

**Stepmother: Stepson to Wife**



**Susan Hulbert**

A "Her TV" Novel



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# Stepmother: Stepson to Wife

**By Susan Hulbert**

“I’ve never felt so nervous,” William confessed as he sat in his huge white dress.

“You look lovely and you don’t even want to think about doubts now,” Melanie said.

“So much has happened in such a few weeks.” He touched the top of his strapless dress once again, thinking to adjust it despite the fact that it fit like a glove over his new breasts.

“They’re lovely and look absolutely natural and perfect. No one would guess you didn’t grow them naturally.”

“I can’t believe I have them.” William lifted them again as if checking that they hadn’t shifted, or worse, disappeared altogether. “I worry that I’m too much of a woman for her.”

“Stop that,” Melanie replied. “You’re my step-daughter and I wouldn’t have given my blessing for you to marry my oldest and dearest friend if I wasn’t sure it would be good.”

“That wasn’t anything I ever thought about.” He turned to the mirror to check that his makeup hadn’t smudged. “I mean I expected that a girl would figure in my future somewhere, but I didn’t expect to *be* one.”

“I never thought that Sarah would end up with a girl,” Melanie replied. “I always thought that she’d be too much for an ordinary boy to make her happy.”

“So this most un-ordinary boy is the one she’s chosen.”

“She told me that story about wanting a trophy wife ages ago,” Melanie said. “I always thought it was a way of deflecting the conversation when we talked about men.”

“I guess it was more than that,” William said and turned as there was a knock at the door.

“Help me with my veil.” He sat to allow her to fuss and arrange it over his head. “I’d better take this ring off so that she can slip the wedding band onto my finger.”

William took the ring from his left hand and slipped it onto his right. “I hope I can get it off this finger. I want to wear them together so that they show in the wedding photographs.”

He stood and took a deep breath, then turned to Melanie. He leaned forward and kissed her gently.

“Thank you, stepmother,” he said. “After you’ve given me away, you have to promise to be a caring mother-in-law to my new husband.”

“Husband?” Melanie asked. “And I’m giving you away?”

“Sarah insisted that I was to be her wife; her trophy wife, remember?”

He waited for her to open the door to walk to the ceremony. “And we have to decide what I’m to be called. I can’t be William forever.”

He stepped forward and saw Sarah waiting for him with their celebrant and friends. His new life was beginning.

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It all began some months earlier...

“Melanie, you’re looking wonderful.”

Sarah waited as Melanie stood and hugged her before they sat at their table on the terrace.

“You’ve lost weight and I love your hair.”

“You always know how to say the right thing,” Melanie replied. “I have to admit, I’m feeling very good with myself recently.”

“Divorce must be good for you.”

“It is *really* good.” Melanie smiled. “When I look back, I don’t know how I put up with that creep for so long. It amazes me.”

“It amazes me too,” Sarah replied. “I never liked him. That’s why we dumped his company when he wanted us to represent him.”

“I’m so glad that it didn’t spoil our friendship.”

“Nothing could ever do that. You’re my oldest and dearest friend.”

“That’s so good to hear.” Melanie paused. “It’s because I have to ask you for a favour.”

“Go ahead and ask.” Sarah took her hand. “If I can do it, you know I will.”

“I have a stepson,” Melanie replied. “I don’t think you ever met him, but he was abandoned when his father left me.”

“Don’t tell me you got him as part of the divorce settlement.”

“That’s one way of putting it.” Melanie laughed. “Seriously, William’s graduated last year. He got a first-class degree in Art History.”

“That sounds like he’s really bright.”

“He’s bright all right but he’s got no personality and opportunities for art historians aren’t thick on the ground.”

“I don’t see where I fit into this.” Sarah looked puzzled.

“I thought if you could offer him a job, something or anything to get him started. He’s been trying really hard but I guess at interviews he doesn’t come over as being dynamic.”

“I still don’t know what you’re asking.”

“Please could you give him something to do?” Melanie said. “Anything at all so that he can mix with people, maybe get a bit of experience and some social skills.”

