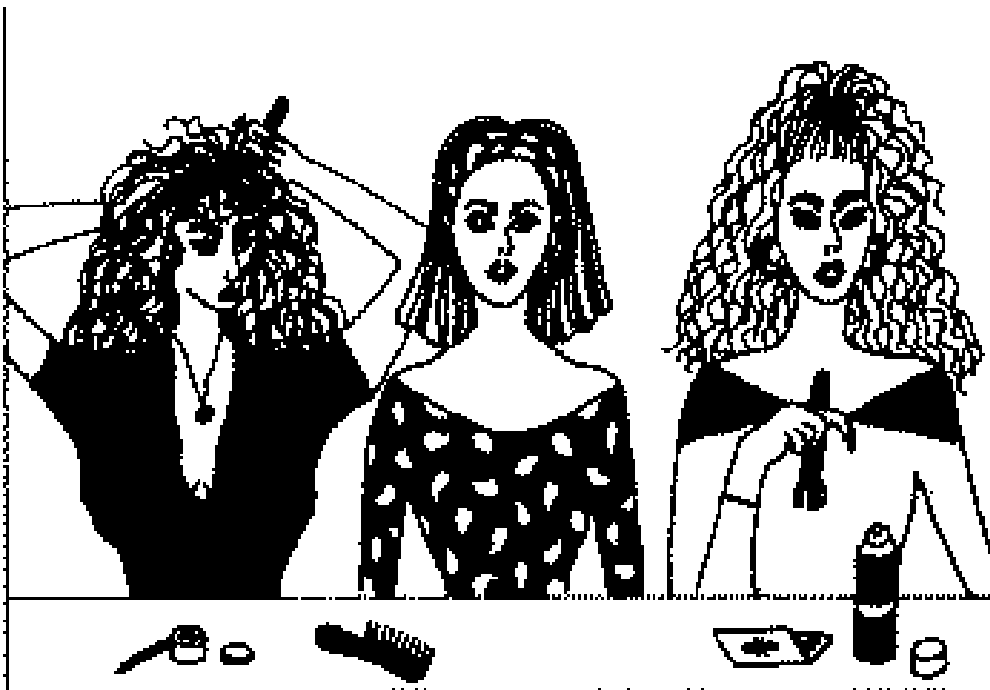


AMERICA TRANSFORMED

BOOK II: IMPRISONED BY SEX

By Liz Jamesguard



ILLUSTRATED BY LORI FLEMING

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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AMERICA TRANSFORMED

by Liz Jamesguard

BOOK TWO: IMPRISONED BY SEX

Driving fast on the freeway, the wind blasting through the open car window whipped long brown hair across my face. A bra cutting me in half, panties snugged up between my legs, and air flowing up my skirt disturbed me, but that damned hair bothered me the most.

Knowing it would be hot, I rolled up the window and opened the vents. Kathy Caldwell thought air-conditioning was an environmental hazard and wouldn't have it in her car. I longed for my high-powered sports car—with air-conditioning—and wondered what the hell had happened to it.

I looked into the rearview mirror. I had gazed into Kathy Caldwell's beautiful eyes a million times, falling more in love with her each time. Now I was looking out of Kathy Caldwell's eyes.

Mentally, I was the same as I had been five weeks ago and maybe that was why I still thought of the car, the hair, the bra, and the eyes as Kathy's. Legally, I figured they still belonged to her, but realistically that wasn't strictly true anymore.

The hair wasn't beating me anymore, but in no time there was a furnace between Kathy's—my breasts. I pulled at the bra through a silk blouse, knowing it wouldn't help. I opened the window again. Being bludgeoned to death with my own hair was preferable to roasting.

Turning on the radio to a mid-afternoon talk show, I listened to a few overly-credentialed, pompous suits discuss the deficit. Those ass holes . They had no idea that anyone other than they had a solution for the deficit, for equal and civil rights, for unemployment, and nearly every topic on the social agenda. Their lives were going to change, but not as much as mine had.

Five weeks ago I had been Grant Williams, Chief Investigator for the Bureau of Prisons, middle-aged man. I was still Grant Williams, but physically I was Kathy Caldwell, Assistant Director of Prisons, a beautiful woman. In a strange way, it was promotion.

A little over a month ago, Kathy Caldwell had assigned me to investigate corruption and curious practices at the Home for Wayward Girls. I had a talent for undercover work.

I loved Kathy and wanted to marry her, but she had never been comfortable with my job—pretending to be somebody else for months at a time. I didn't want to be away from her again, but she had appealed to our strong, shared sense of justice. I had promised her that this would be my last assignment.

Not only did I have a talent for the mental and emotional aspects of undercover work, for convincing people I was who I wasn't, I also had an ace in the hole. A strange scientist named Philby had a little machine that could physically alter people. He called it a Philby Matter Transmuter, and he had tried to explain the principle to me a few times. He finally said it was like a FAX machine. It sort of digitized people. Once digitized, Philby could then edit the person and put them back together any way he wanted.

So I had been undercover a few times as a black man and once as a Chicano youth. This time, I had gone undercover as Barbara Harrold, a chronic runaway and prostitute—a thirteen-year-old girl. Kathy convinced me it wasn't so bad, that it was just another undercover role.

Arriving at the Home for Wayward Girls I had expected a distaff version of a young men's prison. It wasn't a normal facility. There were three other girls with me, one black, one Chicano and the last white, like me. I do not know what happened to the black girl and the Chicano. The white girl and I were connected to a horrible machine that reprogrammed our bodies so we had the coordination and muscle control of three-year-old children. Then we were stuffed into poodle skirts and ponytails and locked into 1960's suburbia.

It seemed odd that I had met Jennifer Neiman, the Warden at the Home for Wayward Girls, only five weeks ago. I felt like I had known and hated her all my life.

