

# Corporate Image

Part One

A full-page illustration of a blonde woman with a serious expression, wearing a white bikini top and grey pants, standing in a room with silhouettes of other people in the background.

**Annie Warren**

An "Adult-TV" Novel

## **Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers**

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# Corporate Image

by Annie Warren

## Chapter 1: Enter the designer

That afternoon I received a call from Ms. Sara Tedwell, President and Chairperson of the Board of Cressent Laces.

As you all know, this is the small, exclusive lingerie company that produces such delicacies as Midnight Fog, the sheer black slip that is almost transparent from the lace in it. Or perhaps you know of the Tip Taps Toe, the tap panties that are more of an ultra-short lacy culottes with just enough pure silk with cotton lining at the point of intimacy to protect what all else says needs protecting. Surely you are familiar with these and the other products the company puts out to discriminating boutiques within reach of their modest advertising budget. Their products are all the epitome of femininity and the finest that a woman can place next to her delicate skin.

As you may not know, Cressent Laces employs two designers, three executives and ten factory workers. And, in spite of the beauty and elegance of their delicacies, their sales began falling as an aftermath of the “burn your bra era”, which had destroyed many of the major manufacturers of the time.

I was informed that a meeting of the board (the three executives and two designers) was called, and Ms. Sara Tedwell had put my proposal before the board and a product trial was approved. I was asked to appear tomorrow, at one o'clock, for a more or less formal hearing before the board.

I was to bring whatever evidence and/or samples that I wanted to present to them to demonstrate the efficiency of my proposed new product.

Her statements concerning the Board's interest made me feel good.

I had wanted a test on a basis of a small sampling before I tried to go big. This could be my chance. And I felt that a small company in trouble might be more grateful if my designs bailed it out, than a big company just looking for someone to sit at yet another designer board doing advertising copy and briefing presentations more than actual production designs.

I had received my inspiration years ago from what a decidedly under built girl friend had said. She (and I too) had looked longingly at women with low cut dresses or blouses and at the cleavage that they showed above the neckline. Of course, our longings were quite different... But, at the time, we were both in school to be clothing designers. I guess it was because of her, and some of my other dates, that I de-

cided to go into women's clothing design. (Basically, men's clothing is so limited in what you can do.)

And now, maybe my plans and designs would pay off. I had been out of school for three years and had not managed in that time to get a job. To make it as a male designer of women's clothes means that you have to (somehow) make it big and then you are the rave. Just how you made that mythical jump was unknown to me.

Ah yes, here I was with a chance — if I did not bungle it... And so tomorrow... I had to wait and see, but there was apprehension as well as anticipation.

I showed up about 10 minutes earlier than the appointment. I had my sample and my design specifications. If I could sell these women on my idea, then I could well be on my way to...to...well, at least I would be employed.

I had debated on what to wear.

I had the choice of a three-piece suit, or a sweater and slacks outfit and various steps in between. Did I want to be the businessman (suit), the just of-late Joe College, or the mod designer.

My long blond hair always looked out of place with the suit. And, when I had spoken to Ms Tedwell, the petite president of the company, she had been somewhat conservatively dressed. She appeared only slightly plumpish, which tended to enhance her contrastingly trim waist and large breasts. She wore a gray tweed suit with a simple white blouse, open at the neck. Her dark brown hair had a tinge of gray at

the temples, a gray she refused to have colored as it "gives dignity to my position as president."

Thus, I decided on conservatism, but not the suit. I hated it and so it remained to collect moths as I decked myself out in burnt wood brown wool slacks, beige turtleneck tee shirt and a sort of a comfortable, yet a bit dressy, earth brown cord sports jacket. It was no wowser, but if I came across as too stodgy, I could miss the boat. So, the casual, but, semi-dressy won out.

When I entered the reception area I found Janet May Lee, as the name plate on her desk indicated, to be quite a woman. I learned later that Janet was the token red head of the board. She functioned as receptionist, secretary and comptroller all rolled up into one. She wore a lacy blue blouse, just barely translucent enough to give a bit more than a shadow of her lingerie, but enticingly low cut. As opposed to the trend in tighter skirts, she wore a full swirl type skirt. I noted that she had double piercing for tasteful earrings. Her figure was a knock out; but, on the other hand, in a lingerie factory, you should expect that.

She offered me a cup of coffee and asked politely if I could wait because the meeting had not yet started. With that, she got up in a swirl of skirts to reveal fashionable high heels and went into Ms. Tedwell's office.