“Surely he learned that at the university. From what I hear, it’s one long party with a bit of study.”

“I think he missed out on the party bit and did the study. He’s nice, polite and kind, but he needs to be brought into the world.”

“I think my staff would make him join in. They work hard but they know how to party too.” Sarah paused to think. “I dare say we could find him something, but we don’t have much to do with art or history.”

“Anything to get him out of the torpor he’s sinking into,” Melanie replied.

“You could tell him that we’re going to represent some art collector, or some institution, and want some expertise in-house.”

“That sounds good.”

“I’m pleased that you think so.” Sarah smiled. “It’s all a lie but if he’s willing to take some sort of low-level job, I’m sure we can fit him in.”

“That’s wonderful.”

“Here’s my card. Have him call Sally, my assistant. I’ll tell her to sort something out for him.”

“That’s great,” Melanie said. “He’s such a nice person, despite that rat of a father.”

“You don’t look to be suffering, despite the rat,” Sarah said.

“I’m not; the settlement was worth all the crap he made for me. He was a dreadful husband, but he knew how to make money.” Melanie signalled to the waitress. “Now tell me what’s been happening in your life.”

“If you’re asking if I’m seeing anyone, the answer is no,” Sarah replied. “They all want to control me. They see me as the future little wife. What I really need is a wife like that.”

They both laughed and turned their attention to the menu.

“I wondered if I could change William into someone’s wife,” Melanie said. “I had a dream like that.”

“Maybe it’s his destiny.”

“I wonder if it could be,” Melanie replied. “He’s not like his father at all and I can’t think of a better way of getting even with him.”

“I can see that look in your eye,” Sarah said. “You’re already thinking about it.”

“It’s nothing really; only a passing thought.”

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“There’ll be a boy called William calling you,” Sarah said to Sally when, some hours later, she returned to the office. “I promised his stepmother that we’d give him a job.”

“Had you any particular job in mind?” Sally asked. “We don’t have a vacancy.”

“I don’t know; anything,” Sarah replied. “He’s a graduate in the history of art so he’s probably useless at everything.”

“So what do I do with him?”

“Make him associate vice-president in charge of the coffee machine if you want,” Sarah quipped. “I promised; his stepmother is an old friend. I’m sure you can train him to do something useful.”

“Associate vice-president it is,” Sally agreed. “Presumably we’re going to pay him at basic rate.”

“Of course,” Sarah replied and promptly forgot about William.

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“You heard about this vacancy from an old friend, you said.” William held the card with the numbers on it.

“Yes, it was a friend of a friend actually,” Melanie lied. “She said that they’re really desperate to recruit a promising young graduate.”

“But do they have clients in the art world?”

“They’re trying to break into that sector,” Melanie said vaguely. “You’ll have to ask them. All I’m doing is pointing you in their direction before they hire someone else.”



"I'll look them up and maybe call next week."

"William, you will call them first thing in the morning," Melanie said severely. "You've done nothing for months. I've paid all your expenses; now you either take this job or you take yourself off to live somewhere else."

"But I've no money."

"I don't care. I'm fed up; you've turned idleness into an art form." Melanie's eyes told him not to argue. "And you need to be earning money."

When William turned up for his interview at the office, Sally saw at once that he was nervous and tongue tied. He was smart enough, slim and fresh faced, with long dark hair held back in a low pony tail. He moved languorously, with a grace that was quite unexpected.

Sally had her usual set of questions and ran through them quickly. William scored as willing but lacking in any experience. He'd have been rejected but for Sarah's instruction.

"Congratulations," Sally forced herself to say as she stood at the end of the interview. "You've got the job. Leave your details with the receptionist and we'll email you with details and a start date. We have a casual dress code here so dress for comfort but remember that clients will be coming through, so nothing outlandish."

"I don't think I've ever done outlandish." William shook her hand, smiled nervously, and almost stumbled out of the office.

"I hired your friend's son." Sally brought her list of pressing matters into Sarah's office at the end of the day. "I don't know what he can do but I'm sure that the girls will sort him out."