My assignment had been to get into Warden Neiman's office and find evidence of collusion between Cybermedia, the corporation contracted to administer the Home, and Anthony Costello, Director of Prisons and a political appointee. I relished the idea of catching Costello in a dirty deal.

It was supposed to be easy but, at the Home for Wayward Girls, rehabilitation was accomplished by powerful, electronic brainwashing.

By the time Kathy came to spring me four weeks later, I had been turned into a perfect, utterly feminine teenaged girl. My behavior, beliefs and attitudes had been rolled back to 1960.

Soon after, Kathy and I found out that Warden Neiman's astonishing practices extended beyond turning female juvenile delinquents into fatuous Barbie Dolls. For Jennifer Neiman and her bosses at Cybermedia, running prisons on contract was a clean, easy way to test their sinister machines.

Kathy and I were stunned to find out that Philby, the man who had used his machine to alter my body, worked for Cybermedia. Warden Neiman had known I was an undercover agent from the beginning. Then Costello showed up. He had been told about my undercover work; part of his payoff for making sure Cybermedia got contracts to operate prisons unmolested was for Warden Neiman to turn Kathy into his erotic, mindless, totally devoted secretary.

We were sickened as Jennifer Neiman confessed—no, bragged—that the cocaine epidemic that was destroying society was nothing more than a corporate project designed to fill their coffers and condemn blacks and other minorities to a cycle of crime

and addiction. She boasted that they had made a fortune off the upscale treatment centers that had proliferated so quickly.

Then Neiman passionately told us that the only way to restore America to its previous economic power was for the corporations to take over—completely. She smugly outlined the plan to stimulate the economy by turning every woman in America into a twisted version of women from 1960—ardent consumers, with no ambition beyond their husbands and children.

The men wouldn't need brainwashing, she noted. Once women began to act like women should, men would rapidly revert to blatant sexism, no matter how sensitive they professed to be. According to Cybermedia and the other huge corporations, every man would be a greedy, compulsive ass hole who put career and money first; every woman would be a brainless sex object who obsessively spent that money and raised the next generation of corporate resources.

And with Philby's body-changing and mind-altering technology, Jennifer Neiman and her corporate masters could do it.

Her tactic was simple. Brainwashing devices were installed in every beauty parlor in the country. Any woman who sat under one, whether she be a waitress or a corporate vice-president, would have her mind washed and set along with her hair. Neiman even had a media blitz planned, sinister commercials with powerful subliminal messages encouraging women to get their hair done.

From that point, it had gotten real crazy. Never trusting Costello, Neiman used Philby's machine to transform him into a blonde bombshell with huge tits. Then she demonstrated her hair dryer on Costello by turning him into a brainless bimbo.

Neiman turned Kathy Caldwell—the real Kathy Caldwell—into an illiterate young black girl and stuck her in the ghetto.

Neiman could have left me a fluffy teenager, but she wanted to enjoy my irrevocable metamorphosis into a senior version of Barbie's debutante persona. She turned me into Kathy Caldwell!

Now, like every woman in America, I was doomed to eventually enter a beauty salon, sit under a hair dryer, and have my mind permanently waved into the corporation's idea of a perfect woman: profoundly feminine, an addicted consumer, impulsively sexy, and only concerned with being a perfect housewife and mother.

One good thing came out of all this: the body-changing machine canceled out brainwashing. I was me again, no longer thinking and acting like Barbie, the vacuous teenager.

But I didn't think or act like Kathy Caldwell, either.

Having a lot on my mind, I automatically drove to my own place, looked at it for a time, and wished the world could suddenly go back to normal again. But it wouldn't. Not until crazies like Jennifer Neiman were locked up in padded rooms. I drove to Kathy's place.

One thing that rankled me was that, to Neiman, Grant Williams was off the board, a pawn taken early that had no more bearing on the outcome. Maybe she was right, but I hated the thought of sitting helplessly on the sidelines when my team was losing.

Neiman had overlooked something. Yes, I was stuck in Kathy's body, but Kathy Caldwell was an adult woman in a responsible position with all of the resources of a state agency at her disposal. Neiman should have left me a teenager. I was still me inside Kathy's gorgeous body, with all of the skills, intelligence, and ability I had as a man. Grant Williams—at least in my present incarnation—was still a moving piece.

Arriving at Kathy's house, I pulled her keys out of her purse. I was uncomfortable walking into her home. I had been in her place a million times, but being there in her body, forced to take over her life, felt like I was violating her privacy.

Everything had happened so fast and had been so astounding that it all had the feeling of a dream. I turned on the TV and dropped into the couch. Restless, I got up and walked into the kitchen. I tugged open the refrigerator and peered inside. Kathy didn't drink beer but usually kept some for me. I hooked a bottle and twisted off the top, idly noticing that it took more effort. Just before I took a drink I remembered why Kathy didn't drink beer. She complained that it made her fat. I couldn't betray her like that. I poured the beer in the sink and drank a diet coke instead.

I was bone tired and my attention lapsed. I flopped back on the couch, shoved Kathy's little shoes off, and closed my eyes. The murmur of the TV sound changed to people talking and I subconsciously followed the conversation, something about new problems in the Middle East, old problems with the Federal budget, Democrats were to blame.

I took another drink of water and froze. Carefully putting the green bottle on the coffee table, I got up and punched the TV off. All it would take was one commercial for a beauty salon and I would end up under a hair dryer, my mind getting a permanent wave. I had tasted the power of those commercials. But Neiman said that her media blitz wouldn't begin for two more days.

Oh, yeah. I could really trust that woman.

I did have an advantage over the other victims: I knew what was coming. I would simply avoid TV and radio and maybe save myself from being turned into a model housewife.

