Power Dressing

It started innocently enough. Sue and I were at the mall when a beautiful woman walked by and my eyes followed. Only for a second or two, but that may be all it takes to change your life.

Sue cleared her throat. “Hey! I’m over here.”

My eyes snapped back, but the damage was done.

“What’s she got that I don’t, huh? Let me guess. Sweet face, gorgeous figure, sexy legs, breasts out to here. The whole shebang.”

“I wasn’t— Uh, she has nice hair, that’s all.”

“Right, long hair. Strike four.” Her own blond hair wasn’t long enough to qualify as a pageboy.

“I didn’t mean it like that.”

She shrugged. “It’s true. She’s got stuff that I don’t. And you like her stuff.”

“Gee, I’m a guy.” I took her hand. “But I’m in love with you.”

Sue frowned. “I know. It’s just…” She stared at the woman’s retreating back. “It’s not fair. I don’t even own a dress like that. What’s the point? I’m too stocky, thin hair, high heels hurt my feet. Ever wonder if I’m a woman at all?”

How to answer that? “Uh… no?”

“Oh, yeah? Just last week, at that office party I dragged you to, someone said that we make a cute couple—only I should’ve been the guy.”

“I see. Well, I do like a challenge.” Marcy reversed the sign on the door and escorted me to a lime-green salon chair. “Giddyap,” she said with a smile.

“What?” I gave her a blank look.

“Your ponytail, dear. It needs to be free.”

I undid the elastic.

Marcy whipped a white cape into place and shook out my thick brunette locks. “You have lovely hair.”

“How to answer that? “Uh… no?”

“Look at me, Kip. Look at us. You look more like a woman than I do!” She glared at me. “You’re shorter than me and a lot thinner. Your hair is just as long as hers.” She touched my face. “And check out these long lashes, big eyes, full lips, high cheekbones… You’re already prettier than me.”

People hurried past, averting their eyes. I knew they were listening, judging me. I’d heard it all before: wimp, sissy, pantywaist, not much of a man…

“No, I—” She paused; her eyes gleamed. “This is all your fault, missy, for checking out that woman.”

“Sorry, okay?”

“Not okay.” Sue edged closer, looking down at me. “I want us to be a normal couple, not the freak show we are now.” She jabbed my chest with one stubby finger. “Here’s the deal. I’m gonna be the guy and you’re gonna be the girl.” She smiled cruelly. “You already look like a tomboy, so it’ll be easy.”

I stared at the floor.

“Otherwise, I’ll chuck you and your cheap-ass engagement ring into the nearest dumpster. Got it?”

I nodded eagerly. Marcy ran her fingers through my hair. “Don’t you worry about a thing, I’ve done this before.”

“How?” I felt very small, sitting there.

Marcy ran her fingers through my hair. “Don’t you worry about a thing, I’ve done this before.” She chuckled. “For men, I mean.”

“I see. Well, I do like a challenge.” Marcy reversed the sign on the door and escorted me to a lime-green salon chair. “Giddyap,” she said with a smile.

“Okay, how about this? Full and bouncy when it’s loose, but put it in a ponytail and the girly stuff is hidden.”

I stared at the floor.

“Good. Do this and I’ll forget all about your lady friend back there.” A sly grin crept across her broad features. “You wanna look like her? C’mon.”
Marcy shook her head. “It doesn’t matter, dear. It really doesn’t.” She fluffed out my hair. “You need some layering here, then I’ll curl the ends.

“Very loose curls,” she hastened to add. “It’ll be nice and full when it’s out, very sexy. But pull it all together and it’s just a thick ponytail.”

I nodded hesitantly.

Humming to herself, she trimmed the outer layers and left the rest dangling well past my shoulders. She misted what smelled like industrial waste onto the ends and wrapped the longer tresses around a dozen or more large curlers. She gathered the whole mass into a loose net and sat me under an oversized hair dryer. Then she disappeared, leaving me to browse through an old issue of Mademoiselle.

One picture after another of beautiful women, their eyes boring into mine, as if inviting me to share their strength and confidence. How should I act as a woman, I wondered. Deferential and demure, like I did as a guy, or—not?

Marcy returned twenty minutes later. “Let’s see how you turned out, dear.” She wheeled the dryer away and removed the net. Loose hair fell into my face. “Very nice. Very nice indeed. Just a moment.”

She tidied the part atop my head.

I closed my eyes, feeling the beautician’s steel comb worrying the ends, separating tangled curls. Then her brush glided down my back, stroking each tress until just the right amount of curl remained.

“For a woman’s hair, body is most important,” she said softly. “That’s why we volumize.” She sprayed something sweet on my hair. Expert fingers flicked individual locks this way and that.

“A woman’s hair needs extra volume. It has to be light and full, so it flows and bounces. As a woman, your hair is a reflection of who you are.”

She spun me around. My eyes opened. My hand flew up to touch my hair. It was all mine, all me.

Marcy beamed. Behind her in the mirror, a stocky man stepped into view. He had black hair, short on the sides and spiky on top, and a close-cropped dark beard. He was wearing a brown suit. “Nice hair,” he said with a smirk.

