you're my best student and you're telling me that you can't think of a fitting subject. I thought that you would be writing about gender issues. Have

you changed your mind? I hope not. You wouldn't be the first to do it, but I'm sure you would write the best dissertation in years or even ever. You are bright enough and have surprised me more than once, in a good way. So I'm convinced that you would show me an exciting view of the other way to be a woman, the man's way."

"I haven't changed my mind, but I can't find a person that wants to be part of my research. People obviously like their privacy."

"That's debatable in these days. However, we were talking about another problem. Maybe I can help you with that. I expected something like that to pop up and have thought about a solution, an alternative way."

"And that is?"

"It's very simple if you think about it. You don't need a real transvestite or transgender. You just have to give the subject a twist. "

"What do you mean 'with a twist'?"

"Well, just make the subject an ordinary man, any ordinary man. Then you only need a person to tell you what a transvestite could tell you. Maybe not just like it, but close enough. Just find a guy that you can study, preferably from close by. See how it changes him, *if* it changes him. Control every step of him slowly changing. Write down what he feels, what he thinks. You know what I mean. You know what you want to study and how to get results. The advantage is that you will have an original view on the subject, one that you wouldn't have if you use a real transvestite."

“That’s very nice and I like the idea, but who would be so crazy to be my lab rat, wear women’s clothes? What man would do that?”

She stopped the professor before she could react.

“Don’t answer that. We both already know the answer to that. The real question is, do you know anybody that’s not one of them? I don’t. And are you sure that it will work, studying a so-called ordinary male? The results will be different, maybe even too different.”

“The results will be different, that’s true, but interesting and that’s all your dissertation has to be. Of course I am sure that it will work and I do know the right person for the job and you do too. He’s within your grasp. You only have to convince him to help you. Which won’t be easy, of course, but not impossible. Don’t you have a brother? For what you have told me about him, he sounds like the perfect guy, the perfect guy and the perfect solution. And there you have it, or better said, him.”

“Yes I have a brother, but he will never do that. Why would he be my guinea pig, and such a strange one? He will say no before I have said my last word. I’m sure. I can’t force him to do this.”

“Well, that’s your problem. But I think it is easier than finding someone else. Besides, studying someone you know inside-out will give you more accurate results.”

The conversation kept running through her mind at lunch. Professor Wilkes was right. Using her brother would make a very interesting dissertation. The results would be unconventional enough to make her dissertation noticed beyond the university.

She had to grab such a great chance and there was no better moment than to start that evening.

Lucky for her, Daniel still lived at home with their mother and sister. He had since their father had died. All that the old man left his family was a monthly bonus from the investments he had made during his better days. It wasn't enough to live on and surely not enough to send the daughter to university. So there was the mother, a well-educated housewife with almost no income and the sister, a very smart kid with no future. Her mother couldn't afford university for her, even taking into account her daughter's scholarship. She couldn't get a full one, only a partial one, because of conditions not met.

That's where the brother came into the picture, his money anyway. He had a very well-paid job. He wrote manuals for a company that seemed to appreciate his work. Well, his department head did, but that was easy to explain. She was his fiancée and hardly a very objective person. Recently he had switched from a steady job to being a freelancer so he could work from home and be his own boss. Well, not completely. His fiancée was still the boss, work-related and in private. He would be working for the same firm most of the time. Thanks to his fiancée, of course. If he would lose her, the card house would start crumbling down. Everything seemed perfectly arranged for them as a family. There was only one problem. That son and brother was me.

I didn't have to live at home. I could afford a place for myself and leave my mother and sister to their unavoidable doom, but I never could be so selfish, even when the neighbors always looked at me as if I was a failure. My fiancée already had her own place where there was room for me, but home was where the heart was, for now. She was very pragmatic and we weren't the most romantic couple. Until

I had found this convenient love, I had been single. The scar of the love that had burned me hard still hadn't faded away. That was something my sister Angela teased me with, even when she didn't know anything about it. She had been too young at the time to have any recollection of the affair, only of many others.

Since the love of my life had dumped me, I jumped from one bad relationship into another. That made me just give up, until convenience showed up in the shape of my fiancée. I had short rough-looking brown hair and a gender neutral face. That last one was something I inherited from my grandmother. Those weren't the only parts I blamed my grandmother; I also blamed her for my height. A slender five-foot-six was the right description. Angela always reminded me of this shortcoming. of course didn't like that, but it is after all the job of a sister to annoy her big brother.

“Daniel, I need your help and before you say no, it's important.”

