

Learned Behaviour



Susan Hulbert

An "Adult TV" Novel



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Learned Behaviour

By Susan Hulbert

I always thought I'd make my career in academic life. I graduated in history, and then did a further degree in the history of attitudes and popular entertainment. It was more social history; the history of leisure, rather than the heavy politics and economics.

I never thought that I'd ever become a female impersonator, but when it was the only contract on offer, there were no other choices available back then. No other choices for a single boy without any other means of earning a living.

I never imagined that I'd enjoy it; it was a contractual obligation which I accepted with gritted teeth, even though I knew it was a long contract involving me in accepting some physical modifications which were designed to make sure that I stayed in character.

It was hard at first. I must have seemed strange to everyone with my appearance and behaviour at such odds with each other. I learned that I had to adapt. I determined to make the best of it, and soon began to accept all that goes with being a single female with a decent figure, and one who could look quite attractive.

Don't get me wrong here. I was never the beauty who was going to stop traffic at fifty paces, but I did look good. I learned about makeup and hair, which dress to wear, and what shoes would emphasise my artificial femininity. My long hair and choices of jewellery were chosen to show the world that I was female – even if I wasn't.

Not that I was allowed to tell people that I wasn't the girl I appeared to be.

I never thought I'd ever want to be a woman either. I guess that sometimes the point of no return creeps up on the most innocent and unsuspecting person. Not that I was innocent all the time or, if I'm honest, most of the time.

I learned that femininity is something mysterious to be used whenever it suited me.

I never set out to hurt anyone, and often found myself admitting my secrets in confidence. I chose as carefully as anyone could in these strange circumstances. You have to understand that I was young, hungry for life, and yes, eager to enjoy relationships with the opposite sex; whichever sex that happened to be.

I'm getting ahead of myself. I'd better take you to the beginning.

“Jeremy Plum, please.”

The secretary called my name and I stood from my seat in the general waiting room and followed to the front of the room where she beckoned for me to follow from the foyer and into the inner corridors of the university’s institute for advanced research.

I sat in another waiting room, wood panelled and quite intimidatingly quiet. I was here to receive the verdict on my research proposal. It was vital that I get the approval of the board considering my proposal because that brought the funding I’d need to live and hopefully put me of the bottom rungs of the ladder to academic employment.

I was shown in to the main room to hear the decision. There was only one rather severe looking lady at the other side of the table.

“We read your proposal with great interest,” she began after a brief introduction. “While it has great merit, the board has decided, in the face of all the alternatives seeking approval, that we cannot help you to progress your research.”

It took a few moments to sink in. This was it; the end of my ambitions, at least for this year. I think my face told its own story as a tear escaped my eye.

“Having seen you in person, I am prepared to recommend you to an old colleague who is now a visiting professor emeritus at a private university on the Pacific coast.”

“Thanks,” I mumbled, grateful to have been thrown a lifeline.

“His field of research is very different to both mine and yours, but given the outline he sent me, I think you might be a possible candidate.”

“How different are his interests?” I asked.

“I think it better that he explain in person.” The severe face warmed a little towards a smile. “I’ll ask him to contact you directly if I have your permission to share your details.”

“Yes, of course; anything,” I mumbled as she stood and leaned over the desk to shake my hand.

“I have a feeling that you and the professor will get on famously.”

I thought about that as I walked back to my studio apartment. It was all very mysterious.

I didn’t have to wait too long. A couple of days later, I got a brief email from the professor with several documents attached. These were a most curious set of forms for me to complete and return.

His message said that he’d received my academic references and copies of my qualifications. His forms required me to give all kinds of personal information which I doubted had much regard for academic work.

I got suspicious when I read them. Was this an older guy on the lookout for a young man to seduce under the pretence of something else?

I was really suspicious, but then I remembered where the contact had come from and dispelled my doubts. Maybe I shouldn't have but you can judge that later when you've read my story.