My jaw dropped. Sue?

“Call me Stu.” He adjusted his coat. “What d’ya think, PR guy or sales up-and-comer?”

I nodded, feeling loose curls bouncing around my shoulders. “Uh…”

He grinned savagely. “Ya should’a been a blonde, babe. C’mon.” He hauled me to my feet.

“Where’re we going?”

“Get you dressed. Party’s in two hours.”

I looked at his boots. My “boyfriend” was at least four inches taller than me.

Stu shoved me into a changing room. “Clothes off, smock on,” he said in a gravelly voice.

I knew when not to argue. Marcy sat me down and covered my arms and legs with hot wax. She gave me a teething ring—fresh out of the package—to bite on and ripped the wax from my body, one strip at a time—I nearly bit the pacifier in half—leaving my skin shockingly smooth.

That was bad enough. Worse, in its own way, was having the two of them march me out the front door and halfway across the mall—to a boutique, Marcy said, owned by a friend of hers. There were a few shoppers around, headed for their cars, as I passed by wearing a short smock, slippers, and not much else. But at least none of them knew that I was no lady, or so I hoped.

“Katie here needs a new outfit,” Marcy told the owner of Felicity’s Fashions.

“Oh course. I’ll show you what we have.”

Katie? Where did that come from?


The two women helped me pick out a pair of very practical—yet flattering—three-piece outfits, one pretty in pink, the other in powder blue.

I found myself trapped in another changing room, reluctantly stepping into beige panty hose and a
full-length panty girdle that pinched my waist and added inches to my hips. Marcy inserted two very convincing breast forms into the C-cups, giving me a woman’s bust.

“You make a lovely young lady,” Marcy said, glancing over her shoulder. Stu wasn’t in sight. “Tell the truth, dear. There’s no party, is there?” I shrugged and stared at my nylon-clad feet. “It’s all right.” She touched my arm. “Being pretty is nothing to be ashamed of.” She left me to slip into a beige half-slip, then my new powder-blue skirt, camisole and short-sleeve jacket, and the matching open-toed pumps.

Stu paid for the new clothes using my credit card, signing my old name like he’d been doing it for years. He gave me a handbag and some jewelry bought from another store. I put on the bracelet and a small strand of pearls, which were fake, I hoped, since it was my money.

They escorted me back to the salon like a prisoner to trial, with all thoughts of escape ended by heels so high I could barely walk and a skirt tight enough to shackle my knees. But my makeover as a woman wasn’t over yet.

Back in the salon chair, Marcy covered me with a pink cape and pulled the hair away from my face. “This won’t take long,” she said with a tight smile. That made me nervous. This was the final step.

Humming, she plucked my eyebrows into thin arcs and smoothed foundation from my hairline down to my nearly-invisible Adam’s apple. Using powder and blush, she reshaped my nose, cheeks and jaw. With a steady hand, she lined my eyes and lips, and added rosy shadows to make my eyes look bigger, then black mascara and ruby lip gloss.

Like dinner, I was done.

The cape vanished. Marcy flipped my hair forward, touching it here and there with her brush. She tilted my head to one side and the other to clip earrings under my swaying tresses.

“Head back,” she said tersely. “Open wide.” My reply was muffled by the syringe jammed into my mouth. Icy liquid hit the back of my throat and for several long minutes I could only wheeze.

Finally, I gasped, “What did you do?” in a girlish soprano. I recognized my mother’s angry voice, telling me in no uncertain terms where to get off.

Marcy stepped back and raised her hands. “Chill out,” Stu said. “It’s not permanent. Just a few days.” He cleared his throat. “Maybe a week. Until then—hell, you sound as hot as you look.”

Marcy walked us to the mall exit. “Have fun at the party, Katie,” she said with a wink.

Stu put our bags in the trunk of his camero and held the passenger door for me. I slipped in, smoothing my skirt under me. He slid behind the wheel, looking pleased with himself.

“Well, you got your wish,” I said in a voice that sounded a lot sweeter than I felt.

“Yes, I’m a stud and you’re my girl. Bonus: you’re gorgeous. I’m happy. How about you?” I pressed my knees together. “My panty hose is giving me a nylon wedgie. My girdle is too tight. My hair tickles, my lips taste funny, my eyelashes are too heavy, and I may be allergic to this perfume. How do you think I feel?”

“Now that you look like that chick from the mall,” he said scornfully, “better learn to like it.” Actually, I felt pretty good, but I wasn’t about to tell him that. Moreover, I felt stronger, like the women in the magazine. Time to take charge.

“Take me to a hotel,” I said firmly, tossing my hair. “Something fancy—valet parking, satin sheets, hot and cold running champagne. I deserve the best.” He shrugged and gunned the engine.

Beauty is power. I swapped outfits and told Stu to book a table at the fanciest restaurant he could find. I folded my arms and smiled. He didn’t argue.

Later, we went to bed and I guided his hands and told him exactly what to do. He got on top and kissed me and took my womanhood with a strap-on, but I was in control every step of the way.

The balance of power had shifted.