As I waited, one by one in quick succession, three other women came into what I took to be the waiting room and went into the president's office. Each looked at me and smiled, but the smiles ran from comical, to pleasant, to snide, seemingly all at once. Okay, they smiled complex smiles at me. I could only figure that they must be the members of the board.

A few minutes after my appointment time, Janet came out, turned on a fax-phone answering machine, and bade me follow her. This time I noted clearly, no ring on the ring finger of the left hand. I am no Don Juan, but something clicked when I saw her and I knew I wanted to see more... But, not in a business context!

What can I say about the meeting. It seemed to last for- ever, but still to fly.

I was introduced all around and got to the job of explaining my product after obtaining a nondisclosure agreement, should I be turned down. With that I went into the basic principles of the thing, how it worked, how the various panels worked in pushing and pulling and in essence reworking the chest. The cup size was the crucial measure of how the bra was constructed and how it worked as each size had different panels and operated differently. I showed my sample and just basically how it was constructed. They were at first skeptical (reasonable reaction), but then softened and then took on a mild enthusiasm, lead, sort of, by Ms. Sara Tedwell.

Then Ms. Hamilton, Brenda I believe, hit me with the snag I had feared.

“Well, Mister Luvie. This is well and good. But, can you demonstrate the operation of this bra? Your one sample is obviously too small for any of us here. Your theory is excellent, but the practice needs demonstration.” Brenda Hamilton, one of the designers, was dressed in a black leather miniskirt with a sleeveless white blouse that let just enough of their *Sea of Lace* bra show through. She had designed it three years earlier, and it was the only bra style she wore. Her make-up was heavier than Sara’s, but



lighter than Harriette Simpson's, the other designer. Brenda's outstanding characteristic was shortish blonde hair worn swept back to always show her triple pierced ears which almost always sported some sort of a gaudy bauble with sparkling danglers that hung half way down her neck. She was quite mod if not a bit too much so. Her last design had bombed badly.

I blushed, as the one sample I had was my test sample to see if it would work on the almost minimum chest...MINE. My budget did not allow for fitting models and the like. All had to be done with materials available. I was not muscular, far from it, and thus had enough loose flesh on my chest to make a working model that worked...for me. Since it HAD worked, I had started looking for a proper company to make and market it. But, she was right, and my blush must have told the story of my sample.

"Well," I tried to explain, "the sample in hand is an A-cup minimum model which none of you could wear, indeed. I uh... I uh... made an example that would... well... fit the minimum chest and... uh... well..."

Samantha Clark, vice president in charge of all that Sara didn't do, looked up at the ceiling in contemplation. Her long raven black hair thus hung almost to the bottom of the back of the chair she was sitting on. She pursed her bright red lips in contemplation. Her pink blouse with the see-through sleeves buttoned at the wrists offset the fullness of her black skirt and her pink high heels. She brought her fingertips together in contemplation with a slight clicking sound as her long red nails touched. She knitted her brow almost rumpling the fine eyebrows that she had. But with all of this action, she still

came up with an amused, “What he means, is that it fits him and he doesn’t want to wear it, right?”

“Basically, you hit the nail on the head,” I confessed with considerable embarrassment, hoping that they might find a way to prevent the shameful demonstration I saw coming.

Ms. Tedwell, nailed me into the coffin, sort of, by saying, “Now, Mister Luvie, the best designers know the fit of a product best by wearing. You should know that. If you want to sell us, you will have to put it on and prove its operation and enhancing qualities. So, you can go into the reception room and we will wait here. No one is scheduled to come in, so it should be private enough.”

I had no choice. It was either sink or swim. Demo it, or go try somewhere else where I’d probably have the same request thrown at me. To bad Dawn (my classmate at design school) was not here to demo it for me. I disliked the suggestion, by Ms. Tedwell, about a designer wearing a design to get the best feel. As if to imply that I went about wearing my bra!

So, with trepidation and a great deal of embarrassment, I went into the waiting room and took off my jacket and tee shirt and then put on the bra. With a minor adjustment, I, a male from the ground up, had cleavage. Not spectacular, but presentable on top of obviously having quite noticeable breasts. The bra industry’s lifeblood is enhancement, and this one sure did that for me. From nothing, to a nearly B.

For modesty’s sake I put my tee shirt and the coat back on and returned to the room again.

They eyed me with interest, and not a little amusement, noting how my chest now pushed out my jacket. Then to my shame they requested that I take off my jacket, which I did with trembling chagrin. Without my jacket to try (unsuccessfully, by the way) to cover me, there on my male chest were the unmistakable twin mounds of two female breasts.

I blushed again.