So I completed all the forms; my height, five-foot-seven. I was a hundred and thirty pounds, but I didn't worry about being underweight.

My hair was long and medium brown, usually worn in a low ponytail. I wondered if I should get it trimmed but I was proud of its length and fullness. It hung long, glossy and straight when I let it loose and fell between my shoulder blades.

I had blue eyes and all my own teeth; childhood braces had helped me to have an even and generous smile. As a bit of vanity when I had some money, I'd had the enamel whitened. I thought it made me look good.

It didn't help me with the girls. I think I was too small and too academic for easy dating; besides I didn't have any money or any family to fall back on.

That was the other thing about the professor's questionnaires. I was asked to enter far more details about my family background than I knew. I'd grown up in North Carolina with my mom and stayed there until I went to university in State College, Pennsylvania.

Father was absent and mom never took me to any other relations, so as far as I knew I didn't have any. Mom moved away into a new relationship, offshore to Bermuda. She didn't ask me to visit and apart from a card at Christmas and birthday, we had no communication.

All the questions about family background went unanswered. Similarly my medical history was a blank. I didn't have any to speak of. I'd had the usual vaccinations as a child and probably all the usual infections, but no surgery, no serious accidents and no hospital stays.

Like I said, I thought all these questions were a bit probing, but if I was going to get employed, they probably needed all this for insurance clearance.

I didn't give it too much thought, neither did I worry about sending a bunch of photographs, both close-up and full length. My mobile had a decent camera; I wasn't going to fork out for professional photographs. I wasn't an actor or a model, just a poor student looking for a job.

I sent it all off as quickly as I could, hoping that I'd fit somewhere. After all, I had no other prospects other than food or bar service and I was probably the wrong sex for either of those.

I tried to be patient as I waited for a reply. My rent was coming due and it wasn't going to get paid unless something turned up.

It took the best part of a week. My rent was coming to urgent and I'd told the agent I'd be leaving, hoping they'd let me have another few days. Fortunately it was out of term and there was no one waiting to move in.

The reply instructed me to report to a medical facility but it wasn't the one I was used to on campus. This was a new clinic out of town. I had to get a bus,

then walk a considerable distance to meet my appointment. I was surprised at the appearance of the establishment. It looked more like a swish hotel on a golf course than a health care establishment.

I went to the reception and gave my name. It was clear that I was expected and almost at once a pretty nurse took me to a private room where she went through the statistical information that I'd already given on the questionnaires.

Satisfied that I had given this information correctly, she took me into the garden where I was photographed from all sides, before being asked to strip in the privacy of the room where I was photographed again.

“Now I need some samples,” she announced and held out a consent form for me to sign. “I can read your signature.” She smiled at me waiting for a reply, but when I looked puzzled, she continued. “I’m used to deciphering the scrawl our doctors put on their papers.”

She took my blood pressure, then several phials of blood which were labelled and put aside.

“What happens next?” I asked.

“I have to send these off. I won’t get the results; they’re to go to a university out west. I’ve never heard of it,” she said. “I’d guess they’ll contact you when they have the results.”

So none the wiser, I returned to my apartment, wondering how long I’d have to wait and how long before I got asked to leave.

It was a Tuesday morning when the mail arrived. It was the day I was packing my meagre belongings into a huge rucksack, having sold what I could sell, and given away the rest to goodwill shops.

It seemed like a day when nothing eventful would happen, unseasonably wet, with a bitter wind from the north. I remember that the brown envelope was stained with raindrops as I looked at it; the return address was from out there in the Pacific West.

Once opened, I found an old-fashioned train ticket, leaving the next day. A brief note said that the journey would take several days and that accommodation and meals on the train had been arranged for me. All I had to do was call a number when I knew my arrival time in Sacramento.

I also could take a few days' stopover on the way so that I wouldn't be too tired from all the travelling. I thought that was really kind and thoughtful, even though I had no idea who was paying. It also said that I would be met by a driver at my destination.