"I'm sure they will." Sarah nodded. "They're all such extroverts, they'll convert him."

"Or kill him trying," Sally finished the thought and they both smiled.

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Sarah forgot about William. He started work quietly and with Melanie behind him at home and Sally behind him at work, he started to make himself useful.

It wasn't that the work was particularly difficult; it was just that there was so much of it and as the only man in the office, he had to try harder. There were appointments to book and meetings to arrange. Travel had to be organised and schedules matched. It was never ending.

If there was anything to do with art, he didn't find it. The art of managing the seemingly impossible was something else. He turned out to have a skill.

Once he found his feet and started to build up his own contacts book, William found it to his liking. He was meticulous and if something fell through, the fault was always proven to be at the other end.

The office was all female apart from him. At first he was a novelty; someone to use as the butt of their jokes and their sarcasm. William took it all in good heart. Nothing upset him and he fell out with no one. Quite soon, it was as if he'd always been there.

"What's this carnival night you're talking about?" William asked one evening as they were closing down for the day.

"It's the annual treat for the staff," Zoe, one of the girls said. "I'm surprised you haven't heard of it but then you've not been here long."

"So what is it?"

"It's like a girl's night out where we all get dressed up really specially and let our hair down; no boy-friends, partners or husbands allowed," Zoe explained. "It's a few months away but its great fun."

"So why call it carnival night?"

"I've no idea," Zoe replied. "Dress-up Night sounded dull. We go to one of the best restaurants in town at the boss's expense. We get wined and dined and everyone has a good time."

"I guess I'm not one of the girls," William laughed. "That's why I haven't heard."

"I think you should qualify," Zoe smiled back. "You're one of us and so you could be an honorary girl for the occasion."

William shook his head at the thought of being included. He could guess what they would all be like when let loose together.

"I don't think that's a good idea."

“We can’t leave you out,” Zoe said. “I’ll talk to the others and we’ll work something out. You deserve the chance to really dress up and have a good time too.”

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“I’ve talked to the girls.” Zoe caught up with William a few days later. “They’ve had a vote and decided that you should come to the carnival night.”

“That’s really kind, but...”

“You can be an honorary girl for the occasion. You have to dress up.” Zoe stopped William as he was about to decline. “They’ve seen your screensaver and they think you should dress up like her.”

“But that’s a portrait; she’s from a hundred years ago.” William suddenly knew it had been a mistake to put that picture on his home screen.

“So imagine if she was around today,” Zoe replied. “She’d be as beautiful now as she was then.”

“But I’m not beautiful and I’m not a girl.”

“Stop raising trivial objections.” Zoe shook her head. “You don’t get it, do you? We all want you to come. It’s an all-girl affair, so you’re being allowed to be an honorary girl for the evening.”

“What’s an honorary girl?”

“It’s someone who looks like a girl but isn’t a real one.”

“I’m not sure...”

“Don’t say another word.” Zoe put her hand up as if to stop him. “We’ll arrange it all. I know a salon that would help you get ready. You just have to agree and do what you’re told.”

William had a bad feeling as he decided that it would be better to agree than being seen as the one who wouldn’t join in.

“I’m sure they can’t make me look anything like a real girl anyway,” he said.

“It doesn’t matter,” Zoe replied. “It’s not as if there’s going to be anyone there who doesn’t work here and they all know who you are anyway.”

“Okay,” William said cautiously. “Promise me that they won’t all be taking photographs of me though.”

“Get real; this is the twenty-first century,” Zoe replied. “Everyone takes pictures; Selfie Mania is here to stay.”

“Oh goody!” William thought to himself as he went back to his desk. “I’m going to be embarrassed forever.”

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“William’s settling in and much to my surprise, he’s becoming really good,” Sally said to Sarah some weeks later. “I have him working on all sorts of problems and to be truthful, he’s like my personal assistant.”

“That’s good, thank you. I was afraid that I was letting my sympathy for an old friend distort my judgement when I said we’d take him on.”

“He’s still as quiet as a church mouse though,” Sally added. “The girls keep trying to get him to lighten up.”