This time it was Ms. Simpson, Harriette, who commented. Harriette was a robust woman, as tall as Brenda, but heavy boned, being the heaviest member there. She was also the only one there to wear a dress. A pale blue creation that ended at knee length. Her legs were heavier than the others too, but she tried to compensate (and to also see above Brenda, whenever possible) by constantly wearing very high heels.

“No need to blush, *Mister Luvie*, we’re all women here and know about the female anatomy... Hmmm that is a nice effect under a top, but what about the promised cleavage. The tee has to come off too.”

Hesitatingly, my trembling fingers pulled my tee-shirt off over my head, while I uncomfortably thought about my being required to do a striptease before these women. There, for all of those women to see, was my man’s hairy chest sporting what looked like breasts with fairly presentable cleavage. I could see by their looks that they were impressed. Then they commented.

“It does work. And did you see that the effect was not lost by his high arm position when he took off the tee shirt?” Ms. Tedwell observed.



“I have to hand it to you, Mister Luvie,” Brenda, the most cynical and outspoken member of the board commented. “It looks marvelous. But with fat and the wire, or something, whatever. Now take it off so that we see that you were not cheating.”

I took it off and, to my relief, my bare, hairy chest again became its normal masculine self. Apparently, this impressed them even more than the appearance when on. There were the telltale red marks from the wearing, but no other apparent residue of pseudo-femaleness. I put the now empty bra on the table before them, clearly demonstrating that it was, indeed, empty.

However, they didn’t make up their minds at that time. I was then told that the decision would be made, and that I would be notified the next day.

*Next day? Golly, what were they going to do? Sleep on it?*

Well, one can’t be too choosy, and so I dressed again, collected my sample and charts and left. *What would one more day matter?* I felt that I had a winner and that they were all positively impressed, even Brenda. *Maybe I had a chance after all...*

## **Chapter 2: Production**

I wasn’t sitting on the phone the next day, but you can be sure I wasn’t far from it. At noon I got the call. It was from Ms. Sara Tedwell.

“Well, Mister Luvie, if you still want the position, then it is yours. We are a small company and so had to review our budget to see that it could: carry the ex-

pense of a modest advertising campaign; purchase of new materials, since your design called for some that we don't normally stock; and, of course, your salary. The results, I am happy to say are positive. When can you begin work?"

"Tomorrow, if that is convenient."

"Fine, then I'll expect you tomorrow. We start at 8 in the morning."

"I'll be there!"

It was a simple and short conversation which meant... for the first time in three years, I would be working. I could stop living like the frugal church mouse and could also stop draining my resources. I could not have gone on much longer, as my inheritance from my parent's death was getting dangerously low. Now I could stand on my own two feet, and maybe even be someone, since I owned the patents. There was a new spring in my step and a new liveliness to my ways.

I was working!

The first half day was drudge, like you'd get on any job. Forms to fill out, questionnaires to answer, more forms, etc. etc. Then there was the office space, desk to find, book case, chair, etc. The discovering, that in this female dominated business, the only men's room in the building was in the front office area on the first floor, didn't help since my "executive" office was three floors away. That morning was an exercise in frustration designed to settle me in. And I was getting frustrated, as I was hired; but I wasn't DOING anything!

In the afternoon was the session with the factory crew, the people that would actually be doing the work. Primarily, that too, was only introductions, examination of the equipment available, the stock, cutting, sewing, packaging, etc. Again, it was instructive, but got me no where production wise. Although the crew was relatively small, they were very skilled and had up-to-date machines to work with. The company might have been more in the black if they had skimped a bit, but I, for one, was glad that they had not.

As production designer designate, I interviewed the workers and chose those that I thought had the skill to put the bra together. The day wasn't wasted, but I sure did not accomplish much!

We had all of the materials necessary, but one, and that one could be procured. It had been ordered that morning and would be delivered the next morning when production could begin.

We would start with the A and B cup models in sizes 32 through 36. Trials, thank goodness, with models ("real" women, not me) showed that the product did work for a variety of sizes and shapes. We did not cover all possible sizes, as we were not going to carry all of them, at that time anyway. I had anticipated this day so long ago that I had the cutting masters all made up, the construction steps outlined and documented, all was set from A to Z.

All I would have to do was tutor the women on some of the trickier steps in the process, and some of them were very tricky indeed, to accomplish what the design was meant to do. There had to be subtle, yet firm, tuggings and pullings to do the proper shaping job. All had to be *just* so or it was no go.

Although day one was a lot of frustration for feeding a three year itch, day two would be what I considered the first day forward.