I pondered for a few moments. I had nowhere to go and no real plans; this was different. It was an adventure and whatever happened, I would be somewhere new, maybe able to start over. I didn't know just how prophetic that thought was.

I'd never used the train before, so Amtrak was a new experience. The brochure said I'd see more of the country than a passenger on a plane and that the observation cars were there to make the trip so much more of an experience. I even got business class with a private bathroom. I could never have afforded this.

Hey, it was a few days without worrying about what to eat and where to sleep. An adventure if nothing else. I looked it up on the map; Alabama, Louisiana and into Texas, then New Mexico, Arizona and into California, Los Angeles and, finally, Sacramento.

It had to be good whatever was waiting at the other end.

My nerves started to jangle as the train travelled north through California and my journey was almost over. More than once, I wondered if I was the victim of some sort of hoax but then common sense told me that I'd got the contact from a reliable person.

I called the number given and told a cold robot voice on the answering machine when I would arrive; no human contact. I trusted that someone would meet me because I had no idea where I was meant to be going.

I worried more as I reached the destination. It was dark out there, approaching midnight, and if there was no one waiting, what could I do?

The train lurched gently to a stop. I heaved my rucksack onto my back, over a coat too warm for the season; wearing it was easier than carrying it. I walked down the platform towards the station exit.

My heart skipped a beat. Was there no one there to meet me as promised? I walked on towards the street and there it was, a uniformed driver holding a placard with my name. I don't think I'd ever felt so relieved.

The driver took my rucksack and opened the rear door of a grey limousine for me to enter. I hear the thud of the trunk as my luggage dropped there and then we were off, gliding through unfamiliar streets and onto a freeway.

I've no idea even now of the route we took. We changed to a different freeway and then onto smaller roads and then a rural road into the hills somewhere until the car turned into an entry where the driver waved a pass at an electronic reader.

We crunched over gravel past a big colonial-style mansion and stopped outside a smaller single-storey unit. The driver got out and wordlessly removed my luggage, handed me a key card, then got back into the car and drove away.

I stood, taking in the scene and the silence of the place. There was no sound other than the wind in nearby trees and some sort of night creatures whistling and barking in the distance. I walked to the illuminated entrance door, key card in hand. A light flashed and I heard the click of a lock releasing.

I opened the door and immediately a light came on. I put my rucksack down and no sooner had I taken a step towards exploring the place than a telephone started to buzz.

"I hope you had a pleasant journey." The voice sounded to come from an older man. "I'll call you in the morning and we'll be able to talk properly about your part in my project. Meanwhile, help yourself to anything you wish. There should be provisions to see you through a few days. Welcome and have a good night."

I thanked him and started to ask a question but the silence on the line told me that he'd hung up before I said more than a couple of words.

I wandered round the place to explore. Off the entrance hall, there were two bedrooms, both quite sumptuously furnished, simple but elegant, in pastel shades. I guessed that the previous occupants must have been girls.

The wardrobes in each of the bedrooms held dresses and blouses, jeans and ladies shoes of all styles and colours. There were drawers full of lingerie, neatly packed and many items still in their new packaging.

A large shower room with a sunken bath was between the bedrooms. The towels were superbly soft and the toiletries were the sort of luxury brands I'd only heard of in magazines in the Sunday papers. They were sweetly scented and were obviously there for guests to use.

I decided that since there was only me there, I could use them even if they did have such feminine scents.

The main living room was equally well-furnished, with pastel shades and soft lighting controlled by a fader. The kitchen had a big island unit and a breakfast bar big enough for dinner. As the caller had said, the fridge and cupboards were well-stocked. I couldn't think of anything I might need that wasn't there.

A sun room gave access to a garden with low lighting and seemingly endless space. I surmised correctly in the limited light available that it led to the grounds of the mansion.