“They’ll sort him out.” Sarah was too busy to worry about something that wasn’t really a problem.

“I think he’s really shy and inexperienced in life.” Sally hesitated at the door. “The girls are trying to persuade him to dress up for the carnival night. I think they’ve succeeded too.”

“I’d forgotten about that staff treat,” Sarah admitted. “I hope you’ve got it all arranged.”

“How could I not?” Sally asked. “The girls look forward to it. They can let their hair down at the boss’s expense.”

“It’s good for morale and its tax deductible,” Sarah laughed.

“They’d like him to join in, it would be good for him,” Sally said. “He’s agreed but he’s so reluctant they think he’s not going to go along with them.”

“I do hope he can be persuaded,” Sarah said. “I like to have a happy team in the office.”

“He’s the only boy and I think he feels a bit left out at times,” Sally said. “It would be an easier fit if he was a girl.”

“Perhaps he could be persuaded to show his feminine side.” Sarah knew the thought was going to stick in her head as soon as she said it.

“If only...” Sally laughed.

“I’m having lunch with his stepmother again soon. I’ll mention it to her.”

It was only when she was going to that lunch that Sarah remembered her conversation with Sally.

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“I can’t thank you enough,” Melanie said as soon as Sarah was shown to the table where she was waiting. “I have to convince him that he’s doing well and lately I think he’s starting to accept it.”

“My assistant thinks he’s really useful but he doesn’t socialise much.”

“He never goes out,” Melanie replied. “He still studies, but now he’s been researching fashion in art. He found John Singer Sargeant and some other artists. They painted really fashionable ladies.”

“Okay, you lost me at the name of the artist,” Sarah replied. “Is that the lady in the picture on his screensaver?”

“I’m not sure but you’d love the portraits. I think he’s madly in love with Lady Agnew; she’s probably the one on his screensaver,” Melanie said. “Either that or he wants to be her.” She laughed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beGSYKKI2oU>

“I don’t think I know her.” Sarah looked puzzled.

“You can’t; her portrait was painted over a hundred years ago,” Melanie explained. “But she looks so sexy and exotic in that painting.”

“Okay, I give up.” Sarah waved her hand in a gesture of surrender. “There is one thing you could help him with though.”

“What’s that?”

“The girls are trying to persuade him to dress up and come with them on the carnival night.”

“I never heard of the carnival night.” Melanie looked intrigued.

“I don’t know why it got that name. I set it up a few years ago as a company event for a bit of fun,” Sarah explained. “It’s become a dressing-up competition;

not silly fancy dress, but come as someone you look like or someone you want to look like.”

“That’s going to be way outside William’s comfort zone.”

“It’s a girl’s only night,” Sarah added. “They want him to be an honorary girl for the night.”

“He’ll never agree.”

“They say he has agreed.”

“He’ll probably find an excuse to dip out.”

“I don’t see why it should be too difficult to get him to come.” Sarah winked. “You can use your powers of persuasion. It’s all free, employees only, and there’s a bonus prize for the best costume.”

“I still don’t think he’ll come.”

“Okay, this is your turn to return the favour. Get him to come.” Sarah smiled at a devious plan that sprang into her mind. “Get him to come as Lady Agnew.”

“That’s awful, but I like the idea,” Melanie replied. “I’ll do anything to get him out of the house. It’s going to cost a lot but I can afford it.”

“I’m sure I overheard the girls talking. One said they knew a salon which would help him get ready.”

“I’ll make sure that he’s ready,” Melanie thought. “Could you ask your girl to call me; maybe we can work together.”

“It’s a deal. You get him there and we’re even, favour for favour,” Sarah said. “I suppose I’d better look up the portrait of this mysterious lady.”

She didn’t know that Zoe and the girls had already cooked their own plan with this same objective in mind.

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“Sarah was telling me about carnival night when she treats all the girls in the office to a night out,” Melanie said when William arrived home on Friday evening.

“I know and I’m not going,” he replied. “It’s too stupid for words.”

“I’m sure Sarah doesn’t see it that way.”

“But they’re all girls in the office except me.”