I sat in silence, letting thoughts roll through my mind. Having been in strange bodies before, and having been a girl for the last four weeks, Kathy's female body didn't entirely disturb me. Besides, I didn't have a lot of options.

Recalling my four weeks at the Home for Wayward Girls, what would be most agonizing would be to have my mind perverted again. I sharply remembered what I thought, how I had felt. I didn't want to act like teenaged Barbie, didn't want to think like Barbie, didn't want to feel like Barbie. But my freedom of choice, my very freedom to think and believe what I wanted was rudely stripped from me. And I had known what was going on, but couldn't do a damned thing about it. It was like being forced to watch my own hand being cut off.

It was going to happen again. And I would know it. And unless something amazing occurred, I couldn't stop it. I would keep my mind while my soul was carefully and irrevocably reordered. I would have thoughts and impulses, beliefs and attitudes that weren't mine. I would be deprived of self-determination and pushed into a harsh model of feminine convention against my will. That was by far the grossest insult. I would rather lose my hand than my freedom to think again.

As I undressed in Kathy's bedroom, I was overcome by profound sadness. Everything about the place, her clothes, her bed, the imperceptible, lingering sense of ownership that a person leaves in a room reminded me of Kathy. I put my hands under her breasts and shivered when I felt my touch. I kept thinking back to the times we had shared in this room, about how much I loved her. Looking in her mirror and seeing her reflection was unbearable.

When I woke the next morning I sensed her next to me in bed until reality flooded the feeling away. I was the naked woman in her bed. I wondered where she was now, what her first morning as a sixteen-year-old black girl was like. I wondered if she was thinking of me.

It was Saturday. I shrugged on Kathy's robe and went to the kitchen to make coffee. As the coffee machine burred, I snapped the TV on, remembered that I was daring fate, then turned it off.

Back in the bedroom, I opened Kathy's closets, went through her drawers, picked up and held her shoes. I dressed in a knit shirt and twill skirt because that was what Kathy would wear on a Saturday morning, and for some weird reason I felt obligated to be her. All that day and all Sunday, I argued with myself, finally concluding that I owed it to Kathy Caldwell to be Kathy Caldwell.

Monday morning, I awkwardly dressed in a brown suit that I found in her closet. I had to go to work just as if I were really Kathy Caldwell. As much as I wanted to stay in the house, I couldn't do anything sitting on the couch. Looking in the mirror, I remembered Kathy wearing the suit. It was like she was in the room, close enough to touch—separated from me only by cold glass.

It was funny walking into the office. People I had known for years looked at me differently. The women gave me warm friendly smiles. The men greeted me with subtly disguised leers. I went into her office, sat in her chair, and read memos addressed to her.

Cindy, Kathy's administrative assistant, breezed in and smiled. Her words were, "Morning, Ms. Caldwell. Did you have a nice weekend?" but her inflection asked, "Did you get laid?"

I smiled back. Some things didn't change. "I had a nice weekend, Cindy," I replied, letting her interpret it any way she wanted. I just hoped I would remember to use the right bathroom.

Cindy left and a minute later, Jeffrey Watkins strolled in, plunked into a chair and smiled at my chest. "Did you get that thing straightened out?"

"What thing?" I snapped. I didn't like Jeffrey Watkins. He was a whining sycophant who never failed to mention his Ivy League degree. He didn't care about penol-

ogy. This job was a stepping stone to the administrative power he felt he should have had right out of college. He'd be gone in a second when a position in a sexier agency opened up.

“So, have a good weekend?” he noted with the same veiled query into Kathy's sex life. Although Kathy always suffered him, I frowned. He ignored it and continued, “You know, getting that girl out of the Home.”

“Weekend was fine,” I stammered, trying to fill in the holes in Kathy's recent life. “Yes, everything went fine.”

I wondered what he would say if he knew he was sitting across from Barbara Harold, a girl who had never existed and didn't exist anymore.

Jeffrey left and I studied a report for about fifteen minutes before I wondered why I should bother. In a few months I would be in an apron baking cookies and Jeffrey Watkins would be sitting in Kathy's chair. He would fit right into Neiman's new society. He was already a greedy, conniving ass hole .

But Kathy would be working and I wasn't about to taint her reputation. I muddled through another report, irritated that bureaucracies kept so many damned, useless records, produced so many pointless reports.

“Ms. Caldwell,” Cindy gasped, sticking her head into the office. “You'd better hear this.”

She came in and snapped on the portable TV Kathy kept in her office. The picture focused into a talking-head reporter, his voice serious:

“. . . and the Governor's office had no comment about the allegations against Anthony Costello, the Director of Prisons. Our own investigation has turned up widespread reports of fraud and bid rigging in the state's penal administration. Costello, a political appointee, couldn't be reached for comment . . .”

No shit, I silently told the commentator.

“Channel 7 News, in a news breaking story, has reported that Costello boarded a plane late Friday night—destination: somewhere in South America. Repeating this special news bulletin: Director of Prisons flees in the wake of evidence that he is involved in fraud and bribery. More on this breaking story as it becomes available. We now return to the regularly scheduled program.”

“Can you believe that?” Cindy asked. “Mr. Costello?”

More than you know, I told myself silently.

A commercial came on and I instantly focused on a slightly familiar, lilting jingle. Jerking to see the screen, I was watching a commercial for a beauty salon but it was over before I could react.

Looking up, Cindy had a serious look on her face. “I have to go check my hair,” she announced.

Was it the commercial or Cindy's normal behavior? I emptied my lungs, closed my eyes and interrogated my mind, looking for a new, artificial perception. There was none.

I opened my eyes and smiled. At least Costello's reputation didn't survive and he sure as hell wasn't in South America. Sometime in the near future the Governor would be meeting a big-busted blonde bimbo named Gloria. Gloria Costello.