I still had virtually no money but with all that I found here, I wasn't going to be in need of anything. I suddenly felt so tired from all the travelling. I don't know why I chose it but I ran a bath and poured in some scented product.

I lay back and soaked for a while, then under the shower, I washed my hair as carefully as I always did and used a generous amount of the superb conditioner. I let it soak in, then wrapped my hair in one towel while I used another to dry my body.

A pink robe hung beside the towel rail; not really a colour I was used to but as I was on my own and very tired, I wrapped it round me, feeling the silky material slip over my arms. I fastened the belt and sat at the vanity to dry my hair, brushing it straight as I usually did.

I refastened the robe, brushed my hair back over my shoulders and went in search of a drink before bedtime. I was so tired after all that travelling and the excitement of arriving and finding my accommodation to be so sumptuous.

Not everyone would have found it so but remember, I'd run out of money and had to leave my last place.

I looked through my meagre clothing in search of something to wear to be. All I could find was my last clean T-shirt and I didn't want to use that. Inspiration struck; I could look through the wardrobes. Maybe there was something there that no one would notice if I borrowed it.

And there was; it wasn't what I expected but I couldn't resist the forbidden. I took a long silk night-dress and held it against me. It seemed to be the right size and the way the material slid down my body when I tried it on was so sensuous. No wonder it was a luxury fabric.

It swished around my legs as I walked through to get a glass of fruit juice. I walked round as I drank it just to keep the feel of the silk against my body. I rinsed my glass and put it to drain, then went to brush my teeth before falling into bed for a dreamless sleep.

I didn't wake until the ringing of the telephone disturbed me. It was almost ten and I'd slept for over eleven hours. My voice gave away that I'd just woken up as I croaked an answer.

"I'm sorry to wake you," the voice replied. "I'm calling on behalf of Professor Gordon. He asks if you could meet him in the dining room at one o'clock for lunch. It's in the main house which you must have passed on your way in."

"Sure, yes; I'll be there," I replied, then thought a little further ahead. "It's not too formal, is it? I've only just arrived and I have little more than the clothes I stand up in."

"That's okay, it's totally informal. Chinos and a shirt will be fine."

I said my thanks and sighed with relief. I could do that, even if my clothes weren't the sort of designer wear that I imagined would be acceptable here.

I started to get nervous as the hour approached. I'd come all this way; what could possibly go wrong? A lot, my pessimism answered. I could end up here with nothing and nowhere to go.

Pushing these thoughts to the back of my mind, I thought of the positives. There must have been something said in my favour for me to be recommended and all those tests hadn't ruled me out either.

The Maître d' must have been told to look out for me. As soon as I entered the dining room, he was at my side, then leading me through to a corner table where a distinguished-looking elderly gentleman was sitting with a glass of white wine at his hand.

He rose as I approached. "Jeremy Plum; I'm pleased to meet you at last," he said warmly. "Welcome to my project."

"I'm excited to learn about it," I said, sitting after we'd shaken hands.

"Tell me; what do you know about behaviourism?" he asked.

"I presume it means that all behaviour is learned behaviour," I replied. "But you must forgive my ignorance; I'm a historian rather than a social scientist."

"That's all right." He beamed, reassuring me that I hadn't said anything stupid. "I'm not going to talk about my project over lunch though. I wanted to meet you so that I could get to know you a little."

We chatted over lunch. It seemed to be a set menu because I didn't have to order before a salmon salad

was placed in front of me. As I ate, I found myself telling him all about myself.

I must have seemed boring and one-dimensional. No I didn't have a close relationship with anyone. Yes, I preferred girls to boys. No, there was no one waiting to hear from me. Yes, I was a free agent for as long as the project lasted.

I think I gave him my whole life story over that salmon and the small fruit course which followed. I accepted his offer of Calvados and coffee; a habit he said he'd acquired in France as a young man, then we parted.

"Come to my office in the next building tomorrow morning about eleven and we'll run through the terms and conditions of your time here."