“Damn, Angela, call me Danny. You know I hate the name Daniel. And what is so important that you need my help? You never do.”

Professor Wilkes had warned her not to tell me the whole truth. It was better to keep the details hidden until the deal was sealed. She had to trick me into submission. Force me if it was necessary. Make sure that I had said yes before I knew what awaited me, using the power of ignorance. The professor told my sister what the best way was to do just that.

“Use your mother. You have told me once that he feels guilty about the fact that she stayed home because he was born. Guilt is a very effective means of persuasion. She left a promising carrier behind to



take care of him and he knows that all too well. So use that to convince him.”

Angela knew that fact about her mother all too well, but how did Professor Wilkes know that? She couldn't remember that she had told that to anyone and surely not Professor Wilkes. It was probably because she had been too gossipy again. She always had been too loose-lipped when she was drunk and talking with people she trusted. It was a sin of her younger days and one she thought she had left there too. Obviously she hadn't, but as long as it was the professor, it turned out useful for her problem.

“I need help with my dissertation and you are the perfect person for it. Who would have thought that a brother could come in handy?”

“You are joking, aren't you? How can I be of any help? It's *your* dissertation. I can't write it for you and I wouldn't either, even if I could. Get someone else to help you. I don't have the time anyway. I'm a busy man. I can give you the extra money you need for it, but that's all.”

At that moment my mother came in with the food. She knew her children too well to not see that there was something bothering them. An explanation had to follow, one with a surprising result. And for Angela it couldn't have turned out better, even if she had planned it herself...and she had. Mothers are predictable when it's about their children.

“Danny, you *will* help your sister. Do you hear me? She's your kid sister and when she needs your help, you *will* help. It's a big brother's task to do that in every way he can. So you know what to do.”

“Mom, she's a grown-up. Yes, she's my kid sister, but she's no kid anymore. I don't need to hold her

hand to cross the street. She can do that on her own, just like this dissertation. Besides she even hasn't told us what she needs from me. Knowing her, it probably the stupidest thing possible."

She knew well that her daughter was more than capable to deal most things. So asking for help from me meant that she needed it or she wouldn't have asked. But the most important reason she wanted me to help my sister was that this was the last time. Soon my sister would leave the house. After getting that doctoral degree she would move to the other side of the country. Her professor had pulled some strings. There was a well-paid job waiting for my sister. My mother's already small family would be torn into pieces. Helping my sister would hopefully tighten the family bonds enough to make sure those pieces would stay attached over that long distance. She didn't look forward to having a daughter only a few days a year at some holidays. Maybe my help would even make my sister change her mind about leaving and make her look for a job nearby? She would make sure that I would help, damn sure.

"She will tell you that when you have made your promise. Knowing you to be always busy, I suspect that you will *say* that you'll help. Doing it is something else. Just promise that you will help your sister in any way she wants, even when you don't like it. I don't want to hear any excuse. Just do it. It will make us all happy, especially me."

"Mom, that's absurd. She doesn't need my help. What help could she need from me? And yes, I *will* be busy, too busy to waste my time on helping my kid sister. I have better things to waste my time on."

Words I shouldn't have spoken. Now Mom was mad and I could never stand up against my mother when she was mad, nor could my father.

“That’s enough. You promise to me, now. Promise that you’ll help your sister. That you’ll do what she asks. Whatever crazy or stupid thing she wants you to do. Nothing less, nothing more, or...”

“Or what? Spank me like you did when I was young? I’m a little old for that and too strong too. Mom, why is this so important to you? I don’t have the time for this. I can’t say that enough.”

“Then make time, instead of excuses. I expect my son to put his family first and his job second. I gave up my job for my family. I don’t need you to do that, but no son of mine will abandon his duty to his family. She’s your sister. You’re her brother, act like it. Got that?”

I did. She had used the magic words. The ones that reminded me of the debt I had to her. It also helped that I hadn’t seen my mother this angry in many years and surely not with me. It baffled me.

“Ok, ok, I’ll promise. I will help her with her dissertation in any way I can. I will find a way to make the time.”

I didn’t have to because I had time enough. What I didn’t have was a better excuse. And if I had seen the smile on my sister’s face, I wouldn’t have promised either. But she had it well hidden and she only smiled because she knew what awaited me and how I would react.

“And you! Don’t expect too much. Like I said, I don’t have much time. So what do you want me to do? What will the dissertation be about anyway? Or is that a big secret.”

“Don’t worry. I’m sure that you’ll have the time that is needed. What you’ll be doing won’t interfere

with your normal life. You just have to deliver me the necessary data input for the dissertation.”