But Kathy Caldwell's reputation would survive if I had anything to say about it. And as I was her, I sure as hell did. *How would Kathy handle this whole mess?* I pulled her purse open and fished out a mirror, framing her face in it. *For one thing, Kathy wouldn't let her hair get this bad.*

I stood and walked out of her office, telling a clerk, "Bruce, if any reporters call, tell them, 'No comment.' I guess we'll have to call a press conference for later in the week."

"Right, Ms. Caldwell," he agreed.

Kathy Caldwell was still in control, still decisive.

At the end of my first week, I had settled into Kathy's life. At work, I chaired meetings, signed reports, made a few tough decisions, delegated responsibility. I ate what Kathy would eat and discovered it didn't take much to fill up her small stomach. I wore her clothes, drove her car, lived in her house. I was rather proud of myself for doing Kathy proud. *I just wished that she had worn her hair differently. Maybe a perm and some barrettes.*

Confident that I was assimilating, I used the weekend to think about some kind of counterattack against Jennifer Neiman and her corporate masters. I could call a press conference and expose Neiman and the corporation's plot, or I could phone the Governor and tell him. Either way, I had no proof. Kathy Caldwell would be deemed a crazy woman and disgraced.

The following Monday, I was sitting in Kathy's office, studying a long report on some Ph.D's new ideas about criminal behavior. Without consciously deciding, I pulled the mirror out of Kathy's purse and studied my reflection. I caught myself and jammed the glass back in her purse but I still had the strong, lingering impression that I didn't like her hair.

After work, back at Kathy's place, I tried to relax but kept winding up in front of a mirror. I stared at Kathy in the mirror, again searching my mind for wrong ideas, odd concepts, alien thoughts. When I found one, it was barely perceptible, almost impossible to separate from my own identity. It was similar to when Neiman had turned me into a capricious teenager. Not a concrete idea, just a vague notion.

I didn't consciously think that I should get my hair done, wouldn't choose that from a list of activities. But it was there. An inkling, a perception that I would somehow be happier if I had my hair done. Like the brainwashing at the Home for Wayward Girls, Neiman's commercials didn't work at the rational level, weren't altering words or premises that could be cut out and questioned. Tiny parts of my personality were being altered.

Two more weeks passed and though I tried to avoid the beauty salon commercials, they were everywhere. I was all right as long as I was thinking about something specific, but when I relaxed and my thoughts wandered, the desire to get my hair done popped into my awareness and grew stronger and stronger. It was like quitting smok-

ing. If you didn't think about it, you didn't want a cigarette—but the instant you did, it was a craving.

I had hoped that Neiman's commercials weren't working, but by then a few of my female coworkers had shown up with new hairdos.

On a busy Friday afternoon, I was trying to juggle three calls and read a report, again irritated at the massive paperwork the State agencies churned out. A thought came to me. Corporations were like bureaucracies. They, too, had many records and endless reports.

Regardless of what else she was, Neiman was a corporate animal. In her world, every `t' would be crossed, every `i' dotted, every move documented by memo.

I grabbed the phone, punched a number, and tapped my finger while it rang.

“Investigations—Williams,” stated a deep, bright voice in my ear.

“Marcy? This is Kathy Caldwell,” I replied, trying not to sound eager. “I need to see you.”

My mind raced, tactics and strategies, premises and conclusions fell into place. All was not lost. Marcy Williams, a huge but gentle black woman came up to my desk, her warm brown eyes sympathetic and friendly. “Whatcha need, Mizz Caldwell?”

“I need you to find a girl,” I stated “Probably going under the name Barbara Louise Harrold, but don't count on it. She's black, about sixteen, probably down in the projects somewhere.”

I described Kathy's new appearance from a vivid image etched forever in my mind.

“Okay,” Marcy agreed. “Take her into custody?”

“Yes. But don't bring her to a facility—uh, bring her to my home. She's not in trouble, I just need to talk to her.”

Marcy looked like she always had.

“Marcy, do you ever have your hair done?” I asked. “Not that it doesn't look great.”

“Sometimes. But I don't go to those hip white-girls' places. They don't know how to do nappy hair. Besides, they let us know that they don't much like us going in them places. Hard to believe it's 1990 sometimes.”

Would you believe 1960? I silently asked her. I was sad for Marcy. I knew what she faced in the future unless I could stop it. But I had information. Even if Neiman's brainwashing commercials affected black women—which I had to believe they did—they were actively discouraged from the places with the brainwashing hair dryers. Obviously, Neiman's perfect corporate world was for whites only, for now. I wondered if the black salons had their own set of programs.

“Your hair looks okay—for a white girl,” Marcy said, grinning as she left.

This made corporate sense. Jennifer Neiman had changed me into Kathy Caldwell because there had to be a Kathy Caldwell somewhere. If Kathy had vanished, there would have been an investigation. That meant that there also had to be a Barbara Harrold because she appeared in Neiman's records as an inmate at the Home For

Wayward Girls as well as in the Bureau and Court records. Anthony Costello was accounted for—reportedly living it up in Brazil.

The only person not accounted for was Grant Williams, and I didn't show up in many records. To Nieman, it was safe for me to vanish, I did it all the time. By the time anyone missed Grant Williams, it would be too late.

I leaned back and smiled a bit. I had been beaten at every turn, had had my face rubbed in it by that bitch. Now I was back in the game and about to score a point, even if the game was rigged and the score was 100 to 0.

I opened Kathy's purse and pulled out a mirror, studying her face, looking deep into her eyes as if she would magically say something to me. *I'll find you, Kathy*, I promised the reflection. *I'll get you out of there. I may be in your clothes and sitting at your desk, but together we'll beat them.*

My hand flashed into the reflection and pushed at Kathy's hair and her face in the mirror frowned. *No, I had to stop thinking like that. Like it or not, I was Kathy Caldwell, the Associate Director of Prisons. They were my clothes, It was my desk, my face in the mirror. And my hair looked like shit.*

On Monday of my third week as Kathy Caldwell, it was apparent that the women in Kathy's office had all been under the hair dryers. All of them except me sported fancy new hairdos.