The material arrived and the cutters began cutting and the sewing began. It was very slow at first, as I had to show them how to do it and give them the techniques that were not in any books on sewing; as, I had to invent them, to get the process that I wanted to work properly. I had done a lot of experimentation and now it was going to pay off.

The work went slowly, at first, even with my constant supervision. There are things they teach in design school that never happen in the real world and visa versa. As much as I thought I knew things, I found that I was naive almost beyond words. But I was also a quick learner and was, above all, quick to adapt. I guess that goes with being a quick learner, but I did find out a lot that I would never have guessed at being the way it was.

The first two days produced maybe four complete working bras in an environment filled with questions. On the third day four more were made and I only answered five questions.

It was somewhere about now that I made a play for Janet. I asked her for a date.

She smiled a real warm smile; but, answered that she just couldn't see dating a male designer of women's lingerie. It had something to do with conflicts in images. She said she would have difficulty answering the question of what did her boyfriend did. To answer that he, "designed women's bras and even demonstrated one", would be a bit much.



To put it mildly, I felt the unfairness of her barb.

Almost as an after thought, she added that if I were a woman, it might be different. (I learned later that she went out occasionally with many of the board members.) But, for the time being, she had a polite, “no”, with a dazzling smile.

It almost made me wish that I had gone into some other line of work. But, I understood that I was still an outsider among these women, who no doubt resented my presence even if it might save them their jobs.

Although I found the work quite taxing at times, I felt that I was in my element. All was going well and I was going with it!

### **Chapter 3: Sales, A Snag & Resolution, of Sorts**

Samantha had hired a marketing consultant to handle our new product, perhaps product line. It was then that the marketing consultant said that we should have a photo of the creator of the garment on the package to enhance the salability by giving it a further *personal touch*. As they put it, “the purchaser would react better seeing the image of the woman who designed this most intimate and provocative garment.” Market research had shown that with this personal endorsement and physical display of the product by its creator, the ad campaign could triple sales!

When Sara showed me their report, I said, “Sure, I’ll pose for your photo, that should be no problem.”

She then thrust it under my nose again with her thumb on the salient word within the phrase, "... of the WOMAN who designed ..."

Then she laid it on me.

"Bob, the problem is that the designer should be a woman. I checked the consultants and they said that it could hurt sales if it were a man who had designed it. Has to do with the burn your bra feminist movement that all but ruined our industry. We need to associate the image of our bra with feminine intimate needs. In short, the image of the creator, the image of the woman who created it, should be on the package wearing HER bra. Sorry."

"But, I am a man, Sara. What do you want me to do, change my sex for a silly ad campaign?"

"Not change it like you're thinking. But, we could do a temporary make over, say like from the waist up? Our lawyers say, that would stay within the bounds of truthful advertising, since the designer is wearing the product.

"And, we do need to increase sales. In fact you are our last real hope for survival. If we cannot sell your bra, we all may be looking for a new job. It is the least you can do, now that we have given you this opportunity..."

"After all, your bra fit you nicely, gave you a fine figure, and would fit well with a low cut blouse, some make-up, and a bit of a fixing of the hair? Yes, it could work, won't be painful, and the effects will wear off after a couple of days.

“How would a couple days of possible embarrassment compare to the future of Cressent Laces?”

“A couple of days? What do I do till then, hide? Besides, I would be recognized by my friends and classmates, if not someone else. What would our staff think if I showed up on our packaging looking like a woman? And God only knows, what they will think when I show up for work during those *couple of days*?”

“Tut tut tut. What do you think we do in a lingerie factory, just make clothes? No, we make women more womanly.” She eyed me up and down carefully. “Why, with a nice low cut dress, or blouse and mini-skirt, stylish high heels, hose, a bit of a waist cinch and some proper make-up and a perm, you will make a beautiful woman. No one from your past would recognize you. Unless you tell them, or they have seen you that way before.”

She paused with a slightly amused smile and a shrug only to remind me, “As to our staff. They know who writes the checks here.”

“Hold it, Sara, I am not going to impersonate a woman. I am not a transvestite. And I dislike the broad hints and snide asides by you and the others that I might be one. Nor am I going to run about like one. So. just hold off on your ideas of skirts and high heels, those are not for me, no way!”

“I suppose you’re right. I am sorry about our behavior. I’m certain that it has just been good natured teasing, There is no real need to go all out. At least, not at this time. We’ll just do a head and shoulders make over, say to as far as a nice, low cut blouse would go. I’ll even get my personal beautician to fix

you up. Then you come in and have a photo session and then its back to being Bob. How's that sound?"