He waved in the direction of a separate building further in the grounds. We shook hands again; it was clear that I was dismissed. I walked round the grounds for an hour or so before heading back to my temporary home as light rain started to fall.

"Let me start by giving you details which I know you're going to like," the professor began after I'd taken a seat at the other side of the huge desk in his study.

"Have I to follow any course of study?" I asked.

"You may pursue your own interest and of course, you may decide to write up your part in my project although I'll have to insist that you seek my approval

before any mention or even discussion goes outside the confines of my department.”

“Of course, I’ll agree to that.” I think I was still wondering where this was going.

“You’ll be paid at the level of a senior lecturer with tenure for the time of your stay with the project. Your accommodation will be where you are now as long as it remains acceptable to you. It is fully serviced and you can order in from the restaurants here. That is of course included in your remuneration.”

“Yes.” It was all I could say as I absorbed this good fortune.

“You’ll get a card for necessary expenses, of which there will be many, and the use of a car, some sort of compact which you may choose.”

“What sort of expenses were you thinking of?” I asked.

“Oh, clothes, grooming, travel, accessories; anything really,” he replied. “I don’t want to be prescriptive after such a long wait to get the funding together for my pet project.”

“I understand,” I replied, although I hadn’t a clue where this was going.

“Good, that’s all settled then.” He beamed across the desk and smiled in satisfaction.

“You haven’t told me what I have to do,” I reminded him.

“Oh, no I haven’t; how remiss of me.” He laughed. “Of course, there are no real duties as such; it’s just that you’ll be doing everything as a young woman.”

“But I’m *not* a young woman.”

“Of course not, but you could learn how to be one.”

“I don’t think...” I started.

“Sorry, I should have explained that part sooner.” He smiled. “I want you to adopt the mantle, so to speak, of a young woman. After all, as you observed, all behaviour is learned behaviour.”

“I don’t see...”

“Once you’re looking like a young woman and doing all the things that a young woman would have to do, your behaviour will adapt as you learn. You’ll want to fit in; to conform to expectations. That’s the purpose of this experiment; to determine to what extent behaviour can be learned and how quickly.”

“And you have funding in place for all this?” I was more than a little dumbfounded and didn’t really know what to say to sound sensible.

“Of course I have funding.” He smiled. “It’s for five years and may be extended indefinitely as long as you’re willing to participate.”

“But if it went on too long, I’d not be a young woman any longer.”

“And I may be dead.” He laughed and smiled more heartily. “So what do you say?”

“I don’t know what to say.” My mind was standing still as I tried to take it all in. “I don’t look anything like a young woman.”

“Don’t worry about that,” he replied. “We’ve had your photographs, your blood and your vitals. You’ll make a fine young woman.”

“But I don’t look like one.”

“We can fix all that.”

“I don’t know what I could do as a girl.”

“That’s where learned behaviours come in. You’d have to adapt.”

“I guess there’d be no alternative.” I paused to think about what I’d said. “That doesn’t mean I’m agreeing to anything. I don’t look much like a girl.”

“That’s the least of our problems; we believe that your appearance could easily become very believable.” He shuffled some papers. “You’d have to agree to some minor surgical procedures, mostly cosmetic and either inconsequential or reversible should the project come to an end and you decide you want to revert to your old identity. Of course, you may decide otherwise. That would be up to you.”

“You mean I may want to stay as a female?”

“It may be one of your options.” He smiled again. “I think that depends on the extent to which your learned behaviours become embedded in your psyche.”



“It’s a lot to take in.” I hesitated, trying to phrase an obvious question. “What are these procedures you’d have me undertake?”

“The obvious ones really; you need to look really feminine. I don’t want you to look like a truck driver on a day off.”

“Neither do I. That would be awful.”

He looked down at his papers. “Removal of body hair would be first, followed by some piercings. Ears of course, and I believe that the tummy button piercing is popular.”