As that week wore on, female employees spent more and more of their time in the bathroom, chatting and giggling in front of the big mirrors. Walking in, I immediately felt out of place, uncomfortable with my own kind.

"Nice suit, Miss Caldwell," Cindy said, barely hiding sarcasm. She was dressed in a tight, red knit dress. "And your hair looks great." Cindy's hair was piled on her head, sprayed and pinned into an elaborate mound.

Maybe it was because Cindy was naturally close to Neiman's model of feminine perfection to begin with that she had changed so quickly. It had taken about sixty days, but the other women were changing too, becoming just like Cindy.

They wore frilly dresses with heels, their hair always elaborately styled, make-up complete. They giggled more, smiled a lot, and couldn't seem to get their work done. My female staff now spent most of the workday repairing make-up, fixing hair and discussing each other's dresses and social lives. I caught one girl who had an M.B.A. at her desk filing her long nails.



Just as Jennifer Neiman predicted, the men changed, too. During a staff meeting last week, Jeffrey Watkins had turned to Sue Jenkins, another M.B.A. and his superior, and said, “Sue, honey. Run get me some coffee, would you, babe?”

Two months ago, Sue would have cut his balls off mounted them over her mantle. Now, she smiled, I swore she giggled, and rushed out, returning a few moments later with coffee.

That was the unofficial signal to all males that women could now be safely treated as slaves. My most competent female staffers were kept busy fetching coffee and making copies for the men in the office. Except me. I didn't giggle and still wore business suits. Jeffrey still didn't dare.

The honorific, 'Ms.' abruptly left the language. I was now Miss Caldwell and sometimes, 'babe' or 'honey' like the other women. Three girls quit—right after bridal showers. They were replaced by serious-looking young men.

Jennifer Neiman's corporate society was emerging.

It was harder and harder for me to get up and go to work. The office had become a hostile place. I wasn't behaving like the other women and so had little in common with them. They wore dresses and heels, lipstick and nail polish. More than once I overheard them calling me 'mannish' and 'butch'.

The men still deferred to my title, but I could tell it irked them. Meetings were scheduled and I wasn't invited, decisions were made without my consultation. Kathy Caldwell still held the title of Acting Director of Prisons, but it was meaningless. The men had taken over.

In those sixty days, the concept of getting my hair done had gone from an inkling to a yearning. It took all of my will power to fight off the need to go to a salon. Several times, I had driven by one, fighting off the urge at the last minute.

I had become a pariah, an uppity broad to the men, a betrayer of my sex to the women. I was a danger. I didn't fit anywhere. I was in a woman's body and still acted like a man. I was an outcast as a woman, couldn't be a man. So what the hell sense did to make? I had done what I could. I sure as hell didn't want to be the only survivor—the last thinking woman in America.

What if I ended up the only woman in America with a brain, the last woman who wasn't a perfect housewife and mother from 1960, the only person not corrupted into Neiman's idea of a perfect corporate society? What could I accomplish?

In former times, when the subject came up in cocktail party discussions, I had always stipulated that if World War III ever started, I wanted to be right under the first bomb because I was unwilling to face the aftermath. I knew I could not argue with a 10-megaton hydrogen bomb and accepted its power as inevitable. Like a hydrogen bomb, Jennifer Neiman was equally invincible. Her organization and her access to technology made trying to fight her as logical as facing that hydrogen bomb with a fly swatter. Both were inevitable winners.

It was a Tuesday. I had been Kathy Caldwell for nine weeks. I sat in my office drinking coffee. Nothing but meaningless paper crossed my desk anymore—no one ever came to visit me. I was alone, isolated.

It was my hair. If I would just get it done, everything would be fine. I would be happy again. Like a suicide poised on a ledge fifty stories up, I grabbed Kathy's—my—purse and moved closer to the edge. The results of hitting the ground weren't important—only the decision to commit the act was.

I drove right to the salon, having been by it in weak moments. It was in a small mall flanked by a paint store and an insurance agency. The small lot wasn't crowded and there was a space directly in front, but I parked further away, leaving the opportunity to change my mind during the walk. I wasn't there because of Neiman or her commercials. I could still resist the urge.

I walked right up to the door and snatched it open, went inside and felt a shiver. There were a lot of other customers. A young woman acknowledged me by smiling and stating, "Welcome to Monica's of Paris. Can I help you?"

I looked past her at the two rows of chairs separated by an aisle, stared at the helmet like hair dryers poised like vultures and instinctively backed up a step. *This was the chain of salons Neiman had specifically mentioned. The hair dryers would dry hair—and alter minds.*

Maybe it wouldn't work because I was really man. Shit, who cared? I was on a high ledge. I had to either jump or walk away. . .

"Can I help you, Miss?" she repeated and I wondered if she was in on the plan, if she knew what Neiman and Cybermedia were up to.

It was moot—meaningless.

"Do it to me," I stated, my mind suddenly crystal clear and sharp. My last free thoughts leapt from the ledge. "Get it over with."

Every women in the place looked at me with overt disapproval. I wasn't one of them. A stacked blonde with long fingernails studied me, then announced, "I think you need the Deluxe Treatment, honey."

A few hours later, I walked back to Kathy's car, light brown hair bouncing in waves and curls instead of falling straight down my back. I had almost bolted when they lowered the hair dryer over my head. Teeth clenched, I had focused my attention inward, waiting for the artificial thoughts and ideas to appear in my mind.