"But, I can't play at being woman. I'd look silly, and, it would basically be a lie, no matter what the consultants or lawyers say."

"Trust me, you will look fine and we DO really NEED these photos. No one will recognize you. We can use your real first name. It will just be for packaging. None of the other women in the board can do it, as they are all known, having had their pictures used, even to Janet. You're it, you are the designer of the bra and that's all there is to it.

"Although our sales are increasing, they are not increasing at a rate greater than the cost of new equipment, goods, and workers. Without the ad, to double our sales to the point of efficiency to scale, we stay in the red and we are all out of a job."

"I am not all happy with this whole thing. But, if I got to, I guess we had better get it over with."

I had surrendered with the knowledge that their consultants were probably right, and I didn't want to lose my job, and my future as a designer, just because I refused to have any part of the silly ad.

"Fine. I thought that is what you'd say. Just consider it as being your part of the corporate image... Like I said, all of us have done this type of thing at one time or another. Allowing our photographs to become a part of the corporate image.

"So, tomorrow at eight AM we have an appointment to keep. Claire is a very capable woman and will have you in shape in about three hours or so. Then

you come here and we'll have the shoot. The photographers are already laid on. A few photographs and your ordeal will be all over, and we all will be on the road to riches," Ms. Tedwell promised showing that she had already decided for me.

"Now don't be late. And, remember to wear a brief styled swim suit under your clothes, for modesty sake. You're going to get the full treatment at our expense. Do you want me to call and remind you?"

*What a revolting development this was.*

*Was the advertising consultant a woman, or a man hater? Besides, why couldn't a man design a woman's garment? It had been done before, many many times over.*

*What in the world was this 'full treatment' to be! What in the world could they do to me, that would take three hours? Two whole days looking as a woman. Well, for a few dollars more, and a real job I guess I could do just about anything, even dress up as a woman for a few photographs. Why not?*

I showed up at eight, without her calling.

We went to her friend's beauty salon, which ordinarily did not open until 11, to meet Claire.

Claire was a pleasant woman, pretty, not overly made up as so many hair dressers are, but tasteful. She clucked a bit at my disheveled appearance and poorly kept hair. But, after a short examination, said that it could be done.

And, as had been promised, it did take hours.

After she had me strip to my swimming briefs and put on a pink nylon beauty gown, she led me to a massage room with a shower bath combination. Handing me a *skin conditioner*, as she called it, she advised me to apply it from the neck down, wait until the foul smelling stuff dried, and take a shower.

Once she left I stripped and followed her advice to discover to my embarrassment that I was now as hairless as preschooler!

With trembling shame I slipped on my swim briefs before she returned to give me a complete body massage using a woman's razor to shave off any hair that the depilatory might have missed.

"Can't have a hairy chested model," she laughed with a friendly smile to ease my embarrassment while she noted the results of her efforts with satisfaction as she wiped a sweet smelling oil into my soft hairless skin. "You now have lovely skin."

She gave me a shampoo and conditioning followed by a quick set, that she said would wash out (it didn't). She plucked a whole bunch of hairs from my eyebrows saying no one would notice. (Well, Janet noticed right off with a giggle.)

Then she smeared and daubed my face with all kinds of stuff to cover my light beard shadow and complete my facial make-up. It all felt odd going on and smelled and/or tasted strangely, especially the lipstick. For my ears she gave me some fake pierced look-a-likes. Oh yes, she also sculptured and painted my nails several times, saying that my hands should

be visible in the photos, as I had the long slender fingers that so many women adored.

The result of her ministrations surprised me.

When all was done, a presentable woman peered from the mirror. I doubt that I could recognize the image as me, well, from the neck up.

When all was applied and “fixed” so that it wouldn’t fade (Or fall off; I felt there was that much on), Sara produced my sample bra and a very lacy, sheer red silk feminine blouse. It did not fit with the image of my male slacks, but she had thought of that, giving me a pair of lacy panties, a padded panti-girdle and stretch pants.

“You can hardly go out in public looking like this wearing men’s pants. And the under padding will give you a more natural looking figure.”

My loafers, it seems, were unisex enough.

When I came out of the salon’s dressing booth, I was not wearing a dress, but was indeed very feminine.

I noted to my chagrin that even the lines of my panties could be faintly discerned under the tight stretch pants, but the most observant eye could only conclude that the wearer was female. The blouse was cut quite low so that the cleavage that MY bra produced was clearly evident. The curls in my hair made a frame that very nicely outlined my face with all of its make up. It looked like a stranger’s face, *the face of a woman*.