“What? How? What are you talking about? Just tell me what you want me to do. I still don’t know anything. This way I won’t be able to keep my promise. What data do I have to deliver?”

“Hold it, big brother. Like I said, no need to worry. You will start this weekend. I have to buy the necessary materials for the job first. That reminds me of a very important thing. Can I have your credit card?”

I hesitated a moment but I couldn’t say no. I just had told her that I would give her the extra money she would need. I had no other option than to hand it over. I just didn’t trust her with it.

“You can only buy those things you need for the dissertation. No clothes or other stuff for yourself. Got that? I will check all the transactions very thorough. Every purchase that’s not right, you will pay back.”

“You’re worrying again, big brother, I won’t buy any panties for myself. That I can assure you, not for myself.”

I wanted to react, but I just let it go. She wouldn’t stop as long as I wouldn’t. I wasn’t happy to be kept in the dark, but at least my mother was. Happy that is. Maybe it would change when things started, but the weekend came and nothing happened. Well, that was what I thought. It was already Saturday morning and Angela hadn’t said anything and in a half-hour I would be at the office. Not that they needed me there. I had some things to wrap up, work related and private.

I noticed the change when I searched for fresh underwear. After a shower, only hiding my bottom part behind a towel, I went looking for the necessary clothes and accessories. Like every naked human would do, except a naturist of course. My drawer was empty and the only thing there was a sealed package of ladies underwear, normal black satin briefs. I didn't know what they were doing in my drawer. I screamed out of the opened door.

“Angela, this emptied drawer, is this one of your jokes?”

She stepped in from around the corner, as if she had waited there.

“If it was a joke, we both would be laughing. If it was a prank, only I would be laughing. But be assured it is neither. It is the answer to your million dollar question. It's what you wanted.”

“What question has that for an answer? Not one I asked.”

“But it does. You asked me what it was that I wanted you to do and this is the answer to that question. You should be happy now.”

I looked at her with a big frown on my face, one that slowly turned into an expression of disbelief. That meant that I had guessed the answer. I knew of course of the degree my sister was pursuing and the unconventionalities that came with it. Well, that was what I would call them. The other words I had for it weren't that nice. I also knew that since she started her studies, my sister had a more than intense interest about transvestites. The books about this subject have been piling up at the most inconvenient places. I had intended to ask her, but forgot. So I only had to



add up things and its sum gave me the most plausible answer.

“No, no ... oh no ... no, no, nooo. Don’t tell me that this is what I think it is. This can’t be. Are you totally out of you mind?”

“That is a lot of no’s and if you think that this is your new underwear, then yes, it is what you think it is. You have volunteered to be my new research subject. And this is his first job.”

“I have volunteered nothing and surely not this. You must be mad to think that I would be doing something like that. Forget it, I won’t be doing this. This is not something you can ask of me, no way.”

“Well, Mother won’t like to hear that. Not after you promised the opposite. She will hang you by the balls if you don’t comply.”

“Very funny, but way over the top. I never promised to do something crazy like this and I don’t think Mom will have a problem with me saying no to being your lab rat and worse.”

“Let’s just ask her. She may surprise you. All you have to do is turn around. She’s standing right behind you.”

I wasn’t expecting to look right in the face of my mother when I turned. That made me jump so hard that my towel almost fell down, almost. So there was no need to be upset, but I was. I tried to act as if nothing was wrong while fixing up the towel.

“Mom, you never will believe what Angela wants me to do. It’s so ridiculous that I even can’t say it out loud. I’ll have to break my promise. Angela has to find another way to finish her dissertation.”

“I not only believe it, but I also think that it isn’t a bad idea.

I must admit that at first it sounded weird and twisted. That changed after a minute or two. Then what Angela had in mind sounded completely rational and I think you should keep the promise you made.”

“But Mom, she wants me to turn into a transvestite. How can one expect that I would wear women’s underwear willingly? Have you both gone crazy? This is nothing for a grown man to do, any man.”

“She doesn’t want to turn you into one. She only wants you to *act* like one. That doesn’t *make* you one. And I agree, it will make a heck of a dissertation. So when I walk downstairs I expect you to get dressed in whatever makes Angela happy, because that will make me happy. No matter how strange it all may appear. So long as we keep this in the family, you have nothing to fear and we will keep it in the family. I have told Angela that this stops if she tells someone about it. If you’re the leak, you can’t use it as an excuse to quit. Then I’d expect you to keep on going even if the whole world knows about it.”