Maybe it hadn't started yet, perhaps I really was too much of a man to be turned into a woman. I ruthlessly interrogated my mind and, as far as I could tell, I had only had my hair done. I drove back to Kathy's office and sat, both disappointed that I wasn't suddenly a mindless, perfect woman and relieved that I wasn't. *Maybe I hadn't plunged off the ledge. Maybe the first hydrogen bomb was a dud.*

Leaving the office that Tuesday, I knew I couldn't last much longer. *I wondered if it would accelerate the process of turning me into a capricious woman like the others if I had my hair done every day for the next week. I wanted to be thirteen-year-old Barbie again. She was profoundly happy.*

“Great hair, Miss Caldwell,” Cindy told me as I passed her and this time it sounded like a compliment, not a criticism. I turned and smiled at her, pleased that she liked my hair. *I liked my hair.*

“Thank you, Cindy,” I said, my hands idly pushing at my new curls. “See you tomorrow.” Walking out to my car, I remembered really liking Cindy's dress.

By Friday, my life hadn't magically changed I still sat in my office, just putting in time, having no function, out of place. Not really feeling the need but wanting to break the boredom, I went into the bathroom. Cindy was in there along with three other women who had been intelligent, able professionals three months ago.

“Hi, Miss Caldwell,” Cindy gushed, all smiles and teeth, a lipstick in her hand. The other three grinned at me.

Suddenly, I felt welcome, as if getting my hair curled was the initiation into their club.

“Hi, Cindy. Sue. Mary,” I acknowledged. Then I had to go to the big mirror and look at myself. I did look much better with my hair permed.

“Uh, Miss Caldwell?” Cindy interrupted. “You know, this shade would look just keen on you, don't you think?”

I turned to face Cindy proffering the lipstick.

“Oh, I don't know,” I stammered, unable to find an emotional argument.

“Oh, come on. Let me put some on you. You'll see.”

I tensed as Cindy painted my lips, then looked in the mirror. My mouth was bright red. Instead of looking garish it looked right.

“See? It's you,” Cindy announced.

Embarrassed because I couldn't disapprove, I mumbled, “Thank you, Cindy,” and ducked into a cubicle. When I emerged, the other women were gone. I kept running my tongue over my lips, tasting the lipstick to make sure it was really there.

All that night I kept looking at myself in the mirror, evaluating the new hair and painted lips. I wiped the greasy red stuff off before bed and the next morning, my lips looked pale in the mirror, my face all wrong.

I was nervous and I tried to ignore a nagging feeling that I had something important to do. I looked at my face for the umpteenth time that morning, frowning at my pale lips and messy hair. I had to get my hair done. That would make me happy.

I pulled on jeans and a sweat shirt and left the house. I actually began to sing with the car radio on the way to Monica's of Paris. Entering the place felt like coming home after a long trip.

“Hi, Miss Caldwell,” the operator sang when she spotted me.

“I know I don't have an appointment, but can you fit me in?” I asked, almost begging.

She glanced disdainfully at my clothing, barefaced and messy hair and said, “Of course. It's obviously an emergency.”

I was oddly relieved when I sat in the chair and an operator started fiddling with my hair. I flinched when she lowered the hair dryer over me.

My hair was redone in a more complicated style and I loved it. Standing and paying my bill, I was ashamed of my jeans and sweat shirt, couldn't wait to crawl out of there and change.

“Come again,” the girl said sweetly.

“Of course I will,” I replied. *I could only be happy if my hair was perfect. Of course I would return.*

I made it halfway to my car when I turned and headed towards a drug store as if being pulled by a magnet. There was something in there I had to have. I pushed inside, flushing at the hard looks from both men and women. I went right to the cosmetics section, unsure why I was there but knowing it was where I had to be.

“Can I help you?” a young girl who looked like Sandra Dee asked, her eyes glaring at my outfit. Deep embarrassment came and passed. “I think . . . Uh, I need some lipstick,” I told her.

“Of course you do. What color?”

I looked helplessly at the hundreds of tubes and colors displayed on the wall. “All of them,” I decided.

I drove home fast, running two stop signs on the way. I didn't care if I got a ticket, I just couldn't be seen like I was. I lugged the heavy sack full of lipsticks inside and slammed the door. Dropping my treasures on the couch, I ran into the bedroom and tore the sweat shirt off, then jerked the jeans off. Standing in my bra and panties, I felt dirty.

I carefully protected my hair and sank into a bubble bath, letting the fragrant water ooze my troubles away. When the water cooled, I shaved my legs and under my arms. Padding naked back into the bedroom, I was renewed—clean again.

I put on my silkiest nightgown, took the cap off my hair and carefully put it back in place. My hair looked great, the feeling of silk against my skin was intoxicating.

I padded to the kitchen, poured a glass of wine, and turned on the TV. The program was boring, but when a commercial for a beauty salon aired I was uplifted. For the next several hours, I sipped wine and carefully separated 66 tubes of lipstick from their packaging.

Tipsy and fatigued, I left the lipsticks on the table and stumbled to bed. Drifting to sleep, my pickled subconscious replayed and analyzed the day's events. Rationally, I couldn't believe what I did, but emotionally, it all felt right. I didn't have to search for alien thoughts anymore. They sat in plain view in my mind. *I had plunged off the ledge. The H-bomb wasn't a dud.*

Waking the next morning, I went right to a mirror and was distressed by my flattened hair. Nothing was more important than taking the time to brush it back into style. I wrapped myself in a robe and went to the living room, seriously surveying the lipsticks standing on my table like a company of soldiers.

I spent most of that Sunday in front of a mirror as I tried all 66 shades of lipstick. I could have stopped at any time, but I just let the desire have me.

Monday morning, I had to put my hair back together before I could even think. I couldn't find anything in Kathy's closet that I wanted to wear and finally decided on a black skirt and white blouse. Flat shoes were uncomfortable, my plain cotton bra and panties made me feel gross. Before I left, I put on some lipstick.