“So I wouldn’t think that’s a problem.” Melanie feigned ignorance of it all. “You might decide that one of the girls is really special.”

“You don’t get it,” William said. “Apparently they all dress up and from what I’ve heard, they all do it seriously.”

“Is there a problem in that?”

“They want me to dress up too.” William’s face flushed.

“It’s about time you got a decent suit and stopped dressing like you shop at the goodwill.” Melanie kept her face straight.

“No, they want me in a *dress*.” William looked away. “They want me to go all out like they do; you know with the makeup, heels, hair, nails and everything else that girls do.”

“That sounds like good fun. You studied art so you should be able to do it well,” Melanie said enthusiastically. “I think you’ll really enjoy it.”

“What part of ‘I’m not going’ did you not hear?”

“Don’t be such a wimp.” Melanie looked at him fiercely. “You’re going. I’m going to help you and you are going to look beautiful.”

“There’s not much chance of that.”

“I have made up my mind; don’t you dare answer back,” Melanie raised her voice. “If you don’t want to go, pack your bags. Get out of here at once. I’ve had enough of your attitude and self-pity, leaving me to clear up after you.”

“You know that there’s nowhere I can go.” William was shocked at her outburst.

“Not my problem.” Melanie’s face was reddening in anger. “It’s time you learned that to get on, you sometimes have to do things you don’t want to do because your friends and colleagues are doing it too. It’s called joining in, or being one of the team.”

“But I’d be humiliated.”

“Do you think that girls are humiliated by dressing nicely?”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Did you mean that having fun and looking good is only for the girls then?”

“I think they want to make a fool out of me.”

“They probably don’t need any help if that’s your attitude.”

“I’m scared...”

“You are going and that’s an end to it.”

William and Melanie started at each other until William looked away, understanding that he’d lost the argument.

“I’ll tell Sarah that you’ve decided to join in,” Melanie said. “We’re having drinks later this evening. I’m sure she’ll be really pleased to know that the whole team will be together and that you *can* do something for fun.”

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“Where’s my clean underwear?” William called down after his shower on Monday morning as he was rushing to get ready for work.

“It’s in your drawer, where it usually is,” Melanie replied.

“It’s not there.” William came into the kitchen a few minutes later. “I think you’ve mixed up your lingerie and put it into my room.”

“No I haven’t.” Melanie smiled. “It’s not my lingerie; it’s *your* new lingerie.”

“But it’s all silky and patterns,” William replied.

“Good lingerie often is.”

“But I can’t wear those things.”

“You can’t wear your old things either. I threw them out,” Melanie said calmly. “They were washed out and horrible anyway.”

“But they were mine.” William’s frustration showed. “They were for a boy. This lingerie isn’t for a boy.”

“It is now. I thought it would help you to get into character for the carnival night,” she replied. “Sarah thought it was such a good idea that she’s arranging for her favourite store to send a set for you.”



“Be serious.” William sat with a sigh. “I can’t wear lingerie to the office.”

“Why? Who usually looks at your underwear in the office?”

William looked at her as if waiting for an explanation. Melanie sighed as if it was too simple for him to understand without prompting.

“No one needs to know unless you tell them.”

“I certainly wouldn’t do that.”

“Think of it as helping you to develop a feminine character for when you really dress up.” Melanie smiled. “Imagine that you’re turning into your favourite, Lady Agnew.”

“Have you been looking at my computer?”

“You told me who it was ages ago when I complimented you on the screensaver.”

“I guess so; she is rather special,” William replied.

“I looked at her again and I think you could look a lot like her,” Melanie said. “Your hair’s not as dark, but long enough to take a decent up do. With good makeup, your facial structure could look like hers. She has eyebrows that would look good today and really sensuous lips.”

“My eyes aren’t that colour.”

William forgot himself; he should be objecting, but here he was following Melanie’s fantasy. Lady Agnew had deep green eyes and William’s were light blue.

“Contact lenses could fix that easily,” Melanie replied. “You used to wear them a lot when you were studying.”

“I still wear them.”