When I watched my mother go down the stairs I realized that my sister was gone too. I had the room for myself again, a room with an open drawer and in it a choice. I would survive it as long as I helped my sister or my mother would be angry forever. So I had the choice to help my family and to lose my dignity or I could choose my dignity and lose my family. My sister wouldn’t be mad at me, only be disappointed in me and I knew that a disappointment could last a lifetime when it would be living a country apart.

So it turned out that I loved my family more than my dignity. That didn’t mean that it was easy for



me to open the package and it was *way* more difficult to put the panties on. But it wasn't as weird as I had suspected; the feeling, not the fact. It felt intense and it felt like trouble rising. I was alone, luckily. Otherwise I would have been in real trouble. Now I only needed a hand to get rid of 'it'. Another shower later I finally succeeded to leave for the office. My mother and sister watched me go with an obvious smile on their faces. They saw my awkward walk. My sister had some last words for me, but no comforting ones.

“Brother dear, don't forget to write down all your feelings and thoughts. I need them for my dissertation. And when I say all, I mean *all*. And you better read some of my books so you know how to tuck things away.”

I wouldn't have paper and time enough to write it all down. From the first step I made in my new underwear, I had felt the difference of the cloth. The satin gave me a constant overdose of feelings I shouldn't have. My brain had trouble coping with it. And that wasn't the only thing I had trouble coping with. Luckily things calmed down before I reached the office, not my place to be on a Saturday morning. It wasn't on a weekday either. I only came there now and then when I had to for a project or to see my fiancée Addison. She was the only one there.

“Daniel, you're here. Good, I'm done working.”

She had a great office so I didn't mind to meet her there. She did some extra hours to impress the bosses. There were rumors going around that she had a friend higher up that was looking out for her, something I never believed. Addison wasn't the type. She wanted to do things without any help. That basically explained the extra hours. A promotion doesn't come easy, after all. Besides, I was her friend, the only one I knew of. So now we had the time and a

place to talk about our upcoming wedding. Her office's leather chairs, however, made things worse at places I don't have to tell you about. I tried to avoid embarrassment by walking around.

“Daniel, will you finally sit down so we can start?”

She knew I preferred Danny but she found it a too common name.

That was in contrast with my sister, who didn't mind using the name Danny. She just said Daniel to annoy me. Addison always used Daniel to address me. I couldn't tell what bothered me the most. It was my name, but my friends from long days gone always said Danny. The friends were gone, though, and now only my mother used the name Danny.

“We have to talk about the wedding. You still haven't told your mother. If things keep on going like this, you'll have to tell her on the day of the wedding and I don't think she will like it.”

Wedding, I even hadn't told her that it was this serious between me and Addison. My mother still thought that it was just a way to satisfy my male urges. The fact was that she didn't like Addison. My sister didn't know Addison well enough to make her mind up. I was the only one that liked her and I wasn't really sure that I did. Addison had her eyes on me from the moment that I started to work there. Before I knew it, she had her claws on me. That wasn't difficult after my past history with women. I had gotten burned too many times. It didn't help of course that I still had too much unresolved issues. There wouldn't be any with Addison. Things were clear from the beginning when she asked me to form a partnership with her. Addison never wanted more than my body and the name that came with it just for the public. It would make it easier for her to be promoted. The

founder still had some old fashioned ideas and his children were no different.

Love was never an issue between us. There was none. As said, it was just a partnership of convenience. My body got rewarded with hers. So I didn't complain even when she said that we were going to be married. Why would I? It was not that I expected something better to happen, or should I say someone? That arrangement resulted in these conversations with Addison. Not that she needed me, but they gave the impression that I had something to contribute to the wedding. She arranged everything and I just agreed. Luckily for me the wedding was still months away. But the first rehearsal was just a few weeks before. She believed in good planning and that meant taking no risk. Mistakes were normal, just not on her wedding day.

“I still have time. I'm just waiting for the right moment. She doesn't know that we are this far in our relation yet. It will come to her as a shock. I'll have to bring it up carefully. It will change her life.”

My mother of course wasn't born yesterday. I was a fool to think that she wouldn't know. She saw the looks, the signs and the texts on my phone, especially the proposal, Addison's proposal. It said 'Marriage: yes or no?' To make a short story long, it turned out that a marriage was essential for her career. She was completely convinced of that. She had seen it happen with her boss. If I said no, it would have meant the end of us as a couple. As you know, I said yes to Addison and her expectations by giving up *my* expectations. But we still thought that we had to change my mother's expectations for my life.

“It should change yours, not hers.”