Sitting in my office, I knew I had subtly changed over that weekend. On Friday, Cindy and the other girls looked silly in their dresses, heels and make-up. Now they were all so pretty—something to aspire to rather than criticize. I felt more isolated than before.

I called in sick on Tuesday and headed straight for Monica's of Paris. *I was going to end up just like Cindy, so why suffer?*

Guided to a chair, the operator smiled this time. *I was getting there.* “You're looking better, Kathy,” she said. *Not there yet. But this last treatment will do it.*

“Annie,” I began. We were on a first-name basis by now. “I want to be a blonde, and have the manicurist come over, please.”

I walked out of Monica's looking more like Farrah Fawcett than Kathy Caldwell. In addition to a fluffy mane of golden hair, I let the manicurist talk me into false nails—just until my own grew out.

When I walked into the office, the men whistled and the women gaped. I loved it, shaking my ass a bit as I walked. I sat in my office for a while, smiling as people walked by to take a look at the new me, then went into the bathroom. Cindy and the other air heads followed me in.

“Gosh, Miss Caldwell, you look neat!” Cindy gushed.

“Call me Kathy,” I told them, sensing acceptance and a bit of envy from the other girls. I was in the club—the only one I could ever join.

Every evening after work, I drove straight to the mall. Kathy Caldwell's suits were replaced by silky dresses, her plain underwear by sexy, satin things, her flat shoes by three-inch heels. I wore mascara, eye shadow, and blush now, surrendering any rational objections to my emotional need to be pretty.

On Saturday, I went back to Monica's, hoping one more session under the hair dryer would banish Grant Williams forever, leaving me a blissfully happy woman.

“How's your sex life?” the operator asked idly as she rolled my blonde locks.

I hadn't thought about it. I still loved Kathy. Under the dryer, I waited for the last vestige of Grant Williams to be sponged out of my mind. Suddenly, I was very warm and dizzy, almost like I was high or drunk. When the dryer came off and as they combed out my hair, my body hummed with incredible sensations.

“I think your sex life should improve,” the operator remarked. “How can any man resist you. You're gorgeous.”

My breasts hurt and it was hot between my legs all weekend. Jeffrey Watkins walked into my office on Monday and sat down. Almost immediately, my nipples erected and I squeezed my legs together.

“Hi, Jeffrey,” I said, smiling and gazing into his blue eyes. “Nice tie.” I couldn't think of anything else to say.

“You like it? It's pure silk. Seventy-five bucks.” He slid a file across my desk. “We need to have your signature on these budget items.”

I smiled again and fluttered my eyelashes at him.

“Oh, Jeffrey, I'm so glad you took care of it.” I scrawled my name on the last page, “Whatever you decide is fine with me.”

Jesus Christ, I was flirting with the ass hole. But ass hole or not, I desperately hoped he would ask me to dinner. No, to bed.

Though I had never been interested before, I was terribly excited when the fashion designers introduced new lines of clothing.

There were no pants, no suits, no dresses for the office. Everything was tight and designed to show off the bust and hips, the hemlines were lowered, the material was taffeta and satin. Hats were in, as were gloves.

Critics hailed the clothes as a return to femininity, they let a woman be a woman. How clever of the designers to go back to the 50's and 60's for the look of the 90's. Instead of the golden days, the 60's were the Diamond Years. The greatest fashion revolution in three decades. It didn't matter. I couldn't bear to wear pants now even if I still had some.

Neiman's brainwashing hair dryers had changed me. I was as compulsively feminine as every other woman and I couldn't conceive of being any other way. I was the only woman left at the Bureau of Prisons. Everyone else was married or engaged.

“Uh, Kathy?” Jeffrey Watkins said one day. “The Governor has appointed me the new Director of Prisons. Uh, if you'll trot it on down to Personnel, I think they have something a bit more your speed.”

The real Kathy Caldwell would have pulled his balls off for daring to say that and Grant Williams would have kicked his ass—but I wasn't Kathy Caldwell or Grant Williams anymore. I was only a woman.

Not only was I vain and more interested in the color of my lipstick than my work, I had become more and more submissive. I meekly stood and walked to Personnel, liking the fact that men's' eyes were on my ass every step.

“Uh, Miss Caldwell, isn't it?” a piggish-looking man in Personnel asked.

“Yes. Kathy Caldwell,” I replied, naturally looking down.

“Well, Miss Caldwell. Let's see, your current position is Assistant Director of Prisons at a salary of \$65,000.00 per year, is that right?” I nodded. “Things have changed around her in the past six months. As of last Monday when the Governor signed the bill, no woman may be hired or appointed to any position other than clerical. To open

jobs for men, who need them to support their families. A change for the better in my book.”

I wanted to reach across and throttle that officious son of a bitch, but I couldn't.

“Can you type, Miss Caldwell?”

“Yes, of course,” I snapped.

“Fine. Because you have some experience there, you are now secretary to the Director of Prisons. Your salary will be \$150.00 per week to start. Do a good job and you'll get a salary review in six months but let's not kid ourselves, shall we? You won't be here that long. Six months from now you'll be barefoot and pregnant.”

“I won't do it,” I told the bastard.

“I'm afraid you have no choice, Miss Caldwell. Every unmarried woman over the age of eighteen must have a job. It's the law.”

“So what if I don't want your job?” I challenged.

“Those females refusing to comply will be remanded to the custody of the Office of Social Compliance, Employment Division.”

I walked slowly back into the office, anger growing when I saw Jeffrey Watkins clearing my office and putting my few personal things on a big desk covered by a phone with a typewriter flanking it.

“Oh, Kathy?” Jeffrey beamed. “How'd it go in Personnel? Get everything straightened out?”

“Yes, Jeffrey,” I said, barely hiding my acrimony.