“So it’s settled. Give me your prescription and I’ll order some that will give you that colour,” Melanie replied. “Go and get dressed now and wear the lingerie I’ve put out for you.”

“Do I have to?”

“Yes but only if you want to stay here tonight. Remember, panties have to match the bra; no mixing, its bad taste.”

“Who’s going to know if I match, let alone if I’m wearing a bra?”

“You are and I am. I’ll come to help you fasten your bra and adjust the straps for you.”

“Surely you don’t want me to go that far.”

“I do and the reason is obvious. I know you’ve nothing to put in the cups but it’s the smallest size. You need to get used to feeling one around your chest.”

“Why on earth should I need that?”

“It will change the way you move.” Melanie thought quickly. “When you’ve got your best dress on, it would be awful if you were forever fiddling with your bra.”

“But the panties, the stockings and the garter belt...”

“They’re all essential for you to get used to,” Melanie persisted. “I thought stockings would be easier for you than tights. Think about going to the bathroom.”

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William’s shoulders slumped as he stood and went back to his room. Melanie followed a few minutes later.”

“I called Sarah to say that you’d be delayed. She said that she quite understood and to take your time.”

“You told her why too.” William’s face registered his shock as he realised what this meant. “You didn’t have to do that.”

“She’s my friend. Do you want me to lie to her. Anyway, she knows all about it.”

“But how do you expect me to walk in to her office and face her?” William asked. “She’ll know what I’m wearing.”

“Has she ever inspected your underwear?”

“No but she’ll guess...”

“You’re not there to show her your lingerie. You’re there to do your job. I’m sure that she’ll expect nothing less.”

Twenty minutes later, William was standing in front of the mirror in his room. He looked and tried

hard to reconcile the image he was seeing. From the neck down, it was a girl; a girl with very tiny breasts.

The panties were pale pink, decorated with a darker pink flower pattern. They matched the bra which he'd allowed Melanie to fasten and adjust with great reluctance and after many protests. The garter belt matched too and held up nude stockings on six tabs.

William looked and felt a stirring which quickly became a swelling of his penis. He didn't want to feel excited, but he couldn't stop it."

"I think you'd better go and use the bathroom." Melanie smiled at his discomfort.

She sat and smiled knowingly as he closed the door behind himself. She guessed he wouldn't be gone for long.

"I can see that you're feeling better." Melanie smiled as he came back into the room. "I got you a dancer's belt to hold you in."

"Hold me in?" William repeated.

"It's so that you don't have that embarrassment in the office." She pointed meaningfully. "Now you can put your usual work clothes on over your lingerie and no one needs to know what's underneath."

"But I'll know."

"That's the idea," Melanie replied. "A girl needs to know how to wear good lingerie."

"A *girl* needs to know but not a *boy*." William tried to regain some authority.

"In a few days, you'll wonder how you ever managed to wear anything else."

"Does that go for the empty bra as well?"

"You're right; it doesn't look proper," Melanie replied. "I'll have to get something to make it look better."

"I have to go to work, remember." William pulled at the spare material where his bra cups were loose.

"That's no problem," Melanie replied, crossing her fingers. "I can get the smallest breast boosters. They'll never show under your shirt."

As he was going out of the door, Melanie called him back. She inspected him closely and had him turn

round. When he turned back, she sprayed some of her perfume over him.

“Now I’m going to smell like a girl,” he grumbled.

“You’ve a lot to learn if you want to be a girl, but don’t worry. I’ll speak to Sarah and I’m sure she’ll get the girls in the office to help you.”

William wondered if he’d have been better off saying nothing.

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It wasn’t a good day at work later that week. William felt that everyone was looking at him; that they all knew what he was wearing. He could feel the way his stockings rubbed against his chinos.

The small bra boosters had been discarded. William thought they were too prominent and made everyone look at him.

Every so often, he’d feel the bra strap slipping off his shoulder and he tried to get it back as inconspicuously as possible. The worst time was when he was explaining rearranged appointments for Sarah.