“I’m not having my tongue pierced.”

“You don’t have to do that.” He shook his head. “Whatever gave you that idea? Of course, you’d have to undergo some slight facial alterations. They’d make your chin a little more rounded and your nose a little more pert.”

“That sounds a lot.”

“Not really.” He looked down again. “It may be good to alter your brow line too; that would open up the space around your eyes.”

“It sounds more than a little light cosmetic work.”

“Nonsense. I’m told it’s all quite simple and routine these days.” He looked up. “And the recovery time is quite short. The biggest item of course would be your breast implants.”

I looked at him, my gaze somewhere between astonished and neutral as I didn’t want to end the con-

versation. I thought of the money and my lack of any other prospects. I tried to speak but the words wouldn't come out.

"They'd be an ordinary size, nothing embarrassingly large and they'd look as natural as possible."

I think he thought that would be reassuring, that it would clinch the deal.

"Can I think about it?" I asked. "It's a lot to take in."

"Of course it is." He beamed again. "Come and see me tomorrow morning at the same time."

I didn't settle easily after that. My mind kept churning. I asked myself why I hadn't turned it all down immediately. What did that say about me? If I'd ever had a secret desire to be female. I never realised it previously but was it a latent desire?

If there was no latent desire, had I reacted by becoming challenged by the idea? Did I want to try? More importantly did I want to go through all that surgery?

I tried to envisage what life would be like if I had breasts. Immediately the feelings from wearing silk came back to my mind. Would they be supported by silk lingerie, with lace and soft patterns? What would my nipples feel like?

I closed my eyes and thought of my favourite movie stars. Of course, they were far from natural girls; probably they started out looking quite ordinary. The

makeup, the lashes, the lips, the nails were all pieces of cosmetic artistry. The professor was offering to pay for all of that, and my clothes. I wondered what it could feel like. He'd said nothing about limits.

Then my thoughts shifted to more immediate matters. If I turned it down, what could I do? Where was the next opportunity to come from? It was a situation which I never could have envisaged from anything in my past, but what had I to lose?

The old professor seemed harmless and I had no reason to doubt that he had the funding in place. No reason to doubt it but with such a lot hanging upon my decisions, I decided that I needed to be sure of that. I think I'd decided to go ahead whatever the consequences; sheer curiosity if nothing else compelled me onwards.

I didn't sleep easily that night. The touch of that silken nightdress didn't help at all.

Next day, there was an envelope through my door. I collected it and found an appointment card for the salon within the grounds. I'd seen it in the distance on a small parade of shops at the far side of the main house. I presented myself there at the stated time.

"How lovely to meet you." The only lady in the place greeted me with a huge smile. "I'm Belinda. You must be Jeremy."

I agreed and we shook hands gracefully.

"You've been booked in for an appointment every day," she told me. "We can fit the time to anything

you prefer, but my instructions are to remove all the hairs on your body below your eyebrows.”

“Right. I wasn’t aware of that.” I stumbled as I replied. “It’s not a problem; I’ll be here every morning. I don’t think I’m going to be a problem. I’m not a hairy person.”

I tried to make it sound jocular and was rewarded by a smile.

“I’ll soon find out.” She reached across and stroked my chin. “You don’t have a lot of growth here.”

“I don’t shave often,” I replied. “I don’t need to. I guess I didn’t get the gene for a beard.”

“I’m also asked to pierce your ears. My instructions are for several in each ear, plus a tummy button.”

“That sounds scary.”

“It’s all painless, I promise.” She smiled. “Ear piercing has been practised for countless generations. You’ll hardly feel a thing.”

“What about the other one?”

“That may cause some discomfort until it heals,” she replied. “Good hygiene is exceptionally important there. I’ll be giving you some antiseptic lotion to use twice a day and more if there’s any pain.

“If you’ll put this gown on in the treatment room, I’ll be with you as soon as you’re ready.