“Tut, tut,” he said, shaking a finger at me. “In the office it's 'sir' or, Mr. Watkins.”

I should have hated the humiliation, but two weeks passed and I couldn't explain it. The more the men—especially Jeffrey Watkins—ordered me around, the more they demanded that I do typing and filing and copying, the more I liked it.

But I had betrayed Kathy . She had been acting Director of Prisons after Costello's departure and in only seven months I had been reduced to Miss Caldwell, the winsome secretary. It was a good thing I bought all those clothes last month because I sure couldn't afford it now.

A few more months and I have to give up Kathy's house and move into a cheap apartment. I had wanted to be just like the other girls—submissive, sexy, and happy. Now that I had gotten my wish, I hated it when I stopped to think about, but that wasn't very often anymore.

Two days later, I got up and started for the bathroom. Jeffrey passed me and smiled and my knees went weak. “Hi, Jeffrey,” I gushed, hoping he was looking at my boobs.

“Uh, Miss Caldwell? There's something I need to show you in the storeroom.”

I followed him into the dark room, my heart racing as he closed the door. He gave me a knowing look, took me in his arms, and kissed me. I kissed him back, uncontrollable desire, not intellect, in charge.

It was maybe two minutes between his first kiss and when I ended up on my back on a small table, my dress hiked over my hips, my stockings and panties around my ankles.

Jeffrey shoved his cock between my legs, I closed my eyes, wrapped my arms around him, and drew him inside me.

I was astounded, thinking, "I'm actually getting fucked by Jeffrey Watkins," but I was moaning, "Yes, Jeffrey, Oh, yes, Jeffrey. Harder. Harder."

Jeffrey left and I rearranged my clothes. I went back to my desk. That was it, the end of the line. I couldn't fight it any longer. I had just been fucked in a storage closet. Physically, I loved it. But I was still me and it appalled me.

So that was how it was going to be. I had the emotions of a perfect woman, but I still had the memories and everything that went with Grant Williams. Without thinking I behaved like a woman. But thinking, I was a man trapped in a woman's body, with a woman's desires, unshakable woman's beliefs and attitudes.

Fuck! I hadn't killed off Grant Williams, only made my life hell. The fall from the ledge and the hydrogen bomb had only wounded me.

I would have left the business world forever that minute, but the phone rang. It was Marcy. She had found Barbara Harrold.

I was shocked when Marcy brought the timid, obviously pregnant black girl to my home later that night. I hurried her into the bathroom. Kathy wore a soiled dress and broken shoes. Tears streamed down my face—my tears, not those induced by Neiman's machines.

"Oh, Kathy," I murmured. "What's happened to you?"

She looked up at me with lifeless eyes. "Grant'? Tha' you? Cain you git me stuff? I needs my stuff."

In the living room, Kathy curled on the couch and I could tell she remembered that she used to live there.

"When was the last time you ate?" I asked.

"Don' know. Mebbe three days. I needs my stuff."

"Eat first."

She gobbled a sandwich, looking at me with guilty eyes as if I were going to exact some payment for the food. In her broken, halting words, Kathy choked out a sketchy story.

Neiman had dropped Kathy off in one of the projects in the downtown area with nothing more than the clothes on her back. Kathy had tried to call friends but nobody would let her use a phone for free. When she was allowed to use one, she had trouble understanding the device. Nobody she reached understood her mangled language.

Kathy slept in an alley the first night. The second night, she was gang-raped by three men. One of them stayed behind and forced her to smoke some crack. After that, Kathy's life was a constant blend of sex with men she didn't know and the gnaw-

ing need for drugs. She was a prostitute, selling her body for \$5.00 worth of rock cocaine.

In the eight months I had been turning into a tortured half-man, half-woman receptionist, Kathy had been broken, her spirit destroyed. Now obviously pregnant, she couldn't get money for drugs, and had become a virtual slave to some man. Marcy had found her in a rat-infested tenement, clutching an empty cocaine pipe in her hands.

I thought I would win one, decided that I could at least save Kathy before my conversion was complete. But I couldn't save either of us.

I was going to quit the next day, seeing absolutely no reason to report to work anymore. It was happening just like Jennifer Neiman predicted. It might take six more months or a year, but we would all be perfect corporate citizens.

I didn't regret leaving as I packed a box with personal items when I heard, "Looks good," from behind me. Spinning around, I saw the source of the familiar voice. It was Philby.

He walked up and sat in a chair beside my desk, his long legs out on front of him. I gaped at him, never expecting to see him again.

"Philby," I stuttered, dropping into my chair.

"How's it going?" he asked.

Anger flared. "How do you think? Look at me! I'm so brainless that I can't go five minutes without touching up my lipstick or filing my nails. You know what I did last night? I baked cookies, Philby. Do you know what it's like to be bent over a copy machine and fucked? And loving every minute of it?" I paused, Philby grinned. "What brings you out of your dungeon?" I asked. "Come to gloat?"

"Came for you," he said, grinning slightly.

"Me? Haven't you and Nieman done enough to me already? Christ, Philby. You came to rub it in? I'm Suzy Homemaker, just like you wanted."

"I know. Want to marry you."

"What?" I sputtered, though the thought of being Philby's wife had enormous appeal.

"Always liked Kathy. You're Kathy. Make a good wife."

So that was how it would all end. Kathy locked into poverty and drug abuse and me as Philby's mindless, doting wife. Everybody, especially Neiman, would get what they wanted except Kathy and me. It wasn't fair. It just wasn't fucking fair.

Fuck the ledge and the H-bomb. Right then and there I decided that I wanted to survive, even if it was as a woman. An undeniable need to have my own my mind back, to think and do as I wanted returned.

"Philby," I said slowly after a long silence. "I found Kathy —she's a mess. You want Kathy Caldwell but I don't want to be a housewife. Maybe we can work something out."