He was leaning over her shoulder, comparing her screen with the new list in his hand. The strap slipped own and the bra began to bunch under his shirt making a bulge. He tried to be surreptitious, reaching down his open collar to grasp the errant strap.

“I know what you’re doing.” Sarah looked at him with a huge smile on her face. “Your bra strap’s slipping.”

“How did you know?” William was shocked.

“We all know. It shows through your shirt and I see the way you’re standing and moving,” Sarah replied. “All girls have to get used to bra problems.”

“I’m so sorry. Please don’t fire me.”

“I’m never going to fire you,” Sarah laughed. “Melanie would never forgive me and I know you’re wearing her favourite perfume too.”

“It wasn’t my idea.”

“Well, it should have been your idea.”

“I don’t want to change into a girl.”

“That would take a lot of surgery.” Sarah laughed at the absurdity of it all.

“I mean they want me to dress up.”

“Just do it and don’t be embarrassed,” Sarah replied. “Remember, your stepmother is one of my dearest friends. We talk and sometimes you’re mentioned.”

William wished he could drop through the floor. “Melanie made me wear it,” he stuttered.

“And you’d look better if you put some bra boosters in.”

“How did you...” William realised how she knew.

“The loose material showing through your shirt looks messy. A little shape would look better.”

“But it’s embarrassing.”

“Not in an office full of girls and women. It shows you’re fitting in.”

“I’ll try...” William felt defeated once again.

“I’m proud of you,” Sarah said. “The girls in the office do so want you to join in, to be one of them.”

“Please don’t tell anyone.”

“Okay, if that’s what you want but I think they’ve all guessed,” Sarah agreed. “I’m sure they’d help you if you asked.”

“They’d probably assume that I really want to do this and make me go further and further.”

“I can’t see anything wrong with that.” Sarah loved his discomfort. “I bet you’d make someone a beautiful bride.”

William blushed and stepped to the side. He turned his back and wrestled the strap back into place.

“If you want my advice, I’d suggest some weight in the bra cup would hold it into place better and then the strap wouldn’t slip so easily,” Sarah said. “It’s one of the things girls learn.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Young girls always buy a bra too big, wanting to look like they have more than they really have in there,” Sarah said patiently. “When they get wiser,

they understand that a better fit is more comfortable and that size is a matter of under wiring or padding.”

“You make it sound like it’s all calculated.” William looked at her.

“Believe me, most of it is. A girl doesn’t let her bra slip unless she really wants it to.”

“She might want to?” William asked in a surprised voice.

“It makes the boys look,” Sarah replied. “Call it behavioural science.”

“So there’s some science behind this.” William knew he wasn’t expressing himself well.

“It’s more art than science and you’ve a lot to learn.” Sarah shook her head gently. “Remember that the right size bra is the best. It’s a lot more comfortable and secure.”

“I’ll remember,” William replied. “But I’m only intending to do this once.”

Sarah turned her attention back to her appointments and said nothing more on the subject. She’d heard the talk in the office when he wasn’t there.

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“Mrs. Marsh, please may I have a minute to speak to you?”

“Of course, Sally. Give me a few minutes to look through these emails. Some of them look important.”

“I’ve already starred the ones you need to look at first,” Sally said. “I’ll get your coffee and come back to talk later.”

It was the usual Monday morning activity. There were the reports of weekend trading in the restaurant and bar chain, posts to fill and errors to fix. There were always staff moving on, and applicants to take their places. Special offers had to be arranged and promotional sales planned.

The Monday afternoon meeting was usually the most important one of the week. Sarah Marsh was proud of her family business. She’d inherited it unexpectedly when her father’s illness prompted him to retire.

Now, five years later, she'd expanded the chain and increased profits. All that time, Sally had been by her side, seamlessly arranging her diary and picking out all the really important matters.

"Now what was it that you wanted to see me about, Sally?" she asked a couple of hours later when that first rush of business problems were cleared.

"I'm pregnant," Sally said.

"Congratulations." Sarah was genuinely pleased. "I know that you and Derek have wanted to start a family from when you were working for my father."

"It's truly a blessing," Sally smiled. "At my age, I was beginning to worry that it would never happen."

"I suppose that this means you'll need to take things easy and then you'll be away on maternity leave."

"I'm so sorry."

"Don't be sorry, I'm so happy for you," Sarah replied. "I'll make sure that you get all the benefits you're entitled to when you have to leave and your job's secure for when you want to come back."

"I know it's going to cause a problem but the gynaecologist wants me to go in hospital. I've got to take it easy afterwards. I've had so much trouble that I don't want to take any risks with the baby."

"Of course you don't," Sarah said.

"Please may I work part time, until I have to finish work to have the baby? I'd like to drop to two days a week at the most." Sally spoke quickly, almost afraid the answer would be negative.

"I think that's very sensible," Sarah replied. "You're going to be a very hard act to follow though. Have you any idea who might be able to take over?"

"I've been giving it some thought," Sally said. "There's only one really; it's got to be William Shaw."

"But he's a man, despite his mother's efforts to get him to be one of the girls. You can't be serious."

"Think about it; you've seen him nearly as often as you've seen me," Sally said. "He's very efficient."

"I suppose you're right." Sarah looked up. "I remember when he started to wear lingerie under his clothes."

"I think that was when he started to fit in with the girls in the office," Sally replied. "It can't be easy being the only man."

"His stepmother is a close friend," Sarah replied. "I think she had a hand in it too."

"He's still wearing really good lingerie," Sally replied. "It almost seems natural now. The girls are looking forward to seeing him all dolled up."

"Don't you think my closest assistant should be one of the girls?"

"There's no reason why your PA shouldn't be a man," Sally replied. "He's reliable and a quick learner."

She didn't say that she thought he might be on a journey away from manhood.

"I know who he is and I know how he's adjusting to fit in, but I can't say that I know him well enough to trust him as much as I trust you."

"There's no reason why you should know him that well but he's been almost shadowing me, getting things in order before I trouble you with them, as well as doing his own work," Sally said. "I really think he'll do well."

"But he's like a little mouse, tucked away in his corner of the office." Sarah could hardly picture him. "Do you really think he'd have the confidence to take over from you?"

"I agree that he's very quiet but he's also super-efficient," Sally said. "And as for confidence, wearing what he does suggests that there's something akin to confidence there."

"Okay, get him to work with you until you have to leave," Sarah decided. "If he can be trained to do things as well as you've always done, I'll be happy."

"Will you tell him or should I?"

"You can tell him; he's your protégé. Tell the wages office to pay him at your grade."

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"I don't feel too good." William's face was very pale and he was sweating profusely.



"I'll call the doctor," Melanie said. "My insurance covers you as well, even on a Saturday. I'm sure they'll see you today."

Melanie walked downstairs and, when she was sure that she was out of earshot, called the number she'd stored on her mobile.

"Doctor Sinclair, it's Melanie Shaw," she said. "Remember, that we spoke earlier in the week?"

"I guess he's ready to see me." Helena Sinclair replied. "Did the potion I gave you work?"

"Yes, I slipped it into his drink last night and now he's pale and sweating."

"Can you bring him in to the surgery in the next hour? I'll warn my nurse and I'll see him immediately."

"Get dressed." Melanie said, back in William's room. "The doctor says you're to get there right away. Apparently, there's a lot of this going round and you could be really sick if you don't get it treated quickly."

"Did they say what it is?"

"No. All I did was describe your symptoms."

Half an hour later, William was dressed in a robe in an examination room. He felt so unwell that he forgot to hide his black lace panties. The doctor saw them and smiled inwardly as she took his blood pressure, looked in his eyes, and listened to his chest.

"It's good that you came straight here," she said. "I'm going to give you an injection, some tablets to take, and I'll take some blood to confirm my diagnosis."

"What's wrong with me?" he asked.

"I suspect it's a gastrointestinal infection, coupled with you being rather run down. Have you been working hard recently?"

William wasn't going to deny that. "I guess so," he replied weakly.

"Lie on your stomach on the examination bed. I'll go and get your injection."

The doctor left the room as William did as